

Sprinkle, John Latham (2018) Political authority in north Caucasian Alania, 800-1300. PhD thesis. SOAS University of London. <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/30968>

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**POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN
NORTH CAUCASIAN ALANIA, 800-
1300**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2018

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Abstract

The Kingdom of Alania was the most powerful polity in the North Caucasus from approximately 930 to 1100. However, the structure of political authority in Alania is a mystery, as is the reason for the kingdom's rise to regional hegemony. Previous historiography has attempted to shoehorn Alania into a narrative of state development, and has over-emphasised external influence and material factors as causative factors in Alania's development.

By contrast, it appears that Alan elites displayed considerable agency and initiative in shaping structures of power in the Central North Caucasus. An analysis of evidence from the North Caucasus suggests that the Kingdom of Alania was not a state in the true sense, but was rather a complex non-state organisation known as a multipolity. In this kind of organisation, semi-autonomous social hierarchies, such as the church, clans and urban organisations, were capable of co-ordinating their activities without surrendering their own autonomy. However, Alan kings were able to assume a superior position in negotiations with these hierarchies, since they possessed a high level of access to the outside world, as demonstrated through prestige goods and titles. This 'power of the foreign' seems to have been a commonly accepted source of political power in the medieval Caucasus. Alan kings were able to access the 'power of the foreign' through their ability to direct the military resources of the North Caucasus, an important bargaining chip with their Byzantine and Georgian neighbours.

The case of the Alan kingdom clearly demonstrates that state structures have not been necessary historically for large-scale, co-ordinated political action.

It also shows the power of ideology in creating human social cohesion, and particularly the power of the exotic and foreign. Far from being irrelevant or epiphenomenal, displays of one's cosmopolitanism can move empires.

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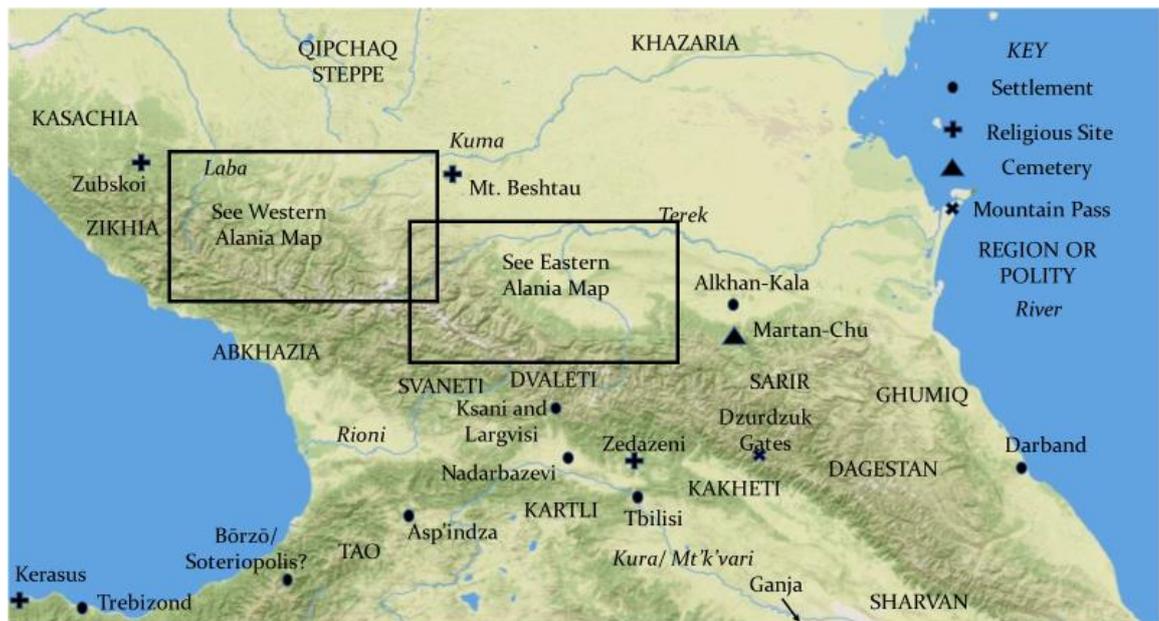
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Introduction



Map 1: *The Wider Caucasus in the 10th-13th Centuries* (image: the author)

In the autumn of 1066, as the forces of William of Normandy and Harold Godwinson prepared for their decisive clash, a meeting of another kind was in preparation two thousand miles away.¹ Standing on the shore of Lake Nadarbazevi, in central Georgia, King Bagrat' IV of Georgia (r.1027-1072) waited for his visitor to arrive. From his vantage point, it was possible to see the distant mountains of the Great Caucasus range, that great barrier between the lands of Georgia, Iran and Anatolia, and the steppes beyond. Behind its snow-capped peaks and mountain passes lay the Kingdom of Alania, from where his ally and brother-in-law, King Dorgholel, would come to meet him. Bagrat's position was

¹ For the date of Bagrat' and Dorgholel's meeting, see Chapter 4, fn. 36.

precarious. His country had been invaded by the Seljuk Turks and his old enemy, Amir Padlon of Ganja, had resumed hostilities. He had need of Dorgholel's help.²

Fortunately for Bagrat', Dorgholel was well-placed to aid him. The Kingdom of Alania was generally recognised to be the most powerful in the Northern Caucasus, controlling access through the strategic passes that connected the Middle East and Eurasia. Recently, Dorgholel had led an army, said to be 40,000 strong, to ravage Ganja. His sister, Queen Borena, was married to Bagrat'. Moreover, his family was intimately connected to the greatest power of the day, the Byzantine Empire.

A century before, his country of Alania had been granted special privileges by the Byzantine emperor in recognition of its official conversion to Christianity, and its strategic importance. Thousands of Alan soldiers, renowned for their skill at arms and loyalty, served in the Byzantine army. Alan officials rose to high ranks in imperial service; one had even commanded a field army. Byzantine priests and missionaries regularly travelled between the centre of the Alan church, one of the largest cities in the Caucasus, and Constantinople. The Alan rulers' seals, attached to their official correspondence, carried the title that they had been granted a hundred years before, *exousiokratōr*: "mighty ruler". Dorgholel's sister had even been the officially-recognised mistress of a previous Byzantine emperor, Constantine IX Monomachos (r.1042-1055).³ His niece, Irene, would marry the brother of another future emperor, Alexios I Komnēnos (r.1081-

² This section is based on a passage in the Georgian royal annals, the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. See *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. by Roin Met'reveli and Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), pp.159-162.

³ On the chronology of the Alan rulers in this period, see fn. 149 and **Table 2** in Chapter Three.

1118). Another niece, Maria, would go on to marry not one but two Byzantine emperors, and was immortalised by Anna Komnēnē, for her political nous.

Judging from an official Georgian account, written a few years later by the chronicler Leonti Mroveli, the meeting of Bagrat' and Dorgholel was a significant event, which reflected well on its host:

“Dorgholel, the great King of the Ossetes [Alans], wished to visit his brother-in-law Bagrat' the *Sebastos*, and requested an audience with him. Bagrat' assented and the King of the Ossetes set out joyfully with all the chiefs of Ossetia [Alania] and, taking the road of Abkhazia, arrived in Kutaisi. He saw his sister the Queen...The King (of the Ossetes) was brought to Kartli. The King was stationed in T'iniskhidi forest, at Nadarbazevi. He met the Ossetes with great pomp and honours. They got together at K'ezuni. There was great joy and a terrific sound of trumpets and tambourines. They spent twelve days together, sporting in great peace and joy. But they cut short the visit owing to the approach of winter. Bagrat' gave gifts and presents to the King and all the nobles of Ossetia. He sent them away, and they departed joyfully.”⁴

Who were these Alans, whose presence brought prestige to the Georgian king? We know so little that there is not a single book in English about their kingdom. In part, this is because the Alans, despite their powerful position, kept no written records: no history, no law codes, no administrative records. This places Alania in an anomalous position, since other polities on the Byzantine

⁴ Met'reveli and Jones, pp.161-2.

imperial periphery- Bulgaria, Serbia, Rus'- all adopted the written trappings of the state alongside the iconography and religion of the Byzantine Empire. Why not Alania? If not through a state apparatus, how was it possible to mould the disparate clans and linguistic groups of the North Caucasus into the most powerful polity ever to emerge in that region? This thesis will argue that Alania's rulers did not adopt the known technologies of the state because they found an alternative method of rulership, one which relied not on administrative techniques, but on their symbolic access to the power of Byzantium. This access placed them in a superior position in the formalised oral negotiations that were a long-term feature of North Caucasian political life. Consequently, they were able to exert a 'gravitational pull' not only on Caucasian social hierarchies, but on states and empires far beyond their mountainous home.

The written evidence about the Alans is not well understood. The leading Western scholar of the Alans, Agusti Alemany, spent twelve years collecting the various textual sources in Latin, Greek, Arabic, Armenian, Catalan, Georgian, Hebrew, Persian, Mongol, Russian, Syriac and Chinese, only to conclude that writing a history of the Alans was impossible.⁵ Other scholars have tried to understand the Alans in outsiders' terms: either through the partisan descriptions of foreign writers, or through theoretical paradigms not designed to explain the history of this region.⁶ However, in all of these studies, there has never been any detailed examination of how the Alan kingdom actually operated, building on

⁵ *Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation*, ed. by Agusti Alemany (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp.xviii-xx.

⁶ For example, Iu. Kulakovskii, *Izbrannye trudy po istorii Alanov i Sarmatii*, ed. by S.M. Perevalov (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2000); Z.N. Vaneev, *Srednevekovaia Alania* (Stalinir: Gosizdat Iugo-Osetii, 1959); V.A. Kuznetsov, *Ocherki istorii Alanov* (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 1992).

evidence from the Caucasus itself. There is a surprising amount of untapped evidence of this kind: archaeological evidence buried in museum archives or obscure Soviet publications, epigraphy which has been barely looked at in a hundred years, new approaches to textual sources from as far afield as Flanders and Yuan China.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to reconsider this evidence, and to answer some of the questions this fascinating kingdom throws up. It will cover the era in which the Alan kingdom had its greatest power and extent. In addition, it covers the periods immediately before and after the Alan kingdom, in order to more fully understand its formation and disintegration- overall, the period 800-1300. This dissertation will take the following format. The first chapter will outline current scholarly approaches to the Alan kingdom, and explain why it cannot be considered an ethnically-based early state, as has previously been argued. The next two chapters will examine the emergence of the Alan kingdom: the second will determine when and why the Alan kingdom became Christian, and the third will examine changes in royal ideology. The fourth chapter examines relations between the Alan kingdom, Byzantium and Georgia, and why these outside powers saw Alania as significant. The fifth chapter uses a close examination of geographical descriptions of Alania and later ethnography to determine how the Alan kingdom actually operated in practice. The sixth and final chapter examines how and why the Alan kingdom came to an end. A selection of significant primary sources is translated in Appendix B.

Through all these chapters, this dissertation will examine how a powerful kingdom could exist without an administration, written laws, taxes or coinage. It

will determine how ostentatious displays of exotic goods and customs could support a system of royal power. Most of all, we will see how, in a geographically hostile environment, with threatening empires all around, the Alans could use the power of ideas to survive, to prosper, and to leave their own mark on the world.

*

Writing this thesis would not have been possible without the help of dozens of people. First and foremost, I should thank my supervisors, Teresa Bernheimer, Hugh Kennedy and Derek Mancini-Lander, for their support, and especially for telling me what I needed to hear, not what I wanted to hear. I should also thank those who have acted in a quasi-supervisory capacity and have made the time to read drafts of this work: Peter Heather, Michael Khodarkovsky, Konrad Hirschler, Heinrich Härke and Irina Arzhantseva. I also thank my friends and colleagues at SOAS for their (very) patient reading of early drafts, and particularly Christopher Bahl for his help with Arabic. In addition, I thank the members of the University of Minnesota Center for Medieval Studies and the University of Chicago's Medieval Workshop and its Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia Workshop for reading drafts of certain chapters. Finally, I would like to thank my mother, Angela Latham, for her help repeatedly reading chapters, and for having to learn more about the medieval North Caucasus than anyone reasonably needs to know.

My particular thanks go to those who have helped me with my research, especially those in Russia and Georgia who helped a bewildered foreigner navigate an unfamiliar academic landscape. These include the staff of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg; the staff of the Stavropol' N.A. Proziretelev

Historico-Cultural and Nature Museum (who reacted remarkably well to finding me sitting on the gallery floor furiously taking notes about Alan-period pottery); the staff of the Karachaevo-Cherkassia M.O. Baichorov Historico-Cultural and Nature Museum; the director of the Nizhny Arkhyz archaeological park, and his wife for the delicious home-made jam; the staff of the Kabardino-Balkaria National Museum; the staff of the Pyatigorsk Museum of Regional Studies, especially S.N. Savenko for allowing me access to their library and Irina Khasha for showing me the open-air museum; and to the very patient staff of the Georgian National Library. My particular thanks go to Andrei Vinogradov for allowing me access to his massive collection of historical, archaeological and architectural material, much of which would otherwise have been completely unavailable to me. In the UK, my thanks go to those who have made the time to meet me and discuss their specialist fields: to Irene Polinskaia, for her help with Black Sea-region epigraphy; to Nick Evans, for his help with the vicissitudes of North Caucasian history and archaeology; and to Agusti Alemany, for his help with various queries on written sources.

My thanks also go to those who have helped fund this thesis and related fieldwork: to the Wolfson Foundation, for providing a generous support package, and to the Tweedie Exploration Fund Fellowship, for helping to fund my fieldwork. I would also like to thank those who have helped with languages, particularly Diana Gapak for her help with Russian lessons, and Nikoloz Aleksidze for his help translating the Georgian Nuzal Inscription.

Finally, my thanks go to my wife, Tamara Latham Sprinkle, for her love, support, and meticulously accurate proofreading.

Chapter One. The Historiography of the Alan Kingdom

Introduction

Since the Alans left behind few written records, our understanding of the Alan kingdom has been shaped to an unusually large degree by the interpretative frameworks of modern historiography. If we are to come to a fuller understanding of the Alan kingdom and the structures of power that sustained it, our first task must be to identify and rigorously examine these frameworks. There are four major historiographical tendencies which are especially relevant to the study of political authority in Alania. Firstly, its rise to regional prominence has generally been seen as coterminous with the creation of an early state, if a somewhat inchoate one. Secondly, loyalty to this state, it is often assumed, was determined by linguistically-bounded ethnicity, which has been seen as a long-lasting or even immutable characteristic. Thirdly, the development of this state, and several of its most significant characteristics, such as a royally-promoted Christianity, are often attributed to factors external to it, whether the machinations of surrounding empires or movements of other ethnic groups. Fourthly, the formation of this state has been attributed to material and economic causes.

It is the purpose of this chapter, and of this thesis in general, to challenge these theories. Moreover, this chapter will examine why these four tendencies have dominated the historiography of the Alan kingdom. This will be done partially through an examination of the source base, and partially through an examination of historiographical tendencies. This analysis of the historiography is particularly enterprise, since the vast majority of our ethnographic,

archaeological and historiographical literature on Alania was produced under the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. Although historical interpretations produced in these periods were determined by political considerations to a certain extent, we should be wary of dismissing their conclusions simply because they were produced in a different intellectual milieu. However, much of this thesis will disagree with the existing historiography of the Kingdom of Alania. As such, it is necessary to perform a detailed analysis to show why this historiography took the form it eventually did. This method has recently been applied to Soviet physical anthropology by Maria Mogil'ner and to ethnography by Francine Hirsch; this chapter will attempt something similar with regards to the historiography of the Alans.¹

This chapter will start with a brief examination of the Alan kingdom's location and extent, defining a number of key terms in the process. It will then proceed to an examination of the evidence for Alania being a state, and for linguistically-bounded ethnicity being an important concept in its formation. It will then examine the reasons why studies of Alania have emphasised external influence over internal processes. As part of this section, we will examine the textual, epigraphic, ethnographic and material culture evidence for the Alan period. Next, it will examine why Alania's history and development are generally interpreted through a material lens. This chapter will conclude by setting out the goals and methodological approaches of this thesis.

¹ Marina Mogil'ner, *Homo Imperii: A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).



Map 2: topographical map of the North Caucasus with modern political divisions (from <https://eurasiangeopolitics.com/north-caucasus-maps/>, accessed 23/10/2017)

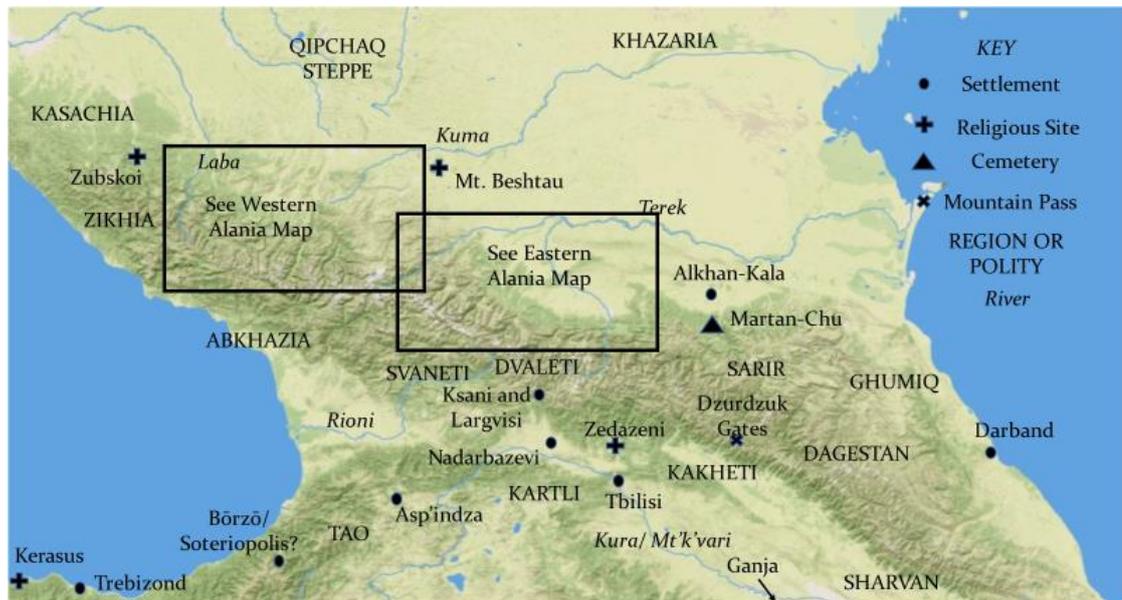
The Alan Kingdom: Definitions and Key Concepts

Geographical Location and Borders

This thesis will consider the Central North Caucasus, which today lies within the Russian Federation.² This region broadly equates to the modern autonomous republics of Karachai-Cherkassia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia and Ingushetia, and to the eastern part of Krasnodar Krai (especially the Laba valley) and part of Stavropol' Krai (in particular the Kislovodsk Basin and the Piatigor'e,

² Nick Evans refers to this region as the 'North-West Caucasus', and this is the more usual usage; however, I use the term 'Central North Caucasus' here to distinguish this region from Zikhia and Kasachia to the West, which are beyond the scope of this dissertation. See Nicholas Evans, 'Mountains, Steppes and Empires. Approaches to the North Caucasus in the Early Middle Ages' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Wadham College, Oxford, 2016).

the area around Piatigorsk) [see **Map 2**]. This region is approximately the size of the Netherlands.



Map 1: *The Wider Caucasus in the 10th-13th Centuries* (image: the author).

According to our medieval geographical sources, the dominant political entity in the Central North Caucasus was the Kingdom of Alania (Byzantine Greek: *Alania*; Arabic and Persian: *Al-Lān*, *Allān*; Georgian: *Ovseti*; Latin: *Alania*; Hebrew: *Alan*; Chinese: *Asud Guo*).³ It has been previously suggested that the ethnonyms *Alan* and **As*, and the related toponyms, *Alania* and *Azia/ Ovseti*, represent different ethno-political formations.⁴ However, I have previously argued that when they are used in external accounts, these terms are effectively synonyms. This is demonstrated by the fact that members of the same royal family are referred to as *Alanoi* in Byzantine sources and *Ovsi* in Georgian.⁵

³ In general on Alan ethnonyms, see *Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation*, ed. by Agusti Alemany (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp.1-9.

⁴ For example, in V. A. Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta* (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 1990), pp.111-3.

⁵ Notably, Alde, an Alan princess who married the Georgian King Giorgi I (r.1014-27), is described as being “of Alan descent” (*tou genous tōn Alanōn*) by John Skylitzēs, but is called *Ovsi* by the Georgian *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (royal annals). See John Skylitzēs, *Synopsis Historiōn*, in Alemany,

However, as we will see, the indigenous meaning of these terms seems to have been more complex.⁶

Medieval textual sources from different cultural traditions broadly locate Alania within the same area. Our most precise account of the North Caucasus' peoples in this period, written by the 'Abbāsīd geographer 'Alī b. Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī (wrote 332-6/ 943-947⁷), locates the Alan kingdom between the Sarir, a mountain kingdom of Dagestan, and the Kashak, the Circassian tribes of the western North Caucasus [see **Map 1**].⁸ In the contemporary *De Administrando Imperio* (c.948-52⁹), a manual of statecraft attributed to the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, the Alans are located in the same region. This source places the Alans further away from Byzantium than the Caucasus mountains and Kasachia (the Kashak), but on the Caucasian side of the steppe peoples to the north, the Pechenegs and Khazars.¹⁰

Given that the Kingdom of Alania was a pre-modern political formation, attempting to define its exact borders is likely to be a vain endeavour; however, we can approximately identify the region under the active influence of its kings. In neighbouring states, sovereignty over a given region seems to have been

p.222; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. by Roin Met'reveli and Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), p.154.

⁶ See John Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or Two? The Question of a "Dual State" in the North Caucasus, 7th-12th Centuries in Russian and Western Historiography', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, forthcoming, and pp.36-7, below.

⁷ Charles Pellat, 'al-Mas'ūdī', *EL*2.

⁸ Translation in *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, ed. by Vladimir Minorsky (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1958), pp.154-8.

⁹ Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. by Gyula Moravcsik and Romilly James Heald Jenkins, 2nd rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 2008), p.116.

¹⁰ *De Administrando Imperio*, Chapters 11, 37, 42, in Alemany, pp.174-5.

defined by control of strategic points, especially fortresses.¹¹ The approximate extent of the region in which the Alan kings held power is therefore suggested by their ability to move troops through the fortified passes of the Caucasus, which served as a physical and psychological barrier according to Arab geographical accounts.¹² According to the Georgian royal annals, the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 11th century Alan kings were able to move armies across several widely dispersed mountain passes on the Caucasus' crest. These included the 'Road of Dzurdzukia' (possibly the course of the River Assa, in modern Ingushetia), which, according to the *Life and Deeds of Kakheti and Ereti* (1745¹³), was used by an army under the command of the Alan king Urdure in approximately 1030. Whilst this is a much later source, it is hard to see what 18th century purpose could have been served by this extraneous piece of information; and given that the rest of this passage was a word-for-word copy of the standard text of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, it probably derived from a now-lost variant manuscript.¹⁴ A second mountain pass used by the Alan kings was the 'Road of Abkhazia', probably the Sancharo or Klukhori pass in modern Karachai-Cherkassia.¹⁵ This was used by the Alan king Dorgholel in around c.1066, an event attested in the *Kartlis Tskhovreba's* standard text. It is therefore probable that by the 11th century, the Alan kings controlled passes along

¹¹ For example, the sovereignty of Georgian kings over the city of Tbilisi was expressed through the symbolic garrisoning of a force of ten men in its fortress. See M.D. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII Centuries*, trans. by George B. Hewitt (Tbilisi: Ganatleba Publishers, 1987), p.97.

¹² For example, in al-Mas'ūdi's *Murūj al-Dhahab*, the fortifications of Darband in the Northeast Caucasus are the dividing line between the lands of Islam and the barbarian peoples beyond. See 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Mas' ūdī, *Les Prairies d'or*, trans. by Charles Pellat (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1962), p.182.

¹³ *Alano-Georgika: svedeniia gruzinskikh istochnikov ob Osetii i Osetinakh*, ed. by Iu.S. Gagloiti (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 2007), p.73.

¹⁴ Gagloiti, *Alano-Georgika*, p.73. In general on Vakhushti's sources, see Vakhushti Bagrationi, *Description géographique de la Géorgie*, ed. by Marie-Félicité Brosset (St. Petersburg: A la typographie de l'Académie, 1842), pp.v-vii.

¹⁵ See Met'reveli and Jones, pp.155, 161-2.

the Great Caucasus' crest, from Karachai-Cherkassia to Ingushetia. The fact that they were able to move military forces through these passes, implies the co-operation of the local inhabitants, and consequently the Alan kings' power over them, whether through coercion or persuasion.¹⁶

Identity

The question of identity in the Alan kingdom is an even more difficult question than its location. Whilst the term 'Alan' was commonly used by Byzantine, Khazar and Arabo-Persian authors to describe the people of the Central North Caucasus, it is less clear that this reflects the self-conception of these peoples. Nonetheless, 'Alania' and 'Alans' are the best-attested endonyms from this region in the medieval period: North Caucasian epigraphy and seals demonstrate that rulers of the Central North Caucasus used the term 'Alania' to describe the region under their power.¹⁷ Similarly, senior officials in the Byzantine Empire who originated from this region used the term 'Alanos' as a

¹⁶ It has been suggested that other regions may have been inhabited by the Alans in the medieval period. The most significant is a large region in the Lower Don, which numerous authors have claimed had an Alan population (the so-called 'Don Alans') from the eighth to tenth (or even 12th) centuries CE. This region has been omitted from this study, partially for reasons of maintaining geographical focus, and partially because the identification of the population as Alan relies on a disputed theory that Alan migrations can be detected through burial typology. For this theory, see A.V. Gadlo, *Etnicheskaia istoriia Severnogo Kavkaza X-XIII vv.* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo St. Peterburgskogo universiteta, 1994), p.160; for a critique of its theoretical basis, see Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or Two?'

¹⁷ Specifically, an inscription of 965 from the Senty Church, in Karachai-Cherkassia, and four seals of the 10th-12th centuries of the Alan kings Gabriel and John Khotositan and metropolitans Ignatios and Eustratios. See D.V. Beletskii and A.Iu. Vinogradov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz i Senty- drevneishie khramy Rossii. Problemy khristianskogo iskusstva Alanii i Kavkaza* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), p.244; S.M. Perevalov, 'Alanskaia epigrafika. 1. Katalog grecheskikh nadpisei', *Vestnik vladikavkazskogo nauchnogo tsentra*, 11.1 (2011), 2-10.

surname on their seals.¹⁸ Consequently, this thesis will refer to the Central North Caucasus as ‘Alania’, and for brevity and ease of usage it will refer to the peoples ruled by its kings as ‘Alans.’ As we will see, however, this should not imply that the term ‘Alan’ represents a linguistically-bounded ethnic identity, as opposed to a geographical and political self-designation overlaying a more complex, region- and clan-based sense of identity.

Societal Structures

This thesis will refer to Alania either as a kingdom, or, when a more neutral terminology is required, as a ‘complex polity’: a site of interaction between different power groups.¹⁹ The choice of the term ‘kingdom’ is a deliberate one. As we shall see in Chapter Three (p.183ff), Alania was ruled by a single royal family in the mid-11th century, passing rulership through at least three generations. These rulers were recognised internationally, carrying the Byzantine title of *exousiokratōr*. This title is used for Alan rulers in the majority of Byzantine sources, although some sources of the 11th and early 12th centuries even refer to them as *basilei* (Michael Psellos, Nikēphoros Basilakēs).²⁰ This usage is paralleled by that of other foreign writers: Alan rulers are referred to as *mepē* (king) in Georgian and *malik* (king/ prince) or *ṣaḥīb* (overlord) in Arabic and

¹⁸ See Werner Seibt, ‘Metropolitan und Herrscher der Alanen auf byzantinischen Siegeln des 10.-12. Jahrhunderts’, in *Sfragistika i istoriia kul'tury*, ed. by E.V. Stepanova (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2004), pp.55-6.

¹⁹ This definition partially derives from Adam T. Smith, *The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), pp.103-4, but lacks his implication of a centralised institutional structure for these interactions.

²⁰ For the title *exousiokratōr*, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.244; Perevalov, ‘Alanskaia epigrafika. 1. Katalog grecheskikh nadpisei’, pp.8-9, and Chapter Three (pp.141-3). For the use of the terms *basileus* and *basilissa* to describe Alan kings and queens, see Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 6, 151 and Nikēphoros Basilakēs, *In Ioann. Episc. Bulg.* 8, both in Alemany, pp.228-9.

Persian.²¹ Moreover, as we will see in Chapter Three (*passim*), Alan rulers constructed a system of religious mystique around themselves, enmeshing much of North Caucasian society within an ideological system- that is to say, a system of normative statements about the universe which seeks to create the reality it claims to describe. This system allowed the Alan kings to wield political authority- definable as “an asymmetric, reciprocal public relationship where one actively practices a power to command that is confirmed by another as legitimate”.²² Therefore, it does not seem excessive to call this system ‘kingship’, or the territory ruled through this system a ‘kingdom’.²³ However, although this system of power had kings at its apex, this does not necessarily imply that this region was monarchical, in the sense of being ruled by one individual; as we will see in Chapter Five (p.250ff), the Central North Caucasian political system was too multipolar to fit that description.

The Outside World

A final definition that we should address is the corollary of the location of Alania: where we should locate ‘the foreign’. This is an important concept in this

²¹ On the use of the term *mepē* to describe Alan rulers, particularly King Dorgholel (r.1050s-c.1072?), see V.A. Kuznetsov, ‘Durgulel’ Velikii i Nizhnii Arkhyz’, in *Metodika issledovaniia i interpretatsiia arkheologicheskikh materialov Severnogo Kavkaza*, ed. by V.A. Kuznetsov, A.G. Kuchiev, and V.Kh. Tmenov (Ordzhonikidze: Ir, 1988), p.80. The term *malik al-Lān* appears in Arabic geographical works of the 9th-10th century onwards (for the date of the ‘Northern Report’, see Chapter Two, p.89ff), surviving, for example, in the *Kitab al-A’lāq al-Nafisa* of Ibn Rusta (c.290-300/ 903-13), and the anonymous Persian *Ḥudūd al-‘Alam* (372/ 982-3). The term *ṣaḥīb al-Lān* is used by al-Mas’ūdī’s *Murūj al-Dhahab* (c.332-6/ 943-7) to describe the ruler of the same kingdom, and apparently is an attempt to convey more precisely the Alan king’s political role. See Alemany, pp.260, 361-2, 263-4 respectively.

²² For this definition of authority, see Adam T. Smith, *The Political Landscape*, pp.25-6.

²³ For the definition of kingship as a magico-religious system of power surrounding a ruler, see Henry Allen Myers and Herwig Wolfram, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), p.1.

thesis, since it appears that Alan rulers drew heavily on non-North Caucasian iconography to legitimise their rule. This concept can be delineated in two ways: geographical, and social. Whilst the modern concept of fixed borders is largely inapplicable to Alania, the region under the power of the Alan rulers was geographically distinct from those under the power of the Byzantine Empire, Georgia and the Khazars, separated from the first two by the Great Caucasus mountain chain and from the latter by the steppes of modern Kalmykia and Stavropol' Krai. We can also delineate 'Alania' from 'the foreign' in a social sense. As I have previously argued, consanguineous clans and local communities known as *As were a prominent feature of medieval Central North Caucasian society. These communities were separate from the social hierarchies which comprised Byzantine or Georgian society.²⁴ This difference was one that Alans themselves emphasised at times- for example, Irene, the Alan wife of the Byzantine statesman Isaac Komnēnos (c.1050-1102/4), specifically advertised her non-Byzantine family origins by identifying herself on her seal as the daughter of the *exousiokratōr* (king) of Alania.²⁵ Since this 'outsider' status was one that even Alans integrated into Byzantine and Georgian societies could emphasise, we can reasonably consider Georgian and Byzantine societies to be 'foreign' to that of the North Caucasus. The fact that Alan rulers found it necessary to send diplomatic correspondence with Byzantine-style seals may be seen as an acknowledgement of and interaction with this 'foreignness'.²⁶ We therefore can define 'the foreign'

²⁴ See Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or Two?', and p.36ff, below.

²⁵ See Jean-Claude Cheynet and Dimitri Theodoridis, *Sceaux byzantins de la collection D. Theodoridis. Les sceaux patronymiques*. (Paris: ACHCByz, 2010), pp.210-11.

²⁶ For seals of Alan rulers, see Perevalov, 'Alanskaia epigrafika. 1. Katalog grecheskikh nadpisei', pp.8-9.

as a person, concept, or style originating from a region geographically and socially distinct from those of the North Caucasus.

Historiographical Tendency #1: Alania as a State

Why Alania Was Not a State

The first historiographical tendency we will examine in this chapter is the trend of seeing Alania as a state, albeit of an early and inchoate kind. This theory implies the reification of power through a more-or-less permanent institutional structure, separate from the personalities of those who man it.²⁷

Numerous historiographical works identify Alania as a state. In the 1950s, Z.N. Vaneev interpreted Alania as a type of early state, lying in a stage of 'early class society'; and in the 1990s, V.A. Kuznetsov, the leading Soviet scholar of Alania, argued that the existence of an early form of the feudal state could be inferred from the presence of a king and a large army.²⁸ However, even by the Marxist-Leninist yardstick used by these authors, Alania falls far short of the definition of statehood.

The primary reason is this: there is no evidence of an institutionalised administration in Alania, for example written administrative records, law codes, and tax registers. To this we may add the lack of any material evidence of institutions controlling economic resources: for example, coinage, milestones, or

²⁷ For this basic definition of the state, see Elman R. Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization: The Process of Cultural Evolution* (New York: Norton, 1975), p.9, and p.26, below.

²⁸ Z.N. Vaneev, *Srednevekovaiia Alania* (Stalinir: Gosizdat Iugo-Osetii, 1959), pp.128-39; V.A. Kuznetsov, *Ocherki istorii Alanov* (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 1992), pp.232-4.

other epigraphic evidence of control over routeways or territory. Whilst dozens of medieval inscriptions in several languages have survived from this region, none names any state official carrying a title.²⁹ Whilst we cannot rule out the future discovery of any of the above, we can be reasonably certain that their absence is not due to written records' destruction or deterioration. This is because of the extremely good preservation conditions in the North Caucasus, which in one case preserved a fragment of an account book and a Buddhist sutra in the grave of a Chinese merchant in the seventh to tenth century cemetery of Moshchevaia Balka (Karachai-Cherkassia).³⁰ Furthermore, one can point to the fact that a number of books *have* survived from the post-Mongol period, and possibly earlier; however, their content is exclusively liturgical and theological.³¹

The lack of these documents does not mean, of course, that conflicts over law or economic extraction did not take place; however, it does demonstrate that these conflicts were not resolved via a formalised bureaucracy, manned by officials whose power was derived separately from their own charisma or societal position. This is significant, since the resolution of societal conflicts through institutional solutions is the crucial determinant of statehood in Elman Service's model of early state development.³² Whilst Service's unilinear evolutionary theory of state formation has been criticised as overly mechanistic and historically

²⁹ For details of these inscriptions, see p.58ff, below.

³⁰ See Evans, pp.175-6.

³¹ S.N. Malakhov, 'O grecheskoi pis'mennoi traditsii u narodov Severnogo Kavkaza v X-XVII vv.', in *Mir pravoslaviia: sbornik nauchnykh statei* (Volgograd: Izdatel'stvo volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1997), pp.34-7; Abraham Firkovich, 'Arkheologicheskiia razvedki na Kavkaz', *Trudy vostochnogo otdeleniia Imperatorskogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva*, 3.1 (1857), pp.110, 125-6, 134-5; Alexander Lubotsky, *Alanic Marginal Notes in a Greek Liturgical Manuscript* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015).

³² See Service, p.9.

unverified, his basic definition of statehood remains highly influential.³³ For example, it strongly informs Chris Wickham's definition of the early medieval state as being defined by the existence of tax systems, via his own utilisation of Henrik Claessen and Peter Skalnik, themselves strongly influenced by Service.³⁴ Service's definition has also been applied to the classification of Eurasian nomadic polities by Michael Khodarkovsky.³⁵ Broader definitions of early political complexity, such as those of A.T. Smith and Norman Yoffee, similarly use the existence of institutional solutions to societal problems as their threshold of statehood.³⁶ Even the classic Marxist-Leninist definition of the state- Lenin's famous "bodies of armed men, prisons, etc."- assumes not just repression along class lines, but a *mechanism* of that repression: an institutional mechanism of the kind that is absent in medieval Alania.³⁷ By all of these definitions, Alania cannot be considered a state.

The Historiography of the Alan State: Marxist-Leninist Taxonomy

The reasons for the Alania being seen as an early state are almost entirely historiographical. Under the Soviet Union, dominant approaches to the study of the North Caucasus were etic and taxonomic. The goal was to fit the history of

³³ For critiques of unilinear social evolutionism, see Adam T. Smith, *The Political Landscape*, pp.33-43; Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.16-34.

³⁴ Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.56-9, 145-8; H. J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik, 'The Early State: Theories and Hypotheses', in *The Early State*, ed. by H. J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), pp.18-23.

³⁵ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met: The Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600-1771* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.16.

³⁶ Yoffee, pp.16-17; Adam T. Smith, *The Political Landscape*, pp.102-4.

³⁷ Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, trans. by Robert Service (New York: International Publishers, 1990), pp.8-13.

the Alans into overarching, externally-determined and (in theory) ‘objective’ frameworks.³⁸

In the field of political history, the framework into which the Alans had to be fitted was the Marxist-Leninist theory of state development, as laid out in Engels’ *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*.³⁹ This was one of the few areas of relevance to medieval history which Marx and Engels directly addressed in their writing. As such, its interpretation was subject to much more stringent restrictions in the Soviet Union than other aspects of medieval historiography (in which, for the most part, authors were left to get on with their argument so long as they put a few genuflecting quotes from Marx, Engels or Lenin in their introduction).

Marxism-Leninism took a thoroughly materialist approach to the question of state formation, arguing that the evolution of societies was determined almost entirely by the means of production and the politics of its control.⁴⁰ Soviet Marxism-Leninism also claimed that socio-political class structures were broadly comparable across different eras and world regions. As a result, theories developed in relation to one part of the world- e.g. Western Europe- could be applied to others- such as the Caucasus. According to this theory, societal development normally went along the following path: pre-clan society >

³⁸ For example, the primary consideration of evidential value was that particular piece of evidence’s “objectivity”, as demonstrated by V.A. Kuznetsov’s argument that due to the incompleteness of our historical record, archaeological evidence can be considered more objective. See V.A. Kuznetsov, *Alanskie plemena Severnogo Kavkaza* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk, 1962), p.11.

³⁹ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, trans. by Michelle Barret (London: Penguin Books, 1986).

⁴⁰ In general, see Marc Ferro, Norman Stone, and Andrew Brown, *The Use and Abuse of History, or, How the Past Is Taught to Children*, revised edn. (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.163-4.

matriarchal clan society > patriarchal clan society > military democracy > slave mode of production > feudal mode of production > capitalist mode of production > socialist society > communist society. Since this schema formed part of the bedrock of Marxism-Leninism, culminating with the final victory of communism, it could not be directly challenged.⁴¹

This unilinear approach led to numerous issues, however. On a fundamental level, Engels' *Origins of the Family* can be regarded as a problematic work: one of its modern translators comments that it "has been criticised- some would say demolished- from every possible factual and theoretical angle."⁴² These include its "methodological innocence", uncritical use of partisan ethnographic accounts, its concentration on a handful of ancient societies to the exclusion of all others, and its numerous factual errors.⁴³

One particularly significant issue is that Marxist-Leninist social evolutionism is not only unilinear, but unidirectional (as it claims societies will inevitably progress towards communism). Marxist theory therefore had great difficulty explaining 'regressive' changes- for example, the adoption of a less hierarchical, clan-based system in preference to a 'feudal' one, as happened in the 12th and 13th centuries in the North Caucasus.⁴⁴ Such changes, it was usually argued, must necessarily be the result of outside forces. In this context, explanations for the decline of the Alan kingdom almost always rely on an

⁴¹ For an example of a Soviet scholar who had to stick to this theory despite disagreeing with it, see L. S. Klein, 'Meta Archaeology', *Acta Archaeologica*, 72.1 (2001), 1-149.

⁴² Engels, p.7.

⁴³ Engels, pp.14-17.

⁴⁴ On this issue, see N.N. Kradin and others, 'Alternativity of Social Evolution: Introductory Notes', in *Alternatives of Social Evolution*, ed. by N.N. Kradin (Vladivostok: Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2000), pp.31-44.

assumption of massive destruction by foreign invaders- Qipchaqs or Mongols. As will be argued in Chapter Six (p.301ff), this conclusion can only be arrived at by a highly selective interpretation of the historical evidence.

The theoretical over-generalisations present in Engels' work and its interpretation in the Soviet Union directly affected our understanding of Alania's political structure. The Alans were invariably classified according to the standard Marxist-Leninist schema, rather than on the basis of independently formulated hypotheses based on the evidence from the North Caucasus. They were normally classified as being either a 'military-democratic' society, in which bands of warriors coalesced around a war-leader, an 'early feudal' society, with systematised exploitation of an unfree peasantry, or a transitional 'early class society' lying between the two.⁴⁵ However, both of these categories (and consequently also the hybrid category between them) can be considered highly problematic. Even under the Soviet Union the inadequacy of the concept of military democracy was recognised, being an over-generalisation of a narrow set of Homeric analogies.⁴⁶ Moreover, the idea of a uniform 'feudal' stage of development does not match the archaeological and textual evidence from the medieval period. Even in Western Europe, the context in which the analytical concept of a feudal system was developed and where the evidence for elite economic control is far more abundant, positing a single 'feudal' system in the

⁴⁵ On the historiography of these debates, see D.S. Korobov, *Sotsial'naiia organizatsiia alan Severnogo Kavkaza IV-IX vv.* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2003), pp.23-33.

⁴⁶ N.N. Kradin, 'Nomadic Empires in Evolutionary Perspective', in *Alternatives of Social Evolution*, ed. by N.N. Kradin (Vladivostok: Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2000), p.279.

early medieval period does not do justice to the wide variety of systems of peasant unfreedom.⁴⁷

In the North Caucasus, the applicability of the Marxist-Leninist paradigm of societal taxonomy is even more uncertain than in Western Europe. A good example of the problems this approach can create is contained in the the works of F.Kh. Gutnov. Gutnov infers the existence of a ‘feudal’ Alan state from isolated pieces of evidence which he argues, *pars pro toto*, can be used to reconstruct the form of an ancient society. Gutnov argues that the increasing richness of grave goods in the 11th-12th centuries can be correlated with the growth of a feudal upper class.⁴⁸ From this, he infers the existence of a feudal state with baronial demesnes, directly comparable to those which he (anachronistically) claims existed in Anglo-Saxon England.⁴⁹ However, Gutnov offers no direct evidence for these claims: he only makes this argument because, according to his classification of the growth of social elites, this is the kind of state that ‘should’ have existed at this stage of social development.

In other words, we simply cannot assume that if society was organised in a certain way in France or England, it was organised in a similar manner in Alania. It is at this point that the weakness of the etic and taxonomic systems adopted by Russian and Soviet historians is revealed: whilst the comparability this allows is useful, we must be aware of the origins of the comparisons we are using, and whether these are appropriate to the field we are studying. A lack of care in our

⁴⁷ Wickham, pp.262-4.

⁴⁸ F.Kh. Gutnov, ‘Gospodskii dvor i votchina u Alan’, in *Alany i Kavkaz*, ed. by M.K. Dzhioev and V.Kh. Tmenov (Vladikavkaz: Severo-Osetinskii in-t gumanitarnykh issledovaniï pri Sovete Ministrov SO SSR, 1992), pp.369-70.

⁴⁹ For a further development of this argument, see F.Kh. Gutnov, *Gorskii feodalizm* (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 2007), pp.180-1.

comparisons can lead to unsupportable conclusions, such as the existence of an Alan state.

Historiographical Tendency #2: Alania as Ethnic Bloc

Primordialism, Ethnicity and Identity in Alania

Just as the evidence for the first of our four historiographical assumptions is very weak, so is the evidence for the second: that the Alans comprised an ethnic bloc, the boundaries of which were primarily defined by language.⁵⁰ Whilst the assumption is rarely spelled out explicitly, the fortunes of this ethno-linguistic bloc are seen as being coterminous with its political expression, so that ‘Alans’ and ‘the Kingdom of Alania’ can be used interchangeably.⁵¹ This theory is itself based on the wider theory of ethnic primordialism, which posits that the roots of modern ethnic groups stretch far back into the past, and represent fundamentally stable social formations that can be externally identified. This contrasts with the dominant paradigms in contemporary Anglo-American historiography, which see ethnicity as being a performative or otherwise socially determined construct.⁵² Whilst both theories have their merits, a result of this focus on linguistically-driven ethnicity has been the neglect of the actual lived experience of the medieval peoples of the Central North Caucasus, and an

⁵⁰ See (for example) V.A. Kuznetsov, *Alano-Osetinskie etiudy* (Vladikavkaz: Severo-Osetinskii institut gumanitarnykh issledovani, 1993), pp.3-4; Iu.S. Gagloiti, *Alany i voprosy etnogeneza Osetin* (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1966), p.6.

⁵¹ For example, in V.A. Kuznetsov and Iaroslav Lebedynsky, *Les Alains: cavaliers des steppes, seigneurs du Caucase* (Paris: Errance, 1997), p.183.

⁵² On these conceptions of ethnicity, see Fredrik Barth, ‘Introduction’, in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Bergen: Univertsitetsforlaget, 1969); Di Hu, ‘Approaches to the Archaeology of Ethnogenesis: Past and Emergent Perspectives’, *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 21.4 (2013), 371–402.

assumption that their society was organised along ethnic lines. Just as with the theory that Alania was a state, this assertion has meant that political and ideological concepts from the medieval North Caucasus are subsumed into contemporary taxonomic frameworks.

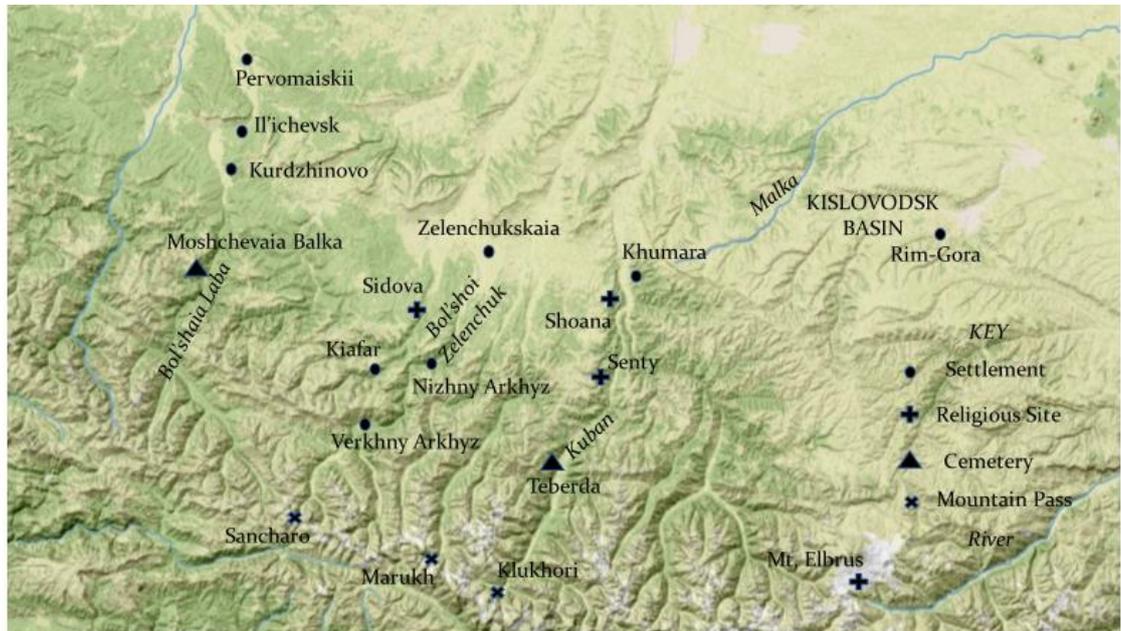
According to the primordialist theory in Soviet and post-Soviet historiography, historical ethnic groups can be objectively identified by a given set of characteristics. The most significant of these identifiers is claimed to be language, with others including a distinctive folk (*narodnyi*⁵³) culture, hereditary physical characteristics, race, self-definition, a defined territory, a particular *narodnyi* psychology, and level of social development according to the Marxist-Leninist schema.⁵⁴ In the historiography of the Caucasus, emphases on these different characteristics varied. However, the overall schema, which saw linguistically bounded ethnic groups as the prime movers in history, was widely shared on different sides of the debate, for example by more explicitly pro-imperialist scholars, and also by those who opposed their arguments, such as Nikolai Marr and his followers.⁵⁵ The argument that *narodnyi* culture could be material was particularly significant, since it logically implied that distinctive ethnicities could be defined and identified through their material remains.⁵⁶

⁵³ The term *narod* and its adjective, *narodnyi*, have no precise English translation, but are closest in sense to the Herderian understanding of *volk* and *volkisch*.

⁵⁴ Iu.V. Bromlei, *Ethnic Processes* (Moscow: Social Sciences Today Editorial Board, USSR Academy of Sciences, 1983), pp.5-19.

⁵⁵ For example, Nikolai Marr's 'Japhthetic Theory', that the Caucasus had once possessed a singular, glorious civilisation united by language and culture, used the same linguistic definition of ethnicity as the works of his opponents, who emphasised 'Aryan' invasions of the region. See Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.31-2, 55-6; Hirsch, p.8.

⁵⁶ This argument gave rise to the dominant culture-historical paradigm of North Caucasian archaeology- the proposition that sets of archaeological remains found in a given region (cultures) can be correlated with bounded ethnic groups. See Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.326-30. For example, V.A.



Map 3: *Western Alania with sites of the ninth to fourteenth centuries. Image: the author.*

However, in the medieval North Caucasus, the evidence for language being a defining characteristic of Alan ethnicity is very weak, as is the evidence for this ethnic identity being expressed through material culture. Although it seems that Alanic- an Eastern Iranian language and the ancestor of modern Ossetian- was relatively widely spoken in the Central North Caucasus, only two inscriptions in that language are known.⁵⁷ The vast majority of inscriptions are written in foreign

Kuznetsov identified a distinct form of burial practice, the ‘catacomb’, as a marker of Iranian-speaking Alan ethnicity, to the extent that the language and ethnicity of the buried individuals can be simply assumed from their form of burial. See for example Kuznetsov, *Alanskie plemena Severnogo Kavkaza*, p.14. Whilst elements of this theory have been criticised, its basic premise is still widely accepted. See, for example, D.S. Korobov, ‘Settlement of Alanic Tribes in Various Areas of the North Caucasus According to Archaeological Data and Written Sources’, *Anthropology & Archaeology of Eurasia*, 50.1 (2011), 51–73.

⁵⁷ Due to its centrality to the primordialist theory of ethnicity, the issue of the Alans’ language is highly disputed. However, an Eastern Iranian language ancestral to Ossetian is specifically identified as Alanic by a section in John Tzetzes’ *Theogony*; the same language is also called ‘Jassic’ by a 14th century Hungarian dictionary. See respectively R. Bielmeier, ‘Die Alanische bei Tzetzes’, in *Medioiranica. Proceedings of the International Colloquium Organised by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 21st to the 23rd of May 1990*, ed. by Wojciech Skalmowski and Alois van Tongerloo (Louvain: Peeters, 1993), pp.1-4; Alemany, p.xx. This language was apparently spoken in a much wider area of the North Caucasus than its descendant, Ossetian: Vsevolod

languages- Greek and Georgian.⁵⁸ Additionally, other North Caucasian inscriptions are known in Old Russian, Arabic and Armenian.⁵⁹ As such, it seems rash to claim that the primary means of ethnic or elite self-identification was through language, when the indigenous languages of the North Caucasus were so neglected. Similarly, whilst Central North Caucasian rulers sometimes self-defined as Kings of Alania, the manner in which this was done was thoroughly Byzantine in inspiration: for example, in Greek inscriptions following Byzantine norms, and seals following Byzantine designs.⁶⁰ For example, the church of Senty in Karachai-Cherkassia contains one of the few extant inscriptions in which a ruler of Alania identifies his country as such.⁶¹ However, despite this clear evidence for Alan self-identification, this inscription is written in Greek, and within a church built in contemporary Byzantine style, rather than reflecting pre-existing Caucasian material culture traditions. It therefore seems unsupportable to argue that a distinct language and a self-contained material culture were directly coterminous with 'Alan-ness'.

Miller identified that the Karachai and Balkar languages have a considerable Eastern Iranian substrate, which is also preserved in place names in modern Karachai-Cherkassia and Kabardino-Balkaria. See V. F. Miller, *Osetinskie etiudy. Ch. 3* (Moscow: Tip. E. G. Potatsova, 1887), pp.7-10. For inscriptions in Alanic, see Ladislav Zgusta, *The Old Ossetic Inscription from the River Zelenchuk* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987).

⁵⁸ For Greek inscriptions, the primary source remains I.V. Pomialovskii, *Sbornik grecheskikh i latinskikh nadpisei Kavkaza* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1881). For inscriptions in Georgian, see V. F. Miller, 'Terskaia Oblast'. *Arkheologicheskiia ekskursii*, in *Materialy po arkheologii Kavkaza Imperatorskago Moskovskago Arkheologicheskago Obshchestva I*, ed. by Countess P.S. Uvarova (Moscow: A.I. Mamontov, 1888), p.20; V.A. Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, pp.78-80; L.I. Lavrov, *Epigraficheskie pamiatniki Severnogo Kavkaza na arabskom, persidskom i turetskom iazykakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), p.16.

⁵⁹ For Armenian epigraphy, see Kh.I. Kuchuk-Ioannesova, 'Armianskaia nadpis' XII stoletia', in *Materialy po arkheologii Kavkaza. Vyp. III.*, ed. by Countess P.S. Uvarova (Moscow: A.I. Mamontov, 1893). The most significant Russian inscription is the Pregradnoe Cross, currently in Stavropol' Museum. For Arabic inscriptions, see Lavrov, p.60.

⁶⁰ On the etymology of 'Alan', see Alemany, p.3. For seals, see Seibt, pp.52-4.

⁶¹ For the Senty inscription, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.241.

Moreover, it seems that this dominion of the kings of Alania did not necessarily imply that the peoples of the Central North Caucasus identified themselves as Alans in an ethnic sense. Rather, ethnographic evidence strongly suggests that the primary conception of identity in the pre-modern period was local and non-ethnic. In the early modern period, each mountain valley formed an individual community- for example, our first comprehensive map of Ossetia, in the Georgian Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi's *Geographical Description of Georgia* (1750), divides the districts of Ossetia by valley.⁶² These valleys were governed by different systems of law and social custom.⁶³ Individual valley communities were referred to as 'Os', and were named after the local village or the area in which they were located- for example, the 'Bezengi-Os' after the village of that name.⁶⁴

I have previously argued that in the Alan period, the primary unit of social attachment was the local valley community, the *As, which was probably similar to those recorded in the 18th century.⁶⁵ The word *As, apparently of Turkic derivation, appears to have been a non-ethnic term, simply meaning 'people' or 'tribe', and was used in this way as far away as Central Asia and Siberia.⁶⁶ This term was mentioned by the Arab geographer Ibn Rusta (conventionally dated to

⁶² See Vakhushti Bagrationi, pp. xxi, 429-33.

⁶³ F.I. Leontovich, *Adaty kavkazskikh gortsev. Materialy po obychnomu pravu Severnogo i Vostochnogo Kavkaza* (Nal'chik: El'-Fa, 2002), especially pp.199-251.

⁶⁴ See Miller, *Osetinskie Etiudy. Ch. 3*, pp.10-11.

⁶⁵ See Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or Two?'

⁶⁶ The fact that this term was used by peoples as far away as Siberia demonstrates that this was not an ethnonym referring to a specific Iranian ethnic group, as has been argued previously, but rather a generic communal designation used by different ethnolinguistic groups. See Sencer Divitcioglu, 'The Mystery of the Az People (VIII Century)', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 12 (2002), 5-14. On the origin of this term, see Stefan Kamola, 'History and Legend in the Jami' Al-Tawarikh: Abraham, Alexander and Oghuz Khan', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 25.4 (2015), 555-77.

290-300/ 903-13⁶⁷) as the name of one of the Alans' constituent tribes, the **Rukhsh-As*, may be contained within the name of the Alan town of **Magas*, recorded by al-Mas'ūdī (332-6/ 943-7) and the *Yuan-Shi* (1369), and was even described as the Alans' autonym by Friar C. de Bridia (1247).⁶⁸ Although this term's precise definition may have shifted over time, the similarity between its use by Ibn Rusta to designate an individual tribe, its use in the same context elsewhere in medieval Eurasia, and its use in the same manner in the early modern period implies a broad continuity in meaning throughout the Alan period.

In summation, not only is there very little evidence for language and material culture being defining characteristics of ethnicity in the pre-modern North Caucasus, the evidence points the opposite way: that self-identification was primarily on a local and clan basis, rather than through a modern-style sense of ethnicity. Rather, the evidence strongly indicates that the theory of primordial ethnicities in the Central North Caucasus is a product of 19th and 20th century historiography.

The Historiography of Alan Ethnicity

As Francine Hirsch and Lale Yalcin-Heckermann have recently demonstrated, the assumptions of the primordialist theory were highly influential in determining the structure of Soviet social scientific institutions,

⁶⁷ S. Maqbul Ahmad, 'Ibn Rusta', *Elz*.

⁶⁸ See Ibn Rusta, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.169; al-Mas'ūdī, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.158; Friar C. de Bridia, in Alemany, p.149. For a translation of the relevant section of the *Yuan-Shi*- the most detailed of a number of Mongol-era sources which mention the town of **Magas*- see Appendix.

which aimed at a greater understanding of (supposedly) discrete ethnic blocs.⁶⁹ The organisation of Alan studies (*Alanovedeniia*) was no exception. Indeed, the most significant periods in the historiography of North Caucasian Alania have been fundamentally determined by *linguistic* discoveries, particularly those regarding the Ossetian language, the most direct descendant of the Alanic language.⁷⁰ These linguistic developments were considered particularly significant, since language was seen as the foundational characteristic of nationality status (*narodnost'*). Moreover, the USSR displayed an- albeit sporadic- concern with national self-determination, with museums and historical institutes based at national level. Since these nationalities were seen as distinct historic groups, the historians and archaeologists based at these institutions ended up studying the ancestry of these (Soviet-designated) nations, which formed the theoretical justification for these nationalities' special status.⁷¹ Since the Alans had founded the medieval period's most significant indigenous North Caucasian polity, the major issue thus became which modern nations could trace their ancestry back to it. Whilst these debates shared the basic primordialist conception of ethnicity, the most important question became how inclusively the boundaries of 'Alan-ness' should be drawn.

The 'more exclusive' version of the primordialist theory of Alan identity traces its ancestry to Vsevolod Miller's studies in the 1880s, and the firm

⁶⁹ Hirsch, pp.8-10; Bruce Grant and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann, 'Introduction', in *Caucasus Paradigms: Anthropologies, Histories and the Making of a World Area*, ed. by Bruce Grant and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (Berlin: W. Hopf Verlag, 2007), pp.4-7.

⁷⁰ On the links between the Alanic, Sarmatian and Scythian languages, see János Harmatta, *Studies in the Language of the Iranian Tribes in South Russia* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetemi Görög Filológiai Intézet, 1952), pp.3-7, 54-6; Alemany, pp.1-9.

⁷¹ On Soviet nationalities policy's links to primordialist theories of ethnicity, see V.A. Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage, 1997), pp.1-10; Hirsch, pp.5-8.

identification of Ossetian as an Eastern Iranian language related to Scythian and Alanic.⁷² In the third part of his *Osetinskie Etiudy*, Miller used this linguistic affiliation to argue that the Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans and Ossetians should be considered a single *narod* (people), which had managed to survive in the remote valleys of the North Caucasus.⁷³ With the publication of Miller's work, the primordialist theory became applied to the Alans, a tendency which has continued to this day. Notably, Miller's work was highly influential in the formation of modern Ossetian nationalism, this process being attributed to Miller's work by Ossetian nationalist intellectuals.⁷⁴

This 'more exclusive' version of the primordialist theory of Alan identity remained dominant until the publication of V.I. Abaev's gargantuan historical dictionary of the Ossetian language. Abaev identified that, while the basic structure of Ossetian is indeed Indo-Iranian, between 60-80% of its vocabulary derives from other languages, especially from neighbouring language groups of the Caucasus, primarily Nakh, Kartvelian and Turkic.⁷⁵ On this basis, Abaev and his followers argued that the creation of the Alan ethnicity was the result of an interaction between an Eastern Iranian ethnolinguistic group and a Caucasian group, rather than a straightforward continuation of the Scythian *narod*. Betraying the linguistic origins of this theory, these ethnic components are generally termed the 'superstrate', and the 'substrate'. On the basis of this idea, V.A. Kuznetsov argued that the Iranian 'superstrate' and the Caucasian 'substrate'

⁷² See V. F. Miller, *Osetinskie etiudy. Ch. 1 & 2* (Moscow: M.A. Ivanov, 1881), p.3.

⁷³ See Miller, *Osetinskie etiudy. Ch. 3*, pp.1-2.

⁷⁴ See Tolz, fn. p.165; Gagloiti, *Alany i voprosy etnogeneza Osetin*, p.22.

⁷⁵ V.I. Abaev and others, *Istoriko-etimologicheskii slovar' osetinskogo iazyka* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1958).

were archaeologically detectable, due to their distinctive, *narodnyi* material cultures.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, both elements came together peacefully in order to form an Alan supra-identity, which could for practical purposes be treated as coterminous with the Alan 'state' of the 10th-13th centuries.

These two theories have competed throughout the second half of the 20th century. A number of scholars, especially of Ossetian nationality, have continued to insist on the direct descent of the Alans and Ossetians from the Scythians.⁷⁷ By contrast, Kuznetsov and a number of other scholars have interpreted the Alans as a mixed group.⁷⁸ However, both these theories derive from the same primordialist conception of ethnicity. In both cases, linguistics leads all other branches of science, and evidence from other sources, particularly archaeology, is fitted into a framework which sees language as the primary determinant of ethnicity and identity.

However, it is clear that, in contrast to the claim of primordialism to embody an eternal truth about human society, its popularity in the historiography of the North Caucasus has been encouraged by contemporary conditions, particularly the institutional organisation of North Caucasian archaeology. This tendency is clearly observable in the organisation of Alan studies along the lines of the various Soviet republics in the region.⁷⁹ From the 1960s onwards, each region or republic could support one or two archaeologists with a medieval specialism:

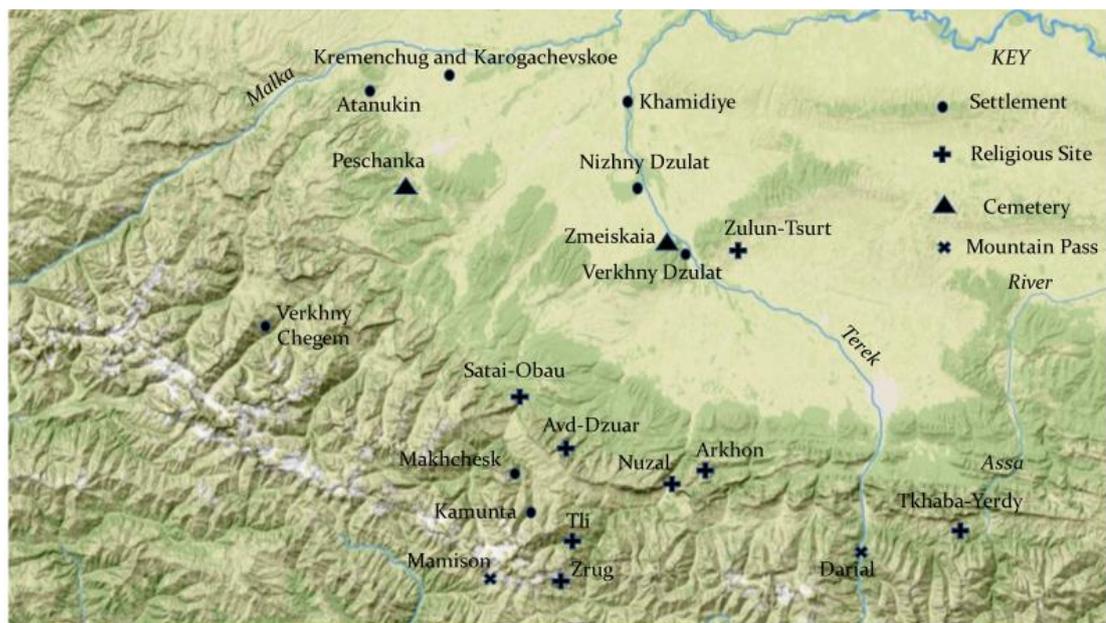
⁷⁶ Kuznetsov, *Alanskie plemena Severnogo Kavkaza*, especially pp.116-19.

⁷⁷ For example M.M. Bliiev and R.S. Bzarov, *Sokrovishcha Alanii. The Treasure of Alania* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2011), pp.9-10.

⁷⁸ See also, for example, Gadlo, *Etnicheskaia istoriia Severnogo Kavkaza X-XIII vv.*, pp.17-20.

⁷⁹ For the organisation of archaeology in the USSR and post-Soviet periods, see N.N. Kradin, 'A Panorama of Social Archaeology in Russia', in *Comparative Archaeologies: A Sociological View of the Science of the Past*, ed. by R.N. Lozny (London: Springer, 2011), pp.245-7.

thus M.N. Lozhkin and V.N. Kaminskii operated in Krasnodar Krai; T.M. Minaeva, V.I. Markovin, and Kh.Kh. Bidzhiev in Karachai-Cherkassia; I.M. Chechenov in Kabardino-Balkaria; V.Kh. Tmenov in North Ossetia; V.B. Vinogradov in Checheno-Ingushetia. In general, these archaeologists concentrated on their own republics, although some were able to excavate outside their home republics, most notably V.A. Kuznetsov, who excavated outside North Ossetia at the urban site of Nizhny Arkhyz in Karachai-Cherkassia.



Map 4: Eastern Alania with sites of the ninth to fourteenth centuries. Image: the author.

Although a number of very well-conducted larger excavations were carried out, for example those of Zmeiskaia Cemetery in North Ossetia, the fortress of Khumara (Karachai-Cherkassia), and at Nizhny Arkhyz, the publication of material from smaller-scale excavations could be rather fragmented along republic lines. This process was not helped by the publication of much material

in so-called ‘grey literature’, small pamphlets with a limited print run.⁸⁰ As a result of the regional organisation of these investigations, they were strongly focussed on the history and origins of currently existing republics, and especially the ancestry of the (Soviet-designated) nations on which their existence was based.

This tendency towards regional fragmentation has only intensified since 1991. A major effect of the collapse of the USSR has been a massive drop in funding for archaeology. The paradoxical result has been to entrench methodological approaches founded in the Soviet period, despite the change in official ideology.⁸¹ This has been conditioned not only by language barriers, financial and regulatory difficulties in international co-operation, but also by a growing divide between more conservative scholars in the North Caucasus and more internationally-oriented ones in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Within the contemporary North Caucasus, the dominant approach to Alan history can be characterised as ‘mythopoeic’- that is to say, the revival or creation of a glorified past as an element of national identity. The term ‘mythopoeic’ should necessarily not be taken as a negative description- as A.D. Smith has cogently argued, national myths and the “perception of cultural uniqueness” are a central element to any group identity.⁸² This is a particularly pertinent point in the North Caucasus, where expressions of nationalism were to some degree

⁸⁰ Kradin, ‘A Panorama of Social Archaeology in Russia’, p.247.

⁸¹ S.M. Perevalov, ‘Ex Fonte Bibere. Aktual’naia problema otechestvennogo alanovedeniia’, *Gumanitarnaia mysl’ Iuga Rossii. Regional’nyi nauchnyi zhurnal*, 1 (2006), 19–30; Katarzyna A. Kaszycka, Goran Štrkalj, and Jan Strzałko, ‘Current Views of European Anthropologists on Race: Influence of Educational and Ideological Background’, *American Anthropologist*, 111.1 (2009), 43–56.

⁸² Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p.22.

repressed during the Soviet period. Many groups who now claim Alan ancestry suffered tremendously during the last century, particularly the Ingush, Chechens, Karachai and Balkars, who were deported *en masse* between 1944 and the late 1950s.⁸³ As such, the search for a glorious past is not only a core element of nation-building, but a form of national healing, a search for a golden age before the trauma of the 20th century. Alania is an obvious target in this search, being the largest indigenous historical kingdom of the North Caucasus, and one free from the Soviet stigmatisation of the recent ancestors of the deported peoples.⁸⁴

Unfortunately, the result of this linguistically-driven primordialism can be a chauvinistic or even racist narrative of history. Thus, numerous claims have been made for the exclusive descent of one North Caucasian people or another from the Alans, often on tendentious linguistic grounds.⁸⁵ This has included at times the subjective interpretation or outright forgery of inscriptions in one language or another to apparently ‘prove’ the affiliation of given sites or regions to the Alans.⁸⁶ This exclusivist historiography can have dire, real-world consequences: for example, in 1992, the North Ossetian leader A. Galazov used the ‘Alanic’ identification of archaeological sites in the Prigorodnyi, a border region between North Ossetia and Ingushetia, to justify the expulsion of the local Ingush.⁸⁷

⁸³ On the deportations of the Stalinist era, see James Forsyth, *The Caucasus: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.534-9.

⁸⁴ See V.A. Shnirel'man, ‘Inventing the Alans: Origins of the Peoples and the Politics of the Northern Caucasus’, in *Social Protests and Nation Building in the Middle East and Central Asia*, ed. by K. Sakai (Chiba: Institute of Developing Economies, 2003), pp.59-60.

⁸⁵ V.A. Kuznetsov termed this process the “battle for the Alans”- see M.S. Gadzhiev, V.A. Kuznetsov, and I.M. Chechenov, *Istoriia v zerkale paranauki: kritika sovremennoi etnotsentristskoi istoriografii Severnogo Kavkaza* (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia, 2006), particularly pp.149-51, 239-55.

⁸⁶ Gadzhiev, Kuznetsov, and Chechenov, pp.175-98.

⁸⁷ See Philip L. Kohl and Gocha R. Tsetsikhladze, ‘Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology in the Caucasus’, in *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology*, ed. by

Whilst the mythopoeic approach's objectives may be noble ones, when combined with modern power politics its results can be very ugly indeed. In this kind of mythopoeic history, it is axiomatic that past historical entities are coterminous with the ancestors of modern nations; their rise and fall, a direct result of the respective vigour of their populations. Since these populations are discrete and boxed off from each other, their expansion can only be achieved through military means. Similarly, since their fundamental nature is unchanging, their ancient power structures can be extrapolated from today's self-perceptions. For example, certain North Ossetian authors have claimed that the Alans' power was based on the same Aryan martial vigour which, apparently, the Ossetians embody today.⁸⁸ It can be seen that, if we are attempting to write a history based on the actual source evidence from the medieval Caucasus, this approach is not a helpful one.

In summary, the marriage of Marxism-Leninism and linguistic primordialism in the Soviet period led to the rise of a peculiarly Caucasian form of historical nationalism. Since the primary aim of historical study became the identification of a given archaeological site, source, or historical people with the ancestors of a Soviet-designated nationality, the actual lived experience of peoples such as the Alans became a strictly secondary priority. However, it is

Philip L. Kohl (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), pp.160-1; Shnirel'man, 'Inventing the Alans', pp.65-6.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Iu.S. Gagloiti's application of Dumézil's trifunctional theories to Alan and Ossetian history in Iu.S. Gagloiti, 'Trekhsfunktsional'noe delenie v etnicheskoi kul'ture Osetin', in *Problemy etnografii Osetin*, ed. by V. Kh. Tmenov (Ordzhonikidze: Severo-Osetinskii nauchno-issl. in-t istorii, filologii i ekonomiki pri Sovete Ministrov SOASSR, 1989), pp.11-24. For the background to this article, being the increased popularity of Dumézil's theories in Ossetian nationalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, see V.A. Shnirel'man, 'The Politics of a Name: Between Consolidation and Separation in the North Caucasus', *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 23 (2006), 37-73.

clear that whilst the primordialist theory claims to recover an eternal truth of human social organisation, its application to the historiography of the Caucasus has been and is motivated by contemporary political and intellectual currents. Whilst much of this work has been motivated by noble intentions, such as restoring national pride to imperial subjects, its consequences have often been very unpleasant. This thesis will therefore not explicitly address the subject of Alan ethnicity; rather, it will attempt to recover the actual lived experience of the historical Alans, to recover their voices, and to not impose our contemporary priorities on them. In particular, rather than simply assuming that loyalty to the Alan kingdom was a natural by-product of ethnicity or language, it will seek to explore the political concepts and ideologies that underpinned it.

Historiographical Tendency #3: Alania and the Outside World

External Influence and the Development of Alania

The third historiographical tendency in the study of Alania is an emphasis on the kingdom's external relations as a causative factor in political and social developments. For example, the Alan rulers' adoption of Christianity in the early 10th century has been widely attributed to the machinations of the Byzantine and Khazar Empires, as has their brief rejection of Christianity during the 930s and 40s. Denis Beletskii and Andrei Vinogradov state that "the fate of Christianity in newly-converted Alania became... a pawn in the political games of the great powers."⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.32.

In contrast to the previous two historiographical tendencies, this emphasis on external influence on Alania is solidly grounded in primary source evidence. It is clear that the outside world was tremendously important to peoples of the medieval North Caucasus: as we will see in Chapter Three (*passim*), access to the outside world was a major factor in legitimating Alan rulers. The Alan royal family intermarried with foreign rulers; Alan mercenaries and courtiers served abroad, rising to high rank in the Byzantine bureaucracy; and a Byzantine-style Christianity penetrated deep into the culture of the North Caucasus. However, I will be arguing in this section that, whilst external influence on Alania was very prominent in the period under study, its importance as a *causative* factor in political developments has been overemphasised. Correspondingly, the importance of internal, Caucasian factors has been somewhat underemphasised. This is primarily a consequence of our source base, which primarily originates from outside Alania, and from elite, diplomatic and administrative contexts. Although there is a considerable amount of source evidence originating from the North Caucasus- epigraphy, ethnography, folklore and material culture being particularly significant- this does not lend itself to writing *evenemential* history. Finally, structural scholarly trends have exacerbated this tendency, in particular the dominance of archaeologists in Alan studies.

It is therefore necessary to examine our source base in order to understand the overemphasis on external causes of social change. We will begin by examining the external written evidence, and historiographical aspects of its interpretation. We will then move on to our North Caucasian source base, which

will be examined in greater detail due to its relative unfamiliarity to the general reader.

Outsider Textual Sources: Introduction and General Issues

When we study the accounts of foreign authors writing about the North Caucasus, there are a number of problematic factors that should be borne in mind (for the full translated text of selected sources, see **Appendix B**). The most significant, and one which cannot be overlooked, is the profound indifference of the majority of our foreign textual sources to the internal affairs of the Alanic kingdom. The Alans, for the most part, only intrude on our narratives when they impinge upon the concerns of foreign authors.

A number of examples may sufficiently demonstrate this indifference. Firstly, despite the long association of Byzantium with Alania (including the presence of numerous Alans in Byzantine society, including royal women, senior officials, and mercenaries), no Byzantine author ever produces a description of Alania longer than a few lines, or any account of its royal family.⁹⁰ Secondly, despite the even closer association of Alania with the royal family of Kartli, later that of united Georgia, there is no description whatsoever of Alania in medieval Georgian sources, or even a genealogy of the Alan royal family, with whom the

⁹⁰ The most detailed Byzantine description of Alania comes in the panegyric (c.1140) of Adrian Komnēnos, son of the Alan princess Irene and the *sebastokratōr* Isaak Komnēnos, yet still makes heavy use of classicising language when describing the “Scythian” Alans. See Nikēphoros Basilakes, *In Ioann. Episc. Bulg.*, 8, in *Alemany.*, pp.229-30, and discussion in Chapter Four (pp.222-4). For the presence of noble Alans in Byzantium, see Michael Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers: The ‘Chronographia’*, trans. by E. R. A. Sewter, revised edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), p.231ff; Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. by E. R. A. Sewter (London: Penguin, 1967), pp.70, 229-31; for the presence of lower-class Alans, see Nikēphoros Bryennios, 2, 12-13, in *Alemany.*, pp.231-2.

Bagrationi kings so frequently intermarried.⁹¹ Thirdly, our mentions of the Alans in Arabic historical sources, such as the *Tarīkh Bāb al-Abwāb* (a chronicle of Darband in Dagestan) are entirely confined to military expeditions into or out of Alania.⁹²

This indifference is so pronounced that even in writings about people who actually visited Alania- for example, the letters of Nicholas Mystikos (Patriarch of Constantinople 901-7 and 912-925) to the Archbishop of Alania, Peter- there is practically no description of the country.⁹³ We may thus note that our outsider textual sources on the Alans generally speak about people who came out of Alania- whether as royal consorts, officials, invaders, migrants, mercenaries, or slaves- rather than the internal workings of Alania itself. Whilst our accounts about these people can still tell us much about their lives within Alania, it seems clear that these individuals comprise an unrepresentative sample of North Caucasians' lived experience.

A second general issue regarding our 'outsider' written sources is that only a handful can be considered 'true' primary sources, in the sense of being official or private documents contemporaneous with the events or processes they refer to. The vast majority rather comprise compilations of earlier material, augmented in some cases by the author's personal experience of the subject (for example, Yāqūt

⁹¹ For example, the marriages of Borena of Alania to Bagrat IV (r.1027-72) and of Davit Soslan to Queen Tamar (r.1184-1213). See Met'reveli and Jones, pp.154, p.246ff.

⁹² *Tarīkh Bāb al-Abwāb*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, pp.25, 31-2, 47.

⁹³ See *Ep.* 52, 118, 133, 134, 135, in Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Letters*, ed. by Romilly James Heald Jenkins and Leendert Gerrit Westerink (Washington, D.C.: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1973), pp. 281-7, 407-9, 433-43, 572-3, 577-8.

al-Rūmī's geographical dictionary (625/ 1228)).⁹⁴ As such, they are only 'primary' in the sense that their forebears have not survived. This point applies as much to the Georgian royal annals, the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (multiple authors; eighth to 14th centuries) as it does to the 'Northern Report', an account of the peoples of the Eurasian Steppes and Caucasus which was utilised by a number of Islamic geographers of the so-called 'Jayhānī tradition'.⁹⁵ As a result, we must be careful with our dating of historical sources- as we will see in Chapter Two (p.89ff), sources can continue to repeat information which was hundreds of years out of date at their time of composition.

As a result of these factors, if we are not careful about balancing what is said about the Alans in outsiders' accounts with evidence from Alania itself, we run the risk of prioritising unrepresentative social groups. Moreover, if we are not careful to read these sources in the cultural context in which they were produced, it is possible to see the Alans as adjuncts to the histories of more powerful peoples. This is particularly important, since practically all of our outsider written sources are strongly affected by *internal* cultural and political concerns. I present several examples of this tendency below.

⁹⁴ See Yāqūt b. 'Abdullah al-Rūmī al-Hamawī, *Dictionnaire géographique, historique et littéraire de la Perse et des contrées adjacentes, extrait du Mo'djem el-Bouldan de Yaqout, et complété à l'aide de documents Arabes et Persans pour la plupart inédits*, ed. by Charles Adrien Casimir Barbier de Meynard (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1861), pp.51-3.

⁹⁵ For the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, see Met'reveli and Jones; for its composition and date, see Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1963), pp.25-6. On the 'Northern Report', see István Zimonyi, *Muslim Sources on the Magyars in the Second Half of the 9th Century: The Magyar Chapter of the Jayhani Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

Outsider Textual Sources on the Alans: Epistemic Concerns

Some of the most significant sources on Alania are a series of Arabic and Persian geographical descriptions. However, these are not without their problems. The most significant of these sources include Ibn Rusta (conventionally dated to 290-300/ 903-13⁹⁶), and a number of later works derivative of the same 'Jayhānī tradition'; 'al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-Dhahab* (332-6/ 943-7⁹⁷); the anonymous Persian *Ḥudūd al-'Alam* (372/ 982⁹⁸); and the *Mu'jam al-Buldān* of Yāqūt al-Rūmī (625/ 1228⁹⁹). The significance of these works is that they do provide brief descriptions of Alania's internal structure. This does not, however, mean that these descriptions are neutral, or necessarily reliable: as Andre Miquel and Ahmed Nazmi note, one of the primary concerns of this material was to place other lands within an Islamic cosmological framework.¹⁰⁰ As we will see in Chapter Two (p.102ff), these descriptions of Alania were deeply implicated in the political order of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, and were rooted in outsider perceptions of the North Caucasus. For example, a number were influenced by an eschatological tradition which identified the Caucasus with the barrier built by Alexander the Great to keep out Yājuj and Mājuj, the peoples of the end times.

⁹⁶ S. Maqbul Ahmad, 'Ibn Rusta', *ELz*.

⁹⁷ Charles Pellat, 'al-Mas'ūdī', *ELz*.

⁹⁸ *Hudud Al-'Alam=The Regions of the World: A Persian Geography of 372A.H.-982 A.D.*, ed. by Vladimir Minorsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), p.vii.

⁹⁹ Claude Gilliot, 'Yakut al-Rumi', *ELz*.

¹⁰⁰ Ahmad Nazmi, *The Muslim Geographical [sic] Image of the World in the Middle Ages: A Source Study* (Warsaw: Academic Publishing House Dialog, 2007), pp.97-102; Andre Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde Musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11e siècle: géographie Arabe et représentation du monde: la terre et l'étranger*. (Paris: Mouton, 1975), pp. xi-xiv.

A second example of this influence of internal epistemic concerns is provided by Byzantine textual sources. Byzantine sources that mention the Alans include works explicitly designed for public consumption, notably the chronicles of Michael Psellos (c.1063-1070s¹⁰¹); John Skylitzēs (c.1092-4¹⁰²), later utilised by George Kedrenos (c.1115¹⁰³); that of Nikēphoros Bryennios (1130s¹⁰⁴); and Anna Komnēne (c.1148¹⁰⁵). Other significant sources can be classified as ‘semi-private’- that is to say, works written without an overt public message. These include the semi-official letter collection of Nicholas Mystikos (912-25¹⁰⁶); and two official dossiers compiled under the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos- the *De Administrando Imperio* (c.948-52¹⁰⁷), a manual of statecraft, and the *De Ceremoniis* (c.956-9¹⁰⁸), which contains a list of titles to be used in official diplomatic correspondence. This ‘semi-private’ categorisation should not, however, lead us to think that these sources represent an objective view, or do not convey a political message. For example, it has become clear that the *De Administrando Imperio* has a carefully designed argument about the strategic importance of the Chersonese, despite its appearance of being a heterogeneous collection.¹⁰⁹ The same may be said for the letter collection of Patriarch Nicholas

¹⁰¹ Psellus, p.15.

¹⁰² Warren Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.230.

¹⁰³ Treadgold, p.241.

¹⁰⁴ Alemany, p.230.

¹⁰⁵ Comnena, p.14.

¹⁰⁶ Evans, p.214.

¹⁰⁷ Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, p.116.

¹⁰⁸ Arnold Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.576-7.

¹⁰⁹ See Paul Magdalino, ‘Constantine VII and the Historical Geography of Empire’, in *Imperial Geographies in Byzantine and Ottoman Space*, ed. by Sahar Bazzaz, Yota Batsaki, and Dimiter Angelov (Boston: Harvard Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013), pp.33-5.

Mystikos, which Nick Evans has recently argued was carefully edited to reflect well on its author.¹¹⁰

The cursory nature of these sources' references to the Alans befits their elite origin, and the overriding Byzantine epistemic concern with *taxis*- the divinely-appointed order with the emperor at its head.¹¹¹ A consequence of this ideology could be a highly dismissive attitude towards foreigners, even after they became Christian; treating with them was seen as being beneath the dignity of the Empire and of the Emperor in particular.¹¹² Nevertheless, once this attitude is taken into account, a great deal can be determined from the treatment of foreign peoples, and especially how it changed over time.

A third case in which we must be wary of outsider bias is that of the Georgian historical tradition. Throughout the medieval period, Alania's nearest neighbours with a literate historical tradition were the Georgian kingdoms of Abkhazia and Kartli, which were united under the Bagrationi dynasty in 1008. As such, it is unsurprising that Georgian sources from this period are of considerable importance. By far and away the most significant Georgian source is the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*- a set of chronicles of eighth to 14th century date, which were collated in the early 18th century under King Vakhtang VI of Kartli.¹¹³ Whilst it is hard to generalise about this heterogeneous body of work, it should be noted that the production of this history was firmly under royal control. This meant, firstly, that

¹¹⁰ Evans, p.202.

¹¹¹ On *taxis* in general, see Jonathan Shepard, 'Spreading the Word: Byzantine Missions', in *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, ed. by Cyril A. Mango (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.235-8; Cyril A. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of the New Rome* (London: Phoenix, 1994), pp.218-23.

¹¹² For examples of this process, see S.A. Ivanov, *Pearls before Swine: Missionary Work in Byzantium* (Paris: ACHCByz, 2015), pp.218-21.

¹¹³ On the compilation of these chronicles, see Toumanoff, pp.21-2.

politically inconvenient facts could be and were excluded; and secondly, its narratives are in general focussed on the affairs of the ruler.¹¹⁴ Consequently, the majority of mentions of the Alans are very cursory, and without exception only occur when they impinge on the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*'s major concerns. Thus, these normally take the form of mentions of military campaigns, or of intermarriages between the Alan and Georgian royal families.

A fourth case in which caution should be exercised is provided by one of our more surprising sources on the Alans in the 13th century: a series of Chinese biographies of notable commanders of North Caucasian extraction who served the Mongols in China. These are contained within the *Yuan-Shi* (1369), the official history of the Yuan Dynasty.¹¹⁵ This work includes details of the Mongol campaigns in the North Caucasus, and details of how these Alan families came to serve the Mongols. Moreover, since it was compiled under the Yuan's successors, the Ming dynasty, it does not have an overtly polemical character.¹¹⁶ However, these biographies are carefully edited in order to present an image of imperial prestige. In this worldview, the emperor stands at the head of a cosmological order, in which he is the only true source of legitimacy.¹¹⁷ As a result, it is possible for imperial servants, including Alans, to retroactively be promoted in seniority in order to correspond with their position in the Yuan official hierarchy.

¹¹⁴ See Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p.3.

¹¹⁵ E.V. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Fragments towards the Knowledge of the Geography and History of Central and Western Asia from the 13th to the 17th Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), vol. 1, p.180.

¹¹⁶ For the compilation of the *Yuan-Shi*, see Bretschneider, vol. 1, pp.180-91.

¹¹⁷ In general on the construction of imperial space in these biographies, see Geoffrey Frank Humble, 'Biographical Rhetorics: Narrative and Power in Yuanshi Biography' (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2017), pp.1-18.

This is by no means a comprehensive listing of outsider written sources which will be used in this thesis- others include Arabic, Persian and Russian chronicles, the ‘Schechter Letter’ (a Judaeo-Khazar mythic history of the late 940s), and Latin Christian travel accounts.¹¹⁸ However, these examples adequately demonstrate that most outsider textual sources had internal epistemic concerns in mind, to a greater or lesser extent, in their descriptions of the Alans. Moreover, given the fact that several of these epistemic traditions- especially the Byzantine, Georgian and Sino-Mongol- explicitly aimed to boost the position of the ruler, we should be particularly careful when evaluating their claims of imperial or royal diplomatic initiative leading to changes in Alan society. However, if we do bear in mind these tendencies, changes in the depiction of the Alans can be highly revealing, as we will see in the following chapters. Unfortunately, the care with which these sources must be handled has at times been lacking.

¹¹⁸ Arabic and Persian chronicles include the Darbandi *Tārīkh Bāb al-Abwāb* (c.468/1075); an anonymous *Mujmal al-tawārīkh w'al-qisas* of 520/1126; Ibn al-Azraq's *History of Mayyafariqin* (c.572/1176); Atā-Malik Juvayī's *Tārīkh-e Jahāngushā* (650-8/ 1252-60); and Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jami' al-tawārīkh* (c.717/1317-18). See Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*; *Mujmal Al-Tawārīkh Wa-Al-Qiṣaṣ: Ta'rif-i Sāl-i 520 Hijrī*, ed. by Malik al-Shu'āra' Bahār (Tehran: Chāpkhānah-i Khāvar, 1939); Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf Ibn al-Azraq al-Fāriqī, *A Muslim Principality in Crusader Times: The Early Artuqid State*, trans. by Caroline Hillenbrand (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1990); 'Aṭā Malik ibn Muḥammad Juvaynī, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. by J.A. Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958); *Classical Writings of the Medieval Islamic World: Persian Histories of the Mongol Dynasties*, ed. by W. M. Thackston (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012). Among Russian chronicles, this thesis will principally refer to the *Povest' Vremennikh Let*, otherwise known as the Russian Primary Chronicle (1377), and to the *Resurrection Chronicle* (1541). See *Povest' vremennykh let po Lavrent'evskoi Letopisi 1377 g.*, ed. by D.S. Likhachev and B.A. Romanov (Moscow- Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1950); Alemany, pp.384-5. Accounts of Latin Christian travellers include the Letter of Riccardus (c.1237), describing the travels of Friar Julian of Hungary, and the travel accounts of Fr. John of Plano Carpini (c.1247), Fr. C. de Bridia (1247), and Fr. William of Rubruck (c.1255). See Mary Dienes, 'Eastern Missions of the Hungarian Dominicans in the First Half of the Thirteenth Century', *Isis*, 27.2 (1937), 225-41; Alemany, pp.150-3, 148-50, 153-8 respectively. For the 'Schechter Letter', see *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, ed. by Norman Golb and Omeljan Pritsak (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp.xiv, 80, 94-5, 102-3, 136.

Historiographical Interpretation of Outsider Sources on Alania

A major tendency in the historiography of the Alans has been an overly literal interpretation of our non-Alanic primary source base, which, as we have seen, cannot be taken at face value. This overly literal interpretation is partially a result of the dominant role of Soviet archaeologists in North Caucasian historiography, following the purges of the pre-revolutionary academic establishment in the late 1920s.¹¹⁹ This dominance of archaeology led to a number of very well-conducted excavations of Alan-period sites. However, it also had the effect that other fields of inquiry were neglected. This was particularly apparent in historical studies, where local archaeologists would frequently attempt to correlate historical information with their findings, regardless of this information's original context.

This de-contextualisation of written source evidence was not helped by the practice of relying on large source compilations, which could frequently be outdated or inaccurate.¹²⁰ One example may adequately illustrate this phenomenon. A number of older and even recent publications cite an account of a tenth-century Arabic traveller, 'Abu'l- Kassim', who provided a lengthy account of the Alans, or so it has been claimed.¹²¹ However, this supposed traveller never existed; rather, he was an invention of the early 19th century Swedish-Armenian diplomat, Count Abraham d'Ohsson. In his *Des peuples du Caucase*, d'Ohsson

¹¹⁹ On the effects of these purges, see Perevalov, 'Ex Fonte Bibere. Aktual'naia problema otechestvennogo alanovedeniia', and in general, Trigger, pp.326-30.

¹²⁰ See Perevalov, 'Ex Fonte Bibere. Aktual'naia problema otechestvennogo alanovedeniia', pp.24-8.

¹²¹ See for example Gagloiti, *Alany i voprosy etnogeneza Osetin*, p.134; R.F. Fidarov, 'Rol' Verkhonogo Dzulata v gosudarstvennoi ideologii Alanii', in *Istoriko-filologicheskii arkhiv* 7, ed. by R.S. Bzarov (Vladikavkaz: Institut istorii i arkheologii RSO-A pri SOGU, 2011), p.8.

translated a number of early Arabic and Persian travel accounts, then synthesised them as the recollections of an explicitly fictional traveller.¹²² The fact that a fictionalised account, albeit one closely based on real geographical reports, could find its way into some Soviet histories suggest a certain neglect of source-criticism.

It should be clearly stated that not all Russophone studies of the Alans can be tarred with the same brush. Especially since the fall of the USSR, a number of scholars, particularly Denis Beletskii, Andrei Vinogradov and S.M. Perevalov, have explicitly reacted against the neglect of historical studies in the Soviet period, and have started to reinstate source analysis in their studies of the Alans.¹²³ Nonetheless, the very fact that such a movement is necessary demonstrates that we should be wary of prevailing historiographical trends in the field. In particular, given the clear outsider- and state-centric bias of many of our written sources, we should be particularly careful when crediting outsiders for initiating major political and social changes in Alania.

This trend of emphasising outside initiative over internal evolution was exacerbated by the primordialist conception of ethnicity which has dominated the field of Alan studies. Contained within this theory is the implication that because the most important features of a given culture are subject to relatively little change over time, radical cultural changes must necessarily come from an external source. As a result, external causes of major cultural changes, such as the

¹²² See Abraham Constantin Mouradja d'Ohsson, *Des peuples du Caucase et des pays au nord de la Mer Noire et de la Mer Caspienne, dans le dixième siècle, ou, voyage d'Abou-El-Cassim* (Paris: Didot Père et Fils, 1828), pp.i-iii.

¹²³ See in particular Perevalov, 'Ex Fonte Bibere. Aktual'naia problema otechestvennogo alanovedeniia'; Beletskii and Vinogradov, *Nizhny Arkhyz i Senty*.

Christianisation of the Alan kingdom and the decline of Alan kingship, tended to be preferred. However, as we will see in Chapters Two and Six (pp.106-7; p.301ff), in neither case does external influence properly explain these processes.

North Caucasian Sources: Introduction

A second major reason for the development of Alania being attributed to external influence is the nature of sources from the Central North Caucasus. These are surprisingly plentiful. However, they are also generally little-known and present their own challenges- for example, the North Caucasian Greek epigraphic record has not yet been typologically classified. As such, these sources need to be analysed in detail before they can be used as evidence for medieval Alan power structures.

It is particularly important to note that most of these sources do not lend themselves to analysis of specific events, but rather to an analysis of long-term processes. Nonetheless, as an indigenous counterbalance to the literary productions of outside empires, they must surely be accorded a good deal of weight in any analysis of Alania. The evidence from the Central North Caucasus can be broadly divided into medieval written sources, material culture, ethnography, and folklore.

North Caucasian Epigraphic Sources

Our North Caucasian textual sources for this period are almost exclusively epigraphic.¹²⁴ Whilst in general these consist only of brief memorials, there are nonetheless a handful of longer inscriptions which can act as an important counterbalance to outsiders' accounts. These inscriptions are exclusively of a Christian, religious character, and are usually directly associated with churches or other holy sites. One of the most important is a Greek inscription from 965, found in the 1990s during renovation work at the church of Senty, in the Kuban valley of the modern Republic of Karachai-Cherkassia. This brief inscription describes the a 10th century restoration of the church. Its particular importance is due to it providing indigenous evidence for the Central North Caucasus being called Alania by its rulers, and it being one of the few attestations of its rulers calling themselves by Byzantine titles.¹²⁵ A second inscription of particular importance is a Greek inscription from a bronze cross, found in 1960 at the site of Nizhny Arkhyz (Karachai-Cherkassia), which provides a considerable amount of data on the Alan calendar.¹²⁶ These two inscriptions will be analysed in detail in Chapter Three (pp.147-8, 178-9). The third inscription of critical importance is a now-lost, 14th- to 15th-century Georgian inscription from the chapel of Nuzal in

¹²⁴ It has been claimed that the *Derbend-Namah*, a Dagestani chronicle with numerous recensions from the 17th-20th centuries, has considerable information relating to the Alans. However, I have previously argued that this source is a mythic history of early modern local dynasties in Dagestan, and is unrelated to the Alan kingdom. See A.V. Gadlo, 'Strana Ikran (Irkhan) dagestanskoi khroniki "Derbent-Name"', in *Voprosy arkheologii i etnografii Severnoi Osetii*, ed. by V. A. Kuznetsov, A. G. Kuchiev, and V. Kh. Tmenov (Ordzhinikidze: Severo-osetinskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut istorii, filologii i ekonomiki pri Sovete Ministrov Severo-Osetinskoi ASSR, 1984); Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or Two?'

¹²⁵ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.244.

¹²⁶ E.Ch. Skrzhinskaia, 'Grecheskaia nadpis' iz srednevekovoi Alanii', *Vizantiiskii vremennik*, 21 (1962), 118-26.

North Ossetia.¹²⁷ Whilst many questions surround this inscription, it is unique in providing a North Caucasian account of history which otherwise was only communicated orally. This inscription will be addressed in detail in Chapter Six (p.292ff).

In addition to these longer inscriptions, a large number of shorter inscriptions and graffiti are known- the precise number is unclear, but there are at least 50 Greek inscriptions known in the Central North Caucasus.¹²⁸ These inscriptions were generally written in Greek, although examples in Georgian, Armenian, Old Russian, Arabic, Alanic, and possibly Ingush are also known.¹²⁹ While a few of these inscriptions come from churches, notably Senty Church (Karachai-Cherkassia) and Tkhaba-Yerdy (Ingushetia), or from ostraca or portable objects, the majority are known from standing stones or crosses, usually six to eight feet tall.¹³⁰ Unfortunately, relatively little work has been done on the corpus of inscriptions since its collection in the 19th century.¹³¹ For example, the

¹²⁷ Reproduced in Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, pp.78-80.

¹²⁸ The exact number of inscriptions in the region is not clear, as our current records are awaiting publication (personal communication from Andrei Vinogradov). V.A. Kuznetsov counts at least 110 Greek inscriptions and crosses in the Upper Kuban and Kabardino-Balkaria, however this figure includes crosses with no inscriptions, for example a group of 20 14th-century stone crosses found at Zhankhoteskoe (Kabardino-Balkaria). See Kuznetsov, *Ocherki istorii Alanov*, p.117; I.M. Chechenov, 'Novye materialy i issledovaniia po srednevekovoi arkheologii tsentral'nogo Kavkaza', in *Arkheologicheskii issledovaniia na novostroikakh Kabardino-Balkarii*, ed. by V. A. Kuznetsov (Nal'chik: Znak Pocheta, 1987), pp.77-82.

¹²⁹ Pomialovskii, *Sbornik grecheskikh i latinskikh nadpisei Kavkaza*; Miller, 'Terskaia Oblast'. *Arkheologicheskii ekskursii*, p.20; Lavrov, *Epigraficheskie pamiatniki Severnogo Kavkaza*, pp.16, 60. Kuchuk-Ioannesova, 'Armiaskaia nadpis' XII stoletia'; Zgusta, *The Old Ossetic Inscription*; L.P. Semenov, *Arkheologicheskie i etnograficheskie razyskaniia v Ingushetii v 1925-1932 godakh* (Grozny: Checheno-Ingushskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1963), pp.59-61.

¹³⁰ For two particularly tall examples, see Countess P.S. Uvarova, 'Opisanie kamennykh krestov, stolbov i statui, sobrannykh E.D. Felitsynym i G.I. Kulikovskim', in *Materialy po arkheologii Kavkaza. Vyp. VII.*, ed. by Countess P.S. Uvarova (Moscow: A.I. Mamontov, 1898), p.139.

¹³¹ On failed attempts to produce a new corpus of inscriptions in the Soviet period, see V.P. Iailenko, 'O korpuse vizantiiskikh nadpisei v SSSR', *Vizantiiskii vremennik*, 48 (1987), 160-71.

corpus of inscriptions has not been typologically classified nor analysed palaeographically.

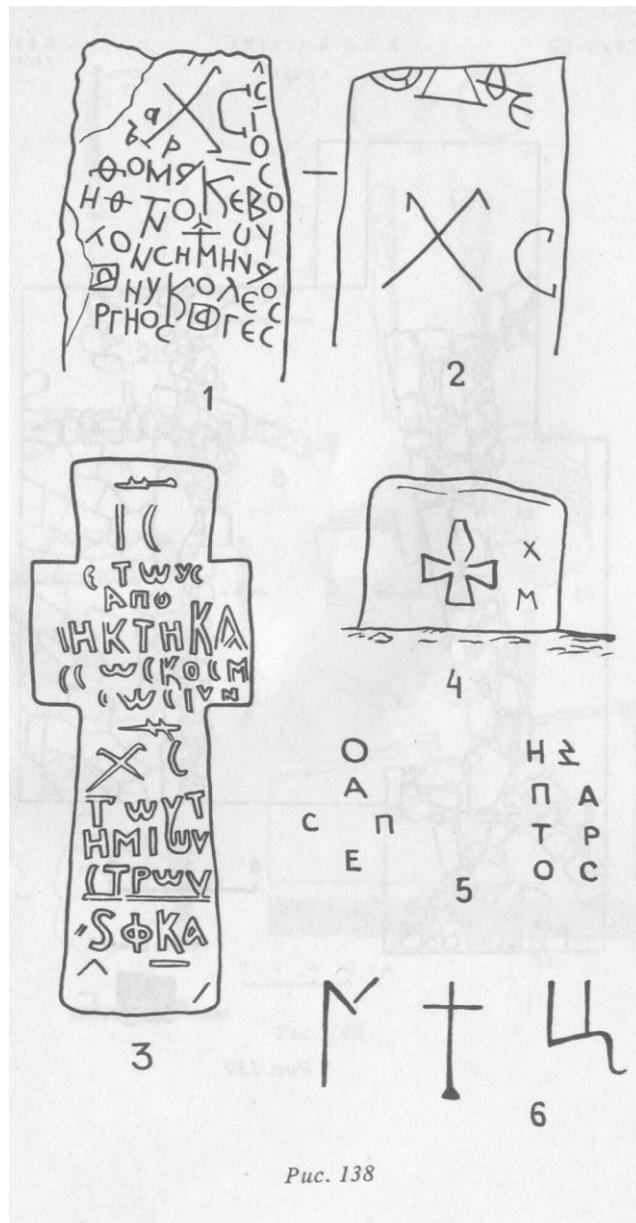


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Fig. 1: Stone Cross of 1012/13 from Nizhny Arkhyz (no. 3). From V.A. Kuznetsov, *Nizhny Arkhyz v X-XII vekakh*, (Stavropol': Kavkazskaia Biblioteka, 1993), p.440.

It is difficult to date the vast majority of these inscriptions. However, a few do include dates, from which it is possible to tentatively date certain wider inscriptional styles to the Alan period. Notably, a freestanding stone cross from

Nizhny Arkhyz is dated to 6521 AM (1012/13 AD) [fig. 1].¹³² This is the earliest stone cross known in the region which carries a date, although one may also attribute to this period the Pregradnoe Cross (Stavropol' Krai) of 1041. These two crosses, which have a long, thick stem and a thick, short crossbar, are particularly significant, as they can be linked on grounds of typological similarity to a number of other crosses known in the North Caucasus. Comparable examples include those from Zamankul in North Ossetia, Zubskoi, near Maikop (Adyghea), Khumara (Karachai-Cherkassia), Il'ichevsk *gorodische* (Karachai-Cherkassia), and to a number of examples from the Bolshoi Zelenchuk valley, including the Alanic Zelenchuk inscription, which has been independently dated on palaeographical grounds to the 11th or 12th centuries.¹³³ It may thus be tentatively suggested that crosses of this type generally date to the Alanic period.

The function of these standing crosses also needs to be established. A number contain inscriptions of a clearly funerary nature. For example, the cross at Zubskoi (11th century?) reads “*ekoimēthē ho doulos tou theou Georgios*” (‘here lies the servant of God, Georgios’); and a cross of 8th October 1341 from Sidova, Karachai-Cherkassia contains the same formula, dedicated to another Georgios.¹³⁴ However, other crosses have no obvious connections to burials, for example the

¹³² Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.49.

¹³³ See V.A. Kuznetsov, “Zulun Tsurt” u s. Zamankul’, in *Voprosy osetinskoi arkheologii i etnografii. Vyp 2*, ed. by V.A. Kuznetsov and V.Kh. Tmenov (Ordzhonikidze: Institut istorii, filologii i ekonomiki, 1982); for examples known near Zubskoi, Khumara and the Bolshoi Zelenchuk valley, see Uvarova, pp.137, 139-40, 142; M.N. Lozhkin and S.N. Malakhov, ‘Srednevekovye kamennye kresty Pourup’ia’, *Istoriko-arkheologicheskii al'manakh*, 4 (1998), 136-40; Zgusta, p.60.

¹³⁴ Uvarova, pp.137-8; V.V. Latyshev, ‘Kavkazskie pamiatniki v Moskve’, *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva*, 1.2 (1886), p.4.

Zulun-Tsurt cross, which V.A. Kuznetsov suggests may have been a road marker.¹³⁵

If we wish to determine the social function of these crosses, it is significant that despite the attested presence of longer, declamatory inscriptions such as that at Senty, it was a shorter, memorial type of inscriptional formula which became popular. This implies that the major social meaning of these inscriptions was communicated by a method other than through the text. It is therefore plausible that these crosses served to communicate primarily oral claims about the deeds of well-known individuals, in a manner comparable to contemporary Qipchaq *baba* statues and Armenian *khachkar* cross-stones, and later Ossetian *dzuar* shrines.¹³⁶ The stele's oral message, it can be suggested, was reinforced by the holy power of the written word itself, a practice which is widely attested in medieval Armenia.¹³⁷

In addition to the epigraphic record, it is clear that there once existed a North Caucasian manuscript tradition. Numerous reports of the 18th and 19th centuries describe the existence of late medieval manuscripts.¹³⁸ These were principally of a liturgical nature, although one report describes an explicitly

¹³⁵ Kuznetsov, "Zulun Tsurt" u s. Zamankul', pp.17-19.

¹³⁶ According to William of Rubruck, *baba* (small statues which topped Qipchaq burial mounds, which are also known in the North Caucasus) were memorials to well-known heroic individuals. See Friar William of Rubruck, *The Mission of William of Rubruck. His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Mongke 1253-1255*, trans. by Peter Jackson (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), p.95. Medieval Armenian *khachkar* cross-stones and 19th century Ossetian *dzuar* shrines could serve a similar function, memorialising heroic deeds or individuals. See Hamlet Petrosyan, 'The Khachkar or Cross-Stone', in *Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity*, ed. by Levon Abrahamian and Nancy Sweezy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p.63; Miller, *Osetinskie etiudy. Ch. 1 & 2*, pp.253-9.

¹³⁷ See Antony Eastmond, 'Other Encounters: Popular Belief and Cultural Convergence in Anatolia and the Caucasus', in *Islam and Christianity in Medieval Anatolia*, ed. by Andrew Peacock, Bruno De Nicola, and Sara Nur Yildiz (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p.190.

¹³⁸ See, for example, V. F. Miller, 'Terskaia Oblast'. Arkheologicheskiiia ekskursii', in *Materialy po arkheologii Kavkaza Imperatorskago Moskovskago Arkheologicheskago Obshchestva I*, ed. by Countess P.S. Uvarova (Moscow: A.I. Mamontov, 1888), p.76.

theological work. Unfortunately, only one such manuscript still survives today. However, this Byzantine lectionary of 1275 is of major importance as it contains a series of marginal glosses in the Alanic language.¹³⁹ These works provide clear evidence, albeit of a relatively late date, of the penetration of Christianity into the culture of the North Caucasus. As such, they will be addressed in detail in Chapter Six (pp.307-8).

The value of these epigraphic and written sources is threefold. Firstly, they paradoxically provide evidence for the centrality of orality in the medieval North Caucasus; secondly, they are a crucial source for the construction of authority in medieval Alania; and thirdly, they attest the Christianisation of non-royal elites. However, the fact that the precise dates of many of these inscriptions are not known, and the fact that the political claims they once communicated were primarily oral in nature, makes them far more useful for tracking longer-term social processes than for an analysis of political events.

Material Culture Evidence

Despite the presence of these textual sources, the vast majority of evidence for the Alan kingdom is unwritten. The principal element of this evidence base is material: the architecture of at least 80 surviving churches, and archaeological remains of Alan cemeteries and settlements.¹⁴⁰ The importance of this evidence is

¹³⁹ See Lubotsky, *Alanic Marginal Notes in a Byzantine Liturgical Manuscript*.

¹⁴⁰ A precise count of surviving churches dating from the Kingdom of Alania is not currently possible, due to the dating issues which will be outlined in this section, the Kingdom's uncertain boundaries, and the fact that a number of churches described in the 19th century are now lost. However, 61 Alan-period churches are known in the Upper Kuban region; to this we may add several dozen examples of varying types known from Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia and Ingushetia, although certain of these types are particularly difficult to date. In particular, the

its indigenous North Caucasian origin, and in the fact that it allows us to access elements of Alan society which otherwise are completely unrecorded. For example, the most significant settlements of medieval Alania are known almost entirely from archaeology, and are known by their modern Russian names, such as Nizhny Arkhyz and Verkhny Dzulat. However, archaeological evidence has its own challenges, particularly issues of dating and interpretation, which have led to an emphasis on outsider sources for the writing of *evenemential* history.

Since the initiation of systematic archaeological work in the North Caucasus by the *Imperatorskaia Arkheologicheskaiia Kommissia* (IAK) in the 1880s, hundreds of medieval sites have been identified in the region formerly occupied by Alania.¹⁴¹ However, only a small percentage of these sites have been excavated. The main concentration has been on excavating cemeteries, due partially due to interest in burial typology as a marker of ethnicity, and due partially to the endemic grave-robbing in the region, which has required archaeologists to quickly excavate cemeteries when they are discovered.¹⁴² However, in recent years there has been increasing interest in excavating settlement sites, in keeping with the functional-processural turn in late Soviet and Russian archaeology.¹⁴³ Despite this, only a handful of settlements have ever

'Caucasian type' of rectangular chapel continued to be used and constructed up to the 15th century, and their repeated redecoration and stone construction makes dating evidence particularly difficult to come by. See V.N. Kaminskii and I.V. Kaminskaia, 'Novye issledovaniia khristianskikh khramov malykh form v zapadnoi Alanii', *Istoriko-arkheologicheskii al'manakh*, 2 (1996), 172–81; Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.255–307.

¹⁴¹ The best synoptic surveys of Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia are I.M. Chechenov, *Drevnosti Kabardino-Balkarii. Materialy k arkheologicheskoi karte* (Nal'chik: El'brus, 1969) and V.Kh. Tmenov, *srednevekoveye istoriko-arkhitekurnye pamiatniki Severnoi Osetii* (Ordzhinikidze: Ir, 1984). I know of no comparable surveys for Krasnodar or Stavropol' Krai, Karachai-Cherkassia or Ingushetia.

¹⁴² Evans, p.99.

¹⁴³ On this shift, see Irina Arzhantseva, Dega Deopik, and Vladimir Malashev, 'Zilgi: An Early Alan Proto-City of the First Millennium AD on the Boundary Between Steppe and Hill Country', in *Les*

been properly excavated: even at major urban centres such as Verkhny Dzulat and Nizhny Dzulat, only small portions of the sites have ever been examined.¹⁴⁴ As a result, identifications of many sites' type and date has only been based on preliminary surface surveys.

The issue of imprecise dating is rendered more significant by the relatively recent development of a stable relative chronology for ceramics and other items (especially bronze decorative amulets) through which sites can be dated. A chronology of these items was only fully worked out in the 1980s.¹⁴⁵ As a result, dates derived prior to this point can be very imprecise, only specifying an approximate date range. For example, the typologically important Zmeiskaia cemetery in North Ossetia, excavated in the 1950s and 60s, could only be dated to the approximate period of the 10th-12th centuries.¹⁴⁶

The issues of relative chronological dating are trivial, however, in comparison with the lack of absolute dating evidence. As far as I am aware, only a handful of sites in the North Caucasus have ever been radiocarbon dated, principally Nizhny Arkhyz and a number of sites in the Kislovodsk basin.¹⁴⁷ I am

sites archeologiques en Crimée et au Caucase durant l'antiquité tardive et le haut moyen-âge, ed. by Michel Kazanski and Vanessa Soupault (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p.211.

¹⁴⁴ The only records of these excavations I am aware of are V.B. Vinogradov and S.A. Tolovanova, 'O roli gruzinskogo elementa v istorii khristianskikh khramov Verkhnego Dzhulata (Dediakova)', *Mantse*, 2 (1981), 149–60 (a brief article concentrating on church architecture), and a note in Chechenov, *Drevnosti Kabardino-Balkarii. Materialy k arkheologicheskoi karte*, pp.46-7, regarding excavations at Nizhny Dzulat.

¹⁴⁵ See V.B. Kovalevskaia, *Kavkaz i Alany: veka i narody* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984).

¹⁴⁶ V.A. Kuznetsov, 'Zmeiskii katakombnyi mogil'nik', in *Arkheologicheskie raskopki v raione Zmeiskoi Severnoi Osetii*, ed. by E.I. Krupnov (Ordzhinikidze: Severo-Osetinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1961), p.126.

¹⁴⁷ These dates themselves may be unreliable, as human remains in the North Caucasus tend to have unusually high carbon content due to fish consumption, which threw off the radiocarbon dates from Klin-Yar (near Kislovodsk). See in general Heinrich Härke and others, 'Rezervuarnyi effekt v radiouglerodnykh datakh iz Klin-Iara (Stavropol'skii Krai)', in *Materialy po izucheniiu istoriko-kul'turnogo nasledii Severnogo Kavkaza. Vyp. XI.*, ed. by A.B. Belinskii (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2013). To this may be added the unclear provenance of radiocarbon dates from Nizhny Arkhyz. See V.A. Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh: k*

not aware of any use of alternative absolute dating methods in the North Caucasus, for example dendrochronology or thermoluminescence dating. As a result, the primary method of providing absolute dates are foreign coin finds—whether Byzantine, Sassanian or Islamic. This method is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the number of coin finds diminishes almost to zero in the eighth-tenth centuries, and secondly, even where they are present, it seems clear that coins could be kept in circulation as jewellery for centuries after their minting date.¹⁴⁸ As such, relying too heavily on the presence or absence of coins in graves can give a false impression. For example, Z.N. Vaneev attributed the apparent absence of grave goods in the tenth-twelfth century to Christianisation, but this interpretation relied on Countess Uvarova’s misdating of sites based on isolated coin finds.¹⁴⁹

As a result of these dating issues and simple lack of funds for excavations, the awesome potential of North Caucasian archaeology has not yet been fully realised. In particular, it is difficult to specify the date of cultural changes at a degree of exactitude of less than a century. As such, whilst it is possible to use archaeology to track patterns of cultural change, these patterns are general and long-term. Furthermore, the inexactness of our dating evidence means that our

istorii srednevekovykh gorodov Severnogo Kavkaza (Stavropol’: Kavkazskaia biblioteka, 1993), p.293: this states that the “cultural layer” (*kul’turnyi sloi*) was tested, but is not specific as to what item the sample was taken from.

¹⁴⁸ For issues of coin finds, see V.B. Kovalevskiaia, ‘Khronologiiia drevnostei severokavkazskikh Alan’, in *Alany i Kavkaz. Alanta: istori ama kultura*, ed. by V.Kh. Tmenov (Vladikavkaz: Severo-Osetinskii institut gumanitarnykh issledovani, 1994), pp.123-5. On the wider regional coin drought in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, see Roman K. Kovalev, ‘The Production of Dirhams in the Coastal Caspian Sea Provinces of North Iran in the 10th Century- Early 11th Century and Their Circulation in the Northern Lands’, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 19 (2012), 133–85.

¹⁴⁹ See Vaneev, p.83; on issues with 19th-century publications’ site dates, see Kuznetsov, *Alanskie plemena Severnogo Kavkaza*, pp.8-9.

reliance of analogic reasoning (as opposed to the mapping of chronological or spatial relationships, for example) necessarily increases. As a result, we become more reliant on textual sources for interpretation, and there is greater latitude in the interpretative paradigms we use. As we will see in the final part of this chapter, this latitude can lead to some quite considerable logical jumps, for example the emphasis on agricultural intensification as a direct cause of the Alan kingdom's emergence.

Ethnography

A third major North Caucasian source on the Alans is provided by later ethnography: although, given the circumstances of its collection, it is hard to say whether this qualifies as an internal or an outsider source. This evidence was generally collected during and immediately after the Russian conquest of the region in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

However, one should be aware of the deep investment of many of these ethnographers in the Russian imperial project. For example, the German linguist and ethnographer Julius von Klaproth begins his *Travels in the Caucasus and Georgia* by noting that the work of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, his employer, directly aimed at “effecting the augmentations [of the Russian Empire].”¹⁵⁰ Klaproth also stated that this was the aim of other ethnographers who had preceded him, I.A. Guldenstadt (who travelled to Ossetia in 1770-1) and

¹⁵⁰ Julius von Klaproth and Frederic Shoberl, *Travels in the Caucasus and Georgia Performed in the Years 1806 and 1808, by Command of the Russian Government* (London: H. Colburn, 1814), p.2.

Jacob Reineggs (travelled c.1781).¹⁵¹ Other early travellers were even more explicitly linked into the Russian imperial project- Lt. Col. Steder (travelled 1781) was an intelligence agent tasked with averting a union of mountain peoples.¹⁵² The same major caveat may apply to our evidence from North Caucasian customary law codes, which were codified on the orders of Russian military commanders and were intended to solidify the control of the North Caucasian aristocracy, who more frequently sided with the Russian Empire.¹⁵³

These caveats being borne in mind, it should be said that not all ethnographic accounts of the North Caucasus in this period should be tarred with the same brush. Most significantly, a number of these were produced by individuals not directly affiliated with the Russian Empire. These include the accounts of Ottoman traveller Evlia Chelebi, who travelled in the North Caucasus in 1666, the geographical description of the North Caucasus by the Georgian Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi (1750), and the late 19th century travel accounts of the Englishman, John Baddeley.¹⁵⁴ Whilst these accounts are by no means unproblematic, they do provide a counterweight to Russian imperial accounts. Moreover, whilst many Russian ethnographers of the Caucasus did have an explicitly imperialist bias, others had a deep sympathy for their subjects: as we

¹⁵¹ See *Osetiny glazami russkikh i inostrannykh puteshestvennikov (XIII-XIX vv.)*, ed. by Boris Aleksandrovich Kaloiev (Ordzhonikidze: Severo-Osetinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1967), pp.70-89; Jacob Reineggs and Friedrich August Marschall von Bieberstein, *A General, Historical, and Topographical Description of Mount Caucasus: With a Catalogue of Plants Indigenous to the Country* (London: C. Taylor, 1807).

¹⁵² For his mission, see Kaloiev, p.57.

¹⁵³ See Leontovich, fn. p.199; Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), p.19.

¹⁵⁴ Evlia Chelebi, *Iz vlecheniia iz puteshestviia turetskogo puteshestvennika. Vyp. 3. Zemli Zakavkaziia i sopredel'nykh oblastei Maloi Azii i Irana*, ed. by A.D. Zheltiakov (Moscow: Izd-vo vostochnoi literatury, 1983); Vakhushti Bagrationi, pp.425-461; John F. Baddeley, *The Rugged Flanks of Caucasus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940).

have seen, Vsevolod Miller did much to encourage the development of modern Ossetian nationalism. Whilst the biases this sympathy engendered are by no means unproblematic, they speak against the claim that Russian ethnography in this period was irredeemably orientalist.¹⁵⁵

Nonetheless, we clearly cannot ‘map’ the later structure of North Caucasian society on to the Alan period directly.¹⁵⁶ This is particularly true since our ethnographic evidence dates from the period of colonial contact, in which the proximity of an imperial military and the introduction of market relations had a major impact on North Caucasian society.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, it is notable that the Alan period simply did not feature in the cultural memory of North Caucasians in the 19th century- for example, there is no reference whatsoever to the Alan kingdom in folkloric evidence collected in this period. Rather, ethnographic evidence is most valuable in providing analogies for the interpretation of archaeological and textual sources. Moreover, evidence from Russian official documentation and Kabardian law codes collected by the Russian army may provide evidence for the long-term social structures of North Caucasian society.¹⁵⁸ However, it is clear that this kind of evidence is of little use in reconstructing 10th and 11th century political events, leaving undiminished our reliance on outsider written sources for this purpose.

¹⁵⁵ For this point more broadly, see David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp.8-9.

¹⁵⁶ As attempted in Vaneev, pp.87-111.

¹⁵⁷ Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices*, p.18.

¹⁵⁸ Leontovich, *Adaty kavkazskikh gortsev; Kabardino-russkoe otnosheniia v XVI-XVIII vv.*, ed. by N.A. Smirnov and U.A. Uligov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1957).

Folkloric Evidence

Prior to the 19th century, the primary medium for communication, cultural transmission and historical memory in the North Caucasus was the spoken word. A large amount of this oral evidence was recorded by Russian ethnographers in the 19th and 20th centuries. As such, oral accounts of the North Caucasus provide a vital source of information on the history of the region, which can potentially provide a counterweight to indifferent and biased outsider accounts. However, like other ethnographic evidence, this folkloric evidence cannot be ‘mapped’ directly on to the Alanic period.

For this study, the most important folkloric evidence is a cycle of heroic legends known as the Nart Sagas, which provide important information on the belief systems of the peoples of the Caucasus in the medieval period. A measure of the antiquity of some of the information contained within these sagas is provided by one Karachai-Balkar saga, which clearly describes a Plinian eruption of Mount Elbrus, a dormant volcano and the highest mountain in the Caucasus.¹⁵⁹ This demonstrates the two millennia-long antiquity of at least part of this legend, since the last eruption of this volcano occurred in the first century CE, according to geological evidence.¹⁶⁰ Apart from this, certain of the iconography within the sagas, notably the recurring appearance of sacred, golden deer, harks back to the religious beliefs of the pre-Alanic Sarmatians.¹⁶¹ Finally, it is generally accepted that the names of a number of gods and heroes in Ossetian folklore derive from

¹⁵⁹ See Saga 130a in Tanzilia Khadzhlany, Rimma Ortabailany, and D.G. Hunt, *The Narts: The Heroic Epos of the Balkar and Karachay People* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994), pp.352-3.

¹⁶⁰ See Smithsonian Institute Global Volcanism Program, ‘Elbrus’, <http://www.volcano.si.edu/volcano.cfm?vn=214010> (accessed 25/03/2015).

¹⁶¹ I have previously made this suggestion in John Latham, ‘Sun-Gods and Soviets: Historicising a North Caucasian Nart Saga’, *Iran & the Caucasus*, 20.2 (2016), 159–78.

Christian saints.¹⁶² It seems reasonable to associate the introduction of these saints into the religious pantheon of the North Caucasus with the Christianisation of Alania.

A number of major scholars- notably Georges Dumézil, Georges Charachidzé, V.I. Abaev, H.W. Bailey, D.G. Hunt and V.A. Kuznetsov- have gone much further than this, arguing that the entire cycle of Nart sagas dates back as far as the third to first millennia BCE, albeit with some more recent accretions.¹⁶³ The methods which have been used to date the sagas vary: but essentially, they extrapolate a date either from references to technology or to ethnonyms (Hunt, Bailey), or from features of the society described in the sagas (Dumézil, Charachidzé, Abaev, Kuznetsov). The latter method is particularly common in Soviet publications, which almost universally see the Narts' society, which lacks any state institutions, as representative of an ancient, 'patriarchal-clan' stage of social development.¹⁶⁴

Unfortunately, neither of these dating methods takes full account of the range of features present within the Nart Sagas.¹⁶⁵ The fundamental flaw in these theories is that they try to extrapolate an ancient origin for all of the sagas based on a selective choice of apparently ancient features within them. However, this ignores the fact that the Nart Sagas have copious references to modern technology- one of their most arresting features is the fact that stories about

¹⁶² See, for example, Georges Dumézil, *Romans de Scythie et d'alentour* (Paris: Payot, 1978), pp.25-7, 54-5, 67; see also Chapter Three, p.167.

¹⁶³ Dumézil, p.9; Georges Charachidzé, *La mémoire Indo-Européenne du Caucase* (Paris: Hachette, 1987), p.11; V.I. Abaev, 'The Ossetes: Scythians of the 21st Century', *Nartamonga: Journal of Alano-Ossetic Studies*, 1.1 (2002), p.vii; H.W. Bailey, 'Ossetic (Narta)', in *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry. Volume 1: The Traditions*, ed. by A. T. Hatto (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1980), p.39; Khadzilany, Ortabailany, and Hunt, pp.46-7; V.A. Kuznetsov, *Nartskii epos i nekotorye voprosy istorii osetinskogo naroda* (Ordzhonikidze: Izd-vo 'Ir', 1980), pp.28-31.

¹⁶⁴ For an excellent résumé of Soviet scholarship on the Nart sagas, see Kuznetsov, *Nartskii epos i nekotorye voprosy istorii osetinskogo naroda*, pp.5-27.

¹⁶⁵ In general, see Latham, pp.161-3.

heroes fighting giants feature stagecoaches, medical doctors, modern rifles, cast-iron bridges and barbed wire. This implies a highly malleable approach to the formation and re-telling of the sagas, especially with regard to the kind of technological and social details that are used to argue for their ancient origin. Effectively, just because some features of the Nart Sagas are ancient, does not necessarily mean that the entire cycle is ancient, in the same way that just because some features are clearly 19th century, this does not mean the entire cycle is modern.

This does not, of course, mean that the Nart Sagas are useless as historical evidence for the pre-modern period. As the examples listed above demonstrate, there clearly *are* elements within the sagas of very ancient date. However, for these to be usefully analysed, any attempt to use them must be based on comparison with other, independently dated sources. Such comparisons must also take account of any features which appear to be of recent origin, as well as those which appear to be ancient, and not take at face value political claims made in the sagas.¹⁶⁶ A final methodological approach must be to emphasise the recent origin and recording of these fundamentally oral tales, and not to confuse them with textual sources, which are essentially ‘frozen’ at the time of writing or copying. Thus, to talk about the survival and preservation of stories, legends etc. would be a misnomer; it is the themes, tropes, characters, etc. *within* these stories that are ancient, rather than the stories themselves.

However, since we must see the Nart Sagas as essentially recent creations, albeit reusing very ancient strands of mythology, we cannot use them as direct

¹⁶⁶ For such a methodology, see Latham, ‘Soviets and Sun-Gods’, pp.175-6.

evidence for events in the Alan period, as opposed to long-term processes. We can therefore see that whilst we possess a considerable amount of North Caucasian evidence relevant to the study of the Alans, almost none of it can be used to understand these political events. Once again, this reinforces our reliance on non-Alanic textual sources. This is not necessarily problematic, if we are cautious in our usage of these sources. Unfortunately, as we have seen, this kind of caution has at times been lacking.

External and Caucasian Sources on the Alans: Conclusion

To summarise, it is worth restating that the Alan kingdom was undoubtedly subject to external influences and diplomatic pressures throughout its existence. However, due to the nature of our source base and dominant historiographical trends, the importance of these external factors has been overemphasised. While North Caucasian sources are relatively plentiful, problems of dating and typology mean that they cannot provide much information on short-term historical events, although they are extremely useful when examining longer-term trends. Our outsider written sources, by contrast, do provide a reasonably large amount of *evenemential* information, but have a considerable degree of bias which has not previously been taken into account. Most significantly, the fact that the Alans appear as outsiders in these sources necessarily means that North Caucasian social processes are obscured. This thesis will, by way of compensation, seek to rehabilitate these internal factors as a cause of Alania's development.

Historiographical Tendency #4: Material Conditions over Ideology

Agriculture, Trade, and the Emergence of Alan Kingship

The final historiographical tendency we will examine is the elevation of material conditions as a causative factor in political or social change. For example, V.A. Kuznetsov argued that the rise of the Alan kingdom was a direct consequence of agricultural intensification.¹⁶⁷ He also drew attention to the importance of trade routes in the Central North Caucasus; most notably, a branch of the Silk Roads which ran through Alania. Kuznetsov argued that these trade routes led to an increased supply of prestige goods, which spurred on the processes of social differentiation that gave rise to the Alan 'state'.¹⁶⁸ However, I will argue that these material factors have been overemphasised, partially due to our source base, and partially due to historiographical trends.

Similarly to the question of external causes of societal change, this is more an issue of emphasis: it is undeniable that material conditions played an important part in creating the environment in which the Alan kingdom could rise to power. For example, Kuznetsov's position has been partially vindicated by the discovery of an extensive network of terraced fields, broadly dateable to the seventh to 12th centuries, in the Kislovodsk Basin (Stavropol' Krai) and near the Darial Pass (North Ossetia).¹⁶⁹ D.S. Korobov and G.E. Afanas'ev argue that this

¹⁶⁷ Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, p.105.

¹⁶⁸ Kuznetsov, *Alano-Osetinskie etudy*, p.68.

¹⁶⁹ G.E. Afanas'ev and D.S. Korobov, 'The Ash-Tigors' Granaries and Palaeo-Climate of the 7th-12th Centuries AD in the North Caucasus', in *'My Life Is Like the Summer Rose.'* Maurizio Tosi e *l'Archeologia come Mode di Vivere*, ed. by C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky and Bruno Genito (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2014), pp.6-12; D.S. Korobov and A.V. Borisov, 'The Origins of Terraced Field Agriculture in the Caucasus: New Discoveries in the Kislovodsk Basin', *Antiquity*, 87.338 (2013), 1086-1103; G.E. Afanas'ev, 'K probleme vysokogornogo terrasnogo zemledeliia na tsentral'nom Kavkaze', in *Arkheologiia, etnologiia, fol'kloristika Kavkaza (2010)*, ed. by G. Gambashidze (Tbilisi: Meridiani, 2011), pp.61-2.

system was carefully designed to maximise productivity on lower mountain slopes in a period of increased aridity.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, during the Alanic period, the heavy iron ploughshare seems to have been re-introduced.¹⁷¹ It is therefore plausible that agricultural production was greater in the Alanic period than in those preceding and following it.

In a similar manner, it is clear that foreign prestige goods did indeed flow into the Central North Caucasus in the medieval period. The best demonstration of this process is the seventh to tenth century cemetery of Moshchevaia Balka (Karachai-Cherkassia), where, thanks to fortuitous conditions of preservation, items of silk clothing and even the notebook of a Chinese merchant have been preserved.¹⁷² Byzantine silk has also been found at the tenth-12th century cemetery of Zmeiskaia (North Ossetia), and Byzantine glass beads are common finds across the Central North Caucasus, to the point that they are used as dating evidence in older publications.¹⁷³ Furthermore, there are numerous finds of Byzantine coins up to the early ninth century, after which imitations are known – an indicator of continued demand which supply could not match.¹⁷⁴ In addition, there is considerable evidence of trade from the Islamic world, especially in the sixth to ninth centuries. The most significant evidence for this are the numerous finds of ‘Abbāsid dirhams, especially around Darial, but also of prestige imports

¹⁷⁰ Afanas'ev and Korobov, pp.10-14.

¹⁷¹ A heavy iron ploughshare was found in an 11th-12th century hoard near Kyz-Burun (Kabardino-Balkaria). See Chechenov, *Drevnosti Kabardino-Balkarii. Materialy k arkheologicheskoi karte*, p.59.

¹⁷² Evans, pp.134-7, 147-56, 175-6; A.A. Ierusalimskaia, ‘Le cafetan aux simourghs du tombeau de Mochtechevaja Balka (Caucase Septentrional)’, *Studia Iranica*, 7 (1978), 183–211.

¹⁷³ See Kuznetsov, ‘Zmeiskii katakombnyi mogil'nik’, pp.126-7; V.A. Kuznetsov, ‘Raskopki Zmeiskogo katakombnogo mogilnika v 1959 g.’, in *Alany i Kavkaz*, ed. by M.K. Dzhioev and V.Kh. Tmenov (Vladikavkaz: Severo-Osetinskii in-t gumanitarnykh issledovaniï pri Sovete Ministrov SO SSR, 1992), p.361; Kuznetsov, *Alanskie plemena Severnogo Kavkaza*, p.50.

¹⁷⁴ For Byzantine coin finds, see Korobov, *Sotsial'naia organizatsiia alan Severnogo Kavkaza IV-IX vv.*, pp.299-300; for imitations of Byzantine coins, see Vaneev, p.82.

from the Transcaucasus and Iran, such as glass, carnelian, inlaid beads, and gemstones.¹⁷⁵

However, it is one thing to point out the material conditions prevalent in the medieval Central North Caucasus, but quite another to argue that these were a causative factor in political or social developments. Notably, to directly infer the rise of kingship ideologies from agricultural intensification seems overly reductive. Firstly, it appears that this was not the first period of agricultural intensification in the North Caucasus, as similar terraces are also known in the first millennium BCE.¹⁷⁶ However, this previous period of intensification was not correlated with the formation of complex polities, as far as we are aware. Secondly, the dates of Early Medieval terracing in the North Caucasus are too imprecise to be directly correlated with periods of increased social stratification; possible dates for strip lynchets in the Kislovodsk basin, indicative of the use of heavy ploughs, range between the second and 12th centuries CE.¹⁷⁷

A similar point may be made regarding trade goods. It is notable that our best evidence for the import of high-status textiles, the silks of Moshchevaia Balka, dates to the period before the Alan kingdom's rise to regional hegemony in the 10th and 11th centuries.¹⁷⁸ A more significant issue is that the distribution

¹⁷⁵ On coin finds, see Thomas S. Noonan, 'Why Dirhams First Reached Russia: The Role of Arab-Khazar Relations in the Development of the Earliest Islamic Trade with Eastern Europe', in *The Islamic World, Russia and the Vikings, 750-900: The Numismatic Evidence* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1998), pp.151-66; for these and other goods, see Irina Arzhantseva and Olga Orfinskaya, 'Sogdskii faktor v torgovle shelkom na Severnom Kavkaze', in *Kul'tura, istoriia i arkheologiia Evrazii*, ed. by I.S. Smirnov (Moscow: Rossiskii Gosudarstvenyi Gumanitarnyi Universitet, 2009), pp.9-11.

¹⁷⁶ See Korobov and Borisov, p.1096.

¹⁷⁷ Evans, pp.123-6.

¹⁷⁸ Burial disturbances and poor site recording at other sites producing high-status textiles, notably Nizhnaia Teberda (Karachai-Cherkassia), render it extremely difficult to precisely date the arrival of these textiles in the Central North Caucasus. See Zvezdana Dode, 'Costume as Text', in *Dress and Identity*, ed. by Mary Harlow (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2012), p.12.

patterns of prestige goods are not clear. Without a better understanding of the mechanisms by which prestige goods arrived in the Central North Caucasus, and in particular whether this process was controlled or co-ordinated by elites, it seems rash to directly attribute increased social stratification to their availability. Indeed, it is notable that foreign prestige goods are relatively widely distributed—for example, finds of 10th-11th century Byzantine glass beads and bracelets are not just concentrated in major transshipment points or settlements, but are also found in relatively remote cemeteries, such as Martan-Chu in Chechnya and Kari-Tsagam in North Ossetia.¹⁷⁹ This presents a marked contrast to regions where finds of foreign prestige goods are tightly concentrated, such as North African E-Ware in sixth-century Britain, from which elite control of their distribution has been inferred.¹⁸⁰ Whilst the data on foreign prestige goods in the North Caucasus is too chronologically unclear to draw definitive conclusions, either positive or negative, given this uncertainty it seems unwise to directly infer the rise of social stratification in the Alan period from a pattern of increased imports. This is particularly true, given the lack of direct evidence for elite control over economic resources, such as written land grants or milestones demonstrating elite control over routeways.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ See V.B. Vinogradov and Kh.M. Mamaev, 'Alanskii mogil'nik u sel. Martan-Chu v Chechne', in *Voprosy arkheologii i etnografii Severnoi Osetii*, ed. by V.A. Kuznetsov, A.G. Kuchiev, and V.Kh. Tmenov (Ordzhinikidze: Severo-Osetinskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut istorii, filologii i ekonomiki pri Sovete Ministrov Severo-Osetinskoi ASSR, 1984), pp.85-6; A.A. Todorova and Moshinskii, A.P., 'Srednevekovye busy iz mogilnika Kari Tsagam', in *Severnyi Kavkaz i kochevoi mir stepei Evrazii: VI 'Minaevskie chteniia' po arkheologii, etnografii i kraevedeniiu Severnogo Kavkaza*, ed. by A.A. Kudriavtsev (Stavropol': Stavropol'skii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2003), p.75.

¹⁸⁰ Ewan Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports to Atlantic Britain and Ireland, AD 400-800* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2007), pp.134-5.

¹⁸¹ See S.M. Perevalov, 'Pis'mennost' Kavkazskoi Alanii: iazyki i sfery primeneniia', in *Vostochnaia Evropa v drevnosti i srednevekov'e. Pis'mennost' kak element gosudarstvennoi infrastruktury. XXVIII chteniia pamiati chlena-korrespondenta AN SSSR Vladimira Terent'evicha Pashuto*, Moskva,

We can thus see that, whilst the wide availability of foreign goods may well have created a situation where the outside world was seen as a source of prestige, we cannot say that this process was directly causative of increased social stratification. This implicitly projects a more modern, economic mode of thinking back into a past in which, as we see from the lack of coinage and written records, market relations were not prevalent. Rather, we have to see these prestige goods as part of a wider system of social signification. To argue that increases in agricultural production led directly to state formation is likewise overly reductive. To use an agricultural analogy, noting that the soil is fertile does not explain the field that stands on it. To explain the formation of North Caucasian complex polities, it is therefore not sufficient to simply look at proxy indicators such as increased resource availability; rather, we should explicitly reintroduce the political and the ideological into the equation.¹⁸²

The Historiography of Alan Material Culture

It is not hard to explain the material concentration of Soviet archaeological studies of Alania, as this derives directly from the material focus of Marxism-Leninism. As we have seen, Marx and Engels theorised that the direct cause of social evolution was the productive basis of the society in question. As a result, Soviet research on the politics of Alania primarily aimed at the question of class formation, which was seen as the main driver of social development and

20-22 *Aprilia 2016 g. Materialy konferentsii*, ed. by E.A. Mel'nikova (Moscow: Institut vseobshchei istorii, 2016), pp.223-4.

¹⁸² For this point more broadly, see Adam T. Smith, 'Archaeologies of Sovereignty', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 40 (2011), 415-32.

political life. However, this debate existed despite, or perhaps even because of, the relatively poor knowledge of the economic base of Alanic society. Therefore, in many cases attention was paradoxically devoted to identifying political features which, it was argued, could be used to extrapolate Alania's socio-economic structure, given that they were supposedly a direct consequence of this economic base. For example, great energy was expended in arguing over whether the "princes (*t'avadit'a*) of Alania" who attended the great feast held by the Georgian king Bagrat' IV constituted a *comitatus*, which Engels stated would accompany the leader of a military democracy, or a feudal aristocracy.¹⁸³ In effect, the economic cause of political processes were assumed from their supposed ideological effects, rather than the other way around.

This concentration on material aspects of Alan-period culture has continued in post-Soviet archaeology. Some studies, such as Irina Arzhantseva's settlement excavations, and D.S. Korobov's holistic landscape studies of the Kislovodsk basin, have drawn on new technologies such as GIS mapping.¹⁸⁴ However, these approaches also owe much to the brand of functional-processual archaeology practiced since the 1930s in the North Caucasus, as does the objective of determining the social structure of ancient societies from their material remains.¹⁸⁵ In the 1980s, pioneers of modern Russian 'social archaeology' such as

¹⁸³ Met'reveli and Jones, p.162. For examples of this debate, see Gagloiti, *Alany i voprosy etnogeneza Osetin*, pp.170-1; Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, p.107.

¹⁸⁴ See for example Arzhantseva's work on Kiafar (e.g. Irina Arzhantseva and Svetlana Ruzanova, 'The Problems of the Beginning of Medieval Towns in the North Caucasus', in *Making a Medieval Town: Patterns of Early Medieval Urbanisation* (Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology, Polish Academy of Sciences, 2010)); Korobov and Borisov, 'The Origins of Terraced Field Agriculture in the Caucasus'.

¹⁸⁵ Notably, it draws on the legacy of pioneering regional site surveys conducted in the 1930s by A.A. Iessen. See A.A. Iessen, 'Arkheologicheskie pamiatniki Kabardino-Balkarii', *Materialy i issledovaniia po arkheologii SSSR*, 3 (1941), 7-50; in general on Soviet settlement archaeology, see Trigger, pp.334-7.

G.E. Afanas'ev and V.B. Kovalevskaia aimed to achieve this goal through the excavation of settlements and statistical analysis of the contents of graves.¹⁸⁶

They argued that it was possible to track processes of social change and class formation via these indicators.¹⁸⁷ This approach has produced a number of exciting discoveries- for example, our knowledge of the economic basis of Alan society has been markedly improved by Korobov's work, and Kovalevskaia and Arzhantseva's settlement surveys have, for the first time, given us an insight into medieval population patterns.

However, in recent years, post-Soviet settlement archaeology has come under fire from a post-processural point of view for not adequately explaining processes of ritual and ideology.¹⁸⁸ It is clear, for example, that we cannot see the contents of burials as directly representing the structure of society; rather, they reflect the social priorities of the burying community.¹⁸⁹ It is notable that post-processuralism in general has not had a major impact in post-Soviet archaeology. This is possibly because its emphasis on the performative aspects of identity may conflict with primordialist paradigms, which remain highly influential. Retaining a material concentration in archaeological studies of the Alans does not directly challenge the work of older scholars, who continue to occupy senior positions in Russian academia.

¹⁸⁶ For the rise of 'social archaeology', see Kradin, 'A Panorama of Social Archaeology in Russia', pp.251-6; Korobov, *Sotsial'naia organizatsiia alan Severnogo Kavkaza IV-IX vv.*, pp.30-3; a good early example piece is G.E. Afanas'ev, *Donskie Alany: sotsial'nye struktury Alano-Asso-Burtasskogo naseleniia basseina Srednego Dona* (Moscow: Nauka, 1993).

¹⁸⁷ See for example S.N. Savenko, 'Alanskie vsadniki v pis'mennykh istochnikakh i v arkhologicheskikh dannykh: voprosy sravnitel'nogo analiza', in *Materialy po izucheniiu istoriko-kul'turnogo nasledii Severnogo Kavkaza, Vyp. IX*, ed. by A.B. Belinskii (Stavropol': Nasledie, 2009), which argues that increased wealth of graves in the late 11th century allows us to track these social processes.

¹⁸⁸ For this debate, see Kradin, 'A Panorama of Social Archaeology in Russia', p.256.

¹⁸⁹ See Evans, p.136.

We can therefore see that while the material aspects of Alan culture cannot be neglected, their prominence in studies of Alania is a consequence of historiographical factors. The material concentration of Marxism-Leninism has led in turn to a strongly materialist bias in Soviet and post-Soviet archaeology. This has correspondingly led to the underdevelopment of politically- and ideologically-rooted analyses of the evolution of the Alan polity.

Methodological Approaches

We can therefore see that there are major lacunae in our understanding of the Alan kingdom. Although the questions of Alania's statehood and ethnic composition have been hotly debated, albeit within a rather sterile set of parameters, Alania's internal dynamics have been surprisingly understudied. Similarly, the ideological and explicitly political aspects of the Alan kingdom have not been analysed in detail. Through new methodological approaches, it will be possible to shed new light on the Alans' own sense of place, worldview, and political organisation.

This new methodological approach consists of four principles. Firstly, there is **reading 'along the grain'**. In order to assess the reliability of our written source materials, it is necessary to look at the context in which our evidence about the Alans occurs. This applies both to the objectives of individual sources, and to the cultural and epistemic context in which these works were written. An understanding of these sources' contexts may then allow us to pick out elements within them which, basically, do not make sense- that is to say, cannot be explained by domestic ideological factors. As Ann Laura Stoler has argued in the

case of 19th and 20th century colonial records, such a method of reading ‘along the grain’ may help us pick out elements in our non-native sources which challenged these ideologies.¹⁹⁰ These elements consequently have a far greater chance of reflecting an outside reality.

The second principle is **triangulation**. Because of the aforementioned lack of concern with the Alans that most of our primary sources display, it is necessary to compare the writings of different writers from different linguistic and cultural traditions. If different writers with different concerns agree on a given fact, but then try to ‘spin’ it in different ways, we should give it greater credence than one which is not corroborated.

The third principle is the **primacy of North Caucasian evidence**. Although our evidence from the North Caucasus has major limitations, there is enough of it to confirm or refute our outsiders’ accounts, in certain respects at least. Whilst of course this information should not be taken as objective, it does emanate from the cultural milieu that we are attempting to examine; therefore, its own biases are particularly important for determining how people in the North Caucasus saw their world. Moreover, while it is necessary to use analogy to interpret archaeological evidence, this material culture evidence can sometimes act as a counterbalance to outsider accounts of the Alans.

Finally, this thesis will attempt to reintroduce an **idealist perspective** into the study of the Alans. As we have seen, the overwhelmingly dominant perspective in the Soviet Union and afterwards was materialist: that social

¹⁹⁰ See Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Commonsense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp.21-4.

developments were determined fundamentally by economic and otherwise material factors. In the orthodox Marxist conception, this went as far as to declare ideas a “superstructure” resting on an economic base: effectively, ideas were considered epiphenomenal. However, recent studies of other regions of the Caucasus, such as A.T. Smith’s work on Bronze Age Armenia, have emphasised the ability of material culture to actively construct conceptions of power, not just passively reflect them.¹⁹¹ This thesis will attempt to apply this insight to the medieval North Caucasus.

Conclusion

Approaches to the study of medieval Alania have been strongly influenced by the political and intellectual contexts of the Soviet Union and its successor states. Whilst emphases varied, four major historiographical trends can be discerned. Firstly, the Alan kingdom has been seen as a type of early state and has been placed within a unilinear schema of human social evolution. Secondly, loyalty to that kingdom has primarily been explained in terms of linguistically-bounded ethnicity, which is seen as a stable, long-lasting, and objectively identifiable social quantity. Thirdly, the social and political development of the Alan kingdom, for example the adoption of Christianity, has been primarily attributed to external influence, rather than internal processes. Fourthly, Alania’s development has also been seen as a consequence of material factors, notably

¹⁹¹ See Adam T. Smith, *The Political Landscape*; Adam T. Smith, *The Political Machine: Assembling Sovereignty in the Bronze Age Caucasus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), especially pp.2-21.

agricultural intensification and the availability of prestige goods, rather than ideological factors.

Of these four main historiographical trends, the classification of Alania's social development and its ethnic composition have been frequently addressed, and do not offer much opportunity for productive further study. By most benchmarks, Alania cannot be classified as a state, and its previous classification as one is more a consequence of Soviet taxonomic frameworks than of analysis of evidence from the medieval Central North Caucasus. Similarly, if we approach ethnicity from an emic point of view, there is little evidence for linguistically-defined ethnic self-identification being important in this period.

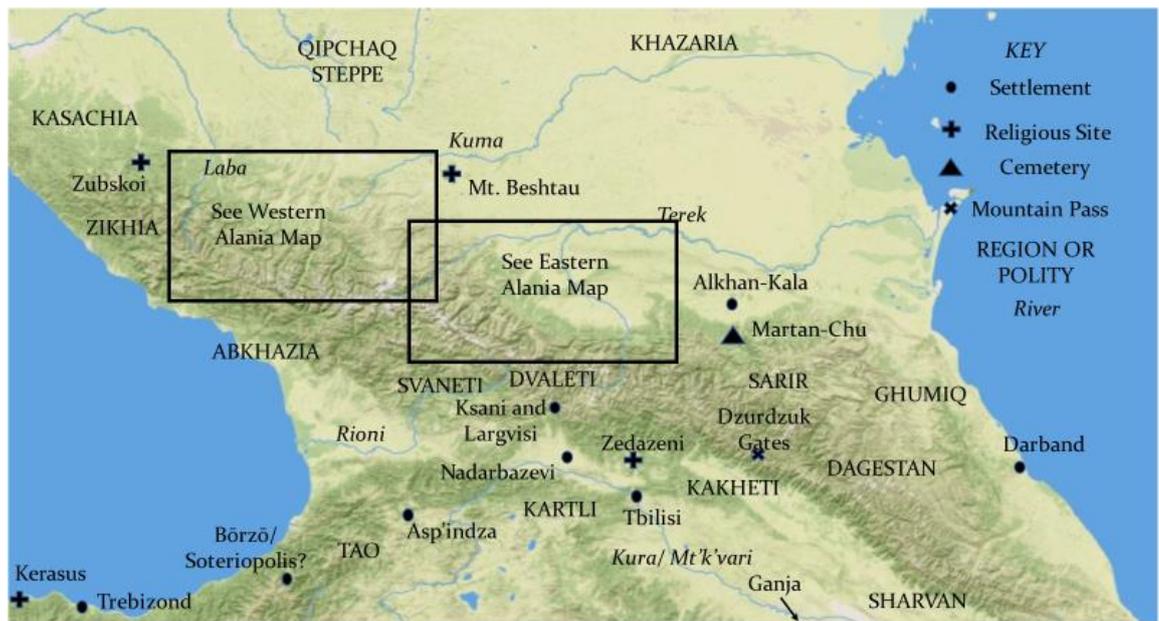
By contrast, access to the outside world was clearly important to the peoples of the Central North Caucasus. This is demonstrated by their adoption of Khazar and Byzantine cultural elements, such as Byzantine-style Christianity. Furthermore, material factors, such as agricultural intensification, did help shape the cultural environment in this region. However, both these trends have been overemphasised in the historiographical literature, particularly as causes of social change; this is partially a result of our reliance on outsider accounts of the region, and partially on an overly literal interpretation of these sources. For the North Caucasus' peoples, this can lead to a curiously disempowering narrative, which downplays or denies the possibilities of internal change and innovation within societies.

Rather than limiting ourselves to criticising our predecessors, it is perhaps more productive to see the lacunae in the literature as an opportunity for a new study of the Alans, one which attempts to place the Alans themselves, their

worldview and power structures at the centre of our analysis. This is the purpose of this thesis. It will attempt, as far as possible, to take an emic approach: that is to say, to look at issues of identity as the Alans saw them, rather than how outsiders defined them, or seeing outsiders' and insiders' views as coterminous. Finally, it will attempt to go beyond the taxonomic, but rather to adopt an analytic approach to the development of the Alan kingdom and its peculiar character.

Through these approaches, we can hope to reconstruct how elites of the Central North Caucasus used objects, architecture, and the spoken and written word to create a new system of power in the region. It will describe how these elites used the reflected glory of Christian Byzantium to enmesh individuals and groups within this system. Finally, it will study why this system came to an end, and what came after it.

Chapter Two. The Conversion of Alania



Map 1: *The Wider Caucasus in the 10th-13th Centuries. Image: the author.*

The Conversion of Alania and Chronological Debates

In the ninth and tenth centuries, the systems of power which underpinned the Alan kingdom changed significantly. The kings of the previously pagan Central North Caucasus converted to Christianity, and would, in time, emphasise a political Christianity as a support for royal rule. By the eleventh century, this had become a major element in royal iconography and ideology.¹

This chapter will discuss whether the Alan kings' adoption of Christianity was fundamentally the result of outside political and diplomatic initiatives,

¹ For example, an image of the Alan king Urdure, dating to the 1010s to 1020s and preserved on the *templon* of the monastery at Zedazeni, Georgia, depicts him wearing the robes of a Byzantine emperor and with his head surrounded by a halo, implying his divine election. See Nina Iamanidzé, *Les Installations Liturgiques Sculptées des Églises de Géorgie (VIIe-XIIIe Siècles)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp.164-8.

especially from Byzantium. The issue of Christianisation can stand as a proxy for a much larger question: did Alan society change because of external or internal factors? Due to the relative abundance of evidence (by Alan standards), this question provides a useful testing ground for the theory that Alan society was a fundamentally static one, its evolution determined by the machinations of other, more powerful empires.

In particular, this chapter will examine a group of Islamic geographical writings on Alania- specifically, the so-called 'Jayhānī Tradition'- which have not previously been studied in a North Caucasian context. These will allow us to complement recent reconsiderations of Byzantine sources on the conversion of Alania, and broaden our view of this Christianisation process.²

In order to understand the adoption of Christianity by Alan elites, we must analyse not only how this process occurred, but when. In the period 912-25, two Byzantine religious missions, led respectively by the monk Euthymios and the Archbishop Peter, were sent to Alania by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nicholas Mystikos (patriarch 901-7 and 912-25).³ These missions are known to us through the correspondence of the patriarch with these missionaries, preserved in a letter collection edited after his death.⁴ The conversion of the Alans has often been directly attributed to these missionary efforts.⁵ However, Nicholas never

² In particular, see Nicholas Evans, 'Mountains, Steppes and Empires. Approaches to the North Caucasus in the Early Middle Ages' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Wadham College, Oxford, 2016), pp.200-214; D.V. Beletskii and A.Iu. Vinogradov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz i Senty- drevneishie khramy Rossii. Problemy khristianskogo iskusstva Alanii i Kavkaza* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), pp.18-65.

³ On the dating on the missions to Alania, see Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Letters*, ed. by Romilly James Heald Jenkins and Leendert Gerrit Westerink (Washington, D.C.: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1973), pp.265-7, 279-81, 335, 548-9, 558-9; Evans, pp.204-6.

⁴ Evans, p.202.

⁵ For example, in Iu.Iu. Kulakovskii, 'Khristianstvo u Alan', in *Izbrannye trudy po istorii Alanov i Sarmatii*, ed. by S.M. Perevalov (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2000), p.167; Beletskii and Vinogradov,

explicitly takes credit for converting the Alans in his letters to Euthymios and Peter, nor explicitly gives his missionaries credit for doing so.

Our Islamic sources can shed further light on this process. Notably, the *Kitāb al-A'lāq al-Nafīsa* of Ibn Rusta, conventionally dated to 290-300/ 903-13, describes the Alan king as being a Christian.⁶ Since this work dates to the period before Euthymios' and Peter's missions, this implies that Byzantine diplomatic initiative was not directly responsible for his conversion.⁷ Furthermore, Josef Marquart, B.N. Zakhoder and Jean-Charles Ducène have argued that Ibn Rusta's account, and others related to it- the so-called 'Jayhānī Tradition'- draw on still older sources, and that their descriptions of the peoples of the Caucasus and Western Steppe actually represent the situation in the mid- to late ninth century.⁸ If this is true, then it would imply that the Alan king had converted to Christianity decades before Nicholas Mystikos' missions. However, Istvan Zimonyi has recently argued that the passage on the Alans is a mid-10th century interpolation into these sources, and that the Alans' conversion was indeed the result of Byzantine missionary efforts.⁹

These chronological discussions on the date of Islamic descriptions of the northern peoples have, however, mostly focussed on the peoples of the Western

pp.19-25; V.A. Kuznetsov and Iaroslav Lebedynsky, *Les Alains: cavaliers des steppes, seigneurs du Caucase* (Paris: Errance, 1997), p.183.

⁶ For the conventional date of Ibn Rusta, see S. Maqbul Ahmad, 'Ibn Rusta', *Elz*.

⁷ On the diplomatic and imperial character of the missions sent by Nicholas Mystikos, see Evans, p.184..

⁸ Josef Marquart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge: Ethnologische und Historisch-Topographische Studien zur Geschichte des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts (ca. 840-940)*, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961), pp. xxviii-xxxii; B.N. Zakhoder, *Kaspiiskii svod svedenii o Vostochnoi Evrope* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1962), pp.68-75; Jean-Charles Ducène, 'Al-Ġayhānī: fragments (extraits du K. al-Masālik wa l-Mamālik d'al-Bakrī)', *Der Islam*, 75.2 (1998), 259-82.

⁹ István Zimonyi, *Muslim Sources on the Magyars in the Second Half of the 9th Century: The Magyar Chapter of the Jayhani Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp.19, 32.

Steppes, rather than the Alans specifically. Moreover, they have not incorporated archaeological evidence from the Central North Caucasus, which appears to show the increasing influence of Christianity in the seventh to ninth centuries. This chapter will therefore analyse these Islamic sources with specific reference to Alania and its conversion, incorporating this archaeological data and a re-examination of our Byzantine sources. Our evidence, it will conclude, points to a process of gradual Christianisation in Alania during the ninth century. This suggests a syncretic and Caucasian-led process, rather than a sudden moment of conversion led by foreign missionaries.

Islamic Geographical Sources on Alania

The Jayhānī Tradition: Introduction

A series of Arabic and Persian geographical descriptions of Alania, dating from the ninth to 13th centuries, are among the most valuable of our sources on the early history on the Kingdom of Alania. The most significant for this chapter are certain geographical sources belonging to the so-called ‘Jayhānī tradition’- i.e. works related to the lost *Kitāb al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik* of the Sāmānid vizier al-Jayhānī¹⁰ (after 301-2/914¹¹). Although Jayhānī's geography has not survived, fifteen other works appear to have either used his *Kitāb al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik*, or shared a common source with it- therefore, we have an approximate idea of its

¹⁰ The full name of the al-Jayhānī who wrote the *K. al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik* is disputed, but was most likely either Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Jayhānī or Abū 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Jayhānī. See Ducène, pp.260-1.

¹¹ On the vexed question of the date of Jayhānī's *K. al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik*, see Charles Pellat, 'al-Djayhānī', *El2*; Ducène, pp.260-1. Ducène dates the *Masālik* to between 301/913-14 and approximately 310/922, and Pellat agrees the first date represents a *terminus post quem*.

contents.¹² Of the surviving works from this tradition, the most relevant to the question of the Alans' Christianity are the *Kitāb al-A'lāq al-Nafisa* of Ibn Rusta (conventionally dated to 290-300/ 903-13¹³), the *Zayn al-Akhhbār* of Gardīzī (c.440-3/ 1049-52¹⁴), and al-Bakrī's *Kitāb al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik* (c.460/ 1067-8¹⁵). In addition, this chapter will also refer to three independent descriptions of Alania in al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-Dhahab* (332-6/ 943-7¹⁶), the anonymous Persian *Ḥudūd al-'Alam* (372/ 982¹⁷), and the *Mu'jam al-buldān* of Yāqūt al-Rūmī (625/ 1228¹⁸).¹⁹ All of these works mention that the king of Alania is (or, in the case of Mas'ūdī, recently was) Christian.²⁰ However, Ibn Rusta, Gardīzī, al-Bakrī and the *Ḥudūd al-'Alam* all state that some or most of his people are pagans. The first three of these texts do so in such similar terms that they clearly derive from a single source (for the full texts of all these sources, see **Appendix B**). These passages on the Alan king's Christianity respectively read: "The Alan king is a Christian at heart, but all the people of his kingdom are heathens worshipping idols" (Ibn Rusta); "The

¹² For a full list of works known to have used Jayhānī, see Zimonyi, pp.12-13.

¹³ S. Maqbul Ahmad, 'Ibn Rusta', *El2*.

¹⁴ C. Edmund Bosworth, 'Gardīzī', *El3*.

¹⁵ Jean-Charles Ducène, 'al-Bakrī, Abu 'Ubayd 'Abdallah', *El3*.

¹⁶ Charles Pellat, 'al-Mas'ūdī', *El2*.

¹⁷ *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World: A Persian Geography of 372A.H.-982 A.D.*, ed. by Vladimir Minorsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), p.vii.

¹⁸ Claude Gilliot, 'Yaqut al-Rūmī', *El2*.

¹⁹ Met'reveli and Jones claim that Qudāma b. Ja'far repeats the information of Ibn Rusta on the Alans, however this is a mistake for Ibn Rusta himself, as stated in their sourcebook. See *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. by Roin Met'reveli and Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), p.119; *Svedeinia arabskikh pisatelei o Kavkaze, Armenii i Azerbaidzhane*, ed. by N.A. Karaulov (Tbilisi: SMOMPK, 1903), p.51.

²⁰ Ibn Rusta, in *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, ed. by Vladimir Minorsky (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1958), pp.166-7; 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, trans. by Charles Pellat (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1962), pp.171-6; *Ḥudūd 'al-'alam Min 'al-Mashriq 'ila 'al-Maghrib: kih bi-Sāl-i 372 Hijrī-i Qamarī Ta 'lif Shudah 'ast*, ed. by Manūchihr Sutūdah (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tehrān, 1962), p.191; 'Abd al-Ḥayy ibn al-Zahhāq Gardīzī, *Tārīkh-i Gardīzī*, ed. by 'Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī (Tehran: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, 1984), p.595; 'Izvestiia al-Bekri o slaviankakh' i ikh' sosediakh', ed. by Baron V. Rosen, *Zapiski Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk*, 32.1 (1878), p.64; Yāqūt b. 'Abdullah al-Rūmī al-Hamawī, *Dictionnaire Géographique, Historique et littéraire de la Perse et des contrées adjacentes, extrait du Mo'djem el-Bouldan de Yaqout, et complété a l'aide de documents Arabes et Persans pour la plupart inédits*, ed. by Charles Adrien Casimir Barbier de Meynard (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1861), pp.51-2, 503.

King of the Alans is a Christian and all the inhabitants of his kingdom are pagans, idol-worshippers” (Gardīzī); “After a journey of three days is the country of the king of the Alans. He is a Christian but the majority of inhabitants of his state worship idols” (al-Bakrī).²¹

The Jayhānī Tradition and the Christianisation of the Alans

If the reports of Ibn Rusta, al-Mas‘ūdī and the *Ḥudūd al-‘Alam* are taken in the chronological order in which they survive, they appear to broadly support the narrative of the Alans being converted by Byzantine missionaries in the first two decades of the tenth century. Moreover, they appear to show increasing Christian influence within Alania during the course of this century.

However, it is clear that these Islamic geographical works are not primary sources in the strict sense- rather, they are compilations of older geographical reports, sometimes dating back centuries. Of all of the authors of the above-listed reports, as far as we are aware only one (al-Mas‘ūdī) ever travelled to the Caucasus himself, apparently in the 930s.²² The other authors of these reports were writing in regions far removed from the Caucasus: Ibn Rusta was a native of Isfahan; the anonymous author of the *Ḥudūd* wrote in Gūzgān (in modern Afghanistan); Gardīzī apparently wrote in the Ghaznavid court at Ghazna (also in modern Afghanistan); al-Bakrī was writing as far away as al-Andalus.²³ It thus

²¹ Ibn Rusta, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.169; Gardīzī, p.595; Rosen, p.64.

²² Mas‘ūdī, *Les prairies d’or*, pp.2-3; ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Mas‘ūdī, Paul Lunde, and Caroline Stone, *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1989), p.12.

²³ Respectively: Minorsky, *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World*, p.vii; ‘Ibn Rusta’, *El2*; ‘Gardīzī’, *El3*; ‘al-Bakrī’, *El3*.

follows that these authors must have relied on older, second-hand accounts for their information- indeed, al-Mas'ūdī repeatedly criticised other geographers for doing so.²⁴ A pronounced example of this tendency is the word-for-word repetition of al-Mas'ūdī's own report on the Alans by Yāqūt, nearly 300 years after its first attestation; this is despite the fact that other sections of his dictionary entry directly contradict it.²⁵ It thus follows that if our later Islamic sources repeat the information of earlier works, then our earliest extant reports may repeat the information of even earlier, lost authors.

It appears that at least part of the Jayhānī tradition's account of the 'northern peoples' of Eurasia dates to the ninth century. Ibn Rusta's and al-Bakrī's near-identical accounts describe the Magyars as a people of the Black Sea steppe, which dates this passage prior to their arrival in modern Hungary in 895.²⁶ If the Alan part of the Jayhānī tradition was derived from the same original source as the Magyar section, this would mean that at least one Alan king was described as Christian by a source of the ninth century.

However, it is important to note that the Jayhānī tradition is not a coherent whole, but rather a hypothetical reconstruction from our extant

²⁴ Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, pp.2-4; 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Mas'ūdī, *Le livre de l'advertissement et de la revision*, trans. by Bernard Carra de Vaux (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1896), pp.1-3.

²⁵ For example, one of the reports that Yāqūt reproduces tells us that the Alans have no king and each tribe has its own leader, whereas another of his reports, a reiteration of al-Mas'ūdī, describes a powerful Alan king. See Yāqūt b. 'Abdullah al-Rūmī al-Hamawī, pp.51-2.

²⁶ Aḥmad ibn 'Umar Ibn Rusta, *Les atours précieux*, trans. by Gaston Wiet (Cairo: Publications de la société de géographie d'Égypte, 1955), pp.160-1; Ducène, p.279. For other versions of this passage on the Magyars, see Zimonyi, pp.32-6.

sources. Moreover, the entire idea of source transmission progressing in a direct, stemmatic fashion has been challenged in recent years.²⁷

On this basis, Istvan Zimonyi has recently suggested that the section on the Alans' Christianity is a later interpolation into the Jayhānī tradition, perhaps from the mid-tenth century.²⁸ He notes that in the earliest account belonging to this tradition, that of Ibn Rusta, the chapters on Eastern Europe and the Caucasus are placed between the descriptions of Iran and Tabaristan without any contextualisation or subtitle, which implies their later interpolation.²⁹ Furthermore, Zimonyi claims that the conversion of Alania is not recorded until the early tenth century and Nicholas Mystikos' mission, and that a section describing the Alan king as Christian therefore cannot date prior to this point. If Zimonyi's interpretation were correct, it would mean that the Alans were indeed converted by Byzantine missionaries in the early tenth century, and that the initiative in this process may be attributed to factors external to the Caucasus.

Ibn Rusta's Account of the Alans: Original or Interpolation?

I argue that there are five reasons for rejecting Zimonyi's suggestion, and for dating the original description of the Alans utilised in the Jayhānī tradition to the ninth century. We have already mentioned the first: Nicholas Mystikos does not explicitly claim credit for the conversion of the Alans. The second, and most significant, relates directly to the passage on the Alans in Ibn Rusta. Its image of

²⁷ See L.G. Reynolds and N.G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, Fourth edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.212-6; Daniel Selden, 'Text Networks', *Ancient Narrative*, 8 (2010), 1-23.

²⁸ Zimonyi, pp.19, 32.

²⁹ See also Zakhoder, p.69.

the Alans does not match other, more securely dateable descriptions of the Alans in the mid-10th century. Ibn Rusta describes the Alan ruler as carrying a Turkic title, *Baqatar*, rather than a Byzantine one; moreover, no mention is made of Byzantine priests in the country. This does not tally with al-Mas'ūdī's description, firmly dateable to the 930s or 940s, which mentions the presence of Byzantine priests and gives the ruler a different title, **Kar-Kundaj*.³⁰ Nor do these descriptions correspond to the picture of Alania presented by the Greek inscription at the Senty church (Karachai-Cherkassia), dating to 965, which records a metropolitan of Alania and the royal title of *Exousiokratōr*.³¹ Indeed, the title of *Baqatar* is the one piece of information in Ibn Rusta that can be securely tied to a source from a different historiographical tradition. An Alan ruler with this title also appears in the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, the Georgian royal annals. This source clearly places this title in the ninth century, rather than the tenth, as the *Baqatar* mentioned by the Georgian sources was killed at the Battle of Asp'indza in c.885.³²

A third reason to reject Zimonyi's suggestion is that Ibn Rusta's section on the Caucasus is not exceptional in being placed 'out of order'. Rather, Ibn Rusta's geography shows no consistent organisation at all- for example, his section on India directly follows the section on Rome and Byzantium.³³ As James Montgomery has demonstrated, even within individual sections of his work- for example, his account of the Rus'- there is no consistent organisational schema.³⁴

³⁰ Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.157.

³¹ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.244.

³² See Met'reveli and Jones, p.144. On the date of this battle, see Evans, p.198.

³³ See Ibn Rusta, pp.134-48.

³⁴ James E. Montgomery, 'Ibn Rusta's Lack of "Eloquence", the Rus' and Samanid Cosmography', *Edebiyat*, 12 (2001), 73-93.

As such, it seems rash to single out any individual segment of his account as a later interpolation based on the order in which it appears in the work.

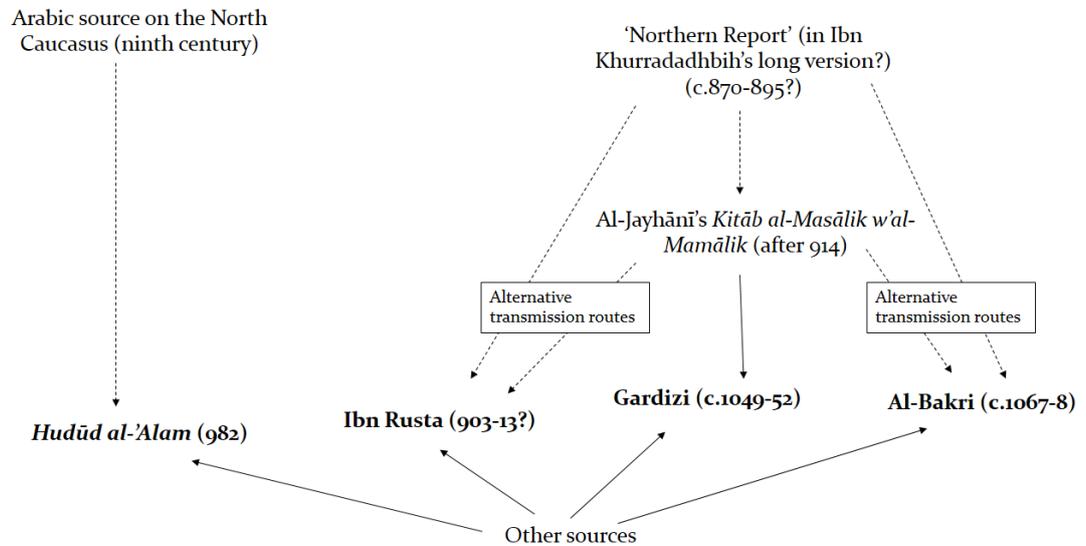


Fig. 2: schematic diagram of transmission of geographical reports on the Alans. Works in **bold** still exist today. Dashed lines indicate reconstructed transmission routes not directly attested in the text of surviving works.

Fourthly, the wider textual history of the passage on the Alans does not suggest that it is a tenth-century interpolation. It is notable that the one element of the Jayhānī tradition's description of the Alans which remained the most stable was its emphasis on their ruler's Christianity. This is particularly significant in the case of al-Bakrī, who deletes almost the entire description of the Alans found in Ibn Rusta and Gardīzī, with the sole exception of this point.³⁵ It is, however, notable that al-Bakrī retained the entirety of the description of the Sarir kingdom of Dagestan which immediately precedes this section.³⁶ On this basis, Zimonyi himself suggests that al-Bakrī used a different version of the Jayhānī tradition to

³⁵ Rosen, p.64.

³⁶ Rosen, pp.63-4.

the one utilised by Gardīzī and Ibn Rusta.³⁷ An alternative explanation is that al-Bakrī did not use Jayhānī directly for this passage, but rather that the coincidence between his work and Ibn Rusta's geography results from the use of a common source.³⁸

This hypothesis is strengthened by the possibility that Ibn Rusta also did not directly use Jayhānī, but rather had a source in common with his work. This possibility arises from these works' composition dates. Our best date for Ibn Rusta being active is 290/903, since he mentions visiting Medina in that year.³⁹ By contrast, our most plausible dates for Jayhānī writing are later than this, between 301/913-14 and 310/922.⁴⁰ Although we cannot be certain of the end date of Ibn Rusta's working life, the fact that he is attested prior to Jayhānī suggests that the similarities between their works may have resulted from their use of a common source, rather than Ibn Rusta using Jayhānī directly.⁴¹

The commonality of the passage describing the Alans' Christianisation therefore suggests that it was part of the original account used by Jayhānī, not a later interpolation. This passage may have been an element common to the various recensions of Jayhānī's original work which were subsequently used by other geographers. Alternatively, it may have been part of a common source used by both Jayhānī, and Ibn Rusta and/or al-Bakrī. If this is the case, it seems even

³⁷ Zimonyi, pp.22-3.

³⁸ Ducène, pp. 264, 274.

³⁹ Ibn Rusta, p.81.

⁴⁰ The dates of Jayhani's *K. al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik* are disputed, but it is agreed to have been composed after 301/ 913-14. See Charles Pellat, 'al-Djayhānī', *EL2*; Ducène, pp.260-1.

⁴¹ The commonly cited *terminus ante quem* for Ibn Rusta's work, 300/ 913, is a relatively weak one. The argument runs that he fails to mention a raid on Isfahan, his home city, which occurred in that year, meaning that his work must date prior to that point. However, there is no necessary reason for a geographical description to mention this event. See Ibn Rusta, p.175; Zimonyi, p.15.

less likely that an identical passage which described the Alan king as a Christian was interpolated into both Jayhānī and his original source. In either case, the result is the same: it seems that the passage on the Alans was part of the same report which described the Magyars as a people of the Black Sea steppe, and therefore was composed prior to 895. Both of these alternatives place the passage on the Alans' Christianisation much more firmly in the ninth century than the tenth.

A Second Source for Ninth-century Alan Christianity: the Ḥudūd al-'Alam

A final argument for a ninth-century date for Jayhānī's source on the Alans is corroboration from other sources. In particular, the anonymous *Ḥudūd al-'Alam* calls the Alan ruler a Christian, and his people a mixture of Christians and pagans.⁴² However, its description of the Caucasus clearly derives from a different source. The order of its sections is completely different to Ibn Rusta, Gardīzī and al-Bakrī's accounts- for example, the descriptions of the Sarir and Khazars come after the passage on the Alans, whereas in all the works deriving from Jayhānī, they come before it.⁴³ Moreover, it contains information and names found nowhere else, notably its curious information that Alania borders on the 'Sea of Gurz' (*daryā-ye Gurz*), an otherwise unknown name for the Black Sea.⁴⁴

While the *Ḥudūd* was composed in 372/982, it clearly used older works as sources. For example, its section on the Rus' was apparently borrowed from a

⁴² Minorsky, *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World*, p.160; Sutūdah, p.191.

⁴³ Minorsky, *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World*, p.161.

⁴⁴ Sutūdah, p.191. On this term's uniqueness, see *Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation*, ed. by Agustí Alemany (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp.361-4.

ninth-century geographical source, since it uses the title Khaqan for their ruler.⁴⁵ It is likely that its section on the Alans was also borrowed from a ninth-century source, independent from that used in the Jayhānī tradition. This is because of its obscure name for the Black Sea, *daryā-ye Gurz*, which occurs in the same passage as the description of the Alans' religion. This term clearly refers to the Black Sea, rather than to the Caspian, since it is said to lie in the same direction relative to Alania as the Pechenegs of the Black Sea steppe.⁴⁶ It appears that this term is a misinterpretation of the well-known name for the Black Sea in older Arabic geographical accounts, the *bahr al-Khazar* (بهر الخزر), and possibly resulted from a misreading of this term as *bahr al-Jurz* (بهر الجرز) (Georgian Sea).⁴⁷ If the *Ḥudūd's* source used the term *bahr al-Khazar* to designate the Black Sea, this is exceptionally interesting, since this usage is solely associated with works of the ninth century such as Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Kitāb al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik* (c.232/846 or c.272/885).⁴⁸ Calling the Black Sea the *bahr al-Khazar* only made sense in the ninth century, when the Khazars had a presence on its northern shore.⁴⁹ However, in the tenth century, with the waning of Khazar power in this region, the term *bahr al-Khazar* acquired its modern meaning of the Caspian Sea.

The above implies that the author of the *Ḥudūd* used an otherwise-unknown Arabic source of the ninth century, which, apart from calling the Black

⁴⁵ Minorsky, *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World*, p.159; Peter Golden, 'Rus', *EI2*.

⁴⁶ Minorsky, *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World*, p.159.

⁴⁷ The ninth- to tenth-century Arabic term for Georgia was generally *Jurzan*, as opposed to the modern *Jūrjā*, this being the term used in Ibn Khurradādhbih, for example. See 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kniga putei i stran*, ed. by Naila Velikhanova (Baku: Elm, 1986), pp.108, 300.

⁴⁸ 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-al-Mamālik*, trans. by M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1889), p.79.

⁴⁹ Zimonyi, p.30.

Sea the *bahr al-Khazar*, also described the Alan king as a Christian. This use of an older source would also explain the unusual term, *daryā-ye Gurz*. Since this passage clearly refers to the Black Sea, but the common tenth-century usage of the term *bahr al-Khazar* was the Caspian, it would be logical for the author or a later copyist to interpret this term using the similar name of a people known to inhabit the Black Sea region- being the *Jurz/ Gurz* (Georgians). Such a mistake is eminently plausible, since the rest of this passage appears rather garbled- for example, its cardinal directions have been rotated counter-clockwise by 90 degrees, so that the Sarir kingdom of Dagestan is placed to the north of Alania, rather than to the east.⁵⁰ It therefore seems that a second, unknown Arabic source of the ninth century also described the Alan king as Christian. This not only pushes the date of the Alans' Christianisation back into the ninth century, but also corroborates a ninth-century date for the original source used by the Jayhānī tradition.

Jayhānī's Source and the Date of the Alans' Christianisation

It seems clear from both internal and corroborating evidence that the source used by Jayhānī for his description of the Alans originated in the mid- to late-ninth century. We thus may reasonably ask what this source was. Whilst the manuscript tradition is too unclear for us to be certain, the most likely candidate is the full edition of Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Kitāb al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik*, one of

⁵⁰ Minorsky, *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World*, p.160.

the most famous early works of Islamic geographical writing. This work does survive, but only in a compendium version of a lost, longer original.⁵¹

There are a number of reasons for suggesting Ibn Khurradādhbih as the original source of this account of the Alans, later used by Jayhānī. Firstly, the list of Turkic peoples described in the works of the ‘Jayhānī tradition’ is exactly the same as that described in our existing, compendium version of Ibn Khurradādhbih.⁵² This suggests that the organisational structure of parts of Jayhānī’s work may have originated with Ibn Khurradādhbih, not just some isolated quotations. Secondly, we have evidence that Ibn Khurradādhbih’s longer version contained a description of the Caucasus which was widely used. According to al-Mas’ūdī, in the early 10th century the standard and best reference work on the Caucasus was that of Ibn Khurradādhbih. Moreover, we know that Mas’ūdī had access to the lost, longer version, as he includes a quotation from it which is not preserved in our extant compendium version.⁵³ Thirdly, and most convincingly, al-Muqaddasī’s *Ahsan al-taqāsim* (c.375/ 985⁵⁴) explicitly names Ibn Khurradādhbih as Jayhānī’s principal source.⁵⁵ Specifically, he reported that:

“I have seen, moreover, in Nishapur, two succinct works, of which one was ascribed to al-Jayhānī, the other bearing the name of Ibn Khurradādhbih

⁵¹ For the identification of our surviving edition of Ibn Khurradādhbih as a compendium edition of an originally much larger work, see ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-al-Mamālik*, pp. xvi-xx. On the issue of the manuscript tradition’s lack of clarity, I am indebted to Jean-Charles Ducène (personal communication).

⁵² Hansgerd Göckenjan and István Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte über die Völker Osteuropas und Zentralasiens im Mittelalter: die Ğayhānī-Tradition (Ibn Rusta, Gardīzī, Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam, al-Bakrī Und al-Marwazī)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz in Kommission, 2001), p.31.

⁵³ Mas’ūdī, *Les prairies d’or*, pp.5-6, 181-2. For Mas’ūdī’s possession of a longer version of Ibn Khurradādhbih, see ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-al-Mamālik*, p.xvi.

⁵⁴ Andre Miquel, ‘al-Mukaddasī’, *El2*.

⁵⁵ See Zimonyi, pp.8-11, 16.

as author. They agreed with each other in substance, except that al-Jayhānī had provided some additional material.”⁵⁶

If the original source of the information now preserved in Ibn Rusta, al-Bakrī and Gardizī was Ibn Khurradādhbih, it would imply that the Alan king had converted to Christianity prior to 271-2/885, the approximate date of the later, second edition of Ibn Khurradādhbih’s work.⁵⁷

In summation, we can say that the evidence points towards Ibn Rusta, Gardizī, al-Bakrī and the *Ḥudūd al-Alām* preserving elements of two separate accounts from the ninth century, which both described the Alan king as a Christian. One of these ninth-century accounts may have been the longer, original edition of Ibn Khurradādhbih. Along with the lack of any mention of Byzantine influence over the Alans, the fact that the ruler does not carry a Christian title, and the fact that large numbers of Alans apparently remained unconverted, the early date of these sources implies a slow, syncretic conversion process. However, having established the dates of these sources, we must ask whether the picture they convey is an accurate one.

⁵⁶ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Muqaddasī, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions: A Translation of Ahsan al-Taqaṣim fī Marīfat al-Aqalim*, trans. by Basil Anthony Collins (Reading: Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilisation, 1994), p.4.

⁵⁷ See Göckenjan and Zimonyi, pp.30-1. It is possible that we can push back the date of Ibn Khurradādhbih’s hypothesised report on the Alans even further. Michael de Goeje argued that Jayhānī’s source was a copy of Ibn Khurradādhbih’s earlier edition, which he dated to 230-4/ 844-7. Moreover, the fact that Ibn Khurradādhbih apparently, according to de Goeje, was working from ‘Abbāsīd archival sources implies that his information was already at least a few years old when he was writing. Indeed, Marquart argued that part of the ‘northern report’ of Ibn Rusta dates prior to 827, as it still describes Britain as a heptarchy. However, it would be overly speculative to argue on this basis that our report on the Alans also dates in its practical entirety from this first half of the ninth century. Rather, it seems to reinforce the impression that Ibn Khurradādhbih used a number of sources to produce his work. See ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-al-Mamālik*, p.xxi; Marquart, p.29.

Discourse and Accuracy in the Islamic Geographical Tradition

Eschatology and Administration in the Islamic Geographical Tradition

Whilst the Muslim geographical tradition is largely free from overt polemical bias, to see it as a simple and neutral iteration of geographical fact ignores its deep entanglements with the Islamic imperial project.⁵⁸ Therefore, if we are to read ‘against the grain’, and determine how accurate our information on the Alans’ conversion is, we must first read ‘along the grain’, and identify the overriding discourses of Islamic geographical accounts of the North Caucasus.⁵⁹ This is vital not only for the question of the Alans’ Christianisation, but also more widely for the study of Alania, as these accounts, particularly Mas’ūdī’s, are our best source for its social structure. In analysing the oldest reports on the Caucasus- the ninth-century accounts used by Jayhānī and the *Ḥudūd al-‘Alam*, and the early tenth-century account of al-Mas’ūdī- we can identify two overlapping discursive tendencies: the eschatological, and the administrative.

The eschatological tendency in Islamic geography originated from the identification of the fortifications of the Caucasus with the wall supposedly built by Alexander the Great to keep out Yājuj and Mājuj, the Qur’anic equivalent of the biblical Gog and Magog of the end times.⁶⁰ By extension, this tendency identifies the ‘northern peoples’ beyond the Caucasus with Yājuj and Mājuj. For example, al-Mas’ūdī’s description of Darband is highly informed by this

⁵⁸ For example, al-Muqaddasī claimed that Jayhānī’s reason for writing his work was “to achieve conquest of the [foreign] territories, and to acquire knowledge of the resources of [foreign] countries...” Muqaddasī, p.3.

⁵⁹ On this methodology, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Commonsense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp.21-4.

⁶⁰ On Yājuj and Mājuj, see Ahmad Nazmi, *The Muslim Geographical [sic] Image of the World in the Middle Ages: A Source Study* (Warsaw: Academic Publishing House Dialog, 2007), pp.18, 97, 100-102, 108.

tradition.⁶¹ He describes the wall as being divinely inspired, stopping the irruption of the northern peoples into the Dār al-Islām, among them the Alans, Sarir and Turks. This, moreover, is linked by Mas'ūdī into an uncharacteristically polemic piece on the decline of the 'Abbāsids, who, he states, would be unable to hold back the peoples of the Caucasus (including the Alans) without the help of God and the Darband wall. It is possible, given Mas'ūdī's known Shi'ism, that this passage represents a response to the rise of the Shi'i Buyīds.⁶² In this context, the depiction of the situation under the 'Abbāsids as equivalent to the petty kingdoms of Iran between Alexander and Ardashir, and even as equivalent to the *jāhiliyah*, may reflect an attempt to legitimise the caliphate's Shi'i challengers. In this context, the strength of the non-Islamic peoples of the Caucasus may have been emphasised in order to reinforce the sense of the caliphate's decline.

However, there are reasons to think that this eschatological tendency was not hugely influential on descriptions of the Alans in this period. Firstly, reports of the power of the Alans in the mid-tenth century are not confined to Mas'ūdī, but are also found in the Khazar 'Schechter Letter' (c.949⁶³) and, by implication, in the formulae used to address the Alan ruler in Constantine Porphyrogennētos' *De Ceremoniis* (c.956-9⁶⁴).⁶⁵ As such, we might consider Mas'ūdī's description a

⁶¹ Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, p.182.

⁶² On Mas'ūdī's Shi'ism, see Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, p.1.

⁶³ Kevin Alan Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria*, 2nd edn. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p.97.

⁶⁴ Arnold Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.576-7.

⁶⁵ *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, ed. by Norman Golb and Omeljan Pritsak (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), p.113. On the formulae used for Alan rulers in the *De Ceremoniis*, see Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, ed. by Ann Moffatt and Maxeme Tall (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2012), p.679; Bernadette Martin-Hisard, 'Constantinople et les archontes du monde Caucasiens dans le Livre des Ceremonies II, 48', in *Travaux et memoires 13*, ed. by College de France, centre de recherches d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance (Paris: De Boccard, 2000), p.366.

polemic utilisation of an externally observable situation, rather than an outright fabrication. Secondly, it is noteworthy that even at the start of our period, no Arabic and Persian geographical account explicitly identifies the peoples of the North Caucasus with Yājuj and Mājuj; rather, they are listed separately. Indeed, in the account of Sallum the Interpreter's journey to Yājuj and Mājuj, first recorded in the short edition of Ibn Khurradādhbih, the Caucasus is not considered a plausible location for the wall of Alexander. Rather, the location of this wall and of Yājuj and Mājuj is pushed much further north, the Alans merely appearing as one of a number of peoples who, in accordance with diplomatic protocol, forward on the interpreter to his next destination.⁶⁶ It may thus be argued that by the mid-ninth century, the Caucasus was simply too well-known to Islamic geographers to be considered a plausible home for the peoples who would usher in the end of days.

It is therefore the administrative tradition which appears most prominently in our early Islamic geographical accounts of the Alans. This tradition originated from the practicalities of administering the huge 'Abbāsid Empire, especially in maintaining its post-routes.⁶⁷ Paradoxically, this seemingly neutral, administrative point of view can make the descriptions of foreign peoples in earlier Muslim geographical accounts hard to analyse. Moreover, as a consequence of this administrative function, the overwhelming concentration of our surviving geographical accounts is on Muslim lands.⁶⁸ As a consequence of

⁶⁶ See Travis E. Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation, and the 'Abbāsid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), pp.77-9, 196.

⁶⁷ See Adam J. Silverstein, 'The Medieval Islamic Worldview', in *Geography and Ethnography: Perceptions of the World in Pre-Modern Societies*, ed. by Kurt A. Raaflaub and Richard J. A. Talbert (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp.282-3; Nazmi, pp.9-13.

⁶⁸ Silverstein, p.284.

this focus on the Islamic world, the reports on non-Islamic peoples of the Caucasus are largely formulaic and give information of practical use to an administrator. In general, information on a given people is basic, consisting of some recombination of the following categories: the name of a people; their system of government; their religion; their main cities and/ or fortresses; minerals produced in the lands; their neighbours; its people's mode of life; and marvels occurring there. For example, the *Ḥudūd al-'Alam* defines a country using its climate, religion, law and custom, language, and political allegiance as parameters; its borders are defined by mountains, rivers and deserts.⁶⁹ There is a particular focus on titles of foreign rulers, which makes sense from an administrative point of view, should any correspondence need to be addressed to them.⁷⁰ However, these categories are often imprecise and can miss much nuance; for example, al-Mas'ūdī implausibly describes the Kashak (Adyghe) as Magians, possibly on the basis of their burial practices.⁷¹

Although the 'administrative tradition' in Islamic geography was not a neutral discourse, and clearly had formulaic categories into which non-Muslim countries had to be placed, it should not be written off as a source of information. The very fact that this information was compiled for practical purposes implies that it was thought to be useful and accurate. After all, the critiques Islamic geographers levied at each other's works were on the grounds of utility and accuracy, rather than (for example) religious orthodoxy. For example, al-

⁶⁹ Minorsky, *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World*, p.82.

⁷⁰ For example, the Caucasian section of the anonymous 12th century *Mujmal al-Tawārikh w'al-Qisas* consists only of a list of rulers and their titles. See *Mujmal al-Tawārikh wa-al-Qiṣaṣ: Ta'rif-i Sāl-i 520 Hijrī*, ed. by Malik al-Shu'āra' Bahār (Tehran: Chāpkhānah-i Khāvar, 1939), pp.421-2.

⁷¹ Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.157.

Muqaddasī criticised Jayhānī's work for its inaccurate recording of postal stages , and al-Mas'ūdī criticised Ibn Khurradādhbih for not giving enough context or practical information on the peoples of the North Caucasus.⁷²

A more significant reason for considering these reports broadly accurate is their very conservatism, however. As we have seen from our study of the eschatological tendency, older impressions of a geographical region could be hard to shift. Moreover, this rigidity in categorisation could apply to the religious sphere- there was no room, for example, for the creation of a new category for unknown religions, such as that of the Kashak. In order for this kind of category shift to occur- such as the Alans no longer being classified as a potential people of the end times, but as a Christian people- it seems logical that the Alans must have shown sufficient outward signs of being Christian for them to be placed in a different epistemological 'box'. This shift in discourse is the strongest evidence that we should take these Islamic geographical reports seriously, and trust their information about the Alan kings being Christian.

Conclusion: Islamic Sources for Alan Christianisation

In this context, we may suggest that a sufficient number of reports about the Alans had reached the Islamic world to alter the eschatological view of the Caucasus as the domain of the utterly pagan Yājuj and Mājuj. This theory is supported by the fact that two separate ninth-century reports, both now lost, appear to have described the Alan king as a Christian. This shift in discourse

⁷² See Muqaddasī, p.3; Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'or*, pp.181-2.

implies that the Alans showed sufficient signs of being Christian to convince external observers that they belonged in that category, rather than being pagans. This therefore implies a reasonably substantial number of Alans were displaying outward manifestations of their new faith.

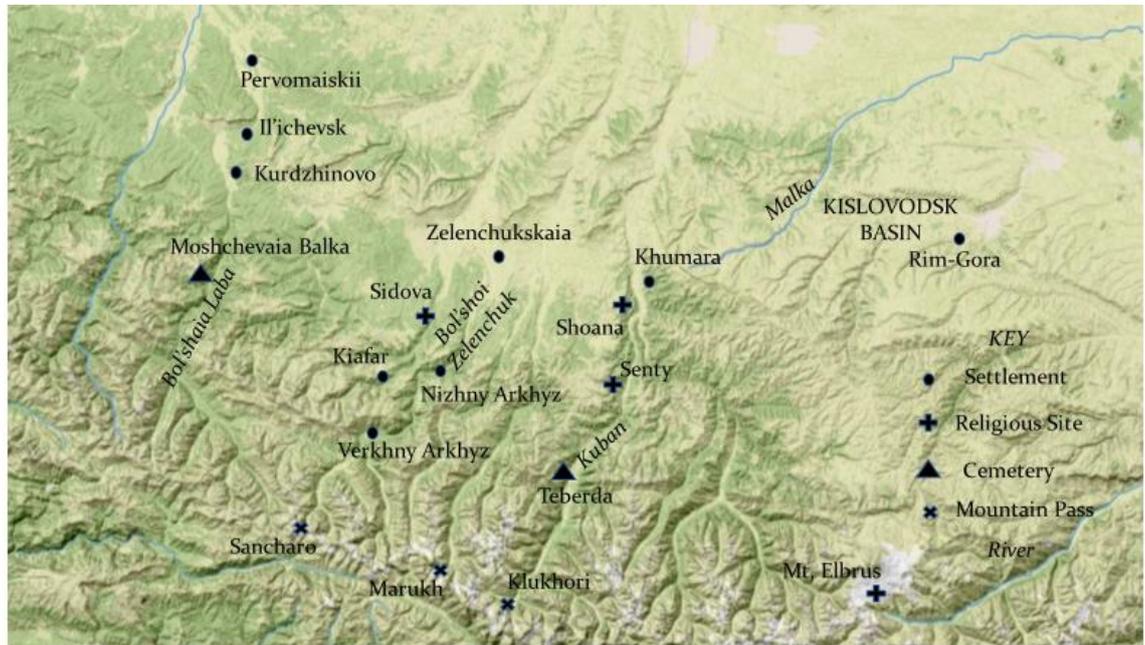
However, this does not necessarily imply a full-scale conversion of the population, but rather a partial and gradual process. This mixed picture is supported by our archaeological and epigraphic evidence, to which we will turn next. Moreover, the complete lack of any evidence of Byzantine influence in these descriptions, whether in royal titulature or the presence of Byzantine priests, strongly suggests that this process was not a direct result of missionary efforts.

Complication and Corroboration: Non-Islamic Sources on the Alans'

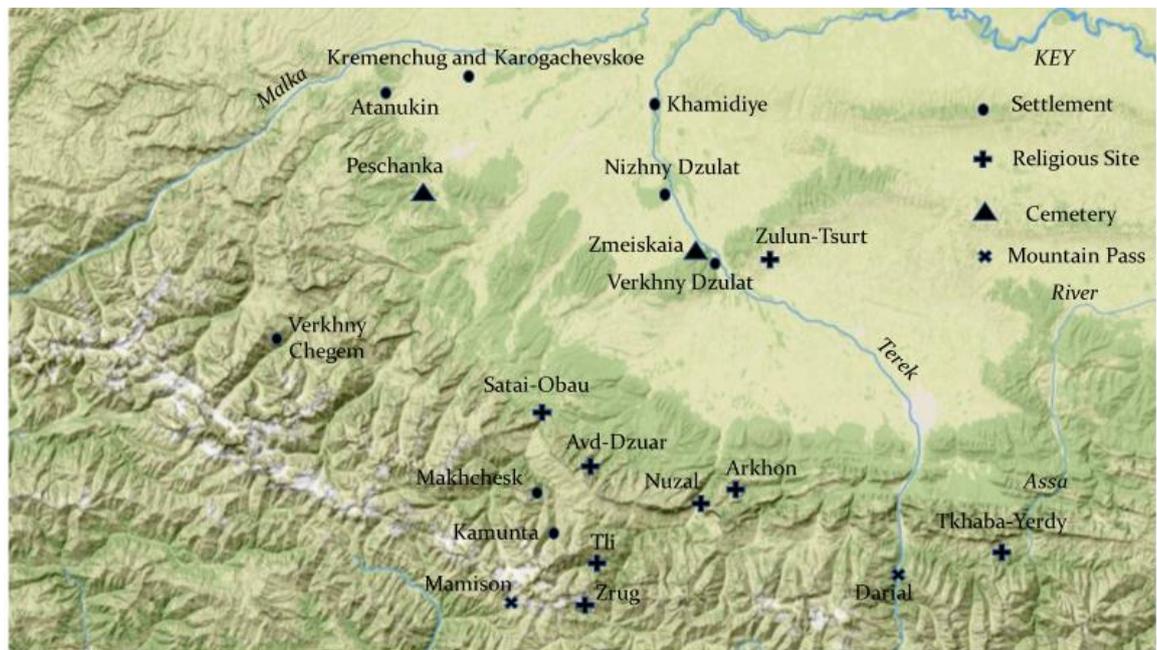
Christianisation

Archaeological and Epigraphic Sources

Our archaeological evidence from the North Caucasus in this period offers some of the strongest evidence for the introduction of Christianity prior to the tenth century. This evidence, however, comes with the general caveat that the presence of individual Christian artefacts, such as crosses, does not necessarily equate to Christian belief. Nonetheless, by the late ninth century, we find far more than isolated finds in the North Caucasus, but rather items of public display: notably Christian inscriptions and churches. This implies Christianising styles being considered prestigious by at least part of the population.



Map 3: Western Alania with sites of the ninth to fourteenth centuries. Image: the author.



Map 4: Eastern Alania with sites of the ninth to fourteenth centuries. Image: the author.

Archaeological evidence suggests that Christianity had influenced the North Caucasus for a considerable period of time prior to the ninth century. Certain burials from the seventh century onwards contain isolated Christian artefacts. For example, the cemetery of Moshchevaia Balka (Karachai-Cherkassia) produced a Syrian niello-work silver reliquary cover and a boxwood Syrian reliquary, both of the ninth century.⁷³ Whilst these finds could easily be trade goods or plunder buried irrespective of their original religious meaning, there are also examples of carved crosses known in funerary contexts, which implies a more deliberate act of religious ritual. For example, a number of carvings of crosses dated to the sixth to eighth centuries are known from the cave cemetery of Peschanka, near Nal'chik (Kabardino-Balkaria).⁷⁴ Similarly, a set of stelae with carved crosses at Koz'i Skaly on Mt. Beshtau, near Piatigorsk (Stavropol' Krai), have been identified as belonging to the eighth or ninth centuries, although the dating method is unclear.⁷⁵ A somewhat clearer piece of evidence is provided by a series of carved crosses known from the Kubran ravine and Tokmak-Kaia, near Khumara (Karachai-Cherkassia), which have been dated to the eighth and ninth centuries through analogies with Crimean cross designs.⁷⁶ Whilst these isolated items do not necessarily prove Christian conversion, they do demonstrate contact and familiarity with Christian religious belief.

⁷³ A.A. Ierusalimskaia, *Die Gräber der Moščevaja Balka: frühmittelalterliche Funde an der nordkaukasischen Seidenstrasse* (Munich: Editio Maris, 1996), pp.124-5.

⁷⁴ A.A. Iessen, 'Arkheologicheskie pamiatniki Kabardino-Balkarii', *Materialy i issledovaniia po arkheologii SSSR*, 3 (1941), 7-50.

⁷⁵ Aleksandr Iur'evich Pogrebnoi, 'Osobennost' khristianizatsii Zapadnoi Alanii vo vtoroi polovine VII-XIV vv.' (unpublished Kandidat Nauk Thesis, Iuzhnii Federalnyi Universitet, 2009), p.5.

⁷⁶ S.N. Malakhov, 'Materialy k tserkovnoi arkheologii Alanii', in *Iz istorii kul'tury narodov Severnogo Kavkaza: sbornik nauchnykh statei*, ed. by Iu.A. Prokopenko and V.V. Vasilenko (Stavropol': Grafa, 2010), pp.63-6.

However, another piece of epigraphic evidence does suggest a closer affiliation with Christianity. This is a partial stone cross found at the *gorodishche* (fortified settlement) of Rim-Gora near Kislovodsk (Stavropol' Krai) in 1846, which V.V. Latyshev dated by its orthography to the seventh or eighth centuries.⁷⁷ This cross is fragmentary, and its text contains frequent misspellings. Its text is nonetheless recognisable as the Byzantine funerary formula, “*Mnēsthēti, Kyrie, tas psychas tōn doulōn sou*”, (“remember, Lord, the souls of your servants...”). While this formula is widely known in the Byzantine world, inscriptions using it in combination with the monogram I X NHKA, as on the Rim-Gora cross, are found most commonly in the region around Constantinople. The most securely dateable example is an inscription of 861-2 from Bisanthe-Panion, although this formula is known from the 6th century onwards.⁷⁸ The use of this particular formula implies not only contact with this region, but a well-developed sense of Christian belief- for example, the value of petitionary prayer to a deity influential over the afterlife using set liturgical formulae.

There is a final piece of archaeological evidence which corroborates our textual evidence for increased Christianisation at the end of the ninth century. However, unlike the previous piece of evidence, its inspiration is Georgian, rather than Byzantine: an indicator of a mixed religious environment in the pre-10th

⁷⁷ V.V. Latyshev, ‘Kavkazskie pamiatniki v Moskve’, *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva*, 1.2 (1886), p.2; see also I.V. Pomialovskii, *Sbornik grecheskikh i latinskikh nadpisei Kavkaza* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1881), p.6 (No.7). This date is accepted by Sergei Savenko- see S.N. Savenko, *Vosstozdanie muzeia drevnostei pod otkrytym nebom v Pyatigorske* (Stavropol': Stavrolit, 2013), p.43. In addition to this discovery, A.P. Runich and I.N. Mikhailov reproduce a poor-quality image of what appears to be a liturgical book fragment from the same excavation, but give no further information about its findspot or date. See A.P. Runich and I.N. Mikhailov, ‘Gorodishche Burgusant, ili Rim-Gora’, *Materialy po izucheniiu Stavropolskogo Kraia*, 14 (1976), 162–82.

⁷⁸ See Packhard Humanities Institute, *Searchable Greek Inscriptions* <<http://epigraphy.packhum.org>> [accessed 08/01/2016].

century period. This evidence comes from the site of Il'ichevsk, in the Bolshaia Laba valley of Karachai-Cherkassia. According to the report of the excavators, V.N. Kaminskii and I.V. Kaminskaia, one of the churches there (No. 6) was built some time in the late ninth century, since debris from its construction filled in a group of *grubenhaus*-type sunken huts (*poluzemlianki*). The destruction of these huts took place in the last decades of the ninth century, which implies the construction of the church at this date.⁷⁹ Interestingly, Church No. 6 at Il'ichevsk and the slightly later Church No.2 display a different set of architectural influences to other churches in the Upper Kuban region, having more in common with Georgian-style churches of the sixth century onwards than with Byzantine architecture.⁸⁰ This implies that these churches' construction cannot be considered a direct result of Byzantine influence. Furthermore, it is plausible that other churches of ninth-century date are yet to be discovered, since of the 61 Alan-period churches known in the Upper Kuban region, only those at Nizhny Arkhyz, Pervomaiskii, Kurdzhinovo, Il'ichevsk, Senty and Shoana have so far been excavated.⁸¹

Of course, the presence of Christian inscriptions and churches does not mean that a wholesale Christianisation took place prior to the Byzantine missions of the early tenth century. It is notable, for example, that pagan and possibly even Zoroastrian religious sites are also known in this period.⁸² However, it may be

⁷⁹ V.N. Kaminskii and I.V. Kaminskaia, 'Novye issledovaniia khristianskikh khramov malykh form v Zapadnoi Alanii', *Istoriko-arkheologicheskii al'manakh*, 2 (1996), 172–81.

⁸⁰ Kaminskii and Kaminskaia, pp.177–8.

⁸¹ Kaminskii and Kaminskaia, p.172; Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.283–6.

⁸² For example, a rather mysterious eighth to tenth century shrine is known at the fortress of Khumara in the Upper Kuban, which its excavator, Kh.Kh. Bidzhiev, suggested might be pagan, Christian or even Zoroastrian. In any case, it bears little resemblance to any known form of Christian architecture. See Kh.Kh. Bidzhiev, *Khumarinskoe gorodishche* (Cherkessk: Karachevo-Cherkesskoe otdelenie Stavropol'skogo knizhnogo izdatel'stva, 1983), pp.45–8.

argued that these archaeological and epigraphic remains demonstrate a slow penetration of Christianity into Central North Caucasian culture. This evidence tallies with the descriptions of Islamic geographers, who describe the Alans as a mixture of pagan and Christian.

However, these archaeological and epigraphic finds from the North Caucasus allow us to suggest that this slow Christianisation process had a measure of elite support. It seems axiomatic that the construction of churches implies at least toleration of the new religion, and most likely some element of elite patronage, since this would most likely have been necessary to marshal the resources for their construction. Whilst it is not certain, the apparent Georgian influence on the design of these churches seemingly demonstrates a reorientation of elite authority towards Christian and Georgian styles.⁸³ In a similar way, the religious artefacts found buried in graves and the funerary inscription from Rim-Gora perhaps indicate a reorientation towards Byzantium by those who acquired these prestigious symbols of foreignness. In this polycentric political world, it seems that the Christian world to the south was growing in significance. To understand the full importance of this change, we must return to our textual sources, and re-examine the Byzantine textual evidence for the Alans' Christianisation.

⁸³ Some publications (e.g. V.A. Kuznetsov, *Ocherki istorii Alanov* (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 1992), p.311) claim the Alans were under the sway of the Georgian church during the seventh century; however, this is based on a post-15th century interpolation into the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. See *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles: The Original Georgian Texts and the Armenian Adaptation*, ed. by Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp.370-1.

Byzantine Textual sources

Our most significant Byzantine textual source for Alan religion in the ninth century is a single sentence in the *Life of St. Andrew* of Epiphanius Monachos (this is apart from other texts composed in this century which reproduce earlier sources: one of these, the *Bibliotheca* of Patriarch Photios, will be addressed in Chapter Four (p.195ff)). This work, written between 820 and 843, is a synthesis of at least three apocryphal lives of the apostle.⁸⁴ Its composite nature is clear from the work's structure: for example, the account of the apostle's visits to Trebizond, Amisus (Samsun) and Jerusalem occurs twice.⁸⁵ The author identifies himself as 'the monk Epiphanius', was strongly iconodule, and possibly was writing in the region of Sinope.⁸⁶

This might seem a slim haul indeed for the cultural outpourings of Byzantium over more than a century. However, the events of the early to mid-ninth century are only covered by three Byzantine narrative sources- the Continuator of Theophanes' chronicle, composed over a century later, the chronicle of George the Monk, and the so-called 'Logothete's Chronicle'.⁸⁷ Within

⁸⁴ On the date and composition of the work, see *Grecheskie predaniia o Sv. Apostole Andree. T. 1. Zhitiiia*, ed. by A.Iu. Vinogradov (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 2005), pp.40-4.

⁸⁵ Epiphanius Monachos, 'Peri tou Biou kai tōn Praxeōn kai Telous tou Hagiou kai Panegphēmou kai Prōtokantou tōn Apostolon Andreou', in *Patrologia Graeca CXX*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Impremerie Catholique, 1864), pp.223, 227, 230, 242.

⁸⁶ The author's location and iconodule sentiments are clearly demonstrated by a story in which he claims to have personally (*en autē de genomenoi egō to Epiphanius Monachos*) found on a promontory near Sinope a marvellous statue of St. Andrew which had resisted the attempts of iconoclasts to smash it. He claims this occurred approximately 50-70 years after Constantine V Copronymos' reign (741-775), which would accord with Vinogradov's dating. See Epiphanius Monachos, p.219.

⁸⁷ On Byzantine historiography in this period, see Warren Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.78.

these works, the overwhelming focus is on internal Byzantine affairs. As such, the absence of any other mention of Alan Christianity is not surprising, given the complete lack of contemporary reports on the Alans.⁸⁸

The interest of this source lies in its explanation of a statement in the original *Life of St. Andrew* by the fourth-century bishop Epiphanius of Salamis, and the link Epiphanius Monachos draws between this work and the Alans.⁸⁹ Epiphanius of Salamis' passage tells us that the apostle converted the "Scythians, Sogdians and Gorsinos" (*Skuthas, Kosogdianous kai Gorsinous*). Epiphanius Monachos updates this statement to reflect ninth-century Byzantine geographical conceptions.⁹⁰ His passage mentions that in his own day, this is the area "where the Iberi and Susi [=Svan?] and Phusti and Alani dwell" (*henthā oikousin Iberes kai Sousoi kai Phostoi kai Alanoi*). The interest of this passage lies in its placing Alania within the Christian sphere, by identifying it as a region which had previously been Christianised.

Due to its hagiographical function, this source cannot be taken as direct evidence of Christian evangelism in Alania, either in the first century or the ninth. However, it is notable that almost a century before Nicholas Mystikos' missions to Alania, a Byzantine writer already considered Alania to lie within the Christian sphere of influence. In this context, we should reconsider the evidence of the patriarch's letters, and what elements of them represent new developments in the religious history of the North Caucasus.

⁸⁸ The chronicle of Theophanes (composed c.810-15) does mention the Alans, but only in the context of a Byzantine mission to the North Caucasus a century before. See Alemany, pp.199-204.

⁸⁹ For Epiphanius' use of this source, see Epiphanius Monachos, pp.217-8.

⁹⁰ Epiphanius Monachos, p.222.

Nicholas Mystikos: The Moment of 'True' Conversion?

Given the evidence from Islamic geographical sources and archaeology for a lengthy process of Christianisation in the Central North Caucasus, it is necessary that we reconsider the Byzantine missions sent by Nicholas Mystikos in the 910s and 920s, and the letters that describe them. The letters of the Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos which relate to Alania can be divided into four groups. Firstly, there is a single letter addressed to an unknown group of missionaries (79); this group is identified by Romilly Jenkins and Leendert Westerink as a mission to Alania led by the monk Euthymios, and which they date to 912.⁹¹ Secondly, there are two letters to rulers of the Byzantine client state of Abasgia, the territory of which roughly coincides with modern Abkhazia (51 and 46). These are addressed to Princes Konstanti I and Giorgi II, and probably date to 913 and 923-5 respectively.⁹² Thirdly, there is a large group of letters addressed to Peter, Archbishop of Alania (52, 118, 133, 134, 135, of which 133 and 134 are essentially duplicates of 52 and 118, which apparently were lost in transit). According to Nick Evans, the proper chronological order of these letters should be 133, 52, 118, 134, 135, and they date respectively to 914-18 or 919/20 (letters 133 and 52), 921 (letters 118 and 134), and 923-5 (letter 135).⁹³ These represent one half of an ongoing correspondence where the archbishop apparently complains of the conditions in Alania, that the patriarch does not understand the 'realities on the ground' there,

⁹¹ Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, pp.335, 558-9.

⁹² I follow Nicholas Evans' revised dating of these letters in this section. See Evans, pp.212-14; Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, pp.265-7, 279-81, 548-9.

⁹³ Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, pp.281-7, 407-9, 433-43, 572-3, 577-8; for their dates and order, see Evans, pp.209-14.

and of discord between himself and Euthymios' group of missionaries. The archbishop's half of this correspondence, frustratingly, does not survive. Finally, there is a letter (23) to the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon, dated by Evans to 922, which threatens the Tsar with a huge Byzantine-led coalition which includes the Alans.⁹⁴

These letters overwhelmingly address the internal concerns of the missions, the letters to Peter largely consisting of apostolic exhortations by the patriarch. As such, whilst extremely valuable evidence for changing Byzantine attitudes to missionary work, one must be cautious in using these sources as evidence for the conversion of Alania.⁹⁵ This need for caution is suggested by the one aspect of Nicholas' letters which does directly concern the society of Alania, the deep concern with the dissolution of unlawful marriages that the patriarch expresses in Letters 133 and 52.⁹⁶ However, it is notable that other Christian accounts of the Alans from the medieval period do not mention marriage practices as a source of conflict. For example, while the Nicaean Bishop Theodore of Alania (wrote c.1223-6⁹⁷) and Riccardus' description of the travels of the Dominican monk Julian of Hungary (travelled c.1235-7⁹⁸) both described the Alans as semi-pagan, neither of these accounts mention or criticise their marriage

⁹⁴ Alemany, p.191; Evans, p.214.

⁹⁵ An example of the letters' use as a source for the history of Byzantine missions is S.A. Ivanov, 'Religious Missions', in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c.500-1492*, ed. by Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.322.

⁹⁶ For example, this is the only section of Nicholas' letters which Agusti Alemany reproduces in full. See Alemany, p.189.

⁹⁷ S.N. Malakhov, 'K voprosu o lokalizatsii eparkhial'nogo tsentra Alanii v XII-XVI vv.', in *Alany: Zapadnaia Evropa i Vizantiia*, ed. by A. G. Kuchiev, V. Kh. Tmenov, and V. A. Kuznetsov (Vladikavkaz: SONII, 1992), pp.167-8.

⁹⁸ Mary Dienes, 'Eastern Missions of the Hungarian Dominicans in the First Half of the Thirteenth Century', *Isis*, 27.2 (1937), 225-41.

practices.⁹⁹ Indeed, not a single other source from the medieval period describes Alan marriage practices as being pagan, which contrasts with other regions in the North Caucasus, such as Zikhia, where Riccardus does mention pagan marriage practices.¹⁰⁰ Whilst this hardly means that the Alans rigorously followed canon law, the fact that later authors displayed no concern about unlawful marriages, combined with the fact that Nicholas shows interest in no other aspect of Alan society, should make us wary of the patriarch's concentration on this issue.

In this context, we can suggest that this concern was influenced by Nicholas' own political struggles over the legality of the fourth marriage of Leo VI (r.886-912) to Zoe Karbōnopsina, one of the most significant events of Nicholas' patriarchates.¹⁰¹ Nicholas comments that the Archbishop "should continually apply your doctrine and salutary exhortation in a paternal and generous spirit... towards the powerful ones, who have great power to counteract the salvation of the whole nation" (*Ep.* 52), and that "if the case [of unlawful marriage] is too strong to be opposed, then see at least that the evil goes no further, and in future do not permit the tribe/ people (*genos*) to be polluted by such marriages."¹⁰² (*Ep.*133) These comments perhaps represent a softening of Nicholas' position on

⁹⁹ For Theodore and Julian's descriptions of the Alans' semi-paganism, see Bishop of Alania Theodore, 'Alanikos', in *Patrologia Graeca CXL*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Brothers, 1857), pp.409-10; *Vetera Monumenta Historica Hungariam Sacram Illustrantia. T.1. Ab Honorio PP. III usque ad Clementem PP. VI 1216-1352*, ed. by August Theiner (Osnabruck: Otto Zeller, 1968), pp.152-3. However, as Chapter Six will demonstrate (pp.275-8, 312-14), neither of these references can be taken at face value.

¹⁰⁰ For example, Julian described the ruler of Zikhia as having a hundred wives. See Theiner, p.152.

¹⁰¹ In general on Nicholas Mystikos' political struggles over this marriage, see Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, pp. xvii- xxii; on Byzantine marriage law, see John Meyendorff, 'Christian Marriage in Byzantium: The Canonical and Liturgical Tradition', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 44 (1990), 99-107.

¹⁰² *Dia touto chrē tēn men didaskalian kai tēn pros ta kala odēgousan parainesin adialeiptōs patrikōs kai met' epiekeias prosagein... pros de tous mega dunamenous eis enantiōsin tēs tou pantos ethnous sōterias...* Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, pp.281-7; *Ei d' antibainoi tou pragmotos he dunamis, teōs mēketi prokoptein to kakon mēd' apo tou nun epitrepsein toioutois gamois katamolunesthai to genos.* *Ibid.*, pp.433-5.

unlawful marriage compared to his position prior to his deposition in 907, and- if these letters can be dated to the period 914-18- may have been an ‘olive branch’ to Zoe. Whilst Archbishop Peter did perhaps make some kind of complaint regarding marriage among the Alans, the nature of this complaint is unclear, as it seems that Nicholas took the opportunity to make a statement of Byzantine political affairs in his reply. This would explain Peter’s apparent complaint to Nicholas in a later letter, answered in Letter 135 thus: “you write that your sorrows are many... but that since I [Nicholas] have no experience of exile, I do not appreciate these.”¹⁰³

Given the apparent influence of domestic Byzantine concerns on these letters, we should be careful when using them as evidence for conversion. An example of the malleability of their descriptions of the Alans is provided by Letter 23, written in 922, which enumerates the nations aligned against Tsar Simeon of Bulgaria. This letter counts the Alans as one the “nations dwelling in paganism” (*ethne atheia suzōnta*).¹⁰⁴ On this basis, S.N. Malakhov argued that the Alans were still not Christian at this point, a suggestion which D.V. Beletskii and A.Iu. Vinogradov rightly criticise for taking Byzantine attempts at intimidation too literally.¹⁰⁵ This explanation does demonstrate that the religious status of the Alans in these letters is highly dependent on context, however.

This being borne in mind, we should examine the point at which Nicholas comes closest to claiming credit for the conversion of the Alans, and which is

¹⁰³ Pollai, *grapheis, hai thlipseis... kai epei apeiroi xeniteias hēmeis, lanthanei tēn hēmeteran eidēsīn*. Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, pp.437-43.

¹⁰⁴ Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, pp.157-9. For the date of this letter, see Evans, p.212.

¹⁰⁵ S.N. Malakhov, ‘Khristianizatsiia Alanii v 912-925 gg. (po pismam Nikolaia Mistika)’, *Mir pravoslaviia*, 3 (2000), 30–33; Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.31.

sometimes interpreted as evidence for their conversion by this mission.¹⁰⁶ In Letter 135, he writes to Archbishop Peter that the monk Euthymios “was your predecessor as herald of piety to that nation [the Alans], and himself sowed the seed of doctrine...”¹⁰⁷ This sentence occurs in the context of Nicholas exhorting Peter to resolve his differences with Euthymios, with whom the archbishop had had a dispute of some kind. Specifically, Nicholas is extolling Euthymios’ status and achievements. In this context, if the baptism of the Alan ruler had indeed been achieved by Euthymios, it seems strange that Nicholas does not say so more explicitly. While his earlier letter to Euthymios’ party (79) does mention ongoing conversion activities, it makes no mention of any royal conversion, nor of any major conversion event.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, this choice of phrase cannot be attributed to stylistic concerns or to the patriarch’s circumspection, as elsewhere in the letter collection there is an explicit reference to the baptism of the Alan ruler. This reference, however, occurs in Letter 51, dated to c.913 and apparently addressed to Konstanti, Prince of Abasgia.¹⁰⁹ It congratulates Constantine for supporting the Christian instruction which has led to the baptism of the Alan king. The context of this statement is clearly a Caucasian one, in which the only participants, according to Letter 51, are the Alan ruler and his people, and the Abasgian prince who has supported this conversion process. Beletskii and Vinogradov interpret these references as a diplomatic courtesy to the Abasgian ruler.¹¹⁰ This is possible but

¹⁰⁶ For example, in Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.24-6.

¹⁰⁷ *...malista de hoti kai pro humōn kēruχ tēs eusebeias tō ethnei gegomen kai autos ton sporon katebaleto tēs didaskalias...* Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, pp.437-43.

¹⁰⁸ Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, p.335.

¹⁰⁹ Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, p.281.

¹¹⁰ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.21.

unlikely, given that it is far more specific than the references to the Alans' conversion in the letters to Euthymios and Peter, whereas if this were merely a courtesy, one would expect the situation to be the other way around. In any case, given the Islamic geographical evidence for Alan kings adopting Christianity prior to the Byzantine missions, we must interpret this letter in the context of a long, locally-driven process of Christianisation.

Yet it would nonetheless appear that a significant discontinuity in the history of Christianity in Alania is recorded in Nicholas' letters. Letter 51 refers to the "prince of Alania *and all those who with him* have been found worthy of Holy baptism" [italics mine].¹¹¹ This deserves closer scrutiny. For it is here, in contrast to the mixed religious picture that we have prior to this point, that we find the first evidence of mass baptism, taking place in a context of royal authority. This kind of mass baptism, as opposed to individual baptism or syncretic forms of belief, implies an overtly political process, with the king serving as an 'opinion leader', in the same manner as Nora Berend identifies in other newly converting societies.¹¹² This apparent link between the Christianity of the king and the Christianity of his subjects, thus legitimating royal power, would be an ongoing theme until at least the 12th century.

I argue that rather than being the record of a mission culminating in the mass conversion of the Alans, Nicholas Mystikos' letters record the setting up of an archdiocese, to give official sanction to a long-running and ongoing process of

¹¹¹ ... *tēs Alanias arkhontos kai eis tous hosoi sun autō katēxiōthēsan to hagiou baptismatos*. Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, pp.279-81.

¹¹² Nora Berend, 'Introduction', in *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200*, ed. by Nora Berend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.21.

Christianisation. As such, we should perhaps see these letters as representing an extension of Byzantine official power into the North Caucasus.¹¹³ However, it is clear that the process of Christian conversion and the extension of Byzantine influence were not necessarily coterminous. Rather, the latter followed the former. It is important to establish the distinction, as this throws the initiative in Christianisation back on to local, North Caucasian factors and political actors.

Conclusion

It would thus appear that by the late ninth century, a considerable number of people in the Central North Caucasus had adopted a recognisably Christian form of belief. This seems to have included elites who were able to sponsor the construction of a church and imitations of Byzantine epigraphic styles. It seems that by the late ninth century, at least one Alan king had outwardly converted to Christianity, and was externally recognised as having done so. This is clear from a re-examination of the Arabic and Persian geographical accounts of Ibn Rusta, Gardīzī and al-Bakrī, which all derive from a common source of the late ninth century. Its description of Alania does not match our tenth-century sources, and its ninth-century date is corroborated by its recording the same title for the Alan ruler- *Baqatar*- as the Georgian *Mat'iane Kartlisa*. Moreover, this date is supported by another Persian geographical source, the *Ḥudūd al-'Alām*. Its description of Alania similarly describes the Alan king as a Christian but his people as pagans, and its geographical terminology suggests that it derives from a

¹¹³ This interpretation broadly accords with Nick Evans' conclusions, which places Nicholas Mystikos' missions in the wider context of Byzantine interest in the Caucasus. See Evans, p.200.

separate ninth-century Arabic source. Whilst these sources' reliability should not be taken for granted, the relatively conservative nature of Islamic geographical discourse suggests that a relatively major shift in the religious confession of the Central North Caucasus must have taken place for these sources to take notice of it. This confessional shift is also suggested by ninth century archaeological evidence. Most importantly, it appears that one of the Georgian-style churches at Il'ichevsk (Karachai-Cherkassia) was built in the late ninth century, well before the arrival of Byzantine missionaries.

The classificatory systems of outside observers can conceal as much as they reveal, however, for it would appear that the underlying reality within Alania was far more complicated. This is demonstrated by the fact that, despite the conversion of at least one previous ruler, it was still considered necessary for the Alan king mentioned in Nicholas Mystikos' letters to be baptised along with his followers. Despite this apparently slow, syncretic process, the evidence of church building well prior to these missions, and of a conversion to Christianity ostentatious enough for Islamic geographers to reclassify the Alans, shows that the use of Christianity by elites in the North Caucasus was not a new phenomenon. This suggests that the Alans' reorientation towards Christianity and Byzantium was an active political choice, rather than simply a case of an external, imperial force acting on a passive object. In this case, the fundamental driving force in a major socio-political change was internal, rather than external, and that the process was gradual, rather than immediate. The supposedly static Alans were not so immobile after all.

We will finish this chapter with some suggestions as to why this process took place. The fact that Christianisation could support royal power in developing polities in the medieval world is well-attested, whether in Rus' or England.¹¹⁴ It is reasonable to suggest that this provided a strong incentive for Alan rulers to convert to Christianity, especially given the geographically and linguistically diverse region they ruled. The mystique of a foreign religion could serve as a signifier of power, recognised by all, in a way that an individual valley or clan's cult could not.¹¹⁵ Moreover, the crucial importance of Christianity was that it placed the ruler within a unitary and universalising cosmology: a powerful force indeed for an ambitious would-be hegemon.¹¹⁶ In this context, it is easy to see why Alan elites over the course of the ninth century slowly began to emphasise their connections to the Christian countries to the south over their connections to the Khazar Khaqanate and the steppe world. At some point in the late ninth century, probably around 870 or 880, this change reached such a point that the Alan king himself converted. However, the full implications of this switch did not become apparent until the early 10th century. With the setting up of a Byzantine church organisation within Alania, Alan elite authority would begin to transform from a system which emphasised links to the Khazar Khaqanate, to one which emphasised links to Byzantium and Georgia. In the next

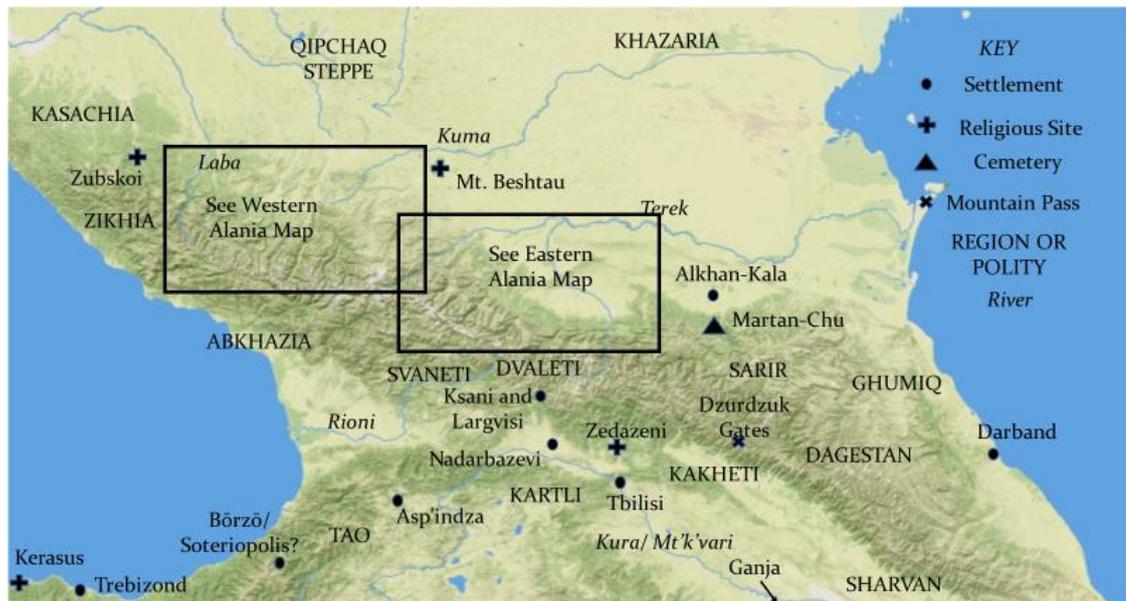
¹¹⁴ Jonathan Shepard, 'Rus', in *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200*, ed. by Nora Berend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.396-7; Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.346.

¹¹⁵ On the mystique of Christianity as an incentive for rulers to convert, see Richard A. Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1998), p.237.

¹¹⁶ For comparable cosmological changes among the Bulgars, see Jonathan Shepard, 'Orthodoxy and Northern Peoples: Gods, Gods and Guidelines', in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp.174-8.

chapter, we will examine this transformation and the ideologies that underpinned it.

Chapter Three. The Power of the Foreign: Kingship Ideologies in Alania,
c.875-c.1100



Map 1: *The Wider Caucasus in the 10th-13th Centuries. Image: the author.*

The Emergence of Alania and Royal Ideology

Introduction

In the early late ninth and early tenth centuries, the Caucasus was in a state of upheaval. The two powers which had dominated it for centuries, the Khazar Khaqanate to the north and the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate to the south, were losing their influence. To the west, the Byzantine Empire had begun its long recovery from its losses in the seventh and eighth centuries; by the eleventh century, it would become the most powerful state in the Black Sea region. Across the Caucasus, ambitious regional dynasts were able to exploit this situation to enhance their own power.

The kingdom of Alania is a classic example of this process. In the previous chapter, we established that changes to power structures in Alania could be long-running and initiated internally, notably in the case of the adoption of Christianity. The purpose of this chapter is to examine a related set of changes: the adoption of a Christianising system of hierarchical kingship. This chapter will demonstrate the increasingly hierarchical nature of Central North Caucasian political authority. Furthermore, it will examine how the kings of Alania were able to limit hereditary rulership to a single biological family. These changes, taken together, signify a shift in the Alans' 'mode of power-expression' - the prevailing method in a given society through which power is conceived, reified, and reproduced. In particular, it will examine the kingship ideology - the system of sacralised mystique surrounding the ruler - that allowed Alan kings (and possibly queens) to monopolise the most senior leadership positions in Alan society.¹ In the process, much of Central North Caucasian society was enmeshed in a web of ideological dependence, with the Alan rulers at its apex. The impacts of this system of dependence were far-reaching, from altering conceptions of the afterlife, to changing concepts of time as expressed through the calendar. This kingship ideology featured the ostentatious display of access to the foreign and exotic, particularly the Christian states of Byzantium and Georgia.² This 'power of the foreign' has been observed in multiple Caucasian polities of the medieval

¹ For this definition of kingship - and by extension, the Kingdom of Alania - see Henry Allen Myers and Herwig Wolfram, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), p.1.

² For the definition of 'the foreign' in this thesis - cultural elements, styles and individuals originating in a different geographical and social context to that of the North Caucasus - see Chapter One, pp.23-4.

period, but its importance is yet to be systematically studied or explained. This chapter will offer a possible explanation of its particular power in this region.

This chapter will begin by outlining the background to this ideological system. It will then examine the evidence for rulership in Alania in the late ninth and early tenth century: in particular, the influence of Khazar and related steppe styles. It will then examine the Byzantine-influenced system of Christianised kingship which first appeared around 950. Following this, the chapter will examine the reach and effects of this new system of ideological power.

The Power of the Foreign: Introduction and Parallels

The importance of access to foreign powers, and especially to neighbouring empires, is well-attested in Eurasian history. For example, much of the history of China's relations with its nomadic neighbours was determined by the politics of access to Chinese material wealth.³ In the 17th and 18th centuries, Kalmyk society was profoundly transformed by access to the military and economic power of the Russian Empire, allowing the rise of a more hierarchical form of governance under Ayuka Khan.⁴ And in the 19th century Caucasus, contact with the Russian Empire gave rise to a pro-Russian elite among the Kumyks and Kabardians, who benefitted from the empire's military and economic support.⁵

³ Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp.7-9.

⁴ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met: The Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600-1771* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.15.

⁵ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), p.18.

In the medieval Caucasus, there are examples of an apparently similar process, whereby imperial support allowed the rise of regional potentates. For example, in 806, Ashot, ruler of the Georgian principality of Tao (today located on the Turkish-Georgian border) successfully played the ‘Abbāsids and Byzantines off against each other and extracted titles from both empires, respectively as Prince of Iberia and *kouropalatēs*. This served as a major spur to the founding of the Bagrationi dynasty, who ultimately would become the rulers of united Georgia.⁶

However, there are also instances where legitimation through access to the foreign was of a more symbolic kind. One of the best-documented examples comes from the border principalities of Dagestan, the Alans’ eastern neighbours. In the fifth and sixth centuries, titles were granted to local rulers by successive Sassanian shahanshahs, for example the ‘Tabasaran-Shah’, after the region of that name.⁷ However, the use of these titles greatly outlived the empire that had originally granted them. According to the Arab geographer Ibn Khurradādhbih (wrote c.271-2/885), these titles were still used by these local rulers two centuries after the fall of the Sassanids.⁸ They are even mentioned in a list of titles of foreign rulers in the anonymous *Mujmal al-Tawārikh w’al-Qiṣaṣ* of 520/ 1126, although this source probably also drew on older information: the same list mentions other titles of a ninth-century date, such as Khaqan of the Rus’.⁹ Even

⁶ See Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1963), p.416.

⁷ See M.S. Gadzhiev, ‘Kavkazskaia Albaniia i Dagestan: istoriko-geograficheskii i administrativno-politicheskii aspekti’, in *Albania Caucasica I*, ed. by M.S. Gadzhiev and A.K. Alikberov (Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, 2015), pp.37-9.

⁸ See ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-Masālik w’al-Mamālik*, trans. by M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1889), pp.94-5.

⁹ See *Mujmal al-Tawārikh wa-al-Qiṣaṣ: Ta’lif-i Sāl-i 520 Hijrī*, ed. by Malik al-Shu’ara’ Bahār (Tehran: Chāpkhānah-i Khāvar, 1939), pp.421-2.

more extraordinarily, at some point after the fall of the Sassanians, a legend arose that the golden throne of Yazdegird III, the last shahanshah, had been secretly given to the ruler of the Sarir, one of the most powerful Dagestani polities.

According to Caucasian and Arabic sources from the ninth century to the 19th, the Lord of the Sarir gained some of the glory and legitimacy of the former Sassanid shahanshahs through his possession of this throne. This story appears in a wide variety of sources, from Ibn Rusta's and al-Mas'ūdī's geographical accounts (290-300/ 903-13 and 332-6/ 943-7 respectively), to 17th to 19th century recensions of a Dagestani local history, the *Derbend-Namah*.¹⁰ This story even appears in the *Sharaf-Namah* (587/ 1191 or 607-15/ 1211-18¹¹) of Niẓāmī Ganjavī, who has his hero, Iskander (Alexander the Great), sit on the throne as a sign of his connection to the line of Iranian kings.¹² This story's longevity as a source of political legitimation demonstrates a more ideological aspect to these claims of access to outside empires. In effect, one could still gain political power- and have this recognised both domestically and internationally- through claims of symbolic access to a past empire, not just through access to the material and military resources of a contemporary one.

It appears that a comparable ideology of connection to the outside world, particularly Byzantium and Georgia, was a key factor in constructing political

¹⁰ For Ibn Rusta and al-Mas'ūdī, see *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, ed. by Vladimir Minorsky (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1958), pp.155, 167-8 respectively. For the *Derbend-Namah's* 19th century recensions, see *Dagestanskije istoricheskie sochineniia*, ed. by A.R. Shikhsaidov, T.M. Aitberov, and G.M.-R. Oraziev (Moscow: Nauka, 1993), p.2ff; for its 17th century original, see Aleksandr Kazem-Bek, *Derbend-Nameh: Or, The History of Derbend: Translated from a Select Turkish Version and Published with the Texts and with Notes, Illustrative of the History, Geography, Antiquities, &c. &c. Occurring throughout the Work* (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1851), pp.8, 28.

¹¹ P. Chelkowski, 'Nizami Gandjawi', *Elz*.

¹² See Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Sharafnāmah*, ed. by Vahīd Dastgirdī (Tehran: Maṭba'ah-i Armaghān, 1937), pp.330-4.

authority in medieval Alania. As this chapter will demonstrate, this ideology was broadly comparable to the legends of the Sassanian legacy in Dagestan, in that the symbolism of access to a foreign empire was more significant than direct military or material benefits. In a primarily oral society, the mere fact of these connections was less important than their ostentatious, symbolic display. These connections could be demonstrated through written inscriptions and seals, and through architecture, prestigious foreign imports, royal titles, and marriages with foreign royalty. This chapter will examine these textual, material and oral manifestations of this ideology, and what they can reveal about the Alan kingdom's rise to regional hegemony.

Alan Elite Authority in the Ninth Century

Khazar Influences

In order to contextualise the transformation of Alan political authority in the tenth and eleventh centuries, it is necessary to look at the ways that elite authority operated in the ninth century. From written and archaeological sources, it seems that in this period, North Caucasian elite authority was polycentric: its structure appears to have been based on a series of semi-autonomous clans, rather than a hereditary system of kingship, and elites drew on various sources of foreign legitimation. As we saw in the previous chapter (p.107ff), in the ninth century these sources of legitimation began to include imitations of the Christian styles of Byzantium and Georgia, for example the patronage of churches and inscriptions. However, the most popular method of

legitimation seems to have been imitation of Turkic models, especially those of the most powerful polity in the region, the Khazar Khaqanate.

The first evidence for Khazar influence on political authority comes from royal titlature. The Alan royal title in the ninth century appears to have been Baqatar (Georgian: Baq'atar; Arabic: *baghāir*, almost certainly a mistake for *baghātar*).¹³ This title is of Khazar or related Turkic etymology, and broadly appears to have meant 'brave one' or 'hero'.¹⁴ While this title is common throughout the Turkic-speaking steppe world, the Alan variant is closely comparable to the title *T'ātr* (read: *Baghātar*), carried by a Khazar ruler of the 760s, according to Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī.¹⁵

This title appears as the name of an Alan leader in Juansher Juansheriani's semi-mythical Georgian *Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali (tskhovreba da mokalakeoba vakht'ang gorgalisa)* (early 9th century¹⁶). This account purports to be a description of the eponymous king's campaigns in the fifth century, but clearly reflects the conditions of its period of composition- for example, the Alans are said to have Khazar allies.¹⁷ Whilst this particular passage does not explicitly name this Baqatar as a ruler, the later *Mat'iane Kartlisa's* (c.1070¹⁸) description of the Battle of Asp'indza in 885 calls a different Baqatar the *mt'avari* (prince, tribal

¹³ For this correction, see *Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation*, ed. by Agusti Alemany (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp.276-7.

¹⁴ Denis Sinor, 'Bahādur', *Elz*.

¹⁵ Peter B. Golden, *Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980), p.155. The relevant folio of the Topkapı MS of Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī's *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* is reproduced in Golden's *Khazar Studies*, vol. 2, p.40.

¹⁶ Donald Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History.*, 3rd rev. and expanded ed. (London: Garnett Press, 2010), pp.67-9.

¹⁷ *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. by Roin Met'reveli and Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), pp.83-4.

¹⁸ Rayfield, pp.67-9.

chief; literally: head) of the Alans.¹⁹ By contrast, this passage does not appear to reflect the Alan ruler's title at the source's time of composition, as it describes the mid-11th century Alan ruler, Dorgholel, as a *mepe* (king).²⁰ Our final, and most explicit, source for the Alan title Baqatar is the now-lost ninth-century source of the Arab geographer Ibn Rusta, where it is explicitly described as "a name borne by all their kings (*muluk*)".²¹

Ibn Rusta's account also suggests that the social aspect of Alan political authority was influenced by kin-based, sacralised West Eurasian political models. He mentions that rulership was restricted to members of the tribe of the D.H.s.A.s (دحساس), reconstructed by Vladimir Minorsky to **Rukhs-as* (رخساس: 'shining, bright *As').²² It is plausible that the term **Rukhs-as* was influenced by steppe traditions which associated the colours white and gold with heavenly rulership.²³ It is even possible that this tribal name is related to that of the Ossetian goddess of the dawn, Asirukhsh. Elements of some legends surrounding her seemingly date back to the medieval period and beyond- for example, one saga (36 in Colarusso, Salbiev and May's collection of Ossetian sagas), of which various versions were collected between 1868 and 1881, contains strands linked to

¹⁹ On the etymology of *mt'avari*, see Met'reveli and Jones, p.137; for Baqatar in the *Mat'iane Kartlisa*, see p.144. On the date of the Battle of Asp'indza, see Nicholas Evans, 'Mountains, Steppes and Empires. Approaches to the North Caucasus in the Early Middle Ages' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Wadham College, Oxford, 2016), p.198. This title does not occur in our other Georgian source which describes the civil war in Kartli in 885, the *Life and History of the Bagrat'ids* (*tskhovreba da uts'q'eba Bagrat'ionata*). However, this work was composed in approximately 1030, at which time Kartli was apparently allied to the Alans, as evidenced by the marriage of Borena of Alania to Bagrat' IV. As such, it may have been thought impolitic to mention the participation of an Alan ruler in a war against the- according to the *Life and History*- legitimate claimant to the Kartvelian throne. See Met'reveli and Jones, p.215; Rayfield, p.101.

²⁰ Met'reveli and Jones, p.161.

²¹ *Isim li-kull min muluk 'alaihum*. Ibn Rusta, *Kitāb al-A'lāq al-nafisa*, in Alemany, pp.260-1.

²² Minorsky, p.169.

²³ See Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.59-62.

early medieval recensions of the *Apocalypse of St. Paul*.²⁴ One of these legends describes the election of a chosen hunter who becomes the goddess Asirukhsh's spouse- a possible echo of a ritual of sacral rulership.²⁵

According to Ibn Rusta's account, rulership seems to have been restricted on the basis of kin-affiliation. Whilst this is an outsider's description, there is no obvious reason for Ibn Rusta's source to have invented this fact, and this does not appear to be a *topos* in all descriptions of Northern peoples. For example, the description of the Khazars preserved in Ibn Rusta makes no comparable claim, despite having a similar format to the description of the Alans- notably, opening with the location of the polity and scrupulously recording royal titles.²⁶ This restriction suggests that the theoretical basis of rulership was an imagined kinship structure, comparable to earlier and later steppe empires.²⁷ This suggestion is supported by the *Mat'iane Kartlisa's* terminology used to describe the Baqatar killed at the Battle of Asp'indza. This passage uses the term *mtavari*

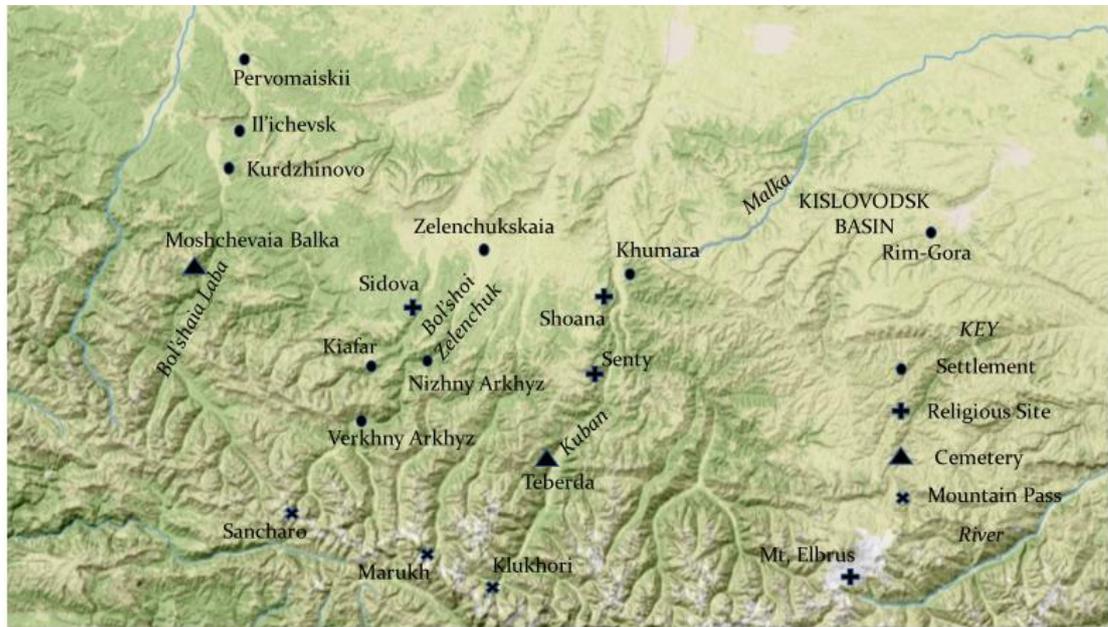
²⁴ In general, see John Latham, 'Sun-Gods and Soviets: Historicising a North Caucasian Nart Saga', *Iran & the Caucasus*, 20.2 (2016), 159–78. This particular variant of the saga was originally published in V.I. Abaev, *Nartovskii epos* (Dzardzhikau: Severo-Osetinskoe gos. izd-vo, 1945), and translated into French in Georges Dumézil, *Le Livre des héros: légendes sur les Nartes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp.116-133, and English in John Colarusso, Tamerlan Salbiev, and Walter May, *Tales of the Narts. Mythology and Folklore of the Ossetian People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp.222-252. The precise date and place of this variant's recording are unclear, although it is very similar to a number of other tales recorded in the 1860s-80s. For these tales, see Georges Dumézil, *Légendes sur les Nartes: suivies de cinq notes mythologiques* (Paris: Librairie ancienne H. Champion, 1930), pp.103-5. Greek recensions of the *Apocalypse of St. Paul* are recorded from the third century CE onwards; however, our best attestation for their presence in the Caucasus, according to Samuel of Ani, dates them to the sixth century onwards. See *Visio Sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin, Together with Nine Texts.*, ed. by Theodore Silverstein (Baltimore: Waverley Press, 1935), pp.3-4.

²⁵ Colarusso, Salbiev, and May, pp.222-5.

²⁶ Aḥmad ibn 'Umar Ibn Rusta, *Les atours précieux*, trans. by Gaston Wiet (Cairo: Publications de la Société de géographie d'Égypte, 1955), pp.156-7.

²⁷ On the Eurasian model of royal election on the basis of imagined kin-affiliation, see Barfield, pp.26-7, A.M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), pp.138-9.

(as opposed to *mepe*) for this leader, suggesting that his rule was thought to be less hierarchical than the Alan rulers of the 11th century.²⁸



Map 3: Western Alania with sites of the ninth to fourteenth centuries. Image: the author.

This impression of a polycentric system of power, showing pronounced Khazar influence, is corroborated by archaeological evidence. It appears that from the Bronze Age onwards, prestige objects were used extensively in the production of Caucasian power structures.²⁹ In this context, it is particularly significant that the seventh- to ninth-century material culture of the Central North Caucasus shows close affinities with the Saltovo-Mayatskyi Culture, the dominant material culture in the Khazar Khaqanate. These affinities include similar grave goods (e.g. Siberian-style bronze bracelets), tamga carvings

²⁸ On the date of the *Mat'iane Kartlisa*, see Rayfield, p.69. On the etymology of *mt'avari*, see Met'reveli and Jones, p.137; for Baqatar in the *Mat'iane Kartlisa*, see p.144. On the date of the Battle of Asp'indza, see Evans, p.198.

²⁹ See Adam T. Smith, *The Political Machine: Assembling Sovereignty in the Bronze Age Caucasus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp.5-6, 20-23.

(marking signs of unclear function, possibly related to clan affiliation), and especially the prevalence of 'baba' statues (the function of which is also unclear, but which probably served as grave markers for deceased ancestors).³⁰ Of particular note are changes in elite dwellings from the eighth century onwards, which increasingly resemble yurts of a Turkic style.³¹ Given the elite nature of many of these items, it seems that methods of legitimation were influenced by Turkic material culture. Indeed, it is possible that not only were North Caucasian elites influenced by Khazar styles of authority, but that the region was home to a major Khazar garrison in the eighth and ninth centuries, at the fortress of Khumara in the Upper Kuban (Karachai-Cherkassia).³²

³⁰ On grave goods and yurts, see V.B. Kovalevskaia, *Kavkaz i Alany: veka i narody* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), pp.148-9; T.M. Minaeva, *K istorii Alan Verkhnego Prikuban'ia po arkheologicheskim dannym* (Stavropol': Stavropol'skoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1971), p.212. On tamga, see Kovalevskaia, p.173, A.V. Gadlo, *Etnicheskaia istoriia Severnogo Kavkaza X-XIII vv.* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo St. Peterburgskogo universiteta, 1994), pp.46-7; Kh.Kh. Bidzhiev, *Khumarinskoe gorodishche* (Cherkessk: Karachevo-Cherkesskoe otdelenie Stavropol'skogo knizhnogo izdatel'stva, 1983), pp.83-92. On 'baba' statues, see Minaeva, pp.213-7; S.N. Savenko, *Vosstozdanie muzeia drevnostei pod otkrytym nebom v Pyatigorske* (Stavropol': Stavrolit, 2013), pp.39-42.

³¹ Evans, pp.114-15.

³² The evidence for this proposition is disputed, but centres on the fortress of Khumara, a massive fortification which dominated the Kuban valley, a major highway between the steppes to the north and the passes leading over the Caucasus mountains. Khumara's excavator, Kh.Kh. Bidzhiev, argued that it was a Khazar garrison, on three grounds (see Bidzhiev, pp.6-7, 34). Firstly, its construction is similar to forts at Sarkel, Semikarakory and Maiaki in the Don steppes, the heart of the Khazar Khaqanate, but differs from the stone or earth *gorodishcha* found elsewhere in the North Caucasus. Secondly, a number of runic inscriptions have been found on the walls of the fortress. Whilst these have not been successfully translated, their form is akin to Turkic runes known from the Don steppes (see Bidzhiev, p.82; I.L. Kyzlasov, *Runicheskie pis'mennosti evraziiskikh stepei* (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura RAN, 1994), pp.3-9, 321-4). Whilst both of these factors could be explained by cultural influence, the third factor does point towards the physical presence of a garrison supplied from the north. The pottery finds at Khumara are identical to those in the Don steppes, but differ considerably from other finds in Karachai-Cherkassia. This includes the design of coarse wares, less likely to be traded due to their low quality. This implies the local inhabitants were connected into the economy of the steppes, rather than the Caucasus mountains. Combined with the massive fortifications, this implies a foreign military garrison. See Bidzhiev, pp.34, 64, 77.

Political Polycentricity and the 'Power of the Foreign'

Although the form of royal titulature among the Alans, the method of royal election, and methods by which authority was displayed through objects show strong influence from the Khazar Khaqanate, we should not by any means see this as a world of monolithic power structures. Apart from the broad-based and non-hereditary basis of kingship, it is clear that political authority was not only demonstrated through imitation of Turkic or steppe styles, but also through other methods. The clearest demonstration of this is the increasing influence of Byzantine- and Georgian-style Christianity. As we saw in the previous chapter, by the end of the ninth century access to this new type of 'power of the foreign' was sufficiently significant that elites were investing in church building, and at least one Alan king had converted to Christianity.

This polycentric picture becomes clear when we look at the archaeological evidence for the prestige goods through which authority was displayed and reified. Although many prestige objects imitated Khazar styles, large volumes of luxury goods were also imported from Byzantium and the Islamic world. This is most famously seen in the finds of Sogdian, Iranian and Byzantine silk from Moshchevaia Balka (seventh-tenth centuries) in the Bol'shaia Laba valley (Karachai-Cherkassia) and the slightly later cemeteries in the Teberda area of the Upper Kuban valley (Karachai-Cherkassia).³³ Indeed, Zvezdana Dode has argued

³³ A.A. Ierusalimskaia, *Die Gräber der Moščevaja Balka: frühmittelalterliche Funde an der nordkaukasischen Seidenstrasse* (Munich: Editio Maris, 1996), pp.115-18; A.A. Ierusalimskaia, 'Le cafetan aux simourghs du tombeau de Mochtechevaja Balka (Caucase Septentrional)', *Studia Iranica*, 7 (1978), 183-211; Irina Arzhantseva and Olga Orfinskaya, 'Sogdskii faktor v torgovle shelkom na Severnom Kavkaze', in *Kul'tura, istoriia i arkhologiiia Evrazii*, ed. by I.S. Smirnov (Moscow: Rossiskii Gosudarstvennyi Gumanitarnyi Universitet, 2009), pp.16-19. Unfortunately, the excavations at Nizhnaia Teberda were so poorly recorded that it is impossible to give a precise date for the cemetery.

that this Byzantine, Sogdian and Iranian silk clothing was the principal marker of social status in eighth- to tenth-century North Caucasian society.³⁴

The archaeological evidence therefore demonstrates that goods considered prestigious in the North Caucasus originated from different sources. Chris Wickham has argued that a situation in which one particular set of trade goods is predominant implies an ideological hegemony of that culture.³⁵ Since no one set of trade goods is dominant within the North Caucasus in this period, it seems that no such ideological hegemony existed.

In summary, the Central North Caucasus in the ninth century can be characterised as a polycentric world. Whilst the methods by which elite authority was demonstrated did have a marked Eurasian and Khazar flavour, and certain social hierarchies did clearly exist, neither of these tendencies were culturally hegemonic. Whilst this 'pick-and-mix' approach to political authority would continue in the first half of the tenth century, one particular source of the 'power of the foreign' became increasingly important- access to the imperial court of Byzantium.

³⁴ Zvezdana Dode, 'Costume as Text', in *Dress and Identity*, ed. by Mary Harlow (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2012), pp.7-18.

³⁵ Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.705-6, 718-9, 787.

The Transformation of Alan Political Authority, c.913-1100*'Title Inflation' and the Rise of Alania*

In c.913, the Alan ruler and his followers submitted to a mass baptism.³⁶

Although at least one Alan ruler had been Christian before this point, the setting up of the Archbishopric of Alania, subordinate to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, marked the entry of Alania into the Byzantine sphere of influence.

It is plausible that at this point, Alan rulers were already using their connections to Byzantium to legitimate their rule. One indicator of this is the construction of a number of churches in this period. Notably, in the early 10th century a new church (No. 2) was constructed near to the pre-existing Church No. 6 at Il'ichevsk (Karachai-Cherkassia); Church No. 2 at the nearby site of Pervomaiskii may also have been constructed at this time.³⁷ Judging by a set of foundations overlaid by a later mausoleum, another early cruciform chapel appears to have been constructed at Senty (Karachai-Cherkassia).³⁸ Interestingly, this church was rebuilt in the 960s under royal patronage, which may hint at an earlier royal connection.³⁹ A clear indication of the Alans' significance in Byzantine eyes is the fact that their church was upgraded to a metropolitanate

³⁶ See *Ep. 51*, in Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Letters*, ed. by Romilly James Heald Jenkins and Leendert Gerrit Westerink (Washington, D.C.: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1973), pp.279-81.

³⁷ See V.N. Kaminskii and I.V. Kaminskaia, 'Novye issledovaniia khristianskikh khramov malykh form v Zapadnoi Alanii', *Istoriko arkheologicheskii al'manakh*, 2 (1996), 172-81.

³⁸ For early remains at Senty, see D.V. Beletskii and A.Iu. Vinogradov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz i Senty-drevneishie khramy Rossii. Problemy khristianskogo iskusstva Alanii i Kavkaza* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), pp.210-11.

³⁹ For royal patronage at Senty, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.241-3.

(senior archbishopric) by the early 930s, judging from a seal of the Ignatios, monk and metropolitan of Alania, dated to this period by Werner Seibt.⁴⁰

However, it appears that the Alans' Christianity was by no means fully established. Moreover, it appears that Alan rulers were still able to draw legitimacy from multiple outside sources, as in the previous century. The best demonstration of this was their renunciation of Christianity and expulsion of Byzantine priests in the early 930s, as recorded by al-Mas'ūdī.⁴¹ Although a direct causal connection cannot be established, it seems that around this time, the churches at Pervomaiskii, Il'ichevsk and Senty were pulled down.⁴²

These events were almost certainly the result of a military defeat of the Alan king by the Khazars, recorded in the Schechter Letter (c.949⁴³), an anonymous mythic history of the Khazar Khaqanate.⁴⁴ This defeat resulted in a switch in the Alans' diplomatic allegiance from the Byzantines to the Khazars, as demonstrated by the release of the captured Alan king from captivity and his daughter's marriage to the Khazar khaqan's son. These events were marked by the Alan king's adoption of a new title, *K.rk.n.dāj* (کرکنداج).⁴⁵ This term is

⁴⁰ See Werner Seibt, 'Metropolitan und Herrscher der Alanen auf byzantinischen Siegeln des 10.-12. Jahrhunderts', in *Sfragistika i istoriia kul'tury*, ed. by E.V. Stepanova (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2004), pp.51-2; on the implications of this seal, Evans, p.241.

⁴¹ According to al-Mas'ūdī, this occurred at some point after 320/932. However, the date 320/932 was also the date of the battle of *Walandar, which forms the culmination of Mas'ūdī's description of the North Caucasus. This may imply that this is an approximate date for the Alans' renunciation of Christianity, rather than an absolute one. See 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, trans. by Charles Pellat (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1962), pp.173, 178

⁴² Kaminskii and Kaminskaia, p.175.

⁴³ Kevin Alan Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p.97.

⁴⁴ See Schechter Letter, in Alemany, p.333. On the 'mythic history' character of the Schechter Letter, see *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, ed. by Norman Golb and Omeljan Pritsak (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp.94-5.

⁴⁵ al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, pp.157-8.

generally reconstructed to **kar-kundaj*, and appears to have been of Khazar origin, due to its similarity to a Khazar- Magyar title of unclear meaning, **kende*, mentioned by Ibn Rusta and Ibn Faḍlān.⁴⁶

The most noteworthy aspect of this episode is that following the Khazars' victory over the Alans, the khaqanate preferred to treat with the Alan king rather than deposing or executing him. This preferential treatment was demonstrated by the title and marriage alliance which demonstrated his access to the Khazar court. This not only implies that the Alan king's position was sufficiently strong to survive the shock of military defeat, but also that his position could be underpinned by access to either the Byzantine or Khazar courts. Whether by accident or design, it seems that the Alan kings were able to play the Khazars and Byzantines off against each other. This is demonstrated by the fact that the Alan rulers were able to extract increasingly grand titles from both imperial courts, and greatly increase their symbolic access to both empires.

It is particularly noteworthy that our best evidence for the Alan kingdom's emergence as an important political force dates to this period. Notably, this includes the testimony not only of Byzantine and Khazar sources, but also of a 'third party': al-Mas'ūdī. He describes the Alan kingdom thus:

“The lord of the Alans [can] muster 30,000 horsemen. He is the possessor of strength, courageous and embodying the political power of the [other] princes.⁴⁷ His kingdom consists of an uninterrupted series of settlements:

⁴⁶ See Ibn Rusta, p.160; Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥīm Ibn Abī al-Rabī', *Ibn Fādlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, ed. by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Penguin, 2012), p.55.

⁴⁷ The translation of this sentence is unclear. See discussion in Chapter Five, p.25off.

when the cocks crow [in one of them] the answer comes from the other parts of the kingdom because the villages are intermingled and close together.”⁴⁸

This source is particularly important, since it appears to have been based on relatively current information from the 930s, given al-Mas‘ūdī’s reliance on his own observations from his travels in the Caucasus, and sceptical attitude to the existing geographical literature.⁴⁹ Moreover, judging by its correspondences with later ethnography, his account appears to be the most accurate attempt of an outside source to describe the internal structure of the Alan kingdom.⁵⁰

At the same time, Khazar sources were similarly playing up the Alans’ importance. In the Hebrew ‘Schechter Letter’, the Alans are described as the “strongest and hardest of all the nations which are around us.”⁵¹ Indeed, they are considered so important that their significance was projected back into this text’s primordial narrative. In this text, one of the first actions of Sabriel, supposedly the first anointed Jewish king of the Khazars, is to ally with the Alans, thus giving mythic sanction to the geopolitical realities of the mid-tenth century.⁵²

A slightly later Byzantine source also implicitly emphasises the Alans’ importance in the 930s and 40s. This is Chapter II.48 of the *De Ceremoniis* of Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos (c.956-9⁵³), a list of titles and honoraria by

⁴⁸ Translation from Minorsky, p.157, amended by Christopher Bahl.

⁴⁹ Mas‘ūdī, *Les prairies d’or*, pp.2-4.

⁵⁰ For example, his description of a peripatetic Alan royal court corresponds with our evidence for peripatetic rulership in the 18th century Kabardian polity. See F.I. Leontovich, *Adaty kavkazskikh gortsev. Materialy po obychnomu pravu Severnogo i Vostochnogo Kavkaza* (Nal’chik: El’-Fa, 2002), p.204, and Chapter Five, p.255ff.

⁵¹ Schechter Letter, line 45, in Alemany, p.333.

⁵² On the ‘mythic history’ character of the Schechter Letter, see Golb and Pritsak, pp.94-5, 102-3.

⁵³ Arnold Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.576-7.

which foreign potentates are to be addressed. Of the Caucasian rulers in this list, only the Alan ruler is not “ordered” to perform an action, and is thereby not treated as a vassal of the Byzantine Empire.⁵⁴ In addition, the Alan king is given the highest title available to foreign potentates, *Exousiokratōr* (‘mighty ruler’), which it seems was specifically invented for him.⁵⁵ Finally, any correspondence addressed to the Alan ruler should be sent a golden bull of two *solidi*. Taken together, these honours place this king on the same level as the Pope or the Kings of the Franks, as well as two of the most powerful rulers of the Black Sea region, the *archon* of Bulgaria and the Khazar Khaqan. This grant of imperial honoraria to a previously obscure kingdom represents a particularly surprising development, given Constantine’s well-known admonitions in the *De Administrando Imperio* (c.948-52⁵⁶) to be sparing with the award of Byzantine imperial titles and prestige goods.⁵⁷ In the *De Ceremoniis*, by contrast, we see Constantine straining the bounds of his own rules in order to accommodate the Alan kings- an implicit indicator not only of their geopolitical significance to Byzantium, but of Alans’ own power to affect the epistemic concepts of foreign empires, as well as their near-neighbours. I suspect that this reflects the Alans’

⁵⁴ Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, ed. by Ann Moffatt and Maxeme Tall (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2012), p.688. On the implications of this formula, see Toynbee, p.409.

⁵⁵ For the listing of titles in the *De Ceremoniis*, see Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, p.679; for the implications of the title *exousiokratōr*, see Bernadette Martin-Hisard, ‘Constantinople et les archontes du monde Caucasiens dans le Livre des Ceremonies II, 48’, in *Travaux et memoires* 13, ed. by College de France, Centre de Recherches d’Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance (Paris: De Boccard, 2000), p.366.

⁵⁶ Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. by Gyula Moravcsik and Romilly James Heald Jenkins, 2nd rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 2008), p.116.

⁵⁷ See Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, *De Administrando Imperio*, pp.67-9.

ability to actively play the Byzantine and Khazar empires off against each other—however, the evidence is insufficient for us to be certain.

Whether its acquisition was the result of a deliberate Alan policy or a happy accident, the ultimate result of this game of ‘title inflation’ was the Alan rulers obtaining the title of *exousiokratōr*, by which Alan rulers would be known for the next two centuries.⁵⁸ In this ‘bidding war’ for the Alans’ allegiance, the Byzantines were the eventual victors, since it seems that the Alan king abjured Christianity for a relatively short period of time. The precise date of the return of Christian clergy to Alania is not clear, however this had apparently taken place prior to the mid-950s. The first direct evidence for the return of Byzantine clergy is the Senty Church inscription of 965, which mentions “Theodore, metropolitan of Alania”.⁵⁹ However, the formulae used in c.956-9 to address the Alan ruler in the *De Ceremoniis* of Constantine Porphyrogennētos refer to the Alan ruler as a Christian (“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost... to so-and-so, *Exousiastēs* of Alania and our spiritual son”).⁶⁰ It is therefore reasonable to assume the return of Christian clergy prior to this point.⁶¹ Even earlier than this, Constantine’s *De Administrando Imperio* describes the Alans as

⁵⁸ For the use of this title in the 1150s, on a seal of John Khotesitan, see S.M. Perevalov, ‘Alanskaia epigrafika. 1. Katalog grecheskikh nadpisei’, *Vestnik Vladikavkazskogo Nauchnogo Tsentra*, 11.1 (2011), 2–10.

⁵⁹ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.244.

⁶⁰ *En onomati tou patros kai tou huiou kai tou hagiou pneumatos... pros ho deina tou exousiastēn Alanias kai pneumatikon hēmōn teknon*. See Alemany, p.177. The use of the term *exousiastēs* in this formula is very curious, given that the Alan ruler is described immediately beforehand as *exousiokratōr*, this title is listed in another passage in the *De Ceremoniis*, and the Senty Inscription of 965 records its use in the North Caucasus. It is therefore most likely a scribal error, or alternatively is a slightly older formula copied wholesale into the text. If the latter explanation is correct, this provides further evidence for a process of ‘title inflation’ between the Byzantines and Khazars.

⁶¹ Josef Marquart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge: ethnologische und historisch-topographische Studien zur Geschichte des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts (ca. 840-940)*, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961), p.167.

Byzantine allies against the Khazars, which implies a possible re-Christianisation at this point.⁶²

As a result of this competition between the Byzantine and Khazar courts, from the early tenth century, the Alan rulers were recognised as the exclusive legitimate voice in the region in dealing with the Byzantine imperial court. Nick Evans has noted that the Byzantine court had a particular model by which they imagined power in the North Caucasus, related to the ability to act, and as being vested in a ranked society.⁶³ In this model, the Central North Caucasus was conceived as a single region- Alania- with a single ruler and a single church organisation. This Byzantine conception of hierarchical, unitary power itself developed this form of power structure in the North Caucasus. By granting prime access to a single Alan ruler, his access recognised by his titles, the Alan *exousiokratōrs* were able to rise to a position of dominance which would not have otherwise been possible.

From this point onwards, the Alan elites increasingly moved away from the polycentric system of authority and its display which had marked the ninth and first half of the tenth centuries. In its place, they adopted a much more hierarchical model of authority which emphasised their connections to the Byzantine world, and the imperial court in particular. For 150 years, this system was the primary method by which Alan elites outwardly displayed their authority. Due to its importance, it is therefore necessary to examine in detail how this system operated, and its effects on North Caucasian power structures.

⁶² Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, *De Administrando Imperio*, pp.63-5.

⁶³ Evans, pp.209-10.



Fig. 3: *Senty Church, near Kosta Khetagurov, Karachai-Cherkassia (photo: the author).*



Fig. 4: The Central church at Nizhny Arkhyz, Karachai-Cherkassia, one of the two largest churches in the medieval North Caucasus (photo: the author).

Atop a high bluff near the modern village of Kosta Khetagurov, in the Kuban Valley⁶⁴ of Karachai-Cherkassia, stands one of the most dramatic demonstrations of how much Alan royal authority had changed by the mid-10th century. This is the church of Senty, rebuilt in 965 in the most up-to-date Byzantine style, the ‘croix libre’.⁶⁵ (see Fig. 3). The church is one of several magnificent churches commissioned in the mid-10th century along the Kuban and Bolshoi Zelenchuk valleys, through which ran the trade routes to the Black Sea coast and Byzantium. The most noteworthy examples are at Senty, the nearby

⁶⁴ Known by this point as the Teberda valley, since the river changes its name at the modern town of Karachaeusk.

⁶⁵ This date is provided by the royal dedicatory inscription within this church, which states that the church was “dedicated and restored” in 965. See Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.244.

site of Shoana, and the fourteen churches at Nizhny Arkhyz, in the Bolshoi Zelenchuk valley. The site at Nizhny Arkhyz is particularly significant, as within a city of 2,000 people stood the largest churches known anywhere in the North Caucasus (see Fig. 4).⁶⁶ Although churches had previously existed in Alania, and there had been a religious site for centuries at Senty, the Senty church is unique in that it explicitly linked the authority of the Alan king to the new religion, and his access to the Byzantine emperor.⁶⁷

This is made clear by a Greek dedicatory inscription at Senty, which, while brief, is a vital source on how the Alan rulers constructed their authority in the mid-10th century. Rather than using a Turkic-derived title such as *Baqatar* or **Kar-Kundaj*, the Alan rulers, David and Maria, describe themselves as *Exousiokratōr* and *Exousiokratōrissa*: the titles granted to the Alan rulers a decade before by Constantine VII.⁶⁸ This inscription demonstrates that not only was this title used in Byzantine court circles, but also within Alania itself. Moreover, the numerous Greek graffiti in the Senty church provides evidence that at least a portion of this local audience possessed a degree of literacy and would have been able to understand this inscription.⁶⁹ This implies that this inscription was one which the Alan rulers were comfortable with their people reading, and which therefore reflects their own self-presentation. Not only did David and Maria utilise their Byzantine-granted titles within a religious building

⁶⁶ On the population of Nizhny Arkhyz, see V.A. Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh: k istorii srednevekovykh gorodov Severnogo Kavkaza* (Stavropol': Kavkazskaia biblioteka, 1993), p.225.

⁶⁷ For earlier churches, see Kaminskii and Kaminskaia, pp.173-5, and Chapter Two (pp.110-12). On earlier burials at Senty, see Minaeva, pp.63-4.

⁶⁸ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.244. The latter title is otherwise unattested, and may designate a female co-ruler.

⁶⁹ On graffiti at Senty, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.245-54.

built in Byzantine format, probably with the direct assistance of Byzantine artisans, but they explicitly emphasised their links to the emperor himself.⁷⁰ In the Senty inscription, the Byzantine emperor Nikēphoros II Phocas (r.963-9) is specifically named before the Alan *exousiokratōr* David or the metropolitan of Alania, Theodore. Moreover, the reconstruction of the church which the inscription celebrates is said to have occurred “under the rule of” (*epi basēl[eias]*) the Byzantine emperor, as well as that of David and Maria.⁷¹ In other words, the inscription concedes a certain sovereignty to the Byzantine emperor. The fact that an Alan royal inscription puts the Alans rulers’ names in such close proximity to that of the Byzantine Emperor, even at the expense of their own sovereignty, suggests that a key factor in their authority was their connection with the Byzantine Empire.



Fig. 5: seal of Gabriel, *exousiokratōr* Alanias (c.1030-50) (photo: from A.Iu. Vinogradov & D.V. Beletskii, *Nizhnii Arkhyz i Senty: drevneishie khramy Rossii*, (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), p.55).

This attempt to link the power of Alan rulers to that of the Byzantine Emperor is also found on their seals. These seals depict Alan kings as a

⁷⁰ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.132.

⁷¹ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.241.

Byzantine-style potentates under the protection of God and the saints.⁷² The most explicit example is a seal of an otherwise unknown ‘Gabriel *exousiokratōr*’, (Fig. 5), dated by Werner Seibt to the 1030s-40s.⁷³ Seibt argues the workmanship shows that this seal was made in Byzantium, and its royal imagery shows particularly heavy Byzantine influence.⁷⁴ Notably, this is one of only three cases we have of any Alan ruler identifying his country by its Byzantine name of ‘Alania’; in addition, the iconography of the Virgin on the obverse emphasises the divine election of the king. By doing so, this seal demonstrates a utilisation of Byzantine conceptions of power, placing the Alan king within the same divine order as the Byzantine emperor, albeit at a lower level.



Fig. 6: The ‘Urdure plaque’, from Zedazeni Monastery, Georgia (photo: from Nina Iamanidzé, *Les Installations Liturgiques Sculptées des Églises de Géorgie (VIIe-XIIIe Siècles)*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), p.165).

⁷² See Perevalov, p.8.

⁷³ Seibt, p.54.

⁷⁴ Seibt, p.54.

Perhaps the most striking visual representation of the change in Alanic royal imagery is an early 11th-century donor plaque from the *templon* (chancel barrier) at Zedazeni monastery in northern Georgia. Despite the considerable damage to this plaque (see **Fig. 6**), the name *Ordokh mepe* is legible next to the left-hand figure. Based on the explicit identification of this figure as a king, the dating of the lettering to the early 11th century and the similarity of the names, this figure is identifiable as the Alan king Urdure, killed in battle against K'virik'e III (r.1010-1037/9), *khorepiskopos* (ruler) of Kakheti, an eastern Georgian kingdom.⁷⁵ This is curious, given that the other figure in the plaque is usually identified as the very same K'virik'e who would ultimately kill Urdure.



Fig. 7: Urdure plaque: detail of *lōros*

⁷⁵ Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p.38; Nina Iamanidzé, *Les installations liturgiques sculptées des églises de Géorgie (VIIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp.164-8.

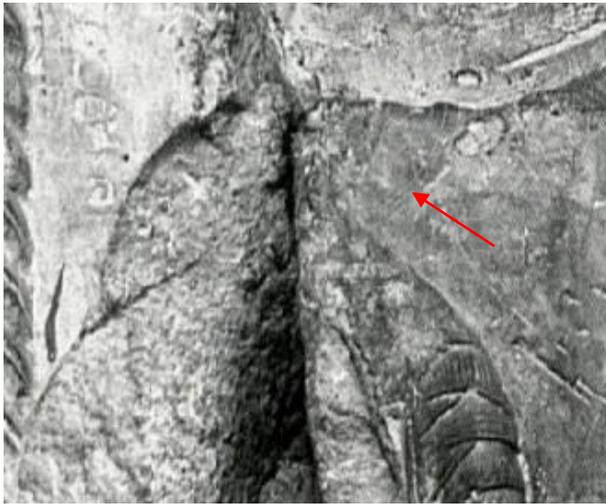


Fig. 8: *Urdure plaque: detail of halo (marked with arrow)*

The significance of this panel is its depiction of Urdure in Byzantine imperial costume and a specifically Christian context. Despite the damage to the panel, it is possible to make out the *lōros*, the kite-shaped jewelled scarf which was a crucial element of imperial ceremonial dress (see Fig. 7). Moreover, it is possible to make out a faint halo around the head of the king, an element which in Byzantine art was applied only to holy personages, notably emperors and saints (see Fig. 8).⁷⁶ Unfortunately, the damage to the head of the left-hand figure makes it impossible to tell whether Urdure originally wore a crown in this image.⁷⁷ However, the use of a halo allows us to suggest that he originally did, given that other Byzantine-style royal images from the 11th century, for example the enamel plaques showing Emperor Michael VII on the crown of Geza IV of Hungary (c.1074), depicted royal personages with haloes as also wearing crowns.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ On the limiting of haloes to imperial personages in depictions of foreign royalty, see Jonathan Shepard, 'Crowns from the Basileus, Crowns from Heaven', in *Byzantium, New Peoples, New Powers: The Byzantino-Slav Contact Zone, from the Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. by Milana Kaimakamova, Maciej Salamon, and Malgorzata Smorag Rozycka (Cracow: Uniwersytet Jagiellonski, 2007), pp.144-5.

⁷⁷ It is possible that the image reproduced by Iamanidzé shows traces of pendilia, however it is impossible to be sure without examining the plaque itself. See Iamanidzé, p.166.

⁷⁸ Shepard, 'Crowns from the Basileus, Crowns from Heaven', pp.144-5.

Antony Eastmond argues that this depiction of imperial regalia in the Urdure Plaque represent an attempt to appropriate the grandeur of Byzantine imperial splendour.⁷⁹ It is particularly notable that this depiction of Urdure and K'virik'e is the first in Georgian art to show a ruler in full imperial costume, a style not used to depict Kartvelian rulers until the reign of David IV (r.1089-1125).⁸⁰ Its novelty is emphasised by the fact that the artist, a certain Zak'aria, appears to have accidentally copied elements of an imperial marriage scene into his depiction of two male rulers.⁸¹ It is plausible, given the placement of this plaque in a monastery only a few miles from the Kartvelian capital of Mtskheta, that this depiction deliberately emphasises the status of the Kakhetian and Alanic rulers at the expense of the kings of Kartli. In any case, the novelty of this depiction demonstrates that this depiction of an Alan ruler cannot be considered a straightforward continuation of traditions of Georgian art. It is even possible that this royal imagery was adopted from Alania itself, given the use of imagery of royal saints in the late 10th century churches at Nizhny Arkhyz.⁸²

In any case, it is significant is that this plaque and the seals of Alan rulers explicitly invoke a different mode of power-expression to that seen in the previous centuries. Whereas the power of the ruler was previously derived from his kin-affiliation to the **Rukhsh-As*, the tribe to which kingship was limited, in this case his elevated status derives from his special proximity to God and the saints.⁸³ This represents a major shift, in that this divine power is explicitly

⁷⁹ Eastmond, pp.26-30, 38.

⁸⁰ Eastmond, p.39; Shepard, 'Crowns from the Basileus, Crowns from Heaven', p.150.

⁸¹ Iamanidzé, p.168; Eastmond, p.39.

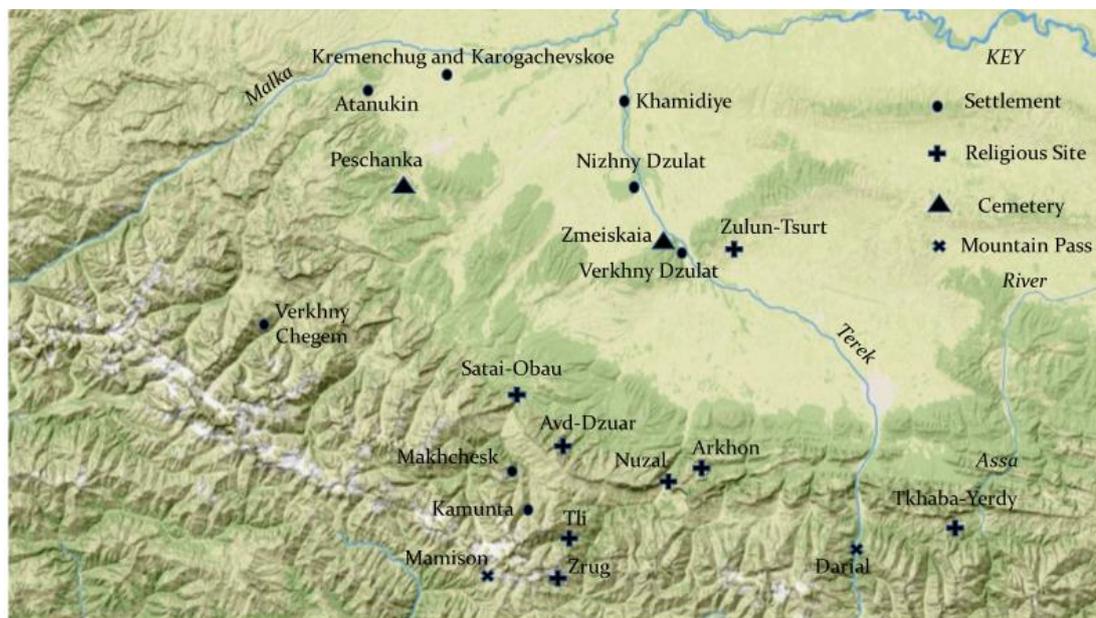
⁸² See Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.172.

⁸³ On the conception of power as deriving from closeness to the divine, see Cyril A. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of the New Rome* (London: Phoenix, 1994), pp.151-4, 218-21.

expressed in terms of a unitary, divine hierarchy, in which the monarch has a unique, exalted status. This cosmological transformation placed the ruler at the very apex of this new system of power.

Non-Royal Elites and Church Architecture

While the Senty Inscription and the Urdure Plaque are the most explicit examples of Alanic royal imagery imitating Byzantine models, it is clear that royal imagery which emphasised the rulers' access to outside, Christian powers was not an aberrant event, nor a style only intended for foreign consumption. Rather, this style was one much more widely used and imitated within the North Caucasus. The fact that non-royal elites used these methods to demonstrate their authority is highly significant, as it tied them into the same system of ideology as the Alan monarchs used to legitimate their rule.



Map 4: Eastern Alania with sites of the ninth to fourteenth centuries. Image: the author.

The most explicit example of North Caucasian elites using Byzantine and Georgian styles to demonstrate their power comes from the dozens of churches which were constructed in the 10th-12th centuries in the Upper Kuban region of Karachai-Cherkassia, the Mamison Pass region of North Ossetia, and the Assa valley of Ingushetia.⁸⁴ There are a number of reasons to think that these churches were built under elite patronage. Firstly, the amount of labour that would be needed to build these churches, especially the cathedral and monastery at Nizhny Arkhyz, implies elite patronage to organise their construction, especially since it appears that they were partially constructed by Byzantine and Georgian masons who would need to be specifically brought into the region. Secondly, comparable processes of cementation of elite authority through church dedications are known all over the medieval world, for example in Georgia and Russia.⁸⁵ Thirdly, and most convincingly, the 10th-11th century church of Tkhaba-Yerdy in Ingushetia has a non-royal donor inscription.⁸⁶ This reads: “Christ, glorify/ the builder [of your] church/ the lord (*p’atroni*)/ David.”⁸⁷ Whilst there is no further clue as to the identity of this David, it seems clear that he was a secular figure, since another donor inscription mentions the “Bishop George”, whose title is explicitly identified, whereas David’s title designates a secular magnate.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ No fewer than 61 Byzantine-style churches are counted by Kaminskii and Kaminskaia in western Alania alone, aside from the Georgian-style churches known in North Ossetia and Ingushetia. See Kaminskii and Kaminskaia, p.172.

⁸⁵ See Eastmond, pp.4-5; Monica White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus, 900-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.119.

⁸⁶ On the date of Tkhaba-Yerdy church, see G. Gambashidze, ‘Tri lapidarnye nadpisi Episkopa Georgiia (X v.) iz khristianskogo khrama Tkobia-Yerda (Ingushetia)’, in *Arkheologiia, etnologiia, folkloristika Kavkaza (2004)*, ed. by G. Gambashidze (Tbilisi: Neker, 2004), pp.47-8.

⁸⁷ See V. F. Miller, ‘Terskaia Oblast’. *Arkheologicheskiiia ekskursii*, in *Materialy po arkheologii Kavkaza Imperatorskago Moskovskago Arkheologicheskago Obshchestva I*, ed. by Countess P.S. Uvarova (Moscow: A.I. Mamontov, 1888), p.20.

⁸⁸ See Gambashidze, pp.47-8. Gambashidze attributes the church’s construction to Bishop George, but does not mention the inscription of David described by Miller. On the title *p’atroni*, see

Vassiliki Dimitropolou has argued that in Byzantium, the visible products of elite patronage “constituted a public statement about the founders and, by extension, reinforced their power over their people.”⁸⁹ In the North Caucasus, in common with other early Christianising polities such as Anglo-Saxon England, this patronage represented a “privatisation” of a previously communal holy space, particularly at pre-existing holy sites such as Senty.⁹⁰ The choice of contemporary Byzantine church designs for the vast majority of these churches, with their enclosed, private spaces, over alternative church types such as the earlier basilica-type halls known at Il’ichevsk (Churches No.3 and 6) and Kurdzhinovo (No.1), may have had the same effect.⁹¹ The implicit statements of power conveyed through the physical size of these churches, larger than any previous religious building than we know of, were reinforced by their very foreignness and their demonstration of symbolic access to the power of Byzantium and Georgia. In the same way as royal inscriptions and images, these churches emphasised their patrons’ close linkages to the wider Christian world.

The most significant evidence for this link is the style and location of the churches themselves. Especially in the case of the churches at Nizhny Arkhyz, the churches were built after Abkhaz, Trapezuntine and Cappadocian models, which were so closely imitated that this work was probably done by Abkhaz or Byzantine architects and builders.⁹² Whilst we cannot be so certain about other

Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p.42.

⁸⁹ Vassiliki Dimitropolou, ‘Giving Gifts to God: Aspects of Patronage in Byzantine Art’, in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.165.

⁹⁰ John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.374.

⁹¹ On basilica-type churches in Alania, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.283-6. On Middle Byzantine church architecture’s ‘privatising’ aspects, see Lyn Rodley, *Byzantine Art and Architecture: Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.144-5.

⁹² Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.132; V.A. Kuznetsov, ‘Iuzhnyi zelenchukskii khram’, *Sovetskaia arkhologiiia*, 71.1 (1971), 239-45; Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v ‘X-XII’ vekakh*, p.240.

sites, the designs of the 10th-11th century churches at Zrug and Tli (North Ossetia) closely parallel contemporary church designs in Georgia.⁹³

It is particularly significant that every single site with Byzantine-style churches of the tenth and 11th centuries in the Central North Caucasus lies along one of the routes leading to the Black Sea coast- Nizhny Arkhyz, on the Bolshoi Zelenchuk valley; Il'ichevsk, on the Bolshaia Laba; Senty and Shoana, on the valley of the Kuban. Moreover, these churches are not located in the plateau zone of the North Caucasus, which archaeological site surveys suggest was the most densely populated and agriculturally productive zone in the medieval Central North Caucasus.⁹⁴ Rather, these churches are located in the region of ravines between the high mountain and plateau zones; that is to say, at strategic 'choke points' overlooking the roads heading down these valleys. The ecclesiastical centre at Nizhny Arkhyz even physically blocked the road towards Abkhazia, and access through its layers of walls would have been impossible without the permission of the city authorities.⁹⁵ Similarly, the Georgian-style churches at Zrug, Tli (North Ossetia) and Tkhaba-Yerdy (Ingushetia) were built along the roads leading up to the Mamison and Dzurdzuk passes. Through their location, these churches, and by implication the elites who patronised them, literally towered over the access routes to the outside world.

⁹³ V.O. Dolidze, 'Khozita-Mairam- dokument kul'turnykh sviazei Gruzii s narodami Severnogo Kavkaza', *Soobshcheniia Akademii Nauk gruzinskoi SSR*, 15.2 (1954), 119-26; V.O. Dolidze, 'Arkhitekturnyi pamiatnik Tli- novyi dokument kul'turnykh vzaimootnoshenii Gruzii s Dvaleti', *Soobshcheniia Akademii Nauk gruzinskoi SSR*, 21.6 (1958), 767-73.

⁹⁴ On the population density of the plateau zone, see Kovalevskaia, pp.12-15; on its agricultural productivity, see G.E. Afanas'ev and D.S. Korobov, 'The Ash-Tigors' Granaries and Palaeo-Climate of the 7th-12th Centuries AD in the North Caucasus', in *'My Life Is Like the Summer Rose.'* *Maurizio Tosi e l'Archeologia come Mode di Vivere*, ed. by C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky and Bruno Genito (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2014), pp.12-14.

⁹⁵ Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh*, pp.232-3.

The access of elites to the resources of Byzantium and Georgia was also demonstrated by these churches' decoration, which was carried out in a manner closely consistent with current artistic trends. For example, the church of Senty contains the first painted image of the Virgin of the Sign known from any source, whether inside or outside the Byzantine Empire.⁹⁶ Similarly, extant paintings at Zrug church show close parallels with Georgian art of the 11th-12th centuries.⁹⁷

In sum, these churches show that non-royal elites also demonstrated their access to the outside world to legitimate their social position. Through doing so, they utilised the same system of Christian and Byzantine-style imagery which legitimated the Alan monarchs' rule. As we will see, the narrowing of acceptable styles of elite legitimation in this period is a key sign of the increasing status of a Christian, Byzantine-style mode of power-expression: a narrowing which reinforced the position of the Alan kings, who had the greatest symbolic access to the outside world.

⁹⁶ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.312.

⁹⁷ A. Vol'skaia, 'Fragmenty zhivopisi gruzinskogo khrama "Khozita-Mairam" v Severnoi Osetii', *Soobshcheniia Akademii Nauk gruzinskoi SSR*, 15.6 (1954), 393-98.



Fig. 9: *Fatimid rock-crystal chess piece (?) from Senty church. Stavropol' Provincial Museum (photo: the author).*

The evidence from non-architectural material culture presents a more mixed picture of elite authority. However, it appears that alternative modes of power-expression- notably, Islamic styles and pre-existing Caucasian heroic traditions- were either rejected and 'overwritten', or incorporated into the new, Byzantine-style system of power.

It is clear that from the mid-10th century onwards, both royal and non-royal elites used Georgian and particularly Byzantine styles of legitimation to demonstrate their symbolic access to the outside world. However, this was not the only method by which elites could do so. It is clear that trade with other regions of the world continued, as did the burial of prestige objects originating from there- implying that Byzantine and Georgian culture, whilst very significant,

was not a completely hegemonic one. Notably, trade goods from Rus' and Iran continue to be found in burials- for example, a bronze cross similar to those found in Kievan Rus' was found at the cemetery of Zmeiskaia (North Ossetia), alongside Byzantine silks.⁹⁸ Similarly, an elite and possibly even royal grave at Senty church, dating to the 11th to 12th centuries, contained a rock-crystal chess piece, possibly from Basra or Egypt [fig. 9], alongside a reworked Byzantine cloisonné enamel chest ornament.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, Arabic and Persian written sources of the 10th-13th centuries- al-Mas'ūdī, Ibn Buṭlān's *Risāla fi Shirā' al-Raqīq wa-Taqlīb al-'Abīd* (450s-60s/ mid-1050s to mid-1060s), Kay-Kā'ūs b. Iskandar's *Qābūs-Namah* (475/ 1082), and the anonymous Persian *'Ajāib al-Dunyā* (617- 628/ 1220-1231)- continue to mention trade with Alania, particularly in slaves.¹⁰⁰

However, our overall impression is of a gradual increase in the importance of Byzantine prestige goods. Although the evidence has not been fully synthesised, it appears that the 11th century saw an increase in the number of Byzantine beads, bracelets and textiles found in graves, for example the fine

⁹⁸ V.A. Kuznetsov, 'Zmeiskii katakombnyi mogil'nik', in *Arkheologicheskie raskopki v raione Zmeiskoi Severnoi Osetii*, ed. by E.I. Krupnov (Ordzhinikidze: Severo-Osetinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1961), p.127; Iu.A. Prokopenko, *Istoriia severokavkazskikh torgovykh putei IV v. do n.e. - XI v. n.e.* (Stavropol': Stavropol'skii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1999), p.121.

⁹⁹ T.I. Makarova and V.I. Markovin, 'Zolotoe ukrashenie s peregorodchatoi emal'iu iz sentinskogo khrama', *Sovetskaia arkheologiya*, 81.3 (1981), 268-74; V.I. Markovin, 'Issledovanie sentinskogo khrama i nekropoliia u reki Teberdy v Karachaevo-Cherkesii', *Istoriko-arkheologicheskii al'manakh*, 2 (1996), 180-202. The approximate *terminus post quem* of this burial is provided by the style of the cloisonné enamel ornament. It is possible that this represents a royal grave due to the epigraphic evidence for royal patronage at Senty, the fact that it is the richest grave known on the site, and because the location of the grave (in the south transept) corresponds with evidence from the early 15th century *Dzegli Eristavta* chronicle for the location of the most prestigious burial place in the church. See *Pamiatnik eristavov*, ed. by S. S. Kakabadze (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1979), p.23.

¹⁰⁰ See Mas'ūdī, p.178; Kay-Kā'ūs ibn Iskandar, *Qābūs-Nāmah*, ed. by Ghulam Ḥusayn Yusufi (Tehran: Shirkat-i Atsharat-i Ali va Farsangi, 1967), pp.115-16; Ibn Buṭlān, in *Die Kunst des Sklavenkaufs, nach arabischen, persischen und türkischen Ratgebern vom 10. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Hans Müller (Freiburg: Schwarz, 1980), pp.70-1; N.D. Miklukho-Maklai, 'Geograficheskie somnenie XIII v. na persidskom iazyke', *Uchenie zapiski Instituta Vostoko-Vedeniia*, 9 (1954), 175-219.

textiles found at Nizhny Arkhyz, Rim-Gora (Stavropol' Krai), Zmeiskaia, and Kol'tso Gora (Stavropol' Krai).¹⁰¹ Apart from this, we have a few instances where material evidence can tell us more about the interaction between cultural influences in the Central North Caucasus. In some cases, it even appears that alternative forms of cultural prestige were 'overwritten' by this new ideological system.

It is notable that whilst the material products of non-Byzantine and non-Georgian regions were still clearly considered prestigious, it seems that the ideological systems which came with them were not. The best example is that of Islam. We know that the town of Nizhny Arkhyz contained a Muslim community, due to finds of three Arabic inscriptions, two of which contain the *shahāda* and possibly formed parts of tombstones.¹⁰² G.B. Romanova suggests that these provide evidence of a mosque. However, it is notable that this alternative system of religious signification does not appear to have been utilised anywhere else in Alania; moreover, Islam's subaltern position is demonstrated by the fact that these inscriptions were broken up in the mid-11th century and built into the wall of a church.¹⁰³ Given the inherently appropriative and destructive nature of

¹⁰¹ Prokopenko, pp.121, 317-8; S.N. Savenko, 'Alanskie vsadniki v pis'mennykh istochnikakh i v arkeologicheskikh dannyykh: voprosy sravnitel'nogo analiza', in *Materialy po izucheniiu istoriko-kul'turnogo nasledii Severnogo Kavkaza, vyp. IX*, ed. by A.B. Belinskii (Stavropol': Nasledie, 2009), pp.354-5.

¹⁰² See L.I. Lavrov, *Epigraficheskie pamiatniki Severnogo Kavkaza na arabskom, persidskom i turetskom iazykakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), pp.60-1, 266; G.B. Romanova, 'K voprosu ob arabskikh kuficheskikh nadpisiakh iz Nizhnego Arkhyza', in *Materialy po izucheniiu istoriko-kul'turnogo nasledii Severnogo Kavkaza, vyp. IX*, ed. by A.B. Belinskii (Stavropol': Nasledie, 2009), p.383.

¹⁰³ Romanova, p.385.

spoliation, we may argue that this represents an act of literal and symbolic destruction of an alternative system of power-expression.¹⁰⁴

Whilst not as overtly violent, it also appears that alternative, pre-existing North Caucasian traditions of power and its imagery were Christianised and Byzantinised. One object of particular interest is a bronze imitation of a Byzantine molybdobull (a seal of office carried by senior imperial functionaries), found at Kamunta (North Ossetia) in the late 19th century.¹⁰⁵ Metallurgical analysis demonstrates that this particular example was designed and cast in the North Caucasus, as does its mixture of stylistic elements. The existence of this object suggests that, as early as the 10th century, the prestige that could be obtained from the possession of this object was sufficiently great that commissioning a local imitation was a viable strategy to obtain it. Moreover, it demonstrates that local production of elite objects had already been turned towards styles which explicitly imitated Byzantine emblems of authority, as opposed to alternative, indigenously-developed designs.

¹⁰⁴ On spoliation as appropriation, see Dale Kinney, 'Introduction', in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture, from Constantine to Sherrie Levine*, ed. by Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p.4.

¹⁰⁵ A.A. Ierusalimskaia, 'Alanskaia replika na vizantiiskii molivdobul', in *Sfragistika i istoriia kul'tury*, ed. by E.V. Stepanova (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2004), pp.60-5.



Fig. 10: The 'Tomb of Dorgholel' (east face). Stavropol' Provincial Museum. Photo: the author.

Further evidence of the Christianisation of older North Caucasian traditions of power is provided by the Kiafar Dolmen Tomb No.1, the so-called 'Tomb of Dorgholel' [Fig. 10]. This massive stone tomb, measuring approximately 3m by 2m by 1.5m, was found in an eighth- to 12th-century cemetery at Kiafar (Karachai-Cherkassia) and now stands in the garden of Stavropol' Provincial Museum.¹⁰⁶ While its connection with the 11th-century Alan king Dorgholel is fanciful, this tomb can still be placed in the Alan period through an analysis of the clothing of its human figures, who wear the type of caftans known to have been used by Alan elites of the 10th-12th centuries, but which were increasingly

¹⁰⁶ On the cemetery at Kiafar, see V.A. Kuznetsov, 'Durgulel' Velikii i Nizhnii Arkhyz', in *Metodika issledovaniia i interpretatsiia arkheologicheskikh materialov Severnogo Kavkaza*, ed. by V.A. Kuznetsov, A.G. Kuchiev, and V.Kh. Tmenov (Ordzhonikidze: Ir, 1988), p.85.

replaced by tunics in later periods.¹⁰⁷ Apart from its sheer size, this tomb is particularly interesting because of its unusual form, being a reused Bronze Age dolmen tomb of mid-3rd millennium BCE to mid-2nd millennium BCE date, of a type primarily known from the Northwest Caucasus.¹⁰⁸ It is marked by a large hole in the east face, a feature common to most types of dolmen tomb.¹⁰⁹ This aperture was possibly connected with the sun, as the rising sun would have shone through it and illuminated the dolmen's interior, or alternatively may have been a way for the soul to escape the tomb on the day of judgment.¹¹⁰ In any case, it clearly had an important, pre-existing cultic function.

The 'Tomb of Dorgholel's particular significance is that a frieze of Christianising bas-relief decoration was added during the Alan period. Notably, the aperture in the east face was explicitly Christianised by the placement of three crosses around its edge, and by the carving of an image of a Christian priest, making the Byzantine-style two-fingered symbol of blessing, to its right. The meaning of the remainder of the symbols and images which cover the tomb has not been firmly established, although N.A. Okhonko suggested that the three registers into which the decoration is divided may parallel the three-level

¹⁰⁷ While this tomb is frequently connected to Dorgholel, this claim's originator, V.A. Kuznetsov, offered no direct evidence whatsoever for this attribution. Moreover, the tomb's contents were looted at the time of or prior to its discovery during the Caucasian War, which allows us to say no more than that it dates to the approximate period of the Alan kingdom. See Kuznetsov, 'Durgulel' Velikii i Nizhnii Arkhyz', p.86; N.A. Okhonko and Zvezdana Dode, *Alanskaia grobnitsa XI veka* (Stavropol': Studiia Ars-Dizain, 1994), p.3. For the clothing worn by figures on the 'Tomb of Dorgholel', see Okhonko and Dode, p.50; in general on caftan styles, see Ierusalimskaia, 'Le Cafetan aux simourghs du tombeau de Mochtechevaja Balka (Caucase Septentrional)', p.208; Irina Arzhantseva and Olga Orfinskaya, 'The Cut of the Clothes of the North Caucasian Alans', *Archaeological Textiles Review*, 55 (2013), 86–96.

¹⁰⁸ V.I. Markovin, 'Dol'meny Zapadnogo Kavkaza', *Sovetskaia Arkheologiia*, 73.1 (1973), 3–23.

¹⁰⁹ Markovin, 'Dol'meny Zapadnogo Kavkaza', pp.9–10.

¹¹⁰ V.A. Kuznetsov and Iaroslav Lebedynsky, *Les Alains: cavaliers des steppes, seigneurs du Caucase* (Paris: Errance, 1997), p.230; Irina Arzhantseva, 'The Cult of Saint Eustace in the North Caucasus', *Name-ye Iran-e Bastan*, 11.2 (2011), 1–12.

cosmology found in the Nart Sagas, in which heroes can travel through the ‘face of the earth’, the ‘world above’ and the ‘world below’. Consequently, he argued that the decorative schema might represent a deceased ruler or hero’s journey to the underworld.¹¹¹ It is notable that in the 1880s, ancient graves were sometimes associated with Nart heroes- for example, Vsevolod Miller was shown a ‘grave of Shoshlan’ in the Uruk valley of North Ossetia.¹¹² It is thus possible that the same association of ancient graves with cult heroes occurred in the Alan period, and that the ‘Tomb of Dorgholel’ was one such site. It is also possible that the redecoration of the ‘Tomb of Dorgholel’ represented an attempt to Christianise an existing holy site, in the same manner as the building of churches near existing burial grounds at Senty and Nizhny Arkhyz. This suggests that the power of Byzantine-style Christianity altered pre-existing cosmologies in the Central North Caucasus. This suggestion is rendered more plausible the existence of epigraphic and folkloric evidence for this process.

Effects of the New System of Power: Cosmological Transformations

Non-Elites and the Byzantine Mode of Power-Expression

This system of power appears to have enmeshed much of North Caucasian society into a hierarchical system of dependence, with emerging royalty firmly in the most prestigious position. Indeed, epigraphic, archaeological and folkloric evidence suggests that the hierarchical worldview contained in the Byzantine-style mode of power-expression caused a major shift in North Caucasian cosmology. Not only, it seems, did fashions in prestige goods change, but also

¹¹¹ Okhonko and Dode, pp.16-25.

¹¹² V. F. Miller, *Osetinskie etiudy. Ch. 1 & 2* (Moscow: M.A. Ivanov, 1881), p.8.

conceptions of time, and of the afterlife. It seems that this system was influential not only on elite representations of authority, but also on non-elites. As a result, all strata of North Caucasian society were entangled in a worldview which placed the Alan kings in a pre-eminent position.

As we saw in Chapter One (p.47ff), the vast majority of our sources on the Alans refer to North Caucasian elites and were written by foreigners, and therefore are the kind of sources which would be expected to emphasise links between the Alan rulers and the outside world. However, it would appear from archaeological evidence that the prestige of Byzantium was also used by non-elites in order to demonstrate their social position, implying the wider appeal of this ‘power of the foreign’. It is notable that one of the most common finds on Alan-period sites are glass beads and bracelets, produced in Byzantium and the Black Sea region.¹¹³ These beads and bracelets can reasonably be considered prestige goods- Ibn Faḍlān reported that these were the most highly valued goods in the Volga region in the 920s.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, analyses of 10th-12th century female burials at Nizhny Arkhyz, Nizhnaia Teberda and in the Mineral’nye Vody region (Stavropol’ Krai) suggest that the standard type of Alan female clothing became increasingly influenced by Mediterranean styles, as opposed to the Central Asian-type caftans used previously.¹¹⁵ Indeed, it is possible that these

¹¹³ See V.A. Kuznetsov, *Alanskie plemena Severnogo Kavkaza* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk, 1962), p.50.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Faḍlān and Ibn Abī al-Rabī‘, p.46.

¹¹⁵ Arzhantseva and Orfinskaya, ‘The Cut of the Clothes of the North Caucasian Alans’, pp.91-4. While the burials at Nizhny Arkhyz from which Arzhantseva and Orfinskaya’s samples originated had been disturbed prior to archaeological excavation and can only be dated to the ninth to 13th centuries, burials in the Mineral’nye Vody region (Stavropol’ Krai) allow a more precise dating of this change in style to the period of the Alan Kingdom. See S.F. Lubova, ‘O tipologii kostiumov naseleniia raiona Kavkazskikh Mineralnykh Vod i Verkov’ev Kubani V-XIII vv.’, in *Iz istorii kul’tury narodov Severnogo Kavkaza: sbornik nauchnykh statei*, ed. by Iu.A. Prokopenko and V.V. Vasilenko (Stavropol’: Grafa, 2010), pp.47-8.

Mediterranean-type tunics were directly imported into Alania.¹¹⁶ This implies that non-elites strove to use foreign fashions in dress and ornament to demonstrate their access to outside resources, in a comparable manner to the elite's use of monumental Byzantine and Georgian-style architecture. Moreover, the fact that these finds mostly originate from burials suggests that this was the 'public face' which the burying community wished to give its deceased members, implying the importance of foreign goods to the creation of this prestigious image.

Apart from this direct archaeological evidence for the attitudes of non-elites, there are other indications of Byzantine-style Christianity's influence on the culture of the North Caucasus. The evidence from folklore suggests that North Caucasian concepts of the afterlife and spatial sources of power were influenced by Christianity. In a comparable way, epigraphy demonstrates that North Caucasian concepts of time were altered by contact with the linear, Christian conception of time. Both of these changes in worldview persisted until the modern period, and far outlasted the Alan kingdom itself. This implies a certain degree of popular relevance and popularity, and demonstrate how far the hierarchical Christian worldview which underpinned the rule of the Alan kings penetrated into the culture of their peoples.

¹¹⁶ Arzhantseva and Orfinskaya, 'The Cut of the Clothes of the North Caucasian Alans', p.94.

The Nart Sagas and Christianisation

The Nart Sagas are a cycle of oral legends of the eponymous Nart heroes, collected in the 19th and 20th centuries. Whilst certain elements of these legends are very ancient indeed, as we saw in Chapter One (p.7off), this does not imply that the entire corpus is of a uniformly ancient date. Rather, the sagas as they survive today should be seen as a collection of folkloric strands which entered into their oral fabric at various times. As such, while the entire world of the Nart Sagas cannot be considered evidence for the Alan period, we can isolate certain strands within them which can expand our knowledge of Christianisation processes. As Monica White and Nora Berend argue, the origin of the saints' cults which were adopted in Christianising regions provides a good indicator of cultural influence and the processes by which this power was adapted to serve local needs and desires.¹¹⁷ This adoption of Christian saints into North Caucasian folklore therefore demonstrates the appeal of Byzantine-style Christianity to at least part of the Alan population.

It is generally recognised that the names of many of the gods and demi-gods of the Nart Sagas ultimately originate in Christian saints. For example, the name of the Ossetian god Wastyrji (Was-Gerge), protector of warriors, derives from St. George; that of Wasilla, lord of lightning, from Elijah (Was-Ella); that of Tutyr, god of wolves, from St. Theodore; the name of Fālvāra, god of domestic cattle, from the martyr saints Florus and Laurus.¹¹⁸ The adoption of these saints

¹¹⁷ Nora Berend, 'Introduction', in *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200*, ed. by Nora Berend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.28; White, pp.32-3.

¹¹⁸ Georges Dumézil, *Romans de Scythie et d'alentour* (Paris: Payot, 1978), pp.25-7, 54-5, 67; H.W. Bailey, 'Ossetic (Narta)', in *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry. Volume 1: The Traditions*, ed. by A. T. Hatto (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1980), p.254; V.I. Abaev and

can be directly linked to the Alanic period, as the painted iconography on the walls of the churches of Nizhny Arkhyz and Senty demonstrates a familiarity with the canon of Christian saints.¹¹⁹

It is notable that this Christianisation process shows a marked Byzantine influence. A large proportion of the saints adopted into North Caucasian culture were those promoted by the Macedonian dynasty of Byzantine Emperors in the 10th-11th centuries, especially the 'military saints' George and Theodore. Kevin Tuite argues that the name of St. George as adopted into North Caucasian languages demonstrates a Greek etymology.¹²⁰ Similarly, both the iconography and name of Afshati, the Ossetian 'master of animals', appear to have been heavily influenced by the cult of St. Eustace, one of the most popular in 10th and 11th-century Byzantium.¹²¹ The Byzantine origin of this cultural influence is demonstrated by the fact it was these saints who were adopted, rather than those popular on the other side of the North Caucasian crest in Svaneti, for example St. Barbara.¹²²

There is some evidence that not only were cults of saints incorporated into the popular religion of the North Caucasus, but that cosmological concepts were transferred from Byzantine Christianity as well. The best example of this is an

others, *Istoriko-etimologicheskii slovar' osetinskogo iazyka* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1958), pp.442-3; Miller, *Osetinskie etyudy. Ch. 1 & 2*, p.263.

¹¹⁹ Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.151-73.

¹²⁰ Kevin Tuite, 'St George in the Caucasus: Politics, Gender, Mobility', Unpublished Paper Draft, 2017, pp.8-9.

¹²¹ See Irina Arzhantseva and Z.Kh. Albegova, 'Kul'tovye kamni kiafarskogo gorodishcha. Esche raz o religioznom dualizme Alan', in *Drevnosti Severnogo Kavkaza*, ed. by V. I. Markovin (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1999), p.190; Arzhantseva, 'The Cult of Saint Eustace in the North Caucasus'. For the popularity of St. Eustace in Byzantium, see White, pp.78-81.

¹²² For saints' cults in Svaneti, see Brigitta Schrade, 'Byzantium and Its Eastern Barbarians: The Cult of Saints in Svaneti', in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-Third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, March 1999*, ed. by Antony Eastmond (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2001), pp.169-86.

Ossetian Nart saga- Saga 36 in Colarusso, Salbiev and May's collection- which tells the story of the hero Shoshlan's journey to the underworld. As I have previously argued, this tale shows strong similarities to medieval Christian apocalypse literature.¹²³ It is particularly notable that its depiction of the underworld differs somewhat from its standard depiction in the Nart Sagas. Rather than a direct parallel to the human world, in this particular saga the underworld is a place of divine judgement and punishment, in a manner clearly influenced by medieval Christian cosmology.¹²⁴

A second example of Byzantine cosmological influence is found in the cycle of tales about the hubristic, invulnerable hero Batraz. In the Batraz cycle, the hero fights a series of duels against increasingly powerful spiritual opponents, culminating in an ill-judged attack on God himself. However, when Batraz is killed, his body is taken by God to 'Shofya', compared by Georges Dumézil to Hagia Sophia, in an act of reconciliation of their previous feuds.¹²⁵ What is notable is that this divine power has its centre in Constantinople, the temporal and spiritual heart of the Byzantine world. This saga possibly shows the influence of Byzantine models of *taxis*, where the heavenly power of God parallels the earthly model of the empire.¹²⁶

¹²³ Latham, 'Soviets and Sun-Gods', pp.170-2.

¹²⁴ Examples of the underworld being a direct parallel to the human world abound in other Nart Sagas. For example, in Ossetian Saga 26 in Colarusso, Salbiev and May, pp.149-54, devils even have enemies who steal their herds of cattle!

¹²⁵ For an Ossetian version of these tales, see Sagas 71 and 72 in Colarusso, Salbiev and May, pp.422-438. For Dumézil's interpretation of this saga, see Dumézil, *Romans de Scythie et d'alentour*, p.56.

¹²⁶ On the centrality of Constantinople to Byzantine thought, see Paul Magdalino, 'Constantine VII and the Historical Geography of Empire', in *Imperial Geographies in Byzantine and Ottoman Space*, ed. by Sahar Bazzaz, Yota Batsaki, and Dimiter Angelov (Boston: Harvard Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013), p.29.

It thus appears that Christianity penetrated relatively deeply into the popular culture of the North Caucasus, strands of which helped form the Nart Sagas as they appear today. This Christian influence had a marked Byzantine tenor. This implies that the prestige of Byzantium was sufficient that it could not only affect the performance of authority, but also could penetrate into the wider oral culture of the North Caucasus, up to the level of cosmological transformations. As such, a political system which relied on the links of its rulers to Byzantium could draw on a reservoir of perceived spiritual power, as well as temporal.

Epigraphy and Christianisation

Our best evidence for the influence of Byzantine-style Christianity on the cosmology of the North Caucasus is a corpus of several dozen inscriptions, many now lost. The significance of this corpus is that it represents some of the only written evidence originating from the North Caucasus itself, as opposed to external descriptions, and which can be directly linked through explicit dates or typology to the Alanic period.¹²⁷ Furthermore, this corpus almost entirely commemorates non-royal patrons. As such, it provides crucial evidence for wider societal attitudes to Christianisation and Byzantine influence.

The first point to make is that Christian devotion was usually expressed through foreign languages, particularly Greek, and in a manner strongly influenced by Byzantine devotional practices. Even in our earliest known

¹²⁷ See Chapter One, p.58ff.

inscription, that from Rim-Gora (tentatively dated to the seventh-eighth centuries¹²⁸), there is an understanding of a powerful, caring God who is worthy of service by mankind; of the concept of a soul, which is looked after by this God; and that the proper means for addressing this God is through the Greek language.¹²⁹ The crosses of 1012 and 1067 from Nizhny Arkhyz, both made to Byzantine designs, are similarly revealing. Both examples provide evidence of the veneration of the cross as “honoured” (*timeōu*), and its restoration or manufacture as an activity worthy of praise.¹³⁰

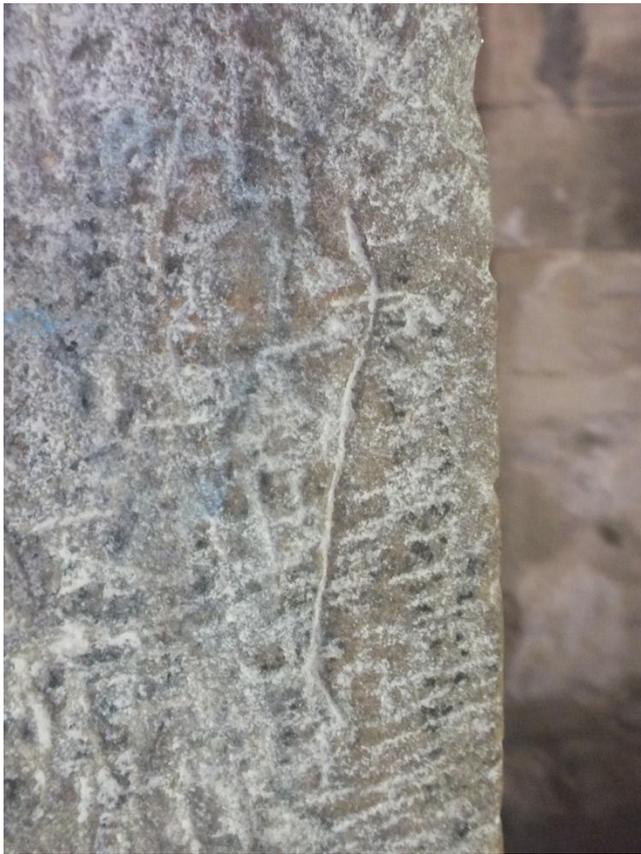


Fig. 11: *graffito of a long-stemmed cross at Shoana church (pre-19th century) (photo: the author).*

¹²⁸ V.V. Latyshev, ‘Kavkazskie pamiatniki v Moskve’, *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva*, 1.2 (1886), p.2.

¹²⁹ See Latyshev, p.2.

¹³⁰ For translation of the cross of 1012, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.49.

A previously neglected source for wider attitudes to Christianisation, possibly those of non-elites, is a corpus of graffiti found in the Nizhny Arkhyz and Senty churches. These graffiti all commemorate individuals with Greek names, taken from the saints whose images decorated the walls.¹³¹ This demonstrates some Greek literacy among the wider local population, and a belief in the effectiveness of prayer to the saints. At least ten separate petitionary graffiti, written by different individuals, are known from Senty Church alone. These graffiti are dateable to the late 10th or early 11th centuries, since they were painted over in approximately 1040.¹³² It seems that this act was performed by the worshippers themselves, which implies a relatively high degree of popular literacy. For example, one petitionary graffito at Senty, of Mary, Leontios, Theodore, George, Anastasia, Timothy, Makarios and another George, is written in three different hands, implying that these graffiti were not simply carved by a single literate Christian individual.¹³³ It also seems clear that these graffiti were carved publicly, as the carvings are relatively deep, which would have required the use of a chisel and a considerable amount of time; an example of this kind of graffito is a long-stemmed cross at Shoana Church [**fig. 11**]. This implies the carving of petitionary graffiti having been an openly practised form of devotion, possibly sanctioned by the clergy.

¹³¹ See Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.245-54.

¹³² Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.213-18.

¹³³ Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.247-8.



Fig. 12: statue of a warrior, originally from Biichesun Plateau (Karachai-Cherkassia) and now at Nizhny Arkhyz archaeological park (photo: the author).



Fig. 13: *Cross-graffiti on the base of the statue above (photo: the author).*



Fig. 14: 'Babylon Sign' on the base of the statue above (photo: the author).

It is plausible that this practice represented an act of commemoration on behalf of a deceased individual. For example, a statue of a warrior, originally located on the Biichesun Plateau on the Karachai-Cherkess side of Mount El'brus but now moved to the archaeological park at Nizhny Arkhyz, has at least eight cross graffiti carved at head height on its base, in addition to a Christian 'Babylon sign'- a type of sign also known from petroglyphs, where a cross is contained within a square 'labyrinth' [figs. 12, 13, 14].¹³⁴ The dating of this statue and the

¹³⁴ A photo of the statue in its original location is reproduced in S.Ia. Baichorov and E.R. Tenishev, *Drevnetiurkskie runicheskie pamiatniki Evropy: otnoshenie Severokavkazskogo areala drevnetiurkskoi runicheskoj pis'mennosti k Volgo-Donskomu i Dunaiskomu arealam* (Stavropol': Stavropol'skoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1989), p.2. It therefore follows that this statue must have been moved to Nizhny Arkhyz after the mid-1980s. For 'Babylon signs' found in Caucasian petroglyphs, see V.I. Markovin, 'K metodike izucheniia smyslovogo soderzhaniia srednevekovykh petroglifov Severnogo Kavkaza', in *Metodika issledovaniia i interpretatsiia arkeologicheskikh materialov Severnogo Kavkaza*, ed. by A.G. Kuchiev, V.A. Kuznetsov, and V.Kh. Tmenov (Ordzhonikidze: Severo-Osetinskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut istorii, filologii i ekonomiki, 1988), p.117.

cross-graffiti on it is problematic, although the statue is of a *baba* type broadly dateable to the eighth to twelfth centuries.¹³⁵ The graffiti on this statue is even harder to date, although analogies from petroglyphs may date these cross-designs to the 10th-13th centuries, and the 'Babylon sign' shows close parallels with the iconography of the 'Tomb of Dorgholel', where one features on the robe of a priest.¹³⁶ Given that this type of statue was described by William of Rubruck as a commemoration of a deceased individual, it is not implausible that these cross graffiti also served a memorial function, being carved on to the statue base by well-wishers.¹³⁷ This practice might be compared to the Alan-period practice gifting of small iron votive crosses to churches, for example the shrine on Mt. Tserkovnoi, near Nizhny Arkhyz.¹³⁸ If we can draw this link, it is interesting that this popular commemoration of an elite figure was of an explicitly Christian form. In summation, both non-written and textual graffiti imply a Christianisation of practices of commemoration of the dead, including elites.

Secondly, it seems that Christianisation not only altered concepts of the afterlife, divine intercession and elite authority, but those regarding time itself. North Caucasian Greek inscriptions prior to the 14th century use the Byzantine AM dating system; from the 14th century onwards, this is replaced by the AD dating system.¹³⁹ These systems share a linear construction of time around certain

¹³⁵ See Minaeva, pp.213-220.

¹³⁶ On petroglyph evidence for cross styles, see Markovin, 'K metodike izucheniia smyslovogo soderzhaniia srednevekovykh petroglifov Severnogo Kavkaza', p.114. While petroglyphs of crosses are known up to the 16th century, these tend to have dots placed between their points, a feature that crosses on this statue lack. On the 'Babylon sign' on the robe of the priest on the 'Tomb of Dorgholel', see Okhonko and Dode, p.15, and **fig. 10**, above.

¹³⁷ Friar William of Rubruck, *The Mission of William of Rubruck. His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Mongke 1253-1255*, trans. by Peter Jackson (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), p.95.

¹³⁸ For the use of small iron devotional crosses at Nizhny Arkhyz, see Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh*, pp.103-4.

¹³⁹ For AD dating on the Sidova Cross of 1341, see Latyshev, p.4.

fixed points- the creation of the world, or the birth of Christ. As Jan Vansina has argued, these calendrical systems can be considered far more universalising than systems dependent on the passage of the seasons.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, they can be considered a direct transmission from the Byzantine world.

¹⁴⁰ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London: James Currey, 1985)., p.174.

the North Church at Nizhny Arkhyz [fig. 15].¹⁴¹ This inscription, written by “the God-loving monk Thomas, presbyter” (*tou theophēlestatou mo[na]ch[ou] Th[ō]m[a] pr[esbuterou]*) contains no less than three dating systems, all correctly co-ordinated with each other- the year 6575 from Adam (i.e. 1067 CE), the indiction, and the lunar cycle. It is the last of these which concerns us, since the purpose of recording the 19-year lunar cycle was to calculate the date of Easter; thus, somebody within the cathedral was performing a computus in order to calculate the correct date. This provides evidence that administrative activity performed by the Alan metropolitanate had a direct influence on the cosmology of wider Alan society: that this activity quite literally had the power to change the time. A surviving Byzantine lectionary of 1275, used in the North Caucasus in the 14th century, provides further evidence of this process of calendrical transmission. Its marginal notes translate Byzantine religious festivals from Greek into Alanic with a high degree of accuracy- for example, the feast of St. John Chrysostom is not transliterated, but rather is translated by the calque *Zirēn kam pan* (lit: ‘golden-mouth day’).¹⁴²

The influence of this new calendrical system is demonstrated by its use until the 19th century. In ethnographic accounts of North Ossetia, the names of months were based on Christian religious festivals.¹⁴³ For example, the month of *Nikkola* in late April and early May coincided with the feast of St. Nicholas on 9th May (old style). From this continued usage, we can infer that this Christianised

¹⁴¹ For this paragraph, see E.Ch. Skrzhinskaia, ‘Grecheskaia nadpis’ iz srednevekovoi Alanii’, *Vizantiiskii vremennik*, 21 (1962), 118–26. For the findspot of the cross, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.49.

¹⁴² Alexander Lubotsky, *Alanic Marginal Notes in a Greek Liturgical Manuscript* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015), pp.33-4.

¹⁴³ See Miller, *Osetinskie etudy. Ch. 1 & 2*, pp.262-4.

concept of time was considered influential not just by elites, but by non-elites as well.

Christianisation and Hierarchical Authority

It is therefore clear from our epigraphic and folkloric evidence that significant elements of a hierarchical Christian worldview were introduced into the culture of the North Caucasus from the Byzantine world. Moreover, it is clear that these concepts were sufficiently popular to be adopted into the oral culture of the North Caucasus, whether in timekeeping or concepts of the afterlife. This influence of Christian cosmology is particularly significant, given that we have direct evidence that Christian cult practices could support the rule of the Alan kings.

This evidence is provided by the apparent existence of a cult of Saints Constantine and Helena. This cult is attested in one of the few surviving wall paintings from the Central Church at Nizhny Arkhyz, an image of Saints Constantine and Helena grasping a tall cross in their hands. D.V. Beletskii and A.Iu. Vinogradov interpret this image, evoking royal initiative in the conversion to Christianity, as a reference to royal support for the relatively recent conversion of Alania.¹⁴⁴ This use of the image of a 'New Constantine' explicitly links this conversion to royal initiative, and their depiction in a Byzantine style in a church specifically accesses the power of the Byzantine Empire in support of this Christianisation process.

¹⁴⁴ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.172.

This cult is also attested indirectly via epigraphy. The Arkhyz cross of 1012 features the formula I X ΝΙΚΑ, which would become the standard initial invocation on North Caucasian funerary inscriptions.¹⁴⁵ This is significant as it references the vision of Constantine at the Milvian Bridge, and the words “*in hoc signo vinces*” (in this sign you shall conquer). This linkage of the cross and victory is also attested in a 15th-century Georgian inscription from Kalaki, near the Mamison Pass (North Ossetia), which mentions the “victory-bringing cross”.¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, this cult of Constantine and Helena played a major role in the Christianisation of another North Caucasian polity. According to the *History of the Caucasian Albanians* of Movses Dasxuranc’i, Dagestani ‘Hun’ elites adopted Christianity in 681-2 because the story of Constantine convinced them that conversion would lead to military victory.¹⁴⁷

We can suggest on this basis that a longstanding cult of Constantine existed in the Central North Caucasus. In some cases, notably the Arkhyz wall painting, this provided a source of legitimation to the Alan kings, linking their authority with Christianisation, and in turn with military victory. Even when the epigraphic invocations of this cult did not directly reference royal initiative in Christianisation, they added to a narrative in which the two were linked.

What is particularly significant, however, is that we have no evidence for the direct royal patronage of the Arkhyz churches, or of inscriptions on crosses

¹⁴⁵ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.49.

¹⁴⁶ See V.N. Gamerekeli, ‘Epigraficheskie pamiatniki mamisonskogo uschel’ia’, in *Problemy istoricheskoi etnografii Osetin*, ed. by V.Kh. Tmenov (Ordzhonikidze: Severo-Osetinskii nauchno-issl. in-t istorii, filologii i ekonomiki pri Sovete Ministrov Severo-Osetinskoi ASSR, 1987), p.94.

¹⁴⁷ Movses Dasxuranci, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, trans. by C. J. F. Dowsett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.167.

which use the monogram I X ΝΙΚΑ.¹⁴⁸ Rather than showing systematic royal control of iconography, these images demonstrate that the system of power-expression through which the Alan kings legitimated themselves, that of symbolic access to the Byzantine Empire, was utilised much more widely within the North Caucasus. From the very highest elites sponsoring the construction of grand churches, decorated in the latest Byzantine fashion, to ordinary people wearing strings of beads imported from the Black Sea, the styles of Byzantium had a profound impact on the ways people in the North Caucasus demonstrated their power. Access to outside resources was something to be ostentatiously flaunted. And at the apex of this system, with the greatest access of all, were the Alan *exousiokratōrs* and *exousiokratōrissas*, the rulers of Alania who carried the title invented for them by the Byzantine emperor. The churches that they sponsored physically dominated the routes by which Byzantine prestige goods arrived in Alania, commanding the landscape across which this wealth flowed. These churches' decoration, and the formulae on the standing stones through which other social elites commemorated their ancestors referenced the importance of royal conversion in bringing Christianity. From the highest to the lowest, the people of Alania were tied into a hierarchical mode of power-expression, with the Alan rulers at the top.

¹⁴⁸ Indeed, there is no evidence for a royal residence at Nizhny Arkhyz, let alone patronage of its churches. See Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.50. For a full discussion of this issue, see Chapter Five, p.244ff.

Shifts in Royal Election

The hierarchical nature of this new mode of power-expression is best demonstrated by another shift in royal authority in Alania: the adoption of a hereditary system of kingship. It appears that access to royal legitimacy was kept within the same biological family, as opposed to being decided by membership of a much wider imagined kin-group.

Our only surviving evidence concerning the Alan royal family in this period comes from scattered references in Georgian and Byzantine chronicles. The haphazard nature of these references themselves is significant, in that they do not form a systematised pattern of representation: no Byzantine or Georgian source explicitly describes or praises the adoption of a hereditary system of succession. Rather, we have to piece together side notices in descriptions of other subjects- notably, the marriages of Byzantine and Georgian elites. This correspondingly increases the likelihood that we are seeing a genuine shift in the organisation of kingship, as opposed to its representation by foreign authors.

Ruler	Reigned	Notes
Ashot' I 'of Tao', <i>Kouropalatēs</i>	Late 8 th / early 9 th century	Granted titles by both Byzantine and 'Abbāsīd rulers
Bagrat' I	826-76	Co-ruler with Adarnase (830-870s), Guaram (d.882)
David I	876-881	
Adarnase I	881-923	Victor of the Battle of Asp'indza (885)
David II	923-37	
Ashot' II	837-54	
Sumbat' I	954-58	
Bagrat' II 'the Idiot'	958-94	

Gurgen	994-1008	
Bagrat' III	1008-14	Originally prince of Abkhazia (since 978). First king of unified Georgia
Giorgi I	1014-27	Husband of Alde of Alania
Mariam of Vaspurakan	Regent 1027-37	
Bagrat' IV	1037-72	Husband of Borena of Alania
Giorgi II	1072-89	
David IV 'the Restorer'	1089-1125	
Demet're I	1125-56	
Giorgi III	1155-84	
Tamar	1184-1212	

Table 1. Rulers of Kartli and (from 1008) Georgia

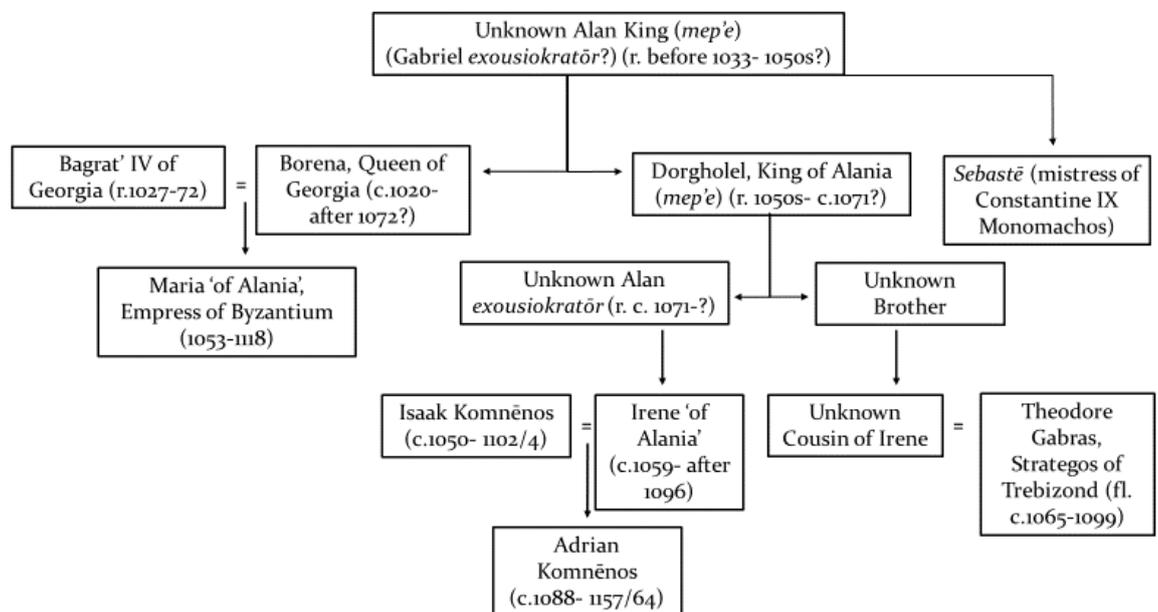


Fig. 16: Partial reconstruction of the Alan royal family in the 11th century (image: the author)¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Many of the dates in this reconstruction are necessarily based on guesswork, particularly Dorgholel's dates of accession and death. The only known evidence of Dorgholel's possible father, Gabriel, is a seal dated to the 1030s-40s by Werner Seibt. Apart from this, we have no evidence for when he reigned, or Dorgholel's accession. See Seibt, p.54. Dorgholel's date of death is somewhat more certain, although still very speculative. It seems clear that Irene of Alania's father, the *exousiokratōr* of Alania, was not Dorgholel (see below). If the information that she was the daughter of the *exousiokratōr* was current in 1072, the date of her marriage to Isaak Komnēnos, this would mean that Dorgholel had died by this point. However, as we have seen, Leonti Mroveli, author of the Georgian *Mat'iane Kartlisa* (written c.1070), mentions Dorgholel in a very offhanded way, as if his audience would already know who he was. This suggests that at this point,

The evidence for the adoption of hereditary rulership is as follows.

According to the Georgian *Mat'iane Kartlisa*, Borena, wife of Bagrat' IV (r.1027-1072), king of Georgia, was the sister of Dorgholel, and the daughter of the king (*mepe*) of the Alans (for a summary of rulers of Kartli and united Georgia, see **Genealogical Table 1**).¹⁵⁰ Borena and Dorgholel's father was possibly the 'Gabriel *exousiokratōr Alanias*' known from the mid-11th century seal mentioned above (pp.148-9).¹⁵¹ Dorgholel, meanwhile, was certainly King of Alania in the 1060s, and judging by the offhanded way in which the *Mat'iane Kartlisa*, first mentions him, may have still been so in the early 1070s. It therefore seems clear that Dorgholel inherited the throne from his and Borena's father.

We can go further than this, however, and posit the succession of the throne from Dorgholel to a son or nephew. According to Nikēphoros Bryennios, in around 1072 Maria 'of Alania', wife of the Byzantine Emperor Michael VII Doukas (r.1071-8), brought her niece, the Alan princess Irene, to marry Isaac

Dorgholel was still King of Alania, or had died relatively recently. Taken together, these facts imply that Dorgholel may have died around 1071. See Nikēphoros Bryennios 2,1, in Alemany, pp.230-1; Met'reveli and Jones, p.154. The placement of the *sebastē* (mistress of Constantine IX Monomachos) as Dorgholel's sister, rather than his daughter, is due to the dates she was known to be active. According to Michael Psellos, she became Constantine's mistress prior to the death of Empress Zoe in 1050, and remained so until the emperor's death in 1055. Given that it seems that Gabriel *exousiokratōr* was still alive in the late 1040s, it is most likely that she was his daughter, since she is explicitly called the daughter of the Alan king by Psellos. See Michael Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers: The 'Chronographia'*, trans. by E. R. A. Sewter, revised ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), pp.231-7, and Chapter Four, pp.219-20. The dates of Irene of Alania are somewhat more certain, since the dates of her children's births are relatively well-established. Her eldest son, John Komnēnos, was born in approximately 1073, whereas her youngest child, Eudokia, was born in around 1096. This relatively long gap implies that she was relatively young when she married Isaac, being most likely only 13 or 14 years old. Therefore, her date of birth probably was around 1058-60. See Kōnstantinos Varzos, *E Genealogia tōn Komnēnōn* (Thessalonika: Kentron Vyzantinōn Ereunōn, 1984), pp.134, 172.

¹⁵⁰ Met'reveli and Jones, p.154.

¹⁵¹ It is also possible that their father was Urdure, but this latter suggestion is unlikely, since the mention of his death in the *Mat'iane Kartlisa* is only a page after the mention of Borena's ancestry. If her father had been Urdure, it would seem more logical to mention him by name at this point, given that Urdure is mentioned soon afterwards without any context. It is much more likely that Urdure was a member of a different royal family, and the father of Alde, second wife of Giorgi I of Georgia. See fn. 29 in Chapter Four.

Komnēnos, a senior Byzantine courtier and brother of the future emperor Alexios I (r.1081-1118).¹⁵² Maria ‘of Alania’ was the daughter of Queen Borena of Georgia, and therefore the niece of King Dorgholel of Alania.¹⁵³ Bryennios also tells us that Irene, Maria’s niece, was the daughter of the *exousiokratōr* of Alania. These facts together imply that Irene was the daughter of a different Alan king, a child of Dorgholel or one of his siblings (see **Fig. 16**). This would entail the succession of the kingship through a third generation, from Dorgholel to either a son or a nephew.

The issue is somewhat complicated in the original Greek, since the term Nikēphoros uses to describe Irene of Alania, *exadelphē*, can mean ‘cousin’, as well as ‘niece’.¹⁵⁴ This first translation would imply that Irene was the daughter of her mother’s brother, King Dorgholel. However, the translation of *exadelphē* as ‘niece’ is far more likely, since Anna Komnēnē mentions in her account that Irene and the Alan wife of Theodore Gabras, *strategos* of Trebizond, were first cousins- specifically, the “daughters of two brothers” (*duein adelphein thugateras*).¹⁵⁵ The events surrounding this passage- the proposed marriage of a daughter of Irene to the child of Theodore Gabras and her first cousin, which had to be called off due to consanguinity- took place in 1091.¹⁵⁶ This is significant since Borena was married to Bagrat IV in around 1033, and thus must at the very latest have been

¹⁵² See Nikēphoros Bryennios 2,1, in Alemany, pp.230-1.

¹⁵³ Despite her commonly used epithet, Maria ‘of Alania’ was in fact a half-Alan, half-Georgian princess and queen, and although she maintained family links with her mother’s homeland, acted within a thoroughly Byzantine sphere for most of her life. As such, Margaret Mullett argues that her epithet is a misleading one. See Margaret Mullett, “The “Disgrace” of the Ex-Basilissa Maria’, *Byzantinoslavica*, 45.2 (1980), 202-11.

¹⁵⁴ E.A. Sophocles, J.H. Thayer, and H. Drisler, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods: From B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900), p.477.

¹⁵⁵ Anna Komnēnē 8, 9, 2, in Alemany, p.209.

¹⁵⁶ See Alemany, p.209.

born in the early 1020s. Thus, if a second, unknown sibling of Borena and Dorgholel had had a child, who was then married to Gabras, it would imply an implausibly long *floruit* (over 60 years) for one generation of the Alan royal family.

Therefore, the evidence points to the succession in the Alan royal family remaining within one biological family for the majority of the 11th century, from at least the c.1030s to the mid-1070s. It is possible that this family held the *exousiokratōrship* for longer- Beletskii and Vinogradov posit a succession of multiple generations from the early 11th to mid-12th centuries, although this remains hypothetical.¹⁵⁷ However, the fact that Georgian rulers concluded marriage alliances with Alan rulers from the 1020s forwards does imply that a narrow ruling group was politically significant enough for these marriages to be advantageous. Notably, the marriage alliance between the two families led to Alan military support in the Georgian campaign against Ganja in October 1065.¹⁵⁸ The reasons for these marriages and the political advantages they conveyed to Byzantine and Georgian elites will be explored in the next chapter.

¹⁵⁷ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.66. In particular, the latter part of this family tree is problematic, as it depends on an unreliable genealogy of Alan kings which is unattested before the 18th century. For further details, see John Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or Two? The Question of a "Dual State" in the North Caucasus, 7th-12th Centuries in Russian and Western Historiography', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, forthcoming.

¹⁵⁸ For the date of this campaign, see *Ta'rikh Bab al-Abwāb*, in Alemany, p.273.

Ruler	Attested	Notes
[Unknown]	913	Alan ruler baptised with the support of Konstanti I of Abkhazia
[Unknown]	c.930	Defeated by the Khazar khaqan; daughter married to khaqan's son. Title of <i>*kar-kundaj</i>
David and Maria	965	David <i>exousiokratōr</i> . Maria carries the unique title <i>exousiokratōrissa</i>
Urdure	c.1030	Possible father of Alde.
Gabriel	1030s-40s	<i>Exousiokratōr</i> . Possible father of Dorgholel and Borena.
Dorgholel	1033, 1065-6	Brother of Borena, Queen of Kartli
[Unknown]	1072	<i>Exousiokratōr</i> . Son or nephew of Dorgholel
Rosimik	1107	<i>Exousiokratōr</i> .
Khuddan/ John Khotesian	1150s	<i>Exousiokratōr</i> .

Table 2. *List of rulers of Alania*

This adoption of hereditary rulership within a single biological family is highly significant. It demonstrates that, at the same time as the Alan monarchs were demonstrating their access to outside empires, the system of government within Alania had become more hierarchical. It seems reasonable to link these two developments together, and argue that this adoption of hereditary rulership was enabled through the imitation of Byzantine imperial styles. In a more hierarchical system, where power derived from exclusive royal access to the temporal prestige of Byzantium and the spiritual prestige of the Christian God, it seems reasonable to suggest that a single family could limit access to this prestige and become hereditary rulers. In Chapter Five (p.26off), we will explore how this prestige could allow the Alan rulers to assume a superior position in the politics of the Central North Caucasus.

Conclusion: Or, Why Did Byzantium Matter in the North Caucasus?

Between the ninth and 11th centuries the Alan kingship changed considerably. At the start of this period, the Alan kingship appears to have been heavily influenced by Khazar titulature and political practice. Notably, Alan rulers carried a Khazar title, **baqatar*, and their method of election appears to have been on a kin-basis, with possible sacral elements comparable to steppe polities. However, the fact that at least one Alan king had converted to Christianity by the late ninth century, and the fact that Central North Caucasian material culture was not dominated by Khazar styles, suggest that this system of power was a polycentric and non-hegemonic one in which legitimacy could be drawn from multiple sources. Following a transitional period in which Alan kings continued to draw legitimacy from their access to both the Khazar and Byzantine Empires, the Alan rulers increasingly emphasised their access to Byzantium to legitimate their rule. Alan kingship moved away from a polycentric system with a relatively broad potential pool of candidates for succession, to a system of hereditary dynastic succession. It moved away from its models of authority showing a marked Khazar and Western Eurasian influence, to using symbols and images of authority reminiscent of the Christian monarchies of Byzantium and Georgia. It moved from the conceptual basis of authority being imagined kinship, to divine election.

I argue that the most important factor allowing the Alan monarchs to implement this more hierarchical system was the increasingly restricted access to the symbolic and material prestige of the outside world in the tenth to 11th centuries, particularly that of Byzantium. Initially gained through the competition for influence between Byzantium and Khazaria in the first half of the

tenth century, this restricted access to the prestige of the outside world was aided by the unitary Byzantine conception of North Caucasian politics, in which a single legitimate Alan ruler communicated with a single legitimate emperor. This linkage between access to the power of Byzantium and the new hierarchical, aristocratic order was most visibly demonstrated by the construction of new, monumental churches along the lines of communication leading to the Black Sea coast and Byzantium. These churches were built in a style explicitly deriving from Byzantium and Georgia; moreover, in numerous surviving cases they explicitly proclaimed either in writing (Senty, Tkhaba-Yerdy) or in iconography (Central Nizhny Arkhyz church) their patrons' connection to this outside world, and to the Christianity which was its most visible symbol. While it seems that not all of these churches were under direct royal control, they did reproduce a system of power in which access to the Byzantine Empire and Georgia was seen as prestigious. The same may be said for the less dramatic means by which non-elites demonstrated their access to the outside world: through writing devotional graffiti in sacred spaces and using fashions of dress redolent of Byzantium. The Alan kings inevitably dominated this system, as they had the most prestigious and direct access, demonstrated by their foreign titles, their dynastic marriages, and their explicit invocation of Byzantine imperial iconography. It seems that this system was an effective one, given the ability of a single Alan royal family to retain the kingship for at least half a century.

It is well-attested that access to foreign prestige encouraged the formation of hierarchical political systems in the Late Antique and Medieval periods, this process being repeatedly attested along imperial peripheries. Jonathan Shepard's work on the Byzantinisation of elite authority in Bulgaria and Rus' provides

particularly close analogies to rise of Alan hierarchical kingship. In the former case, access to Byzantine imperial regalia explicitly underpinned a divinely-appointed hierarchy with the Khan at its pinnacle.¹⁵⁹ In the case of the Rus', Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev's decision to adopt a Byzantine style of rulership was marked by the construction of magnificent churches.¹⁶⁰ Apart from these examples, the rulers of the Sarir, the Alans' eastern neighbours, also appear to have used symbolic access to the foreign to legitimate their rule, claiming that they were the legitimate heirs of the Sassanian *shahanshahs*. Even in ninth- to thirteenth-century Byzantium, foreign artistic elements could be appropriated in order to emphasise the emperor's elevated status, without undermining his official position as vicegerent of God.¹⁶¹

We may finish this chapter by exploring why this symbolic access to the foreign was so important. It seems clear that the importance of imperial recognition in a polycentric society, such as those of the medieval Caucasus, was to provide a source of legitimation not dependent on any one clan, regional, linguistic or religious grouping. Rather, they legitimated the recipient of the title or prestige goods in a language that was universally understood. This metaphor may also be understood literally in explaining the choice of non-native languages- Greek and Georgian- for the inscriptions through which elites proclaimed their access to the outside world. If the medieval North Caucasus was a region of as great linguistic diversity as it is today, then a language foreign to all

¹⁵⁹ Jonathan Shepard, 'Orthodoxy and Northern Peoples: Goods, Gods and Guidelines', in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp.176-8.

¹⁶⁰ Shepard, 'Orthodoxy and Northern Peoples: Goods, Gods and Guidelines', pp.182-4.

¹⁶¹ Alicia Walker, *The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.165-7.

could paradoxically provide a unifying force, in the same way foreign prestige goods and titles could.

This point, however, does not necessarily explain why it was access to *Byzantium* that was so important. It is important to note that in the case of Alania and analogous North Caucasian polities, it was the symbolic and ideological aspects of 'the power of the foreign' that were most significant. In contrast to other Eurasian polities, such as the later Kalmyks and Kabardians, access to foreign prestige did not necessarily mean that North Caucasian rulers were able to monopolise flows of material wealth, or draw on imperial military forces to defeat their rivals. That being said, the considerable stipends that came with Byzantine court titles must surely have helped improve Alan rulers' social positions.¹⁶² However, as the fine Iranian, Middle Eastern and Eurasian objects found at Senty and Zmeiskaia demonstrate, alternative sources of prestige goods were available to Alan elites. The existence of a mosque at Nizhny Arkhyz and the 'Tomb of Dorgholel' demonstrate that these sources of wealth could have been linked into alternative ideological systems, in the shape of the Islamicate styles which were so important in the North-East Caucasus, or indigenous North Caucasian traditions of heroic leadership. However, in both these cases, the alternatives were overwritten by or incorporated into a Byzantine-style Christianity.

I would suggest that the jealousy with which the Byzantine court guarded its recognition made its respect a valuable source of power in and of itself. George

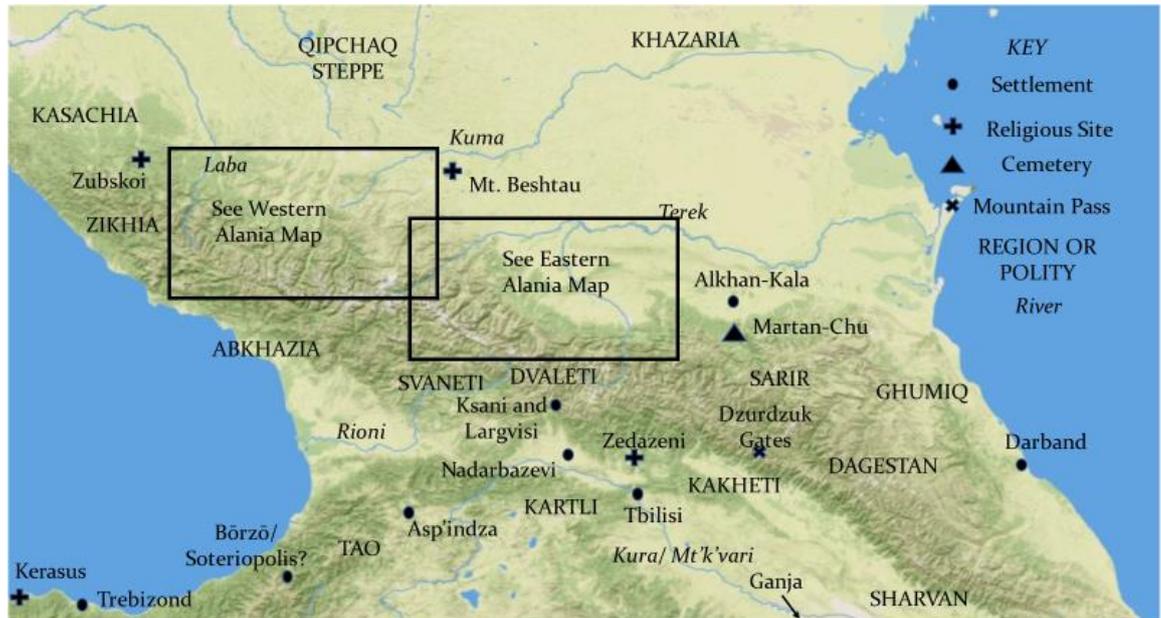
¹⁶² On Byzantine court stipends, see Jonathan Shepard, 'Byzantine Diplomacy, 800-1204', in *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, ed. by Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1992), p.62.

Lipsitz has emphasised that the ability to take on another's identity is a function and privilege of power: a power often summarised by the term 'cultural appropriation'.¹⁶³ Moreover, to have this adoption of a new identity recognised by outsiders can reconfirm, legitimate and reinforce this power. Perhaps the Alan rulers' ability to extract this recognition from the Byzantine Empire was the real root of the 'power of the foreign'. We cannot say whether the Alan rulers genuinely saw themselves as God and the Emperor's vicegerents in the North Caucasus, or whether they saw themselves as thumbing their noses at an imperial superpower. In Alania, perhaps it depended on one's point of view.

In any event, we can see that, rather than being passive objects on which outside influence was exerted, elite Alans had considerable agency in shaping their world, and the mental structures of power which defined it. Through adapting others' power systems and the power of objects, it was possible to put their own stamp on the world.

¹⁶³ George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place* (London: Verso, 1994), p.63.

Chapter Four. 'What is Alania to Us?' Byzantium, Georgia and the Transformation of the Alans' Image



Map 1: *The Wider Caucasus in the 10th-13th Centuries. Image: the author.*

Changing Outsider Perceptions of the Alans: Byzantium and Georgia

In the previous chapter, we saw that access to the outside world- in particular, to Byzantium and Georgia- played a major role in legitimating the rule of Alan kings. In this chapter, we will turn this question on its head. If Byzantium and Georgia meant so much to the Alans, what did the Alans mean to the Byzantines and Georgians? To put it another way, why did these courts allow the Alan elite to access their power, as demonstrated by prestige goods, titles and royal marriages?

This chapter will argue that a major shift took place in Byzantine and Georgian perceptions of Alania between the ninth and eleventh centuries. From a barbarian region on the periphery of the known world, a source of potential danger, Alania's image was transformed into that of a Christian power, if perhaps

a little rough around the edges. This chapter will start by examining two relatively negative depictions of the Alans in the ninth century, in Patriarch Photios' *Bibliothēca* and the Georgian *Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali*, and contrast them with relatively positive 11th and 12th-century depictions of Alania, most notably in Nikēphoros Basilakēs' panegyric of Adrian Komnēnos and the Georgian *Mat'iane Kartlisa*. It will suggest that these latter works' presentation of the Alans was principally a result of dynastic marriages into the Byzantine and Georgian elite families that commissioned these works. These marriages were the consequence of the strategic situation in the mid-11th century, especially after the arrival of the Seljuk Turks. Alan rulers were able to direct the considerable military resources of the North Caucasus against these enemies of Byzantium and Georgia: a bargaining chip that allowed them entry into the civilised world. Not only can we detect an echo of the Alan rulers' power in the North Caucasus, but also something of the behaviour of elite Alans who moved into Byzantine and Georgian society. It appears that they were aware of and able to manipulate these societies' perceptions of the 'other', which resulted in an enhancement of their own and the Alans' collective image.

Barbarian Outsiders: The Image of the Alans in the Ninth Century

Brave, Greedy and a Little Bit Stupid: The Image of the Alans in Photios'

Bibliothēca

The Alans were not always considered a significant power. In order to properly contextualise their rise to imperial favour, it is necessary to briefly review the discourse of older outsider accounts about the Alans- that is to say,

the pattern of statements about them which formed a body of ‘common knowledge’.¹ In the ninth century, this discourse is overwhelmingly indifferent. Where the Alans do appear, descriptions of them are normally patterned after accounts that are centuries old and which retain the same basic theme: that the Alans are an antagonistic force, even barbarians.

This is demonstrated by one of the few ninth-century Byzantine sources which mentions the Alans: the *Bibliothēca* of Patriarch Photios (composed either c.838 or c.855), a summary of the books which the patriarch had read.² This is quite literally a recapitulation of older sources. The *Bibliothēca* contains summaries of several now-lost works which mention the Alans- Arrian’s *Alanica* (early second century), Iamblichus’ novel (mid-second century), Olympiodōros of Thebes’ history (fl. c.412-25), Candidus’ history (late fifth century), and Theophanes of Byzantium’s history (late sixth century).³ This is in addition to summaries of surviving works which mention the Alans, most significantly Procopius’ *Wars* (c.545-51).⁴

In these works, the Alans principally appear as valiant warriors. The theme of the Alans’ prowess in war dates back as far as their first appearance in classical

¹ On the definition of ‘discourse’ in a historical context, see Callum G. Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians* (Harlow: Longman, 2005), pp.60-2; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), pp.25-41.

² On the date and character of the *Bibliothēca*, see L.G. Reynolds and N.G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.62-3; Paul Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism: The First Phase* (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986), pp.207-9. For an annotated index of works reviewed by Photios, see Warren Treadgold, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photius* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1980), pp.117-168.

³ See *Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation*, ed. by Agusti Alemany (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp.193-4; for dates of works, see respectively pp. 81, 88, 96, 82, 204.

⁴ Photios, *Bibliothèque*, ed. by René Henry (Paris: Société d’Édition ‘Les Belles Lettres’, 1959), vol. 1, pp.64-76.

sources.⁵ In keeping with this discursive framework, every one of Photios' summaries (apart from Candidus) describes the Alans operating in a military capacity. A recurring *topos* is that of 'the Alan in the narrow place', where a single Alan warrior holds off a vastly superior force, sacrificing his life for his lord or cause. This *topos* appears in Photios' summary of Olympiodōros, with the sacrifice of an Alan slave to defend the general Gerontius.⁶ It is also known from Procopius' description of the wars of Justinian, where a single Alan mercenary holds the gate of a fortified Sassanian camp against a Roman and Lazic force.⁷

However, alongside this *topos* of bravery, the Alans are described as being tricky, untrustworthy, and fundamentally motivated by self-enrichment. For example, in Photios' summary of Iamblichus' second-century novel, an army of slow-witted but underpaid Alan mercenaries are tricked into believing that one of the novel's heroes, Soraichos, has divine protection after he produces a treasure hidden in a field.⁸ Similarly, in his summary of Candidus, an Alan plays the part of a hired assassin attempting to kill Illous, a senior East Roman court official.⁹ Overall, the depiction of the Alans closely follows the *topos* of the 'greedy barbarian', violent and rapacious, as found in classical ethnography.¹⁰

⁵ For example, see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18, 96-98, in Alemany, p.90.

⁶ See Olympiodōros Fragment 16, in Alemany, p.97

⁷ See Procopius, *Wars* 8, 8, 37-8, in Alemany, p.197.

⁸ Photios, vol. 2, p.47.

⁹ Photios, vol.1, pp.165-6.

¹⁰ See Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.55; Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.xxii.

The Northern Danger: The Alans in the Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali

This depiction mirrors the image of the Alans in Juansher Juansheriani's *Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali (tskhovreba da mokalakeoba vakht'ang gorgalisa)* (early ninth century¹¹), part of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. As we saw in Chapter Three (pp.131-2), this text claims to recount the campaigns of the eponymous fifth-century monarch, however its textual references to Khazars demonstrate its semi-mythical character, reflecting conditions and attitudes of its period of composition.¹²

In this source, the Alans and their Khazar allies play the role of antagonists in a tale of the 'young hero' type, known from the Nart Sagas, in which a young man establishes his place in society through martial deeds.¹³ In this story, the Alans are firmly the antagonists: they invade Kartli, doing great destruction, and offend against morality by abducting the sister of King Vakht'ang, thus obligating him to punish them. Their skill at arms is built up by the easy victory of Tarkhan, the Khazar champion, over Parsman-Parukh, the champion of the Georgians' Persian allies.¹⁴ The strength of the Alan champion, Baqat'ar, is emphasised in comparison to Tarkhan, rendering Baqat'ar's subsequent defeat by Vakht'ang more prestigious. The Alans, nonetheless, are presented as subservient to the Georgians. Vakht'ang says to Baqat'ar: "I will not cross the river, for I am a King...

¹¹ Donald Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History.*, 3rd rev. and expanded edn. (London: Garnett Press, 2010), p.69.

¹² See V. F. Miller, *Osetinskie etiudy. Ch. 3* (Moscow: Tip. E. G. Potatsova, 1887), pp.31-2.

¹³ I am aware of no systematic study of this story-type, however examples are almost too numerous to note. One good example is 'The Nart Named Solitary', in John Colarusso, Tamerlan Salbiev, and Walter May, *Tales of the Narts. Mythology and Folklore of the Ossetian People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp.540-9

¹⁴ *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. by Roin Met'reveli and Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), pp.80-82.

But you are a slave and your destruction will not harm the Alan army, just like the death of a dog. Cross the river and come to me.”¹⁵ Baqat’ar “obeys” this command of Vakht’ang’s, further enhancing the king’s authority within the tale. Overall, the Alans are depicted as a martial people, but ultimately inferior in status, morality and strength to the Georgians and their king.

Directing the Alans: Byzantium, Georgia and the Alans in the 11th Century

The Alans in Byzantine Sources of the Tenth Century

The depiction of the Alans in the mid- to late-11th century contrasts quite dramatically with that in the ninth. As we saw in the previous chapter (p.183ff), in this period both the Byzantine and Georgian ruling families were willing to intermarry with the Alan royal family- perhaps the strongest evidence that any scruples over the semi-barbaric image of the Alans had been overcome.

Part of the reason for this change was surely the increased engagement of Byzantium with the Alans during the tenth century, occasioned by their strategic importance. Famously, they appear extensively in the writings of Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos (r.913-959), who also originally granted the Alan rulers the title of *exousiokratōr*, first attested in his *De Administrando Imperio* (948-52).¹⁶ In this work, Constantine writes that:

¹⁵ Met’reveli and Jones, pp.83-4.

¹⁶ Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. by Gyula Moravcsik and Romilly James Heald Jenkins, 2nd rev. edn. (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 2008), p.65; on this work’s date, see p.11.

“Given that the *Exousiokratōr* of Alania is not at peace with the Khazars, but prefers by far the friendship of the Romans, if the Khazars do not want to keep the friendship and peace of the Emperor, he [the *Exousiokratōr* of Alania] may do them much harm, laying ambushes in their way and attacking them unawares while they cross over towards Sarkel, the Regions (*ta klimata*) and Cherson. And if the aforesaid *Exousiokratōr* strives to bar their way, both Cherson and the Regions will enjoy a long and profound peace...”¹⁷

As Nick Evans has recently demonstrated, in an atmosphere of renewed Byzantine power projection in the Black Sea region, the Alans’ strategic position gave them an importance they had not possessed in the preceding centuries.¹⁸

However, I would argue that the strategic position in the tenth century cannot entirely explain the longer-term shift in Byzantine attitudes towards the Alans. Although the Alans are certainly presented as useful in Byzantine sources produced or recopied in the mid-tenth century, they retain the theme of their fundamental capriciousness. We might read Constantine’s comment that the Alans will only co-operate with the Byzantines if they prefer to do so as a continuation of this tradition, for example. More explicitly, the older histories gathered together in Constantine’s *Excerpta*- especially those of Josephus (c.37-

¹⁷ *Hoti tou exousiokratoros Alanias meta tōn Khazarōn mē eirēneuontos, alla mallon protimoteran tithemenou tēn philian tou basileōs Rhōmaiōn, ean hoi Khazaroi ou boulōntai tēn pros ton basilea philian kai eirēnēn tērein, dynatai megalōs autous kakoun, tas te hodous enedreuōn kai aphulaktōs autois epitithemenos en tō dierchesthai pros te to Sarkel kai ta klimata kai tēn Chersōna. Kai ei poiēsetai spoudēn ho toioutos exousiokratōr tou kōluein autous, megalēs kai batheias eirēnēs metechousin hē te Chersōn kai ta klimata.* Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, p.65.

¹⁸ In general on Byzantine policy in the Black Sea in the 10th century, see Nicholas Evans, ‘Mountains, Steppes and Empires. Approaches to the North Caucasus in the Early Middle Ages’ (unpublished PhD Thesis, Wadham College, Oxford, 2016), pp.181-262.

100), Cassius Dio (c.150-235), Menander the Guardsman (sixth century) and Procopius- emphasised the Alans' willingness to perform raids in return for material advancement.¹⁹ In a similar vein, Theophanes Confessor's *Chronographia* (810-15), a continuation of which was commissioned by Constantine, emphasised the Alans' willingness to raid the Abasgian coast in return for payment.²⁰ It also mentions their unscrupulousness in obtaining wealth, since they betray an agreement with the Abasgians once they have received payment from them. Most importantly, by the time that Alan princesses married into the Komnēnoi family, the immediate exigencies of the mid-tenth century strategic situation had long passed, as had the importance of finding imperial allies against the Khazars. Why, we may ask, did the Alans continue to be important to Byzantium?

In a similar vein, we see that in the Georgian tradition, older ideas about the Alans' dangerous nature continued to be current into the 11th century. For example, the *Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali* was edited and updated by Leonti Mroveli in the early 1070s.²¹ Given that this text and its negative depiction of Alania were still considered relevant, why were the Georgian monarchs so keen to engage with Alan rulers?

¹⁹ See Alemany, p.178; Evans, p.220. For dates of these works, see Alemany, pp.90, 84, 183.

²⁰ See Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia* 600-604, in Alemany, pp.200-2; for this work's popularity in the tenth century, see Warren Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.77, 188ff.

²¹ Rayfield, p.69.

The Alans in 11th Century Byzantine and Georgian Strategy

I suggest that the major reason why Byzantine and Georgian rulers were so keen to engage with Alan rulers was the latter's ability to direct the considerable military resources of the North Caucasus. As early as the *De Administrando Imperio*, Constantine VII speaks of negotiating directly with the Alan *exousiokratōr*, and his influence being decisive in determining the Alans' military objectives.²² In the 11th century, there are numerous instances of Alan kings leading military expeditions against the Muslim principalities of the North-East Caucasus. Moreover, in Byzantine, Georgian and Dagestani sources, the direction of the Alans' military resources is attributed to strategic co-ordination between these Christian powers and the Alan king. We might thus suggest that Byzantine and Georgian elites' objectives were twofold: firstly, to prevent potentially damaging attacks on Byzantine or Georgian possessions, which Theophanes' *Chronographia* and the *Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali* suggested were possible; and secondly, to actively utilise the Alans' military strength against their enemies. This became a particularly prominent strategy with the emergence of the Seljuk threat in the 1060s and 1070s.

The first possible example of military co-ordination between the Alan and Georgian rulers comes from the period 423-4/ 1032-3. In these years large forces of Alans, together with a force of Sarir and Rus', raided Sharvan and Darband, according to the Darbandi *Ta'rikh Bab al-Abwāb* (c.468/1075).²³ This force was

²² Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, p.65.

²³ *Ta'rikh Bab al-Abwāb*, in *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, ed. by Vladimir Minorsky (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1958), pp.31-2, 47. For the date of this work, see pp.2-3.

explicitly led by the Alan overlord, the *ṣāhib al-Lān*- this being a term used to designate the Alan king, judging from Mas'ūdī's usage in the 940s.²⁴ In 1032, this force was large enough to capture Yazīdīyah, capital of Sharvan, although in both this year and the following one the raiders were defeated by the people of Darband.

These events may be connected with marriages between the Alan and Georgian royal families. According to the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, in the early 1030s, three other events of relevance to Alan-Georgian relations occurred. Firstly, Bagrat' IV married the daughter of the King of the Alans, Borena.²⁵ Secondly, in approximately 1033, Bagrat's half-brother Demet're attempted to seize the throne. Demet're was the son of King Giorgi I of Georgia and his queen, Alde, the daughter of an Alan king. When he was unsuccessful, Demet're fled to the fortress of Anakopia in Abkhazia, which he gave over to the Byzantines.²⁶ Thirdly, during Bagrat's minority (1034?), a large coalition of Kartvelian lords, led by the powerful magnate Lip'arit' Orbeliani, invaded Ganja, along with King K'virik'e III of Kakheti, the Armenian King David Anhoghin of Lori and Ja'far b. 'Alī, Amir of Tbilisi.²⁷ While the chronology of these events is not made fully clear in the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, it does appear that Bagrat's marriage to Borena took place shortly after the death of his first wife, Helena Argyra, who had died shortly after

²⁴ See Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.158, and Chapter Five, p.25off.

²⁵ Met'reveli and Jones, p.154.

²⁶ For the date of this event, see Cyril Toumanoff, 'Armenia and Georgia', in *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. IV, *the Byzantine Empire Part I*, ed. by J.A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p.621.

²⁷ Met'reveli and Jones, p.154-5. For the date of this event, see Robert Bedrosian, 'Liparit IV Orbelēan', *DME* vol.7, p.586.

their marriage, four years after his accession to the throne in 1027.²⁸ This probably means that Bagrat' and Borena were married in 1032 or 1033. It is therefore possible that this second marriage can be connected with the Alan raids on Sharvan and Darband in these years. The Georgians' objective in contracting this marriage may perhaps have been to support Lip'arit's campaign against the Muslim principalities of the Southeast Caucasus. Alternatively, the objective may have been to neutralise potential Alan support for Demet're of Anakopia, given the latter's descent from an Alan king, albeit possibly not of the same family as Borena.²⁹

The possible relationship between the marriage of Borena to Bagrat' IV and Alan raids on Sharvan and Darband is rendered more likely by the fact that thirty years later, another set of Alan raids were explicitly inspired by their royal family's connection with the Georgian Bagratids. In 454/ 1062 and 457/ 1065, the *Ta'rikh Bāb al-Abwāb* records major Alan raids against the Muslim emirates of Arran and Ganja (in modern central Azerbaijan), plundering and taking over 20,000 slaves in the former raid alone.³⁰ A further raid may have occurred in 456/ 1064, although this is only a brief notice in the *Ta'rikh's* chapter on Darband and

²⁸ Met'reveli and Jones, pp.153-4. Specifically, a war between Georgia and Byzantium broke out a year after Bagrat's accession, and his marriage to Helena Argyra- a condition of the peace treaty- took place three years after this point. For the chronology of this war, see M.D. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII Centuries*, trans. by George B. Hewitt (Tbilisi: Ganatleba Publishers, 1987), pp.61-2.

²⁹ It is unlikely that Borena and Alde were directly related, since if they were daughters of the same Alan king or were aunt and niece, Bagrat' would have married his stepmother's sister or niece- which seems quite a stretch, even given the Georgian Bagratids' flexible attitudes towards consanguinity (on which, see Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1963), pp.415-16). It is therefore more likely that Alde was a member of a different Alan royal family, or a different branch of the same family. She was most likely the daughter of Urdure, who we know was ruling in the 1010s. See Nina Iamanidzé, *Les installations liturgiques sculptées des églises de Géorgie (VIIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp.164-5.

³⁰ *Ta'rikh Bāb al-Abwāb*, in Vladimir Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (London: Taylor's Foreign Press, 1953), pp.20-2.

may be a mistake for 457/ 1065.³¹ The raid against Ganja in 1065 is also recorded in the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. This source explicitly states that this raid was instigated by Bagrat' IV of Georgia, but was led by the Alan King Dorgholel and Prince Giorgi, son of Bagrat'.³² The Georgians' active co-operation in this raid is confirmed by the *Ta'rikh Bāb al-Abwāb*, which states that the Alan force passed through Georgia in order to reach Ganja and brought a Georgian force with them.³³ While the numbers of Alans claimed by the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (40,000) seem a great exaggeration, given that a band of 200 *ghāzis* offered battle at Shamkūr³⁴ against the Alan-Georgian raid, it seems to have nonetheless been a considerable force, given that the main field army of Amir Abū'l-Aswār of Ganja declined battle.³⁵

A particularly interesting aspect of this campaign is that it can be directly linked to the Alan king's family ties to the Georgian royal family. Apart from the explicit statement that the Alan raid of 1065 took place at the Georgian king's instigation, there is a further passage of interest. Immediately after the passage in the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* which describes this raid, there is a lengthy description of a great banquet hosted for Dorgholel by Bagrat', held under the pretext of Dorgholel's visit to his sister, Bagrat's queen, Borena.³⁶ However, given the Alan-Georgian co-operation in the raid on Ganja, and the growing threat of Abū'l-

³¹ *Ta'rikh Bāb al-Abwāb*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.51.

³² Met'reveli and Jones, p.161.

³³ *Ta'rikh Bāb al-Abwāb*, in Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, p.22.

³⁴ Modern Shamkir, in western Azerbaijan.

³⁵ Met'reveli and Jones, p.161; *Ta'rikh Bāb al-Abwāb*, in Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, p.22.

³⁶ Met'reveli and Jones, p.162. Given this passage's proximity to the description of the Alan-Georgian raid on Ganja in 1065, but the relatively late point in the campaign season that this occurred, it is most likely that this banquet took place in 1066. It can be further narrowed down to the late autumn, since the visit had to be cut short due to the approach of winter.

Aswār's Seljuk overlords, it is reasonable to assume that the discussions were of a more strategic than familial nature, especially given the prominence that the *Kartlis Tskhovreba's* account gives to this event. As we will see, the positive portrayal of the Alans in this passage marks a major shift in their presentation in Georgian historical narratives.

A third example of diplomatic ties with the Alan king directly leading to military support comes from the Byzantine history of Nikēphoros Bryennios (c.1137³⁷). This states that a force of Alan mercenaries, said to be 6,000 strong, was levied directly from the Alan king by Nikēphoros Palaeologos, acting on the orders of Emperor Michael VII (r.1071-1078). These troops were to be used against Roussel of Ballieul's rebellious Norman mercenaries.³⁸

Not only does this event demonstrate the importance to Byzantium of a personal relationship with the Alan king, it can also be connected with marriage alliances between the Alan royal family and the Byzantine elite. This levy of Alan mercenaries took place in the latter stages of Roussel of Ballieul's rebellion, after his return to the Armeniakōn Theme, and therefore probably in late 1074.³⁹

Therefore, this levy certainly seems to have occurred after the marriage of Isaac Komnēnos to Irene of Alania, daughter of the Alan *exousiokratōr* and niece of the

³⁷ Alemany, p.230.

³⁸ Nikēphoros Bryennios, 2, 19-20, in Alemany, pp.233-4. Paul Gautier suggests that these troops were in fact levied from the Georgian king, Giorgi II (r.1072-1089), due to his family connection to Empress Maria 'of Alania'. This seems unlikely, however, as Maria is specifically referred to as the "daughter of the prince of Iberia" (*tou Ibērōn katarchontos thugatera*), rather than being connected to the Alans. Indeed, Irene, wife of Isaac Komnēnos, is called the daughter of the *exousiokratōr* of Alania in the same passage. This demonstrates the precision in Bryennios' geographical terminology, rendering it unlikely that Georgia and Alania had been confused in the case of these mercenaries. See Nicephorus Bryennios, *Histoire* (Brussels: Byzantion, 1975), pp.142-3, fn. p.182.

³⁹ For the dates of this campaign, see Charles M. Brand, 'Roussel de Ballieul', *ODB*, pp.1814-15.

empress Maria. This marriage certainly occurred before 1073, since their first son, John, was born in that year.⁴⁰ Moreover, since Irene was the niece of the Empress Maria, we can draw a direct connection between the imperial family, which ordered the levying of these Alan mercenaries, and the Alan rulers themselves. This connection is explicitly made by Bryennios, who claims that the prime mover in Irene's marriage to Isaak Komnēnos was Emperor Michael himself.⁴¹

It is notable that it is at precisely this point that Alan mercenaries appear more widely in Byzantine service, including in Isaac Komnēnos' own bodyguard. In another passage in Bryennios, two Alan mercenaries play a part in saving Isaac's life from a pursuing group of Turks.⁴² Whilst the internal chronology of Bryennios is not particularly precise, this incident clearly occurred after the start of Roussel's rebellion in 1073- that is to say, after Isaac's marriage to Irene.⁴³ It is possible that not only was the levy of Alan mercenaries in 1074 facilitated through this marriage alliance, but also that this first group of Alan mercenaries had arrived with Irene herself, as part of a deal that had been struck with the Alan king.

In any case, it is clear that connections with the Alan royal family constituted a source of power in Byzantium in the 1070s. This connection was one which was directly emphasised by Alans living in the Byzantine Empire. Notably,

⁴⁰ Kōnstantinos Varzos, *E Genealogia tōn Komnēnōn* (Thessalonika: Kentron Vyzantinōn Ereunōn, 1984), p.134.

⁴¹ Nikēphoros Bryennios, 2, 1, in Alemany, pp.230-1.

⁴² Nikēphoros Bryennios, 2, 12-13, in Alemany, pp.231-2.

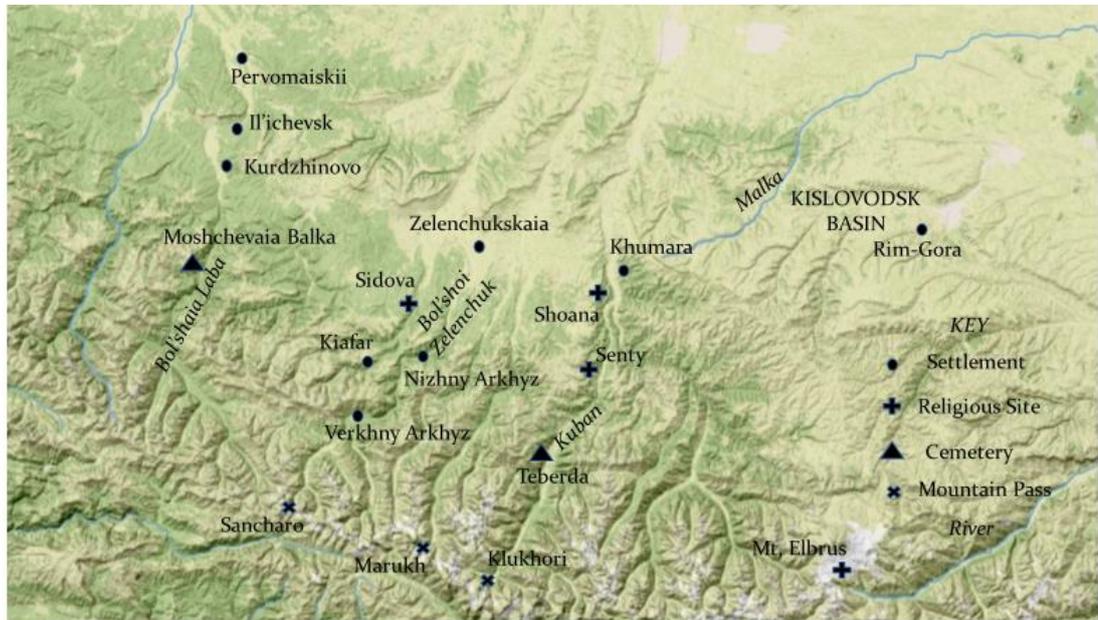
⁴³ Specifically, Roussel's rebellion began after the death of Robert Crepin, firmly dateable to 1073, since Psellos notes that it occurred as he was writing his *Chronographia*. See Bryennios, pp.148, 162-4, fn. p.134.

Irene of Alania's connection with the Alan royal family formed part of her own public image. In a copy of her seal found at Antioch, she explicitly identifies herself as the "daughter of the *exousiokratōr* of Alania" (*tē thugatri tou exousiokratōr[os] Alantias*), alongside her Byzantine court title of *protoproedrissa*.⁴⁴ A further example of Irene's seal is known in the Dumbarton Oaks collection, which also describes her as the daughter of the *exousiokratōr* [fig. 17].⁴⁵ To know Irene, it seems, was to know the Alan royal family, a point which she seems to have been anxious to emphasise.

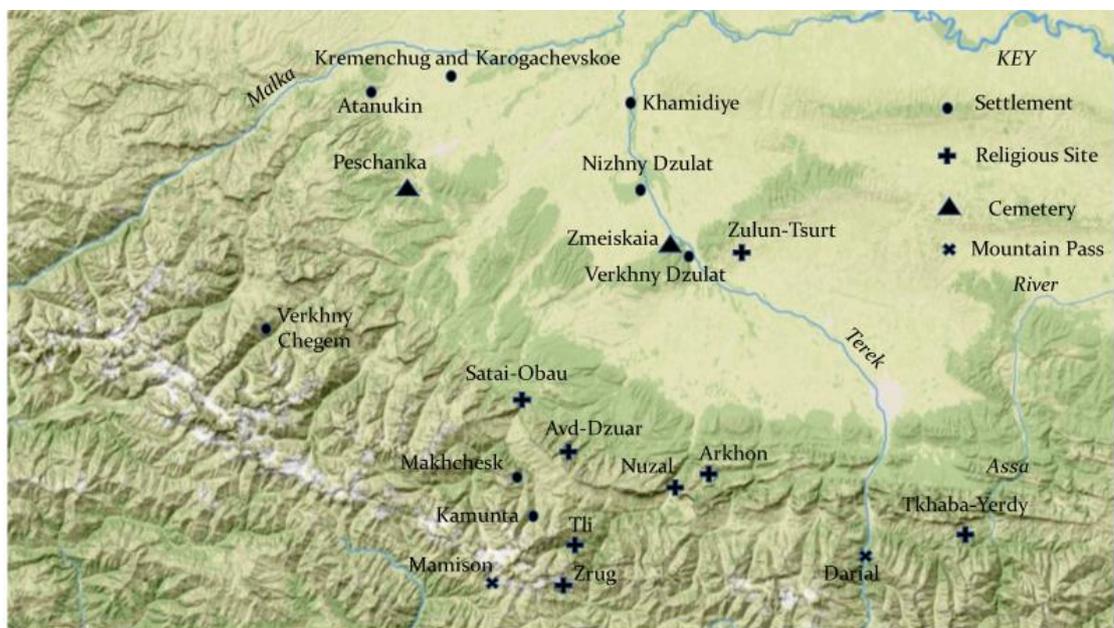
These sources clearly demonstrate the importance of good relations with the Alan elite to both the Georgian kings and Byzantine elites. In times of military emergency, particularly those caused by wars with the Seljuks, the ability to direct the military manpower of the North Caucasus to one's own ends was worth the compromises necessary to obtain it. These compromises not only included the granting of titles and payments, but also intermarriage between the highest elite of both states and the Alan royal family. Implicitly, this leads us to a further point: that the Alan kings were themselves able to direct this military manpower, and good relations with them personally were therefore necessary. This reinforces our conclusions from the previous chapter, of the prominent place of the Alan kings in the politics of the Central North Caucasus, and the importance of relations with Byzantium and Georgia in maintaining this position.

⁴⁴ See Jean-Claude Cheynet and Dimitri Theodoridis, *Sceaux Byzantins de la collection D. Theodoridis. les sceaux patronymiques*. (Paris: ACHCByz, 2010), pp.210-11.

⁴⁵ Dumbarton Oaks Online Catalogue of Byzantine Seals, 'Irene, *Protoproedrissa*, Daughter of the *Exousiokratōr* (of Alania?) (1072-1078)', <http://doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.1007> [accessed 03/05/2018]



Map 3: Western Alania, with sites of the ninth to 14th centuries. Image: the author.



Map 4: Eastern Alania with sites of the ninth to 14th centuries. Image: the author.

No doubt the incentive of plunder was also added to the authoritative power of the Alan kings: all of the *Ta'rikh Bāb al-Abwab's* descriptions of Alan raids mention the amount of plunder, both human and material, which was taken. Indeed, the raid of 423/ 1032 was defeated through an ambush of the

raiding forces whilst they were laden down with booty.⁴⁶ Similarly, Nikēphoros Bryennios makes it clear that the objective of the Alan mercenaries levied in 1074 was payment, and that most of them left Byzantine service because they were not paid promptly.⁴⁷

It is possible that this influx of wealth was sufficiently large to have an effect on North Caucasian society. Sergei Savenko has noted that in the last decades of the 11th century, a number of very rich Alan elite graves are known, notably at Kol'tso Gora, near Kislovodsk (Nos. 1, 8 and 41) and Zmeiskaia (Nos. 14 and 15).⁴⁸ Whilst it is too reductive to directly link this wealth to raids and relationships with Byzantium and Georgia, especially since many of the prestige objects in these graves were of local manufacture, it is possible that an influx of wealth spurred social competition within the Alan elite, leading to increasingly elaborate funeral rituals to demonstrate their social positions.⁴⁹ In any case, it seems that a heavy price was paid for the Alans' co-operation- not only by the Byzantines and Georgians themselves, but also by the people of Arran, Ganja and Darband.

This heavy price may also be understood in epistemic terms. It seems that, as a consequence of their desire for North Caucasian manpower, the Byzantine

⁴⁶ *Ta'rikh Bāb al-Abwāb*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.32.

⁴⁷ Nikēphoros Bryennios, 2, 19-20, in Alemany, pp.233-4.

⁴⁸ S.N. Savenko, 'Alanskie vsadniki v pis'mennykh istochnikakh i v arkhelogicheskikh dannykh: voprosy sravnitel'nogo analiza', in *Materialy po izucheniiu istoriko-kul'turnogo nasledii Severnogo Kavkaza*, vyp. IX, ed. by A.B. Belinskii (Stavropol': Nasledie, 2009), pp.354-5.

⁴⁹ For an example of a mix of imported and locally-produced prestige goods being found in one of these rich graves (No. 14 at Zmeiskaia), see V.A. Kuznetsov, 'Zmeiskii katakombnyi mogil'nik', in *Arkheologicheskie raskopki v raione Zmeiskoi Severnoi Osetii*, ed. by E.I. Krupnov (Ordzhinikidze: Severo-Osetinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1961), p.82. On the theory of rich burials in the same area being a marker of status competition, see Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.340-1.

and Georgian aristocracies were surprisingly flexible in their willingness to accommodate Alan elites. This is demonstrated not only by the physical influx of Alans into both polities in the 11th century, but also by the changing presentation of the Alans in written sources. Part of this latter process is certainly down to the strategic situation, but it also seems that Alan elites were able to successfully engage with Byzantine and Georgian concepts, structures and discourses of power, in order to enhance their own interests.

Diplomacy, Migration, and Changing Perceptions of Alania

Alan Diplomacy with the Byzantine Empire



Fig. 5: seal of Gabriel, exousiokratōr Alantias (c.1030-50) (photo: from A.Iu. Vinogradov & D.V. Beletskii, *Nizhnii Arkhyz i Senty: drevneishie khramy Rossii*, (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), p.55.

When discussing Alan engagement with Byzantine and Georgian power structures, we can point to two processes: movements of documents, and movements of people. Surprisingly, given the absence of written records within the North Caucasus, we do have evidence for the former. An archive of letters

from senior Alan churchmen and *exousiokratōrs* was stored in Constantinople, judging from finds of the seals once attached to them. These seals were washed out by coastal erosion during the 19th and 20th centuries.⁵⁰ It is notable that, judging from the designs of these seals, the Alan rulers enthusiastically embraced this Byzantine mode of diplomacy and the title *exousiokratōr*, judging by the seals of ‘Gabriel’ [fig. 5] (judging by the palaeography, from the 1030s or 1040s), a ‘Rosimik *exousiokratōr*’, also mentioned in 1107 by Anna Komnēnē, and finally the seal of a ‘John Khotesian *exousiokratōr*’ (c.1150), probably identifiable with a King Khuddan mentioned in some redactions of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*.⁵¹ Whilst we cannot say anything about the documents once attached to these seals, it is notable that the designs of the seals themselves place the Alan rulers within the same heavenly hierarchy as the Byzantine emperor. The clearest example of this process is the seal of Gabriel, in which he identifies his country by its Byzantine designation of Alania, one of only three records of an Alan ruler doing so.⁵² The same seal also places the Alan ruler under the protection of the Virgin, in the same way as the Emperor. These seals thus negotiate with Byzantine conceptions of divine order: whilst placing the Alan ruler within a power structure in which

⁵⁰ For the findspot of these seals, see Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Sceaux de la collection Zacos (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) se rapportant aux provinces orientales de l'Empire Byzantin* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2001), p.6; on the circumstances of the discovery of at least one seal from this collection (that of Gabriel), see S.M. Perevalov, ‘Alanskaia epigrafika. 1. Katalog grecheskikh nadpisei’, *Vestnik Vladikavkazskogo Nauchnogo Tsentra*, 11.1 (2011), 2–10.

⁵¹ Perevalov, p.8; Werner Seibt, ‘Metropolitan und Herrscher der Alanen auf byzantinischen Siegeln des 10.-12. Jahrhunderts’, in *Sfragistika i istoriia kul'tury*, ed. by E.V. Stepanova (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2004), pp.54-5. On Rosimik, see Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. by E.R.A. Sewter (London: Penguin, 1967), 13, 6, 2 pp.409-12. On Khotesian/ Khuddan, see Met'reveli and Jones, p.228.

⁵² Seibt, p.54. On the identification of Gabriel, who may have been Dorghole's father, see D.V. Beletskii and A.Iu. Vinogradov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz i Senty- drevneishie khramy Rossii. Problemy khristianskogo iskusstva Alanii i Kavkaza* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), p.54 ; Perevalov, p.8.

the emperor has the superior position, they also emphasise the Alan ruler's elevated position, and the legitimacy his longstanding title conveys.

Alans Abroad: Byzantium and Georgia

In parallel with this movement of correspondence, we have considerable evidence for the movement of people from Alania into the Byzantine Empire and Georgia. This movement of people includes royalty and elites, as well as mercenaries. These individuals seem to have integrated themselves relatively seamlessly into Byzantine and Georgian society. I argue that this integration was an important factor in changing the presentation of the Alans in foreign sources. We even have evidence for their presence increasing the Alan royal family's access to the wealth and prestige of the imperial court.

Examples of royal Alans participating in Byzantine and Georgian society abound, especially in the latter half of the 11th century. Examples include a daughter of an unnamed Alan king (*basileus*), who was Constantine IX's (r.1042-1055) officially recognised mistress, and is known to us by her title of *sebastē*, by which Michael Psellos (wrote c.1063-1070s⁵³) calls her.⁵⁴ As we have seen, Irene of Alania, daughter of the *exousiokratōr* of Alania, married Isaac Komnēnos in around 1072, and an anonymous cousin of Irene's married Theodore Gabras, the autonomous *stratēgos* of Trebizond, in around 1091.⁵⁵ Slightly earlier, we find

⁵³ Michael Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers: The 'Chronographia'*, trans. by E. R. A. Sewter, revised edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), p.15.

⁵⁴ Psellos., p.237. It is unclear which Alan king the *sebastē* was the daughter of; the most plausible candidate is the father of Dorgholel and Borena (Gabriel?). See fn.149 in Chapter Three.

⁵⁵ See Nikēphoros Bryennios, 2, 1, in Alemany, pp.230-1; Comnena, pp.265-6. For the chronology of these events, see Chapter Three, pp.185-7.

Alan queens in Georgia, including Alde, wife of Giorgi I (r.1014-1027), and Borena, wife of Bagrat' IV (r.1027-1072).⁵⁶

Besides these members of the Alan royal elite, we also find other elite Alans in Byzantine service in the 11th century. Alans in the orbit of Maria 'of Alania', daughter of Borena and Bagrat' IV and empress of Michael VII Doukas (r.1071-1078) and Nikēphoros III Botaniatēs (r.1078-81), included a certain John, an Alan court official, who may be the same person as the unnamed *magistros*, an "Alan by birth", who passed a message from her to the Komnēnoi to warn of a plot against them.⁵⁷ Slightly earlier, there is the *magistros* 'Konstantinos tōn Alanōn', one of the commanders of the disastrous Byzantine attack on Dvin in 1045.⁵⁸ Other evidence of Alans moving in Byzantine elite circles, albeit with less clear connections, is provided by a number of seals of individuals with the surname 'Alanos': a *prōtopatharios* 'Sergios Alanos' (c.1025-50); the *patrikos kai stratēgos* and (later) *anthypatos kai katepanō* 'Gregorios Alanos', known in Bulgaria in the mid-11th century; an unnamed '*prōtoproedros kai doux*' (last third of 11th century); and from the latter half of the 11th century, another unnamed Alan *Proedros*, a 'Konstantinos Alanos' (who may be the same as the *magistros* mentioned in Skylitzes and Kedrenos), a 'Georgios tō... A...lan', and another unnamed Alan.⁵⁹ A final indirect attestation of Alan movements into Byzantium

⁵⁶ Met'reveli and Jones, p.154.

⁵⁷ Comnena, pp.69-70, 80-1.

⁵⁸ Georgios Kedrenos, 'Synopsis Historiōn', in *Patrologia Graeca CXXII*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Brothers, 1889), pp.291-4; John Scylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057*, trans. by John Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.411-12. V.A. Kuznetsov suggests that this Constantine was the ruler of Alania itself and a Byzantine vassal; however, there is no evidence in the text for him being connected to Alania, as opposed to him being a Byzantine commander of Alan extraction. See V.A. Kuznetsov, *Ocherki istorii Alanov* (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 1992), p.236.

⁵⁹ Seibt, pp.55-6.

may be gleaned from John Tzetzes' commentary on the *Theogony* (mid-late 12th century).⁶⁰ It seems that he consulted an Alan informant to translate a phrase in his language: an opportunity which, if we believe Alexander Lubotsky's interpretation, the Alan took to make fun of the grammarian, since the Alan translated an innocuous wedding greeting as an obscene chat-up line!⁶¹

In summation, the movement of large numbers of Alans into the Byzantine empire and Georgia in the 11th century, and the high ranks many achieved, demonstrates the ease with which they could integrate into foreign systems of power in this period. Moreover, our evidence from the lives of a number of high-ranking Alans implies this was an important factor in affecting Byzantine and Georgian attitudes to the North Caucasus.

Not So Harmless: Alan Elite Women and Byzantine Stereotypes

Some evidence of Alan reactions to the Byzantines may be gleaned from the careers of Alan princesses who married foreign potentates. It seems that certain elite Alan women were not only aware of Byzantine stereotypes of foreigners and women, but attempted to manipulate them to their own advantage.⁶² The primary methods of doing so were to emphasise one's Christian

⁶⁰ For the date and background of this passage, see R. Bielmeier, 'Die Alanische bei Tzetzes', in *Medioiranica. Proceedings of the International Colloquium Organised by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 21st to the 23rd of May 1990*, ed. by Wojciech Skalmowski and Alois van Tongerloo (Louvain: Peeters, 1993), p.1.

⁶¹ Specifically, he appears to have translated a greeting of happiness on a bride's wedding day as "aren't you ashamed to have your cunt fucked by a priest?" See Alexander Lubotsky, *Alanic Marginal Notes in a Greek Liturgical Manuscript* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015), pp.51-62.

⁶² In general on Byzantine perceptions of elite women's roles in society, see Barbara Hill, 'Imperial Women and the Ideology of Womanhood in the 11th and 12th Centuries', in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.76-85.

piety, in combination with the utilisation of (male) Byzantine perceptions of women. Through doing so, it appears that they not only were able to enhance their own position, but directly and indirectly enhanced the position of Alania at large.

The major method of ‘image management’ by royal women appears to have been a conspicuous performative vulnerability, combined with public Christian devotion.⁶³ This method was utilised by Borena, wife of Bagrat IV of Georgia and sister of King Dorgholel of Alania. A Svanetian icon painting attributed to the queen reads:

“O Virgin who took away Eve’s guilt, saying to Gabriel, ‘I am the maid of the Lord’, rescue me, thy sentinel, the much-troubled Borena who wanders on earth, let the force that was drunk with the first force collapse.”⁶⁴

The “trouble” to which Borena refers to in this passage is unclear; however, it clearly aims to elicit the sympathy of the reader through the comparison of the queen with Eve’s torments after the Fall. Interestingly, this combination of public piety and performative vulnerability was also heavily utilised by Borena’s daughter, the empress Maria ‘of Alania’.⁶⁵ For example, after Alexios Komnēnos’ coup of 1081, Maria claimed that she was a friendless foreigner in need of

⁶³ On the wider employment of this strategy by Byzantine elite women, see Leonora Alice Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.19-20.

⁶⁴ Cited in Rayfield, p.28.

⁶⁵ On Maria’s conspicuous patronage of monasteries, see Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527-1204* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.185-6.

protection in order to explain her continued presence in the imperial palace, which had given rise to rumours that she and Alexios were lovers.⁶⁶

This same strategy of performative vulnerability was also utilised by Maria's niece, Irene of Alania, during the plot of the Komnēnoi brothers in 1081.⁶⁷ In order to secure the safety of her Komnēnid mother-in-law, Anna Dalassēnē, Irene sought sanctuary with her in the cathedral of Hagia Sofia. Anna Komnēnē tells us that Irene publicly removed her veil, vowing not to leave the church without a guarantee from the soon-to-be-deposed Emperor Nikēphoros III Boteniatēs (r.1078-81). This public display of piety and conspicuous vulnerability had the desired result, inducing Nikēphoros to guarantee her and Anna Dalassēnē's safety.

It would therefore seem that three generations of Alan-descended royalty were not only aware of Byzantine and Georgian perceptions of foreign women, but were sufficiently politically astute to take advantage of them. The sources which describe their behaviour do not appear to constitute a systematised pattern of representation, considering that Alan women are nowhere explicitly identified as tricky or manipulative, and in one case (Anna Komnēnē's account of Irene taking sanctuary in Hagia Sofia) the Alan woman in question is not directly named. This lack of a deliberate pattern of discourse around Alan women, added to the different sources which describe their behaviour, implies that these accounts are broadly accurate.

⁶⁶ See Comnena, p.105.

⁶⁷ See Comnena, pp.83-6. Irene is not explicitly identified by name in Anna Komnēnē's text, but is referred to as "Isaac's [Komnēnos'] wife".

In the actions of this family, we can therefore see an example of the process Leonora Neville has identified elsewhere in the works of Anna Komnēnē and Nikēphoros Bryennios, of individuals fashioning their identity through similarity to cultural stereotypes, rather than through conspicuous individuality.⁶⁸ It seems that in different situations, Alan royal women could emphasise different aspects of the Byzantine image of themselves, either presenting themselves as weak but pious women, or as foreigners from a semi-barbarian nation with no protection. In this way, it seems that these royal women attempted to manipulate the way they were perceived to their own advantage. It is reasonable to argue that through this method, Alan royal women were able to ingratiate themselves into Byzantine power structures. We might compare this method to our more indirect evidence of male Alans' experience in Byzantium and Georgia. The evidence of seals and the adoption of imperial ranks by Alan courtiers implies a similar process of interaction with and incorporation into foreign systems of power.

Solving the Alans' Image Problem: Effects of Imperial Access

What, however, was the effect of this ingratiation? It seems that this process benefitted the rulers of Alania, apart from the royal women themselves. This benefit can be divided into two: direct political benefits, and indirect

⁶⁸ Leonora Alice Neville, 'Why Did the Byzantines Write History?', in *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, August 23rd-28th 2016* (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences, 2016), pp.271-5.

epistemic benefits, through changing the Byzantine and Georgian discourses surrounding the Alans.

One incident suggests that this access of royal women to the Byzantine court could be directly advantageous to the Alan kings. This is the case of the aforementioned *sebastē*, Constantine IX's mistress, as described by Michael Psellos. Although Psellos seems uninterested in the (unnamed) *sebastē* herself, largely mentioning her in the context of his own conflict with another courtier, Romanos Boilas, he mentions the honours bestowed on the *sebastē* by Constantine IX.⁶⁹ Psellos alleges that she was presented to Alan envoys in a specifically imperial fashion, dressed in imperial regalia. He tells us that not only did the Alans thus gain symbolic access to the imperial splendour, but also to its physical manifestations: as a result of her mediation, “for the first time in their history the land of the Alans was surfeited with good things that came to it from our Rome [Constantinople]... such as those that in former times the Empire of the Romans was envied for.”⁷⁰ We must, of course, be aware that in these passages Psellos exaggerates for rhetorical effect, in order to emphasise Constantine IX's poor political judgement. As we have seen, Alania had enjoyed a privileged position in Byzantine diplomacy well prior to this event, a fact which a senior courtier such as Psellos would surely have known. However, to make his point effectively he must write within the bounds of perceived plausibility, and the

⁶⁹ Psellus, pp.234-7. On the identity of Romanos Boilas (referred to as a “clown” in Psellos' account), see Speros Vryonis Jr., ‘The Will of a Provincial Magnate, Eustathius Boilas (1059)’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 11 (1957), 263–77; Frederick Lauritzen, *The Depiction of Character in the Chronographia of Michael Psellos* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp.128-9, 150-1. The apparent alliance of the *sebastē* with Boilas may be deduced from Psellos' accusation that the two were in love with each other, for which he offers no evidence, apart from insinuation. See Psellus, pp.231, 237.

⁷⁰ *Prôtos hē tōn Alanōn gē tōn apo tēs hēmeteras Rhōmēes empeplēsto agathōn... kai hois palai to tōn Rhōmaiōn ezēlouto basileion*. Psellus, p.236; Greek text in Alemany, p.228.

outlines of his account were certainly believed by John Zonaras.⁷¹ According to the worldview embodied in Psellos' account, the direct result of Alan royal women having intimate access to the emperor is the enrichment of Alania itself.

Whilst not all examples of Alan access to Byzantine imperial power are as explicit as this, we can see that royal women's access to the Byzantine court also led to a major change in Byzantine attitudes to the Alans. Through marriage into Byzantine and Georgian elites, the Alans indirectly affected their own presentations in literary works commissioned by these elites. It is plausible that this indirect epistemic influence was a further factor in maintaining Alan royal access to Byzantine prestige.

As we have seen, Byzantine views of the Alans in the ninth century emphasised their warlike and mercenary nature. These *topoi* sometimes persist in Byzantine sources of the 11th and early 12th centuries, which in some cases extends to their outright re-use. The best example of this is Nikēphoros Bryennios' use of the *topos* of the 'Alan in the narrow place', also known from Olympiodōros and Procopius, in which a lone Alan warrior bravely holds off the enemy forces. Bryennios uses this *topos* in his story of Arabatēs and Chaskarēs, two Alan mercenaries who alone hold a defile against a pursuing body of Turks in 1073/4, allowing the Komnēnoi brothers, Isaac and Alexios, to escape.⁷² The derivative nature of this passage is suggested by the fact that, despite supposedly taking place in a mountain pass, the two Alan mercenaries climb on top of a house to shoot arrows at the pursuing Turks. This recalls Olympiodōros' account of the

⁷¹ For the use of Psellos' account in John Zonaras, see Alemany, p.225.

⁷² Nikēphoros Bryennios, 2, 12-13, in Alemany, pp.231-2. For the date of the events of this passage, see above, p.207.

death of the general Gerontius, as recorded in more detail by Sōzomen (d. c.450), where an Alan slave climbs on to the roof of a house to shoot arrows at pursuing attackers.⁷³

However, whilst these *topoi* remained in use in post-10th century Byzantine works, the context in which they are used changed significantly. Whereas in Procopius the valiant ‘Alan in a narrow place’ serves to emphasise the valour of the Roman soldier who kills him, in Nikēphoros Bryennios’ account, the two Alans are given an imagined dialogue where they proclaim the valour of the Alan people:

“It was shameful, [Chaskarēs] said, that well-born and brave men should perish when there were Alans present, and such a dishonour would affect the whole nation of the Alans.”⁷⁴

By “well-born and brave men”, Chaskarēs is referring to the Komnēnoi brothers. Here, the positive ‘spin’ on pre-existing *topoi* serves to emphasise the charisma and authority of the Komnēnoi, who are able to inspire loyalty in a people traditionally considered so unruly.⁷⁵ Furthermore, this passage may serve to explain the unusual valour of these particular mercenaries through means of an ethnographic cliché, since it appears in a work which is generally sceptical of their reliability.⁷⁶

⁷³ See Sōzomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 9, 13, 4-5, in Alemany, p.103; see also p.97 for Sōzomen’s use of Olympiodōros.

⁷⁴ *Aischron gar epēsen ei Alanōn entautha parontōn parakinduneuousin andres eugeneis te kai aristoi, oneidos gar an houtō hapan hexei to genos tōn Alanōn.* Nikēphoros Bryennios, in Alemany, p.231.

⁷⁵ On Bryennios’ strong bias in favour of the Komnēni, see Bryennios, pp.25-6.

⁷⁶ For Bryennios’ attitude to mercenaries, see Leonora Alice Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.64-5, 70-1.

This passage must also, however, be seen in the context of the intermarriage of the Komnēnoi with the Alan royal family. Given the fact that our best sources on the Alans in the late 11th century (Nikēphoros Bryennios, Anna Komnēnē, and Nikēphoros Basilakēs) were all strongly supportive of the Komnēnoi, it is not surprising that this integration led to a softening of our sources' attitudes towards the Alans.

The magnitude of this shift is best demonstrated by Nikēphoros Basilakes' panegyric (c.1140⁷⁷) of Adrian Komnēnos, son of Isaac Komnēnos and Irene of Alania. Part of this panegyric extols Irene's heritage.⁷⁸ This work places a positive 'spin' on older *topoi*, notably of the 'Scythian' origin of the Alans, and their valour in war. However, certain aspects which the panegyric emphasises are very new, most notably the Alans' Christian devotion:

“For, as some peoples excel in the number of their forces, others do so in courage and skill at combat, and this one has conquered them all and only serves Christ. For they were captivated by his all-holy words and now are renowned among us for their observance of the ritual and for their Christianity, and are pleased to be called servants of Christ and friends and allies of the Christians.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Nikēphoros Basilakēs, *Nicephori Basilacae Orationes et Epistolae*, ed. by Antonio Garzya (Amsterdam: de Gruyter, 1984), p.26.

⁷⁸ Nikēphoros Basilakēs, *In Ioann. Episc. Bulg.* 8, in Alemany, p.229.

⁷⁹ *Ha men gar tōn ethnōn hyperballei tēn poluplētheian, ha de tēn alkēn kai to pros machas empeiroplemon, pantōn d' epi pasi kekratēke kai Christō monō douleuei. Tois gar ekeinou panagesi logois ezōgrēntai, kai nun apo tēs autēs hemin hagisteias, apo tēs autēs Christōnymias eponomazetai, kai chairei Christou doulon kaloumenon kai tois apo Christou kaloumenois hypospondon te philion.* Nikēphoros Basilakēs, *In Ioann. Episc. Bulg.* 8, in Alemany, pp.229-30.

This passage contributes towards the panegyric's presentation of Adrian Komnēnos as a Christian exemplar.⁸⁰ This text emphasises Adrian Komnēnos' piety from youth and concludes with him undertaking a pilgrimage to Palestine; as such, an emphasis on the piety of his non-Byzantine ancestor might be expected.

This passage nonetheless represents a major shift away from the older presentation of the Alans as primarily motivated by greed, and may even serve as a rejoinder to it. The fact that the Alans are claimed to be of glorious lineage and are generally of interest is supported by the fact that there are a number of small details- the fact the Alans are noted cattle breeders, and that they are divided into numerous tribes- that have no precedent in previous Byzantine descriptions of them. In fact, this brief passage is the *only* known Byzantine description of Alania's society, as opposed to incidental details in passages concerning the movements of elite Byzantines (for example, the 13th century account of Bishop Theodore of Alania).⁸¹ The intermarriages between the Alan and Byzantine elites had, effectively, made the Alan royal family's background and claims to greatness pertinent to the Byzantine worldview. In a manner comparable to other panegyrics of foreign brides of the imperial family- in Nikētas Choniātēs' oration on Maria of Hungary, for example- its framing of Adrian Komnēnos' lineage as glorious and praiseworthy serves to rehabilitate the Alans into the civilised community of Christian nations.⁸² As we can see, the marriage of Irene of Alania

⁸⁰ See Nikēphoros Basilakēs, p.26.

⁸¹ Bishop of Alania Theodore, 'Alanikos', in *Patrologia Graeca CXL*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Brothers, 1857).

⁸² For comparable panegyrics, see Angeliki E. Laiou, 'The Foreigner and the Stranger in 12th Century Byzantium: Means of Propiation and Acculturation', in *Byzantium and the Other: Relations and Exchanges* (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2012), p.92; Nicetas Choniates, *Orationes et Epistulae*, ed. by Jan Louis van Dieten (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), pp.36-40.

into the Komnēnoi family had major consequences for the international image of the Alans.

Bagrat's Feast: Georgian Depictions of the Alans in the 11th Century

Meanwhile, it appears that Georgian perceptions of the Alans were undergoing a similar softening, for similar reasons. As we have seen, earlier accounts in which the Alans appear show them as unambiguously antagonistic to the heroic Georgian kings. This approach contrasts strongly with the one taken by Leonti Mroveli in his *Mat'iane Kartlisa* of c.1070. By this point, Alan royal women had extensively married into the Georgian royal family: most notably, Borena, sister of the Alan King Dorgholel, had married the Georgian King Bagrat' IV. Here, while the *topos* of the Alans' warlike nature continues with the description of their ravaging of Ganja, this *topos* is presented positively due to Dorgholel being allied to the Georgian royal family.⁸³ However, this presentation is juxtaposed with and tempered by the following passage, which we saw at the start of this dissertation:

“After this, Dorgholel, the great King of the Alans, wished to visit his brother-in-law Bagrat' the *Sebastos*, and requested an audience with him. Bagrat' assented and the King of the Alans set out joyfully with all the chiefs of Alania and, taking the road of Abkhazia, arrived in Kutatisi. He saw his sister the Queen, mother of Giorgi the Kuropalate... The King [of the Alans] was brought to Kartli. The King was stationed in T'iniskhidi

⁸³ Met'reveli and Jones, p.161.

forest, at Nadarbazevi [northeast of Gori]. He met the Alans with great pomp and honours. They got together at K'ezuni. There was great joy and a terrific sound of trumpets and tambourines. They spent twelve days together, sporting in great peace and joy. But they cut short the visit owing to the approach of winter. Bagrat' gave gifts and presents to the King and all the nobles of Alania. He sent them away, and they departed joyfully."⁸⁴

This passage presents a considerable contrast to the *Kartlis Tskhovreba's* previous depictions of the Alans. Although their inferior status is implied by their requesting a meeting with Bagrat', the hosting of this diplomatic visit is one which reflects positively on the majesty of Bagrat' IV, and the Alans are presented as prestigious guests. This importance is explicitly linked to the Alan royals' access to the Georgian royal family, via Queen Borena's relationship to King Dorgholel. Overall, this image of family connections is quite a contrast from that of the rampaging Alan warriors of previous Georgian depictions.

It therefore appears that by the late 11th century, the presentation of Alania by Byzantine and Georgian authors had changed, from it being a relatively obscure (if famously warlike) region on the fringes of the *oikoumene*, into a region both valuable and prestigious to court. In short, Alania had, in the eyes of Byzantine and Georgian authors, entered the civilised world. Whilst we must be wary of the snares of literary *topoi*, and not attempt to interpret these sources in a straightforwardly positivistic manner, this shift in discourse is highly significant. This demonstrates the success of certain elite Alans' attempts to

⁸⁴ Met'reveli and Jones, pp.161-2.

present themselves as a civilised, Christian nation, and to utilise preconceptions about themselves to improve their own position.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a major shift in the presentation of the Alans in Byzantine and Georgian sources of the ninth to eleventh centuries. In the ninth century, both the Byzantine *Bibliotheca* of Patriarch Photios and the Georgian *Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali* depicted the Alans as fundamentally warlike and untrustworthy. Although in the tenth century relations between the Alans and Byzantines became somewhat warmer, these *topoi* are still preserved in Constantine Porphyrogennētos' *De Administrando Imperio* and the related *Excerpta*, with the major caveat that the Alans are now seen as useful to the empire. By contrast, in the late eleventh and early twelfth century, the Alans are depicted positively in Nikēphoros Bryennios' history, Nikēphoros Basilakēs' panegyric of Adrian Komnēnos and the Georgian *Mat'iane Kartlisa*. This, I argue, was substantially the result of marriage alliances made between the Alan royal family, the Komnēnoi, and the Georgian Bagratids. These marriage alliances were particularly important because of the Alan kings' ability to direct the considerable military resources of the North Caucasus. The Alan rulers were not only able to prevent raids on Byzantine and Georgian possessions, but also to re-direct them against Byzantine and Georgian enemies. This became particularly important during the period following the arrival of the Seljuk Turks, when both Byzantium and Georgia were in particular need of military manpower.

We can also see the agency of elite Alans in our sources, particularly in the actions of Alan royal women- the *sebastē*, mistress of Constantine IX Monomachos; Borena, Queen of Bagrat' IV of Georgia; and Irene, wife of Isaac Komnēnos. All of these women seem to have manipulated Byzantine and Georgian conceptions of women and foreigners in order to improve their own positions, and even that of the Alan kingdom itself, whether directly through enriching it or by improving its image in the eyes of Byzantine and Georgian official narratives.

We also indirectly can see the power of the Kingdom of Alania through this shift in discourse. The very fact that marriage alliances with the Alan royal family were considered necessary and prestigious demonstrates the importance of good relations with the Alan *exousiokratōrs*, especially in times when military aid was necessary. This period therefore demonstrates the value of 'reading along the grain' of our sources. Whilst no Byzantine and Georgian source explicitly mentions the value of the Alans' military strength, behind the façade of imperial and royal power, we can tell just how valuable the Alans' power really was. The Alan kings were friends worth having.

Chapter Five. The Multiplicity of Alania: Systems of Power in the Central North Caucasus, c.930-1100

Introduction: Alania as Multipolity

The North Caucasus was unpromising ground for a would-be king. Its geographical, linguistic and cultural diversity provided a host of potentially fissiparous elements within any polity that formed there. However, as we saw in the preceding chapters, the Alan kings were able to achieve a regional hegemony, keep kingship within the same biological family, and direct the considerable military resources of much of the North Caucasus. How, we may ask, were the Alan kings able to acquire this military strength, which made their friendship so valuable to Byzantine emperors and Georgian kings? It is the purpose this chapter to explore how the symbolic power of access to Byzantium could be transmuted into power over the Alan kings' subjects: over their bodies, labour, and even, during military expeditions, their lives. As we saw in Chapter One (p.25ff), we cannot use standard paradigms of state formation to explain this process; nor can we attribute loyalty to the kings of Alania to a sense of ethnic solidarity (p.32ff). We must therefore seek an alternative explanation for the Alan kings' rise to regional hegemony.

This chapter will argue that Alania was not a state, but a multipolity: "a highly integrated social system consisting of politically subordinated heterogeneous polities."¹ In this kind of system, subordinated polities do not fully lose their

¹ N.N. Kradin and others, 'Alternativity of Social Evolution: Introductory Notes', in *Alternatives of Social Evolution*, ed. by N.N. Kradin (Vladivostok: Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2000), p.23.

sovereignty, yet are capable of a high level of co-ordination. Consequently, there are two crucial distinguishing aspects of a multipolity. Firstly, there is the existence of *subordinated complex social hierarchies*- notably ‘hierarchies of control’, where leaders or groups of leaders can direct a social group’s activities.² Secondly, these hierarchies must be capable of co-ordinating their activities- there must be a *mechanism of co-ordination*. This chapter will evaluate the evidence for the existence of complex social hierarchies in medieval Alania, and for methods of co-ordination between them. In this way, we can reach a better understanding of medieval North Caucasian systems of social dependency, and explore how Alan kings were able to direct the North Caucasus’ military potential.

This chapter will argue that Alania was a multipolity by comparing the geographical description of Alania in al-Mas‘ūdī’s *Murūj al-Dhahab* (332-6/ 943-7³) with other textual, archaeological and ethnographic sources. This source is particularly significant as it is one of very few descriptions of the society of Alania itself, and was compiled by an author who travelled extensively in the Caucasus. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter Two (p.102ff), this source was influenced by the ‘eschatological tradition’, which saw the North Caucasus as the abode of the destructive peoples of the end times. Although there is a subtle hint of this tradition in Mas‘ūdī’s account, the fact that it overtly describes a sophisticated Alan kingdom represents an interruption of this discursive tendency, implying

² On integrated social hierarchies as components of non-state complex polities, see Carole Crumley, ‘Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies’, in *Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies*, ed. by Robert Ehrenreich, Carole Crumley, and Janet Levy (Arlington: American Anthropological Association, 1995), pp.1-4.

³ Charles Pellat, ‘al-Mas‘ūdī’, *El2*.

that its description cannot be written off as a set of *topoi* or a reuse of older accounts. This, in turn, speaks well for this account's reliability.

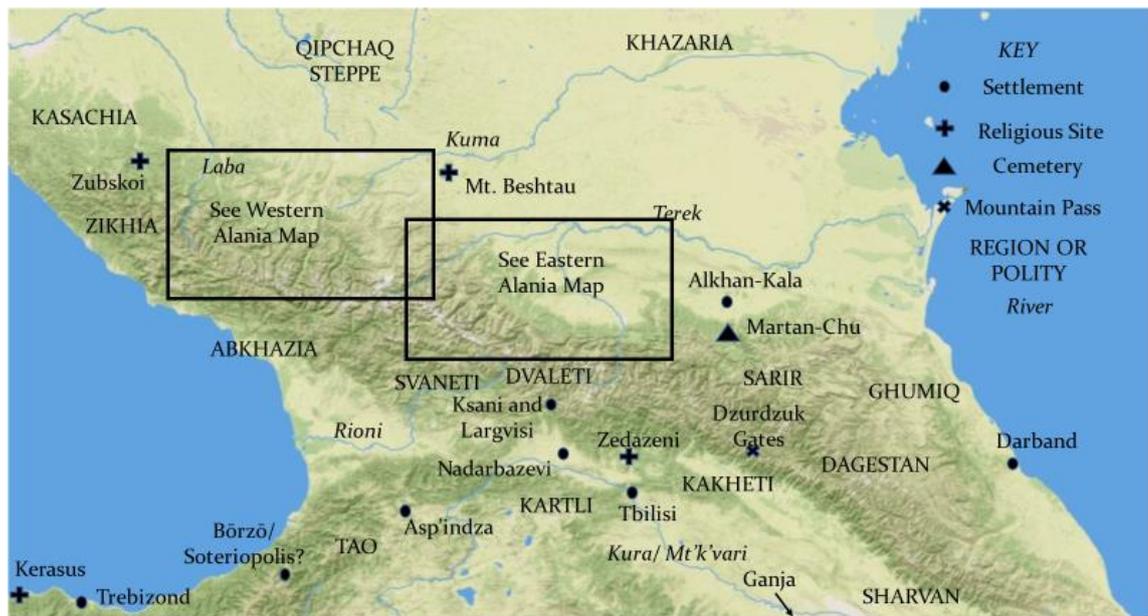
This chapter will argue that three overlapping types of subordinated social hierarchy can be distinguished in medieval Alania: the church, large settlements, and clans- i.e. tribal groups linked by an ideology of consanguinity.⁴ It will further argue that the mechanism of co-ordination between these social hierarchies was a customary system of dependence mediated through formalised oral negotiations.

This chapter will also suggest parallels between the political system in Alania and the type described in a later source, the *Dzegli Eristavta* (c.1405⁵). These parallels suggest that access to the outside world was a crucial determinant of status in these formalised negotiations between non-state hierarchies. Overall, it appears that the elevated status of the Alan kings allowed them to create a regional web of political alliances which paralleled their ideological hegemony.

⁴ On the definition of clan in a Eurasian context, see Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp.1-10.

⁵ *Pamiatnik eristavov*, ed. by S. S. Kakabadze (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1979), pp.15, 53-4.

Mas'ūdī and Multiplicity



Map 1: *The Wider Caucasus in the 10th-13th Centuries.* Image: the author.

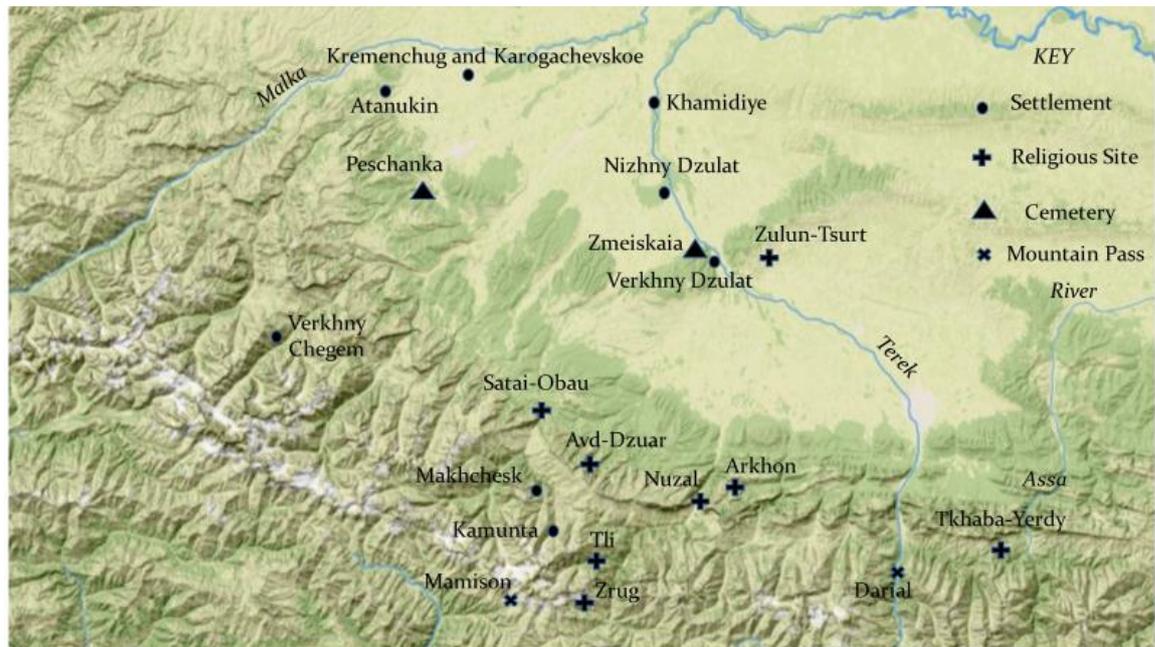
The Murūj al-Dhahab's Passage on Alania

Mas'ūdī's description of Alania (see **Appendix B** for full text) appears in the middle of chapter 17 of the *Murūj al-Dhahab*, following the descriptions of the Khazars, Rus' and Sarir. It can be divided into three parts.⁶

Firstly, Mas'ūdī gives basic information on Alania: its name, location, the title of its king, its capital, its diplomatic status and its religion. This formula closely parallels his other descriptions of peoples of the Caucasus and Western Steppe. For example, the description of the Sarir of Dagestan that immediately

⁶ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, ed. by Vladimir Minorsky (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1958), pp.156-7.

precedes it mentions exactly the same basic information, albeit in a different order.⁷



Map 4: Eastern Alania, with sites of the ninth to 14th centuries. Image: the author.

Secondly, Mas‘ūdī enters a long digression about the most famous location in Alania, the fortress of Darial.⁸ This fort, a possession of the Arab Emirate of Tbilisi, allows him to link the history of this region back into the dominant narrative of Arab-Iranian history. He mentions that this fort was a foundation of the legendary Iranian king Isfandiyar, which in turn links back to the Arabo-Persian literary tradition, since it allows al-Mas‘ūdī to mention a reference to Isfandiyar in Ibn al-Muqaffa’s **Kitāb al-Paykar*. It also allows him to reinforce the eschatological theme of his description of the North Caucasus, namely the

⁷ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.155.

⁸ For example, the description of this fortress is retained in Gardizī’s account of Alania (c. 440-3/1049-52), which otherwise deletes much of the description of Alania found in its source material (Jayhānī’s account or a common source shared with it). See ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ibn al-Zahhāq Gardizī, *Tārikh-i Gardizī*, ed. by ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥabibi (Tehran: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, 1984), p.595.

strength of its fortifications being necessary to keep out the infidel peoples to the north.⁹

In this context, we can examine the third part of this passage. This section returns to a description of Alania itself, emphasising the strength and power of the Alan king and the dense population of the country. This passage's emphasis on the power of the Alan king reinforces the message of the previous section: the importance of the Caucasian fortifications and their maintenance. However, this passage is also similar to the latter part of the description of the Sarir Kingdom, where the number of villages in the country are also mentioned, as is the military strength of the Sarir king.¹⁰ It may therefore be suggested that this section also forms part of Mas'ūdī's 'standard' set of descriptive information about a foreign country, but which has been split off from the rest of his description of Alania in order to reinforce his overall theme. We might therefore suggest that, like the emphasis on the Alan king's power in general, this represents a thematic utilisation of an externally observable situation.¹¹ The fact that this is a subtle emphasis, rather than an explicit statement, as in Mas'ūdī's description of Darband, supports this interpretation.¹²

It seems that while Mas'ūdī did attempt to use his basic set of information about Alania to make a political point, he was also attempting to describe a

⁹ For Mas'ūdī's description of Darband, which makes this point most explicitly, see 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, trans. by Charles Pellat (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1962), p.182.

¹⁰ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.155.

¹¹ Notably, the Alan king's power in this period is also attested by Byzantine and Khazar sources. *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, ed. by Norman Golb and Omeljan Pritsak (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), p.113; Constantine VII Porphyrogennētos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, ed. by Ann Moffatt and Maxeme Tall (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2012), p.679.

¹² See Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, p.182, and Chapter Two, p.102ff.

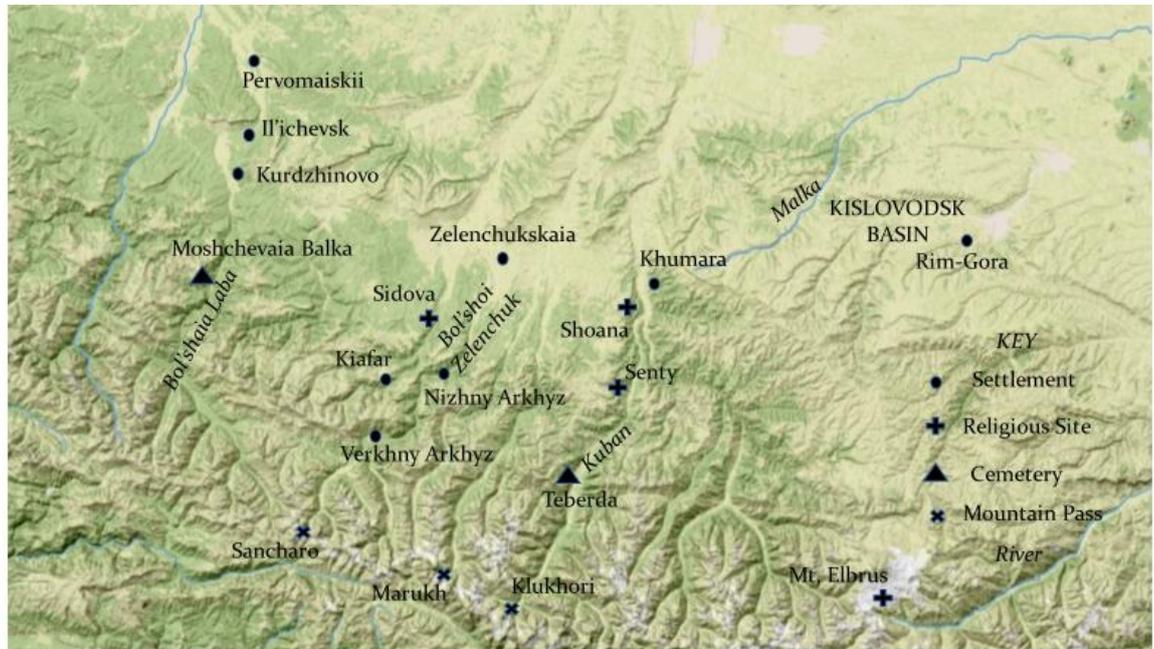
foreign political system to the best of his ability, albeit through an ‘Abbāsīd lens. This is suggested by a number of important correspondences between Mas‘ūdī’s account, contemporary archaeological evidence, and later ethnography, which allow us to link these disparate pieces of evidence into the Alan period. In particular, three types of semi-autonomous social hierarchy can be detected in archaeological and ethnographic sources, as well as Mas‘ūdī’s account: the church, large settlements, and clans. By examining these hierarchies, we can attempt to reconstruct the social structures which underpinned Alania’s political system.

The Church in Alania

As we saw in Chapter Three (p.138ff), Mas‘ūdī’s account of Alania dates to a transitional period in the Central North Caucasus’ Christianisation. However, the close links between the Alan church and Byzantium are clear from his description, since he specifically mentions the expulsion of “the bishops and the priests (*al-usāqafa wa’l-qusūs*) whom the Byzantine emperor had previously sent to them.”¹³ Whilst Mas‘ūdī’s terminology here is too unclear to draw independent conclusions regarding the organisation of the Alan church, the existence of a clerical hierarchy, led by the Archbishop Peter, is made clear in Nicholas Mystikos’ letters from the 910s and 920s.¹⁴

¹³ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.157.

¹⁴ According to Nick Evans’ revised chronology, the first letter referring to an archbishopric is *Ep. 133*, dating to either 914-18 or 919/20. See Nicholas Evans, ‘Mountains, Steppes and Empires. Approaches to the North Caucasus in the Early Middle Ages’ (unpublished PhD Thesis, Wadham College, Oxford, 2016), p.214; Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Letters*, ed. by Romilly James



Map 3: Western Alania, with sites of the ninth to 14th centuries. Image: the author.

Following the return of Byzantine clergy in the 950s and 60s, the existence of a clerical hierarchy closely linked to Byzantium is clearly indicated by a series of administrative documents kept by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. These include mentions of names of metropolitans of Alania who attended church councils, *Notitiae Episcopatum*- registers of real or theoretical bishoprics- and seal impressions once attached to administrative documents.¹⁵ The first mention of the archbishopric is in the letters of the Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos. Following this, we have a seal of Ignatios, “monk and metropolitan of Alania”, probably from the late 920s or early 930s.¹⁶ In 998, an unnamed metropolitan of Alania is

Heald Jenkins and Leendert Gerrit Westerink (Washington, D.C.: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1973), pp.433-5.

¹⁵ For comprehensive lists, see D.V. Beletskii and A.Iu. Vinogradov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz i Senty-drevneishie khramy Rossii. Problemy khristianskogo iskusstva Alanii i Kavkaza* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), p.65; Alfred Baudrillart, Albert de Meyer, and Roger Aubert, *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1912), pp.1336-7; Vitalien Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire Byzantin. Tome 5: l'église. Première partie: L'église de Constantinople* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1963), pp.613-4.

¹⁶ See Werner Seibt, ‘Metropolitan und Herrscher der Alanen auf byzantinischen Siegeln des 10.-12. Jahrhunderts’, in *Sfragistika i istoriia kul'tury*, ed. by E.V. Stepanova (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2004), pp.51-2.

mentioned in an order of Patriarch Sisinius II, as is a metropolitan Nikolaos in a second patriarchal order of 1024.¹⁷ Lists of attendees of church councils in May 1030 and April 1032 mention the metropolitan Clement of Alania.¹⁸ In around 1082, *Notitia XI* ranks the metropolitanate of Alania as 63rd in order of precedence.¹⁹ Finally, in the 12th to 14th centuries, a body of documentation mentions the translation of the see of Alania from its former location in the North Caucasus to Soteriopolis, probably identifiable with Bōrzō, a fortress east of Trebizond.²⁰ This last body of documentation will be examined in detail in the next chapter, due to its importance for understanding the collapse of the Alan kingdom.

The fact that these documents principally mention Alan metropolitans demonstrates the existence of a clerical hierarchy subordinated to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Moreover, it seems that we can classify this as a 'hierarchy of control', with a metropolitan capable of giving orders not only to his own clergy, but also to those outside his immediate diocese. This is indicated by the apparent existence of a line of communication between Alania and Constantinople. Two letters of 998 and 1024 from the Patriarch Sisinius II to the

¹⁷ Gerhard Ficker, 'Das Epiphanius-Kloster in Kerasus und der Mitropolit Alanien', *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbucher*, 3 (1922), p.92.

¹⁸ *Les registres des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople. Vol.1 Actes des patriarches. Fasc.2: registres de 715 à 1043*, ed. by Venance Grumel (Constantinople: Socii Assumptionistae Chakedonenses, 1936), pp.345-6.

¹⁹ Baudrillart, Meyer, and Aubert, pp.1336-7.

²⁰ On the identification of Nizhny Arkhyz as the see of Alania, see p.244ff, below. The location of Soteriopolis is not certain. Iulian Kulakovskii argued the location was either Sukhumi or Pitsunda, in Abkhazia, whereas S.N. Malakhov and Anthony Bryer and David Winfield have argued convincingly that this was the fortress formerly known as Bōrzō, to the east of Trebizond. See Iu.Iu. Kulakovskii, 'Khristianstvo u Alan', in *Izbrannye trudy po istorii Alanov i Sarmatii*, ed. by S.M. Perevalov (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2000), fn. pp.182-3; S.N. Malakhov, 'K voprosu o lokalizatsii eparkhial'nogo tsentra Alanii v XII-XVI vv.', in *Alany: Zapadnaia Evropa i Vizantiia*, ed. by A. G. Kuchiev, V. Kh. Tmenov, and V. A. Kuznetsov (Vladikavkaz: SONII, 1992), pp.152-7; Anthony Bryer and David Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1985), pp.347-8.

monastery of Epiphanius in Kerasus (modern Giresun, near Trebizond) order the monks to provide the metropolitan of Alania with provisions. These letters also mention other “clergy of the aforementioned metropolitanate of Alania” (*klērikoi tēs proeirēmenēs mētropoleōs Alanias*) travelling via Kerasus to Constantinople.²¹ The monks apparently complained to the Patriarch of the expense of feeding the messengers of the Alan metropolitan, which implies that this sea route was in relatively frequent use.²² Indeed, it even appears that the Alan metropolitan, Nikolaos, attempted to have the entire monastery transferred to his jurisdiction, due to its importance in this line of communication.²³ While Nikolaos was unsuccessful in his endeavour, the very fact that he could try to extend his authority in this way implies that the Alan clerical hierarchy had the capability to incorporate subordinate organisations into itself. Moreover, it implies that the church organisation had sufficient political influence to ensure its representatives’ safe passage and provisioning, both in the Pontic region and (implicitly) within the North Caucasus.

This picture of genuine clerical power is supplemented by our evidence for this ecclesiastical hierarchy influencing North Caucasian perceptions of time. As we saw in Chapter Three (pp.178-9), a bronze cross of 1067 provides evidence for the calculation of the calendar taking place at the religious centre of Nizhny Arkhyz.²⁴ This calendar would become so influential that it survived until the 19th

²¹ Ficker, pp.92-8.

²² Gerhard Ficker argues this expense may have been exaggerated by the monks out of fear for their independence being compromised. Nonetheless, the existence of a defined and regular supply route, with concomitant issues, implies a relatively high level of organisation in the correspondence between Alania and Constantinople. See Ficker, p.97.

²³ Ficker, pp.97-8.

²⁴ See E.Ch. Skrzhinskaia, ‘Grecheskaia nadpis’ iz srednevekovoï Alanii’, *Vizantiiskii vremennik*, 21 (1962), 118–26.

century. Put together, these pieces of evidence provide an echo of a surprising variety of administrative activity: of official correspondence, of the maintenance of a line of communication between Alania and Constantinople, and of the calculation of the calendar being performed within the church. We thus have evidence than rather than simply being a Byzantine perception of how political power operated within the North Caucasus, a unitary hierarchy was able to wield practical, administrative power. It appears that the Alan church organisation was able to convert its symbolic ‘power of the foreign’ into power over the movements and actions of its clergy, and even over ordinary North Caucasians’ perceptions of time.

Although the existence of an ecclesiastical hierarchy of control seems clear, the process by which it could convert its ‘power of the foreign’ into political control is less clear. The same may be said for the process by which it could co-ordinate its activities with other North Caucasian social hierarchies. However, there is evidence that this hierarchy could overlap with the second type of semi-autonomous social hierarchy we have identified in Alania: urban hierarchies. Specifically, it is highly plausible that the largest settlement in medieval Alania, Nizhny Arkhyz (Karachai-Cherkassia), was under ecclesiastical control.²⁵ In order to broaden our understanding of the church’s place in Alan society, and the mechanisms by which it controlled and co-ordinated its activities, we must return to Mas’ūdi’s account.

²⁵ On the population of medieval Nizhny Arkhyz, see V.A. Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v ‘X-XII’ vekakh: k istorii srednevekovykh gorodov Severnogo Kavkaza* (Stavropol’: Kavkazskaia biblioteka, 1993), p.225.

Urbanism and Central Authority in Alania

The second type of Alan social hierarchy identified by Mas'ūdī's account are urban hierarchies- that is to say, the authorities responsible for the planning of the many large settlements known within Alania.²⁶ This account mentions the city of *Magas- spelt *Ma'as* (معس) by Mas'ūdī, but which can be corrected to *Magas on the basis of independent mentions in Juvaynī, Rashīd al-Dīn and the *Yuan-Shi* (Persian: مگس, مکس; Chinese: Mks). He calls this city the possession of the Alan king.²⁷ Mas'ūdī also explicitly calls this city the Alan capital (*dār mamlakat al-Lān*), and thereby seems to imply that its organisation was the prerogative of the Alan king, although he also mentions that the Alan king was itinerant. He also mentions that Alania has a large population, famously stating that the villages in Alania are so close together that the cocks' crow in one village can be heard in the neighbouring ones. Overall, this passage not only implies a dense pattern of settlement, but also an urban hierarchy of control, headed by

²⁶ I do not intend to extensively debate the definition of urbanism in this dissertation. However, it is notable that there appears to have been a qualitative distinction between larger, fortified sites (known in the archaeological literature as *gorodishcha*) and smaller, unfortified sites (*selenii*). Similarly, the presence of fortifications, street planning, a dense population, economic diversification, specific house-types, and social differentiation at sites such as Nizhny Arkhyz and Gornoe Ekho (Stavropol' Krai) conforms to the definition of urbanism used by Chris Wickham, which uses the presence of three or more of these indicators as the threshold of urban status. See Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.592; on Gornoe Ekho, see Evans, p.110; on Nizhny Arkhyz, see below, p.244ff.

²⁷ See `Aṭā Malik ibn Muḥammad Juvaynī, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. by J.A. Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), pp.267-9; for Rashīd al-Dīn, see *Classical Writings of the Medieval Islamic World: Persian Histories of the Mongol Dynasties*, ed. by W. M. Thackston (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), pp.231-2, and Faḍh Allāh Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* (Tehran: Nashr-i Alburz, 1994), pp.667-9. The *Yuan-Shi* has never been fully translated from Chinese; I rely here on a personal communication from Andrei Vinogradov of a partial unpublished Russian translation of Chapter 122, a biography of the Tangut commander Shiri-Gambu. For translations of other sections of the *Yuan-Shi*, see *Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation*, ed. by Agustí Alemany (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp.403-429; A.I. Ivanov, 'Istoriia Mongolov (Yuan'-Shi) ob Asakh-Alanakh', *Khristianskii Vostok*, 2.3 (1914), 281-300; for a summary of the sections relating to Alania, see Thomas T. Allsen, 'Mongols and North Caucasia', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 7 (1987), 5-40. Where they reproduce the same passage, these works' translations accord exactly with the Russian translation mentioned above.

the king. However, there are issues with this passage which mean that it must be treated with some caution.

The site of **Magas* has never been identified; as such, trying to locate it has become a minor obsession for many scholars of the North Caucasus. Since it is assumed that this must have been the centre of the Alan 'state', the location of **Magas* has even become a political bone of contention.²⁸ Suggested sites include Alkhan-Kala, near Grozny (Chechnya); Verkhny Dzulat (North Ossetia); Makhchesk (North Ossetia); and Kiafar (Karachai-Cherkassia).²⁹ The most commonly identified site of **Magas* is the city of Nizhny Arkhyz in Karachai-Cherkassia.³⁰ None of these claims have been conclusively demonstrated, although it does seem that we can rule out Nizhny Arkhyz being **Magas*, as no identifiably royal buildings have ever been discovered there.³¹ Moreover, a little-known Chinese description of the Mongol assault on **Magas* in February 1240 seems to describe it as lying on some kind of hill, mountain or promontory.³² This description also excludes Nizhny Arkhyz, which lies on the valley floor, at which

²⁸ For example, in 1994 the Republic of Ingushetia named its newly-founded capital Magas in order to lay claim to the Alan legacy, ironically destroying a number of early medieval archaeological sites during its construction. See V.A. Shnirel'man, 'The Politics of a Name: Between Consolidation and Separation in the North Caucasus', *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 23 (2006), 37–73.

²⁹ On Alkhan-Kala, see Shnirel'man, pp.49–50. On Verkhny Dzulat, see R.F. Fidarov, 'Rol' Verkhnego Dzulata v gosudarstvennoi ideologii Alanii', in *Istoriko-filologicheskii arkhiv* 7, ed. by R.S. Bzarov (Vladikavkaz: Institut Istorii i Arkheologii RSO-A pri SOGU, 2011), pp.12–14. On Makhchesk, see Vladimir Minorsky, 'Caucasica III: The Alān Capital *Magas and the Mongol Campaigns', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 14.2 (1952), 221–238. On Kiafar, see V.A. Kuznetsov, 'Durgulel' Velikii i Nizhnii Arkhyz', in *Metodika issledovaniia i interpretatsiia arkheologicheskikh materialov Severnogo Kavkaza*, ed. by V.A. Kuznetsov, A.G. Kuchiev, and V.Kh. Tmenov (Ordzhonikidze: Ir, 1988), pp.82–89.

³⁰ See Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh*, p.252; the display boards at the modern archaeological park at Nizhny Arkhyz make the same claim.

³¹ See Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.50.

³² *Yuan-Shi*, Chapter 122, biography of Shiri-Gambu (Andrei Vinogradov (personal communication)). There is a brief notice of this biography in E.V. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Fragments towards the Knowledge of the Geography and History of Central and Western Asia from the 13th to the 17th Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), Vol. 1, pp.316–17; however, the passage is not translated in full.

no evidence for a violent assault has been found, and which in any case seems to have been abandoned before the 13th century.³³

In any case, it is possible to suggest that this emphasis on **Magas*'s importance is misplaced, and that by doing so we are reading an outsider's account of Alania too literally. If we look at other Islamic geographical accounts of Alania, we can see that the definition of a city in this tradition could be very broad. For example, the *Ḥudūd al-'Alam* (372/ 982³⁴) mentions three towns (*shahrha*) within Alania: **Khaylān* (خیلان), Darial and Kashak.³⁵ However, the fortress at Darial was not actually a possession of the kingdom of Alania, but of the Emirate of Tbilisi, as confirmed by Eberhard Sauer's recent excavations there.³⁶ Similarly, the Kashak are widely known to have been a completely different people of the North Caucasus- for example, they are listed as such in Mas'ūdī's account.³⁷ Finally, **Khaylan* may be identifiable with the *Khaylandowrk'* (Gate of *Khaylan*) mentioned by the fifth-century Armenian historian Elishē- however, according to this source, *Khaylandowrk'* is an entire region of the North Caucasus.³⁸ It therefore seems that none of the three cities mentioned in the *Ḥudūd al-'Alam* can be firmly identified as urban sites.³⁹

³³ On the date of Nizhny Arkhyz' abandonment, see Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh*, p.246.

³⁴ *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World: A Persian Geography of 372A.H.-982 A.D.*, ed. by Vladimir Minorsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), p.vii.

³⁵ Minorsky, *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World*, p.160.

³⁶ Eberhard W. Sauer and others, 'Northern Outpost of the Caliphate: Maintaining Military Forces in a Hostile Environment (the Dariali Gorge in the Central Caucasus in Georgia)', *Antiquity*, 89.346 (2015), 885-904.

³⁷ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, pp.157-8.

³⁸ See Elishē, *On Vardan and the Armenian War*, in Alemany, pp.284-5.

³⁹ This possibly reflects the *Ḥudūd al-'Alam*'s origin as a map commentary, since other maps of this period, such as al-Kāshghāri's map of Central Asia (464-76/ 1075-94), depict all significant places as cities, whether they are settlements or nomadic tribes. On the *Ḥudūd*'s origin, see Minorsky, *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World*, p.xv. On al-Kāshghāri, see Andreas Kaplony,

While Mas'ūdī's account of Alania seems considerably more reliable than that of the *Ḥudūd al-'Alam*, given its many correspondences with archaeological and later ethnographic evidence, this comparison should make us wary of taking Mas'ūdī's description of *Magas too literally. It is plausible that he is describing an Alan equivalent of the type of settlement known in the Kabardian period (16th-19th century) as a *pshuko*- the principal residence of a *pshi* (prince). For example, Evlia Chelebi, an Ottoman traveller who visited the North Caucasus in 1666, described the *pshuko* of the Misost Kabardians near the Kuma river, which was inhabited by craft specialists and had its own cathedral mosque. This was visited sometimes by a 'khan', who travelled around Kabarda with a peripatetic court, in a manner directly comparable to Mas'ūdī's description of the Alan king.⁴⁰

However, it is dubious whether this kind of settlement could be described as a political capital, given its lack of permanent governmental functions. If indeed *Magas was a settlement of this type, it is possible to suggest that Mas'ūdī's description, although attempting to describe a genuine settlement in the North Caucasus, was also influenced by the structure of Islamic caliphates. In particular, Mas'ūdī may have had in mind the rulership style of the Umayyad caliphs, in which a political capital at Damascus alternated with periods of peripatetic rulership.⁴¹ As a consequence, we cannot take Mas'ūdī at face value and automatically assume a hierarchy of control on the basis of his account alone.

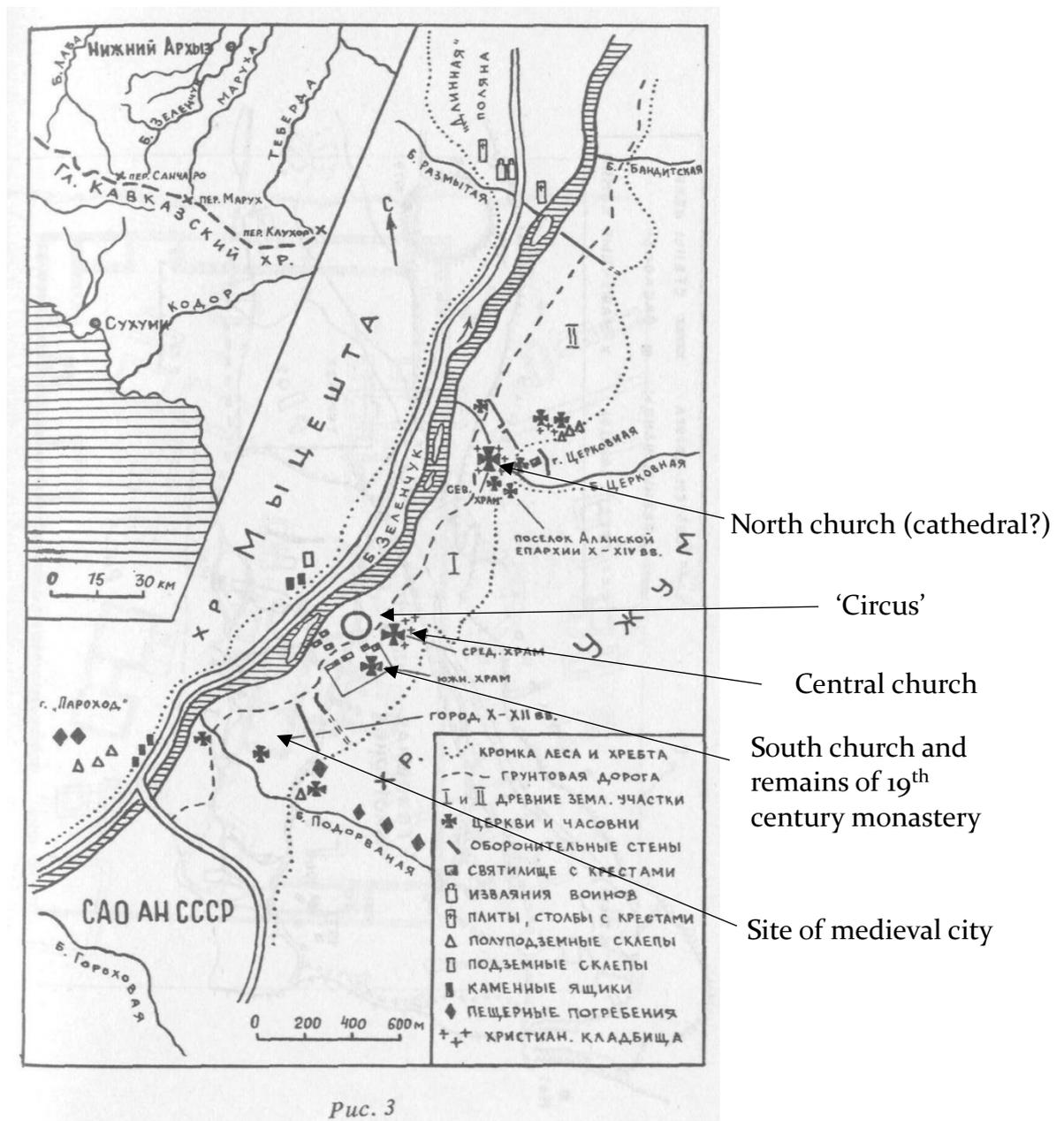
'Comparing Al-Kashghari's Map to His Text: On the Visual Language, Purpose and Transmission of Arabic-Islamic Maps', in *The Journey of Maps and Images on the Silk Road*, ed. by Andreas Kaplony and Philippe Foret (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp.143-7.

⁴⁰ Evlia Chelebi, *Kniga puteshestviia. Vyp. 2: zemli Severnogo Kavkaza, Povolzh'ia i Podon'ia*, ed. by A.D. Zheltiakov (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), pp.85-6.

⁴¹ On peripatetic Umayyad rulership, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), pp.110-11.

However, archaeological evidence does provide plentiful and convincing evidence for urban hierarchies' existence. Through this evidence, we can explore the Alan metropolitanate's relationship to these hierarchies.

Urban Hierarchies in Medieval Alania: The Archaeological Evidence



Map 5: Archaeological map of Nizhny Arkhyz (from V.A. Kuznetsov, *Nizhny Arkhyz v X-XII vekakh* (Stavropol': Kavkazskaia Biblioteka, 1993), p.299)

The site of Nizhny Arkhyz in Karachai-Cherkassia provides the clearest archaeological evidence for the operation of urban hierarchies in medieval Alania. It possesses some of the best-preserved buildings from the Alan period: three churches, two large and one smaller. Excavations from the 1950s to the present, conducted primarily by V.A. Kuznetsov, have identified it as a site considerably larger than any other in the region, with no less than 14 churches, planned streets and a series of defensive walls (see **Map 5**).⁴² More recently, Denis Beletskii and Andrei Vinogradov have comprehensively studied its surviving architecture. This includes the identification of a synthronon and cathedra in the North Church- i.e. seats for the bishop and clergy which designate a cathedral.⁴³ It is thus generally accepted that Nizhny Arkhyz was the seat of the metropolitan of Alania, and that it was from here that the see was translated to Soteriopolis in the late 11th century.⁴⁴

Despite this prominent position, there is much that is unclear about the site of Nizhny Arkhyz. To start with, we do not know what the city was called in the medieval period, either in Greek or in any local language- Nizhny Arkhyz is the name of a nearby modern settlement and astronomical observatory. Moreover, we do not know when exactly or by whom the town was planned and founded, in place of the small agricultural settlement that preceded it.⁴⁵ Most significantly for our subject, the questions of its social structure and political function remain unresolved.

⁴² Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh*, pp.20-1, 76-80, 94.

⁴³ Beletskii and Vinogradov argue that after the North Church's initial construction as a cathedral, the see was translated to the Central Church. See Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.176-8.

⁴⁴ Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh*, p.245; Malakhov, p.149.

⁴⁵ Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh*, p.245.

However, it is possible to deduce certain elements about this process from its peculiar location. Nizhny Arkhyz does not lie in the middle of an agricultural region which could have supported it, but in a mountain gorge. The two closest areas of viable farmland, the upland basin around the modern resort of Verkhny Arkhyz and the plateau region around modern Zelenchukskaia, are both 25- 35 km away.⁴⁶ This implies that the town's food supply could not have been grown locally, but rather would have had to be transported there. Nick Evans has calculated in his work on the Northeast Caucasian city of Darband that a population of over 2,000 people, comparable to that of Nizhny Arkhyz, would require around 500,000 kg of wheat annually to sustain itself.⁴⁷ In Darband's case, he argues, this was partially provided by market transactions, and partially by customary tributes from the city's neighbouring tribes. In the absence of coinage at Nizhny Arkhyz, it is reasonable to argue that this city was solely supplied through the latter method. This implies that whoever controlled Nizhny Arkhyz had enough influence to create and maintain reliable and long-lasting tributary or reciprocal relationships.

Further evidence of the authority wielded by Nizhny Arkhyz's overlords is provided by its regular street pattern.⁴⁸ As in other medieval cities, the fact that there is a street plan implies that somebody was doing the planning.⁴⁹ Moreover, although the urban area of Nizhny Arkhyz has not been fully excavated, it seems from a 19th century plan made prior to the demolition of its surviving buildings

⁴⁶ On Verkhny Arkhyz and its relationship to Nizhny Arkhyz, see V.A. Kuznetsov, 'Drevnosti Verkhnego Arkhyza', in *Severnyi Kavkaz: istoriko-arkheologicheskie ocherki i zametki*, ed. by M.P. Abramova and V.I. Markovin (Moscow: Institut arkheologii RAN, 2001), p.185.

⁴⁷ Evans, pp.74-6.

⁴⁸ See Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh*, pp.20-1.

⁴⁹ See Wickham, pp.670-3.

that these main streets were not encroached on.⁵⁰ This implies that some kind of authority was able to maintain this street pattern after its initial foundation.

It is also possible that legal decisions took place at Nizhny Arkhyz under the auspices of its governors. A mysterious 2.1-metre-high circular wall with a diameter of 88.5 metres near the Central Church (the ‘Circus’) may perhaps be compared to *neima* or *naqim*, circular areas used for legal judgements in the early 19th century.⁵¹ The custom of using these *neima/ naqim* were apparently of considerable antiquity, since it was unknown in the 19th century by whom and when they had been built. It is also notable that in the 19th century, people would travel for a considerable distance to attend these courts. This suggests that, if indeed the Arkhyz ‘Circus’ can be identified with a *neima/ naqim*, this was a site of considerable legal significance, which once again suggests the influence of its governing urban hierarchy.

Since the existence of some kind of urban hierarchy at Nizhny Arkhyz seems clear, we may reasonably ask what kind of authority was able to wield

⁵⁰ Iu.D. Odukhov and S.N. Savenko, ‘Ob odnom redkom plane Nizhne-Arkhyzskogo gorodishcha’, in *Materialy po izucheniiu istoriko-kul’turnogo nasledia Severnogo Kavkaza, vyp. IX*, ed. by A.B. Belinskii (Stavropol’: Nasledie, 2009), p.361. Unfortunately, this plan is no longer accessible to me and I was unable to take a copy whilst researching this thesis.

⁵¹ On the Arkhyz ‘circus’, see Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v ‘X-XII’ vekakh*, pp.106-11, and for the *neima* or *naqim*, see F.I. Leontovich, *Adaty kavkazskikh gortsev. Materialy po obychnomu pravu Severnogo i Vostochnogo Kavkaza* (Nal’chik: El’-Fa, 2002), pp.250-1. It has previously been suggested that this ‘circus’ could be an enclosure for livestock, a pagan sun-shrine, an observatory, or the foundations of a symbolic representation of the Anastasian Rotunda of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, part of a schema in which all of Nizhny Arkhyz acted as a ‘New Jerusalem’. All these suggestions seem unlikely, for the following reasons: the walls are higher than would be necessary to keep in sheep; there is no evidence whatsoever for the second suggestion, apart from a supposed ‘solar’ aspect to the ‘circus’ shape; the ‘circus’ is in the bottom of the valley, from where good views of the sky would be hard to come by; and other elements of the proposed model of Jerusalem, such as a supposedly medieval painting of Christ’s face, seem to date to the post-19th century period. See Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v ‘X-XII’ vekakh*, pp.106-11; E.L. Sosnina, ‘Khristianskie pamiatniki Nizhnego Arkhyza- drevniaia kopiia sviashchennykh simvolov very’, in *Materialy po izucheniiu istoriko-kul’turnogo nasledia Severnogo Kavkaza, vyp. IX*, ed. by A.B. Belinskii (Stavropol’: Nasledie, 2009), pp.371-2; on the ‘Arkhyz Face’, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, fn. p.307.

power over the town's inhabitants and neighbours. As we have seen, it is unlikely that Nizhny Arkhyz can be identified with **Magas*, or its authority connected with that of the Alan royal family. Given the evidence for Nizhny Arkhyz being an ecclesiastical centre and for ecclesiastical administration (for example, the calculation of the calendar) being conducted there, it seems far more reasonable to connect its planning and the supplying of food with the authority of the church. We could possibly compare this supply system with the food renders by which churches and mosques were maintained by mountain communities in 18th century North Ossetia and Kabarda, only operating on a vastly larger scale.⁵² These arrangements were regulated by customary law, and were underpinned by the spiritual prestige of these religious communities.⁵³

While the archaeology of Nizhny Arkhyz provides the clearest example of urban hierarchies operating in Alania, there are other possible examples of urban hierarchies operating within in this region. A large number of *gorodishcha* (fortified settlements) have been excavated in Karachai-Cherkassia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Ingushetia and Chechnya. In a notable correlation with Mas'ūdī's account of dense settlement, a number of these *gorodishcha*, such as those at Kremenchug and Karogachevskoe in Kabardino-Balkaria, consisted of a group of contemporaneous fortified settlements clustered together.⁵⁴

⁵² See Jacob Reineggs and Friedrich August Marschall von Bieberstein, *A General, Historical, and Topographical Description of Mount Caucasus: With a Catalogue of Plants Indigenous to the Country* (London: C. Taylor, 1807), pp.255-9.

⁵³ For example, in the 1844 Malkar law code Islamic clergy were maintained by a specific religious tax (*zakat*). See Leontovich, p.250.

⁵⁴ I.M. Chechenov, *Drevnosti Kabardino-Balkarii. Materialy k arkheologicheskoi karte* (Nal'chik: El'brus, 1969), pp.51-2.

Khamidiye, Nizhny Dzulat and Verkhny Dzulat, three large sites along the bend of the Terek River in Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia, are especially significant for this question, as they display evidence of significant social differentiation.⁵⁵ These sites had a long continuity of occupation, from the first to 14th centuries, and appear to have functioned as industrial and trading centres. Significantly, Nizhny Dzulat, Khamidiye and the 10th-12th century *gorodishche* of Kiafar (Karachai-Cherkassia) contain inner 'citadels', comparable to the *kala* (elite sectors) found in Georgian settlements of the 10th-12th centuries.⁵⁶ Due to this spatial evidence for social differentiation, it has been argued that these North Caucasian *gorodishcha*'s plans suggest the emergence of elite hierarchies.⁵⁷ This process also implies a degree of hierarchical co-ordination of construction work, including the ability of elites to compel labour service for the construction of fortifications.

It therefore seems clear from the archaeological evidence that some settlements in the medieval North Caucasus were subject to a hierarchical authority. These include Nizhny Arkhyz, and possibly Kiafar, Khamidiye, Nizhny Dzulat, and Verkhny Dzulat. These elite authorities, it seems, were able to command a considerable labour force, including for the construction of elite urban sectors. However, whilst we can suggest that these urban hierarchies could

⁵⁵ Chechenov, pp.46-8; V.B. Vinogradov and S.A. Tolovanova, 'O roli gruzinskogo elementa v istorii khristianskikh khramov Verkhnego Dzhulata (Dediakova)', *Mantse*, 2 (1981), 149-60.

⁵⁶ Irina Arzhantseva and Svetlana Ruzanova, 'The Problems of the Beginning of Medieval Towns in the North Caucasus', in *Making a Medieval Town: Patterns of Early Medieval Urbanisation* (Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology, Polish Academy of Sciences, 2010), pp.219-20; on Georgian urbanism, see M.D. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII Centuries*, trans. by George B. Hewitt (Tbilisi: Ganatleba Publishers, 1987), p.35.

⁵⁷ See Chechenov, p.112; V.B. Kovalevskaia, *Kavkaz i Alany: veka i narody* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), pp.143-7; A.A. Iessen, 'Arkheologicheskie pamiatniki Kabardino-Balkarii', *Materialy i issledovaniia po arkheologii SSSR*, 3 (1941), 7-50; Arzhantseva and Ruzanova, pp.219-20.

overlap with other forms of social hierarchy in Alania- for example, the possible control of the ecclesiastical hierarchy over Nizhny Arkhyz- we cannot say exactly how these hierarchies interacted based on archaeological remains alone, nor what kind of relationship was used to compel labour service within them. In order to understand this crucial aspect of the Alan multiplicity, we have to turn to the final type of social hierarchy which Mas'ūdī identifies: subordinated social groups and their rulers.

The Lord of the Alans, Clans, and the Political Structure of Alania

One sentence in Mas'ūdī's account is particularly useful for explaining the interaction of social hierarchies within the Alan multiplicity. This appears to describe the Alan king as the political leader of a group of other princes.⁵⁸ This sentence can be translated as: “[The master of the Alans (*ṣaḥīb al-Lān*)] is the possessor of strength, courageous and embodying the political power of the princes (*al-mulūk*)”, or alternatively, depending on the manuscript recension, as “... is the possessor of dominance among the princes.”⁵⁹ Whilst this passage's precise meaning is ambiguous, it seems certain that the Alan overlord, the *ṣaḥīb*

⁵⁸ I am indebted to Christopher Bahl for his help with the Arabic in this section.

⁵⁹ See `Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa-Ma`ādin al-Jawhar*, ed. by Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn `Abd al-Ḥamid (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijārīyah al-Kubra, 1958), Vol. 1, p.194. The issue is complicated by a variation in the manuscript recensions: MS A reads '*ṣaḥību al-Lān yurakubu fi thalāthīna alfa fārisin wa-huwa ḡhu man'ati wa-ba'si shadīdin wa-ḡhu siyāsati min al-mulūk*, whereas MS B reads '*bayna al-mulūk*'. The former would imply “embodying the political power of the kings”, whereas the latter implies “the possessor of power/ dominance among the kings.” The translation of this passage varies in published editions: Minorsky translates it as “he is powerful, very strong and influential (*among?) the kings”, whereas Pellat translates it more idiomatically as “[le roi des Alains]... est un prince puissant... qui jouit d'une certaine autorité auprès des autres princes.” It appears that Pellat's translation is somewhat closer to the original sense, however. See Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.158; Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, p.173.

al-Lān, can be identified with the *De Administrando Imperio's* *exousiokratoros Alanias* and the Schechter Letter's *melek Alan*, due to his prominence in the Byzantine-Khazar wars.⁶⁰ It is particularly significant that Mas'ūdī differentiates this ruler - the *ṣaḥīb*- from other, subordinate princes- *mulūk*- of a different kind. Notably, the *ṣaḥīb* carries a unique title, **Kar-Kundaj*, and is described as possessing the royal city of **Magas*. Alongside this, he is said to possess “castles and pleasancess besides this town and [now and then] he transfers his residence thither.”⁶¹ This image of peripatetic kingship is supported by a later source, the *Mat'iane Kartlisa*, which describes a large entourage of “princes (*t'avadit'a*) of Alania” accompanying the Alan King Dorgholel to a feast with the Georgian King Bagrat' IV.⁶² Overall, this passage appears to be an attempt to describe the Alan king, distinguished by title and by his peripatetic ruling style, as the political leader of a group of subordinate peoples, whose leaders are considered important enough in their own right to warrant the title *malik*.

It is possible that these subordinated social groups were the constituent clans of the Alan polity. The presence of these clans is consistently mentioned by other medieval sources. As I argued in Chapter One (p.32ff), it seems that the primary method of self-identification within the Central North Caucasus was not with the kingdom of Alania or an Alan ethnicity, but with the **As*- a generic term for a local community, clan or tribe, linked with a given geographic area such as a

⁶⁰ Cf. *De Administrando Imperio* 10 and the Schechter Letter, both in Alemany, pp.173-4, 333-4.

⁶¹ See al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.158

⁶² *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. by Roin Met'reveli and Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), p.162.

valley or village.⁶³ This method of self-identification is indicated by the continuity of this term's meaning through the Alanic period, and the fact that the word *As retains this tribal and non-ethnic meaning in a number of medieval sources and later ethnographic reports.⁶⁴

This contention is supported by apparent references to a tribal or clan-based system of organisation in our non-Alan written sources. Ibn Rusta (c.290-300/ 903-13⁶⁵) comments that the Alans are divided into four tribes (*qabā'il*), one of which is called an 'As' (the **Rukhsh-As*).⁶⁶ Nikēphoros Basilakēs (1140s-50s) comments that the Alans are divided into "many tribes" (*myriophulon*).⁶⁷ Finally, in the 1260s, the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* mentions the migration into Georgia of the Alan Akhasarpakiani clan.⁶⁸ This appears to have been a large corporate group as it apparently contained "many chiefs", and was possibly under the leadership of a woman named Limachav. This group is especially interesting, since it is possible that it traced a consanguineous identity to two eponymous mythic ancestors, Akhshar and Akhshartag, whose names appear in a series of Ossetian Nart Sagas.⁶⁹ If this is so, this may imply that separate identities based around an

⁶³ See also John Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or Two? The Question of a "Dual State" in the North Caucasus, 7th-12th Centuries in Russian and Western Historiography', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, forthcoming.

⁶⁴ For example, in the 19th century, the term 'Os' referred to the individual community of a valley or village, for example the 'Bezengi-Os'. See V. F. Miller, *Osetinskie etimologii*. Ch. 3 (Moscow: Tip. E. G. Potatsova, 1887), pp.10-11. It is particularly significant that some of our 13th century sources, for example Friars C. de Bridia and William of Rubruck, record that the term 'As' was the Alan autonym. It is possible that this reflects a continuation of this local method of self-identification. See Alemany, pp.149, 155 respectively.

⁶⁵ S. Maqbul Ahmad, 'Ibn Rusta', *EL*2. This is the conventional date of this source; for further discussion, see Chapter Two, p.91ff.

⁶⁶ Ibn Rusta, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, pp.166-7

⁶⁷ Nikephoros Basilakēs, *In Ioan. Episc. Bulg.* 8, in Alemany, p.229.

⁶⁸ Met'reveli and Jones, p.359.

⁶⁹ See Sagas 1-5 in John Colarusso, Tamerlan Salbiev, and Walter May, *Tales of the Narts. Mythology and Folklore of the Ossetian People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp.1-18. On the Akhshartagkata in general, see H.W. Bailey, 'Ossetic (Narta)', in *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry. Volume 1: The Traditions*, ed. by A. T. Hatto (London: Modern Humanities

imagined consanguinity existed among other tribal groups of the medieval period. Whilst we cannot be certain of this last point, it does seem clear that clans were a significant force within Alania, to the extent that Arab geographers and a Byzantine panegyricist saw fit to record their existence. We can presume that other political actors- such as the Alan kings- must have taken account of these clans and possessed a mechanism to negotiate with their leaders.

It is highly plausible that this mechanism operated in the same way as the Alan kings' relationships with neighbouring peoples of the North Caucasus. According to Mas'ūdī's account, the Alans and their king possessed a variety of relationships with these peoples. On the one hand, the Alans are said to "prevail" (*mustazhir*) over the Abkhaz, and are "more powerful" (*mustazhira 'alā*) than the Kashak.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the Ghumiq, a tribe near Darband, are explicitly said to "not obey any king but have chiefs (*ru'asā*) and live in peace with the kingdom of the Alan."⁷¹ In between these two extremes of dependence and friendly, equal relations lies the Dagestani kingdom of the Sarir, whose king is tied to the Alan ruler by marriages to each other's sisters.⁷² Whilst we need not believe that Mas'ūdī's external classification of the North Caucasian peoples directly reflects their own classificatory systems, the existence of a web of dependences, friendships and marriage alliances seems clear. We may suggest that these external relationships recorded by Mas'ūdī were in fact the outer

Research Association, 1980), pp.246-7; for their potential links to the Akhasarpakiani, see V.A. Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta* (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 1990), p.110.

⁷⁰ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, pp.159-60.

⁷¹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.155.

⁷² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.158.

reaches of a system of orally mediated, customary dependency, filtered through an Arab geographer's system of classification. It seems that the Central North Caucasus was marked by a system of closer and more hierarchical oral relationships: a web of dependency which Mas'ūdī describes as the Alan *ṣaḥīb* taking some of the power of subordinate *muluk*. It is this closer, inner circle of dependency that we may identify with the Alan kingdom.

It is plausible that these ties of dependency were demonstrated and reified in material terms. This is suggested by a curious passage in the *Ḥudūd al-'Alam*. Its description of the Sarir kingdom mentions that its people are plagued by giant flies the size of partridges, and have to leave food for the flies in order to avoid being eaten.⁷³ This is clearly a marvel-tale, and as we have seen from its confused terminology, the *Ḥudūd's* geography of the North Caucasus can be inaccurate.⁷⁴ However, it is plausible that this is a garbled account of food renders being sent to the Alan capital, *Magas (مغص). The name of this town was sufficiently similar to the Persian word, *magas* (مگس) (fly) for Mas'ūdī to explicitly say that the place-name meant "a fly" (*ḍhubāba*).⁷⁵

In summary, Mas'ūdī's description of Alania, when compared against other written sources of the medieval period, allows us identify three important features of Central North Caucasian politics in the tenth century. These are: a single ruler, distinguished by a title and his peripatetic lifestyle; subordinate

⁷³ Minorsky, *Hudud Al-Alam=The Regions of the World*, pp.160-1. On this suggestion, see Minorsky, 'Caucasica III', pp.233-4.

⁷⁴ See p.242, above.

⁷⁵ See al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, p.158. This etymology which was also used by 'Aṭā Malik al-Juvaynī (c.649-658/1252-1260), who described flies as the namesakes of the city. See 'Aṭā Malik ibn Muḥammad Juvaynī, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. by J.A. Boyle (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1958), p.269.

leaders under him, possibly identifiable with leaders of clans organised through separate ideologies of consanguinity; and a variety of levels of dependence between the Alan king, subordinate leaders, and neighbouring peoples, whose societies varied in their social complexity. It is remarkable that every one of these characteristics is recorded in ethnographic sources on the Central North Caucasus in the 17th-19th centuries. Not only do these correspondences suggest the fundamental accuracy of Mas'ūdi's basic information, they allow us to access this ethnographic data to improve our understanding of the Alan kingdom's political structure.

The Kabardian Comparison: Alan Politics in the Light of Kabardian Ethnography

The best comparator to Alania in the early modern period is the Kabardian polity of the 16th-18th centuries, which covered much of the same territory, was capable of raising large military forces, but also produced little documentation.⁷⁶ This is, of course, not a direct comparison: as the lack of any oral history directly relating to the Alanic period demonstrates, a direct cultural continuity between the Alanic and Kabardian periods cannot be assumed.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the methods by which a powerful polity could operate in the same environment

⁷⁶ For the basic structure of Kabarda in this period, see Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp.14-15; Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, 'Co-Optation of the Elites of Kabarda and Dagestan in the 16th Century', in *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World*, ed. by Marie Bennigsen Broxup and Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov (London: Hurst, 1992), pp.22-6.

⁷⁷ For example, when Evlia Chelebi visited the former Alan settlement of Rim-Gora (Stavropol' Krai)- known as Borgustan by the 17th century- its foundation narrative was linked not to the Alans, but to Iskander ʿDhu'l-Qarnayn, a popular Islamic culture-hero in the Kabardian period. See Chelebi, p.91; for other stories connected with Iskander, see p.70. On the Alan-period date of Rim-Gora, see A.P. Runich and I.N. Mikhailov, 'Gorodishche Burgusant, ili Rim-Gora', *Materialy po izucheniiu Stavropolskogo Kraia*, 14 (1976), 162-82.

appear to have been similar to those underpinning the Alan kingdom. These parallels are particularly significant since the three characteristics of the Alan polity identified in Mas'ūdī's account are also found in the Kabardian period.

Firstly, the institution of peripatetic rulership is clearly recorded in an 1844 collection of Kabardian *adats* (customary laws).⁷⁸ This code assumes a peripatetic lifestyle of princes (*pshi*), since they had the legal right to compel *uzdens* (gentry) to travel with them, and to be quartered by their dependents. These senior *pshi* stood at the top of a complex hierarchy of social classes, encompassing as many as eleven grades, from princes to outright slaves.⁷⁹ Whilst these systems appear to have fluctuated in complexity, at times it appears that titles were at times used to designate a senior prince- for example, Evlia Chelebi reported that the senior *pshi* of Taustan (Little Kabarda, approximately equivalent to modern Kabardino-Balkaria) carried the title of Sultan.⁸⁰

Secondly, systems of orally mediated dependence between senior Kabardian princes and lower grades of Kabardian society appear to have been very common, paralleling the relationship between Mas'ūdī's *ṣaḥīb al-Lān* and the *mulūk* below him. Indeed, Kabardian politics appears to have been based on a series of formalised oral obligations between lowland princes and largely autonomous highland peasant communities.⁸¹ Kabardian princes stood at the head of this hierarchy, and had the right to leadership in war, to be supported

⁷⁸ Leontovich, pp.201-4.

⁷⁹ Leontovich, p.199. The particular rigidity of these classes in this source may be a product of Russian attempts to seek support from the senior Kabardian princes and gentry through solidifying their control over the peasantry.

⁸⁰ Chelebi, p.96.

⁸¹ See Georgi Derluguian, 'The Forgotten Complexities of the North Caucasus Jihad', in *Caucasus Paradigms: Anthropologies, Histories and the Making of a World Area*, ed. by Bruce Grant and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (Berlin: W. Hopf Verlag, 2007), pp.77-8.

financially and to levy troops from vassals, according to the German traveller Julius von Klaproth (1807).⁸² For example, different grades of *uzden* and peasantry in the Kabardian law code of 1844 were defined by the levels of service they owed to *pshi*, which varied between advice and outright serfdom.⁸³ *Uzdens* also possessed their own land, peasants and bondsmen, but were obligated to act as advisors, messengers and soldiers on behalf of the *pshi*.⁸⁴

These social and geographical groups defined themselves by an imagined consanguinity, like the Aksarpakiani seem to have done in the 1260s. For example, a letter from a group of Kabardian princes to Tsarina Elivazeta of Russia in 1748 claimed that the social structure of Kabarda's five divisions derived from the five sons of Inal, the mythic progenitor of all Kabardians, as did the customary seniority of the elder son's supposed descendants.⁸⁵ Similarly, the Kabardian law code of 1844 defined the most senior princely families by their descent from Inal, and the next most senior stratum of *uzdens* by their descent from a different progenitor, Genarduk.⁸⁶

Thirdly, it appears that similar customary ties of dependence operated between Kabardian princes and the senior members of neighbouring mountain communities, in the same manner as the bonds of marriage, dependence and friendship between the Alans and their neighbours. As with the links Mas'ūdī mentioned, the conditions of these bonds varied. For example, according to

⁸² Julius von Klaproth and Frederic Shoberl, *Travels in the Caucasus and Georgia Performed in the Years 1806 and 1808, by Command of the Russian Government* (London: H. Colburn, 1814), pp.315-18.

⁸³ Leontovich, pp.199-208.

⁸⁴ Leontovich, pp.201-6.

⁸⁵ No.119 in *Kabardino-Russkoe otnosheniia v XVI-XVIII vv.*, ed. by N.A. Smirnov and U.A. Uligov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1957), pp.152-3.

⁸⁶ Leontovich, p.199.

Klaproth, the Karachai Tartars owed a regular tribute to Kabardian princes, and the social position of a Karachai sub-prince (*by*) was heavily dependent on their patronage, whereas the Chegem Tartars (Balkars) only paid irregular tribute to the *pshi*, plus a tax for winter pasturage.⁸⁷ A similar difference in levels of hierarchical control was also observed in Ossetia by I.A. Guldenstadt and Lt. Col. Steder.⁸⁸ In Digoria (Western Ossetia), the local princes had closer relations with the Kabardians, and consequently had a more privileged position vis-à-vis the peasantry, whereas in other parts of Ossetia the level of peasant dependence was rather lower.⁸⁹ This varying level of peasant dependence is reflected in a Malkar (Balkar and Karachai) *adat* code, also collected in 1844, which had a much greater emphasis on the obligations of elders to their dependents, for example the provision of food for workers whilst performing labour service.⁹⁰ Some mountain societies, such as the Chechen *tukkhum* confederations, were more egalitarian still, with no princely hierarchy at all, and decisions being made by councils of elders.⁹¹ These varying levels of egalitarianism and of levels of dependence are particularly reminiscent of Mas'ūdi's description of the Ghumiq of Dagestan, who are said to live in a polycentric society maintaining friendly relations with the Alan king.

Given these close parallels between Mas'ūdi's description of the North Caucasus and the basic structure of North Caucasian politics in the 16th- 18th centuries, it is plausible that the various tribes and clans of the Alan polity were

⁸⁷ Klaproth and Shoberl., pp.285-6, 295.

⁸⁸ See *Osetiny glazami russkikh i inostrannykh puteshestvennikov (XIII-XIX vv.)*, ed. by Boris Aleksandrovich Kaloev (Ordzhonikidze: Severo-Osetinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1967), pp.53, 88.

⁸⁹ Z.N. Vaneev, *Srednevekovaia Alania* (Stalini: Gosizdat Iugo-Osetii, 1959), pp.99-110.

⁹⁰ Leontovich, pp.245-7.

⁹¹ Lemerrier-Quelquejay, pp.27-35; Khodarkovsky, p.15.

bound to the centre by the same kind of orally and materially mediated relationships. It is particularly significant that in both cases, these relationships were negotiated on a personal level, whether the bonds of dependence between a Kabardian *pshi* and his *uzdens*, or the ties of marriage between the Alan and Sarir kings. This tallies with the evidence for the importance of personal ties between the Alan king and the Georgian and Byzantine monarchs, as we saw in the previous chapter. This system of personalised customary obligations, we may suggest, was the mechanism of co-ordination which underpinned the Alan multiplicity, and allowed the Alan kings to raise their armies and Alan elites to build their churches.

However, we cannot directly map these later ethnographic parallels on to the Alan kingdom, not least because of certain significant differences between the Alan and Kabardian political systems. Most significantly, whilst Kabardian *uzdens* did at times elect a senior prince, this position was largely ceremonial and conferred no particular power.⁹² By contrast, as we have seen, the kings of Alania were able to limit rulership to a single family, and their command of the North Caucasus' military resources was significant enough for the Byzantine and Georgian courts to actively seek their favour.

We may therefore ask: what was the root of this difference between Alania and Kabardia's respective levels of social stratification? I argue that the major difference was the importance and exclusivity of the Alan kings' access to the outside world. When Mas'ūdī was writing in the 940s, this access to the outside world was expressed through the Alan ruler's Khazar title, **Kar-Kundaj*. However,

⁹² Lemerrier-Quelquejay, p.26.

as we concluded in Chapters Three and Four, in the 150 years after this, access to Georgia and particularly Byzantium became the most important underpinning of the Alan kings' legitimacy. This marker of status, it is possible to argue, placed them in a far superior position to leaders of subordinate social hierarchies, whether urban or tribal, when conducting formalised negotiations. Remarkably, a later source from the Great Caucasus Mountains may provide a parallel to this practice of status marking in formal negotiations.

The *Dzegli Eristavta* and the Political Structure of Alania

Unifying Signs and Symbols in the Dzegli Eristavta

A unique text from the Central Caucasus corroborates the importance of Byzantine recognition in the formation of hierarchical polities. Moreover, through an examination of this text, we can see how this recognition fitted holistically into the orally mediated political system of the medieval Caucasus.

This text is known as the *Dzegli Eristavta* ('Memorial of the Eristavis'), an anonymous 1405 chronicle of the *eristavis*⁹³ of Ksani, a citadel today located in the unrecognised Republic of South Ossetia.⁹⁴ Whilst this is not an Alan text *per se*,

⁹³ *Eristavi* (usually translated as Duke) technically denotes a royal appointee to a major lordship in Georgia, however by the 14th century these had frequently become hereditary feudal lordships. See Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1963), pp.361-2.

⁹⁴ South Ossetia is also claimed by Georgia. On the date of the *Dzegli Eristavta*, see Kakabadze, pp.15, 53-4. Kakabadze argues that this chronicle consists of two temporally distant accounts which have been combined- one dating from the ninth century, and one from the date of the manuscript's composition. Kakabadze's basis for this conjecture is the presence in the text of a 'King Adarnarse' of Kartli, a name not used for Georgian rulers after the ninth century. However, the evidence of the text renders this theory unlikely, as Adarnarse is identified (p.24) as the brother of a 'King Vakht'ang', securely identifiable with Vakht'ang III of Kartli (r.1302-1308) due to his reign being described by the chronicle as being six years long and his being succeeded by his uncle David (VIII, sole reign 1308-11). Moreover, there is no significant change in style or obvious lacuna at this point, as one would expect if this were the point at which two chronicles had been

within its mythic universe the *eristavis* originate from *Ovseti* (Alania/ Ossetia⁹⁵), which implies the compatibility of the political system it describes with those of the North Caucasus.⁹⁶ As we will see, the normative model of rulership it presents seems to have produced very similar outcomes to the observable evidence for rulership in Alania, which implies that the two systems were relatively similar. Finally, whilst this is a later text, the model of legitimation it uses seems barely affected by the upheavals in Georgia in the 14th century. Rather than projecting the political realities of the 14th century back into the mythic past, for example the overlordship of the Kartvelian kings or Mongol Ilkhans, it looks back to an era of Byzantine hegemony, despite Byzantium's relative insignificance by this period.

The chronicle includes a long mythological section which sets out the foundation of the *eristavis*' rule. In it, Rostom, Bibily and Tsitlosana, three brothers from *Ovseti*, cross the mountains from the North Caucasus and are accepted as rulers of the local community of Dvaleti.⁹⁷ This section of the

connected. Indeed, none of the events connected with the reign of the 'King Adarnarse' of the text- the foundation of the dynasty of the *eristavis* of Ksani- are recorded in any other source. Finally, the *Dzegli Eristavta* names these events as being contemporary with the Byzantine Emperor 'Justinian the Builder' (presumably Justinian I (r.527-565)). Given the wide disparity in the dates of rulers mentioned in the text, we can posit two alternative solutions: a) the 'Adarnarse' of the text was a regional ruler of the early 14th century, not recognised by the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*'s official account; or more likely b) this section of the text represents a mythic account, which fits with the mythical and genealogical tone of the account that precedes this section, in which a number of prestigious rulers of the past are invoked in order to legitimise the rule of the *eristavis* of Ksani. As such, this account becomes even more difficult to date. However, the date of the first king who can be firmly reconciled with other sources, Vakht'ang III, may provide a possible point beyond which the story enters 'mythic time', to use Jan Vansina's formulation (see Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London: James Currey, 1985), pp.117-20). The formation of this legend may therefore be dated to some point in the 14th century, although we cannot be any more specific than this.

⁹⁵ I leave the term *Ovseti* untranslated as this a later source, dating to the period after the decline of the Kingdom of Alania. However, it is notable that the ethnonym *Ovsi* is the term used for the Alans in contemporary Georgian sources. This further implies the applicability of the political system the *Dzegli Eristavta* describes to the Alanic kingdom of the preceding centuries.

⁹⁶ For the *eristavis*' mythic origin, see Kakabadze, p.21.

⁹⁷ Kakabadze, p.21.

chronicle establishes the *eristavis*' legitimacy, and is most likely a mythic origin legend from the 14th century, rather than a recounting of any historical reality. This is due to the fact that the historical individuals who appear in the narrative are from widely disparate time periods- for example, 'Justinian the Builder' (i.e. Emperor Justinian I of Byzantium (r.527-536)) is said to have reigned in a time only five generations before Vakht'ang III of Georgia (r.1302-1308).⁹⁸ This implies that this story takes place in 'mythic time', a foundational period for normative customs.⁹⁹ However, this mythic character paradoxically increases this text's importance, as it provides a rare normative account of ideal rulership in the medieval Caucasus.

Within the normative universe of the *Dzegli Eristavta*, three major social groups appear. The first are the autonomous mountain communities of 'Tskhrazmis-Khevsii', otherwise known as Dvals. They appear in the narrative as a relatively undifferentiated mass, who always act in concert. Despite this stereotyped depiction, it is clear that they have the right and ability to choose their leaders and expel them if they are displeased by their actions. For example, early in the narrative, the Dvals become wary of the growing power of the brothers from *Ovseti*, and expel them.¹⁰⁰ It is notable that this expulsion occurs without censure or comment from the *Dzegli Eristavta*'s author, implying this was a common and accepted practice within his normative framework. The social organisation of the Tskhramis-Khevtsii is not clear, however it appears to be

⁹⁸ See Kakabadze, pp.23-4, and fn. 94, above.

⁹⁹ On the foundational characteristics of 'mythic time', see Vansina, pp.22-4.

¹⁰⁰ Kakabadze, p.21. In narrative terms, this expulsion serves to reconcile two different origin stories for the *eristavis*' ancestors, who were considered as originating from the North Caucasus in some sources, including this one, but also as members of the Bibilurami family in others, for example Vakhushti Bagrationi's 'Description of Georgia' (1750). See *Alano-Georgika: svedeniia gruzinskikh istochnikov ob Osetii i Osetinakh*, ed. by Iu.S. Gagloiti (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 2007), p.71.

broadly clan-based: they attach great importance to adopting the brothers into the clan of Bibilurami. The second social group is the church, represented in particular by the monastery of Largvisi, at which the *Dzegli Eristavta* was composed and the claims of which it seeks to enhance. This group is organised into a hierarchy under the leadership of a *mamasakhli* (spiritual father, lit: house-father), and supports the claims of Rostom and his brothers. The final set of actors are the brothers from *Ovseti* themselves. Despite their foreign origin and lack of direct economic control, the brothers stand in a superior position to the mass of the Dval people.

In this context of relatively autonomous communities, power is not established through written laws, nor through the direct control of land or labour; nonetheless, the relationship between the brothers from *Ovseti* and the mass of the people is clearly an unequal one. This authoritative relationship manifests itself through an inequality in the right to speak and act: the brothers are active, but apart from their reactive expulsion of the brothers, the Dval people simply follow their lead and that of the church.¹⁰¹ This relationship of inequality between the brothers and the Dval communities is established through commonly understood acts, oral proclamations, and prestigious material objects.

These methods of establishing authority include descent from a foreign royal line, successful military leadership, the support of the church, and, most importantly, access to the outside world. Rostom and his brothers are claimed to descend from the royal house of *Ovseti*, having been expelled from the North

¹⁰¹ On the conceptualisation of authority as an inequality in the right to speak, see Adam T. Smith, *The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), pp.25-6.

Caucasus by civil war.¹⁰² They also are allowed back into the Dval community due to their successful leadership of a raid on a Georgian fortress.¹⁰³ The decisive reason for their re-admission into this community, according to the *Dzegli Eristavta's* normative universe, is religious sanction, specifically the prestige given to them by their patronage of the monastery of Largvisi. This is particularly indicated by their choosing this as the site of their family tomb, in the place of honour to the right of the altar. This simultaneously serves as a sign of their authority, and a privilege of it, as it is one of the two conditions Rostom gives for his agreeing to lead the Dval community.¹⁰⁴ However, the decisive and final reason that Rostom is able to establish himself as a hereditary ruler is his recognition as ruler by the Byzantine emperor, 'Justinian the Builder'.¹⁰⁵ Their investiture is also demonstrated in material terms, through the grant of prestige objects, including a seal, belt and buckle, arms, horse, banner and spear.

In consequence of these markers of status, a relationship of inequality is established between Rostom and his brothers, and the mountain communities. Their formulation of oral agreements takes on a formalised pattern: the brothers are proclaimed to have a superior position by supposedly unanimous consent of the people. In these oral agreements, the Dvals undertake to perform military service and labour service for their new lords, as well as allowing his heirs to inherit his title of *eristavi*.

The *Dzegli Eristavta's* importance is in showing a normative framework for a relationship of inequality without the existence of written documentation, a state

¹⁰² Kakabadze, p.21.

¹⁰³ Kakabadze, pp.21-2.

¹⁰⁴ Kakabadze, pp.21-2.

¹⁰⁵ Kakabadze, pp.22-3.

apparatus, or direct elite control of land and labour. In this framework, the methods by which this relationship of inequality is established are primarily symbolic- in particular, access to the legitimising power of the outside world, and display of its products. This relationship of inequality means that oral agreements between relatively autonomous communities and elites are tipped decisively in favour of elites, whose position is maintained through their access to the symbols of the outside world.

The Dzegli Eristavta and Systems of Power in the Alan Multipolity

Despite the fact that the *Dzegli Eristavta* is not an Alan text, but a later text from a nearby region, its normative system of power appears similar to that which operated in the Kingdom of Alania. Most importantly, the observable results of system of power within the mythic universe of the *Dzegli Eristavta* are very similar to the evidence we possess in the case of Alania. For example, the *eristavis'* privilege of military leadership is directly comparable to the role of the Alan kings as war leaders. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume some kind of customary labour service in Alania, given the monumental building projects in the Alan period. Some of these cultural parallels are particularly close. In the *Dzegli Eristavta*, the most honoured place of burial is to the right of the altar in a church. In the Alanic North Caucasus, the richest 11th-century burial at Senty church, containing prestige goods from Byzantium and Egypt, was located in the south transept- that is, to the right of the altar.¹⁰⁶ This parallel may be expanded

¹⁰⁶ See T.I. Makarova and V.I. Markovin, 'Zolotoe ukrashenie s peregorodchatoi emal'iu iz Sentinskogo khrama', *Sovetskaia arkheologiya*, 81.3 (1981), 268-74; V.I. Markovin, 'Issledovanie

more broadly, as we can see that the church supported the rule of both the Alan kings and the *eristavis* of Ksani. This is clear from the decorative schema of the churches at Senty and Nizhny Arkhyz in Alania, and through the meta-example of the *Dzegli Eristavta* itself, produced to boost the legitimacy of local elites and to link the monastery of Largvisi to their power.

The most important parallel between authority in the *Dzegli Eristavta* and in Alania is the significance of Byzantine recognition. The culmination of the narrative is the official recognition of Rostom as *eristavi* by the Byzantine emperor- in this case, *the* paradigmatic Byzantine emperor, Justinian.¹⁰⁷ Whilst obviously this is a mythic narrative, it is highly significant that in this normative text, a North Caucasian nobleman becomes a ruler because of his recognition by the Byzantine emperor. As in the Alan period, this privileged access to the Byzantine court is demonstrated through the access of the ruler to prestige objects, which ostentatiously proclaim his designation as ruler by the emperor.

Given the parallels between their results, it is reasonable to argue that the normative systems of power in the Alan kingdom and the *Dzegli Eristavta* were relatively similar. It is clear that access to the outside world, first Khazaria, and then Byzantium, was a widely recognised source of legitimation and prestige in the medieval Central North Caucasus. This access allowed the Alan kings to assume an unequal position in the negotiation of oral agreements with other political actors within the North Caucasus. Their recognition by the outside

Sentinskogo khrama i nekropoliia u reki Teberdy v Karachaevo-Cherkessii', *Istoriko-arkheologicheskii al'manakh*, 2 (1996), 180–202.

¹⁰⁷ Kakabadze, pp.23-4.

world was a foundational basis of the inequality that existed when they negotiated with other social hierarchies, whether tribes or other local kingdoms.

Conclusion: The Alan Kings and Ideological Hegemony

In the previous chapters, we established that access to the outside world, in particular Byzantium, was widely considered a prestigious source of symbolic power in the medieval Central North Caucasus. However, the mechanism through which this symbolic power was transmuted into power over the lives and labour of the Alan kings' subjects is not well understood. We cannot, as in previous explanations, see this symbolic power as a consequence of a system of feudal domination; nor can we explain its transmutation to political power through the operation of a state apparatus.

Through a comparison of the 10th-century description of Alania in al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-Dhahab* with archaeological evidence and later ethnography, we can identify Alania as a multipolity: a system of multiple, overlapping social hierarchies, particularly the church, urban authorities, and clans. All of these hierarchies are attested in Mas'ūdī's account, and their existence is corroborated by archaeological and ethnographic evidence. In particular, it seems that Mas'ūdī's description of the Alan *ṣāhib* (overlord) ruling over a group of subordinate *muluk* (princes) closely parallels the political structure of the 16th-18th century Kabardian confederation. It is possible to suggest that the Alan kingdom was a super-complex variant of the same type of social-political organisation. In this non-state context, negotiation between the Alan polity's constituent social hierarchies took on a crucial importance. We have evidence from both the medieval period and later ethnography that these negotiations took the form of

customary, orally mediated agreements. A 15th-century chronicle, the *Dzegli Eristavta*, provides us with an example of a normative framework underpinning comparable practices of negotiation. This source suggests that symbolic access to the outside world was one of several determinants of status in these negotiating processes, but was a particularly important one. This in turn allows us to hypothesise that within the Alan kingdom, the superior access to Alan kings to the power of the outside world afforded them a much higher status than their negotiating partners. This access allowed them to restrict royal power to a single family, and to forge closer and more unequal links with other social hierarchies. It is this tangled web of oral agreements with the Alan kings that we refer to by the shorthand of 'the Alan kingdom'.

The existence of such a system of orally mediated political power should not necessarily surprise us, nor should the importance of status markers in its negotiation, as there are plenty of other pre-modern examples of comparable orally mediated networks. For example, large confederated polities could be formed on the Eurasian steppe through formal oaths of allegiance between tribes, which retained separate kinship-based identities.¹⁰⁸ We can see that in other situations where multiple social hierarchies negotiated with each other in a comparable manner to Alania, the deployment of symbolic power took on a particular importance. For example, in early Rus', princes with defined, sacralised

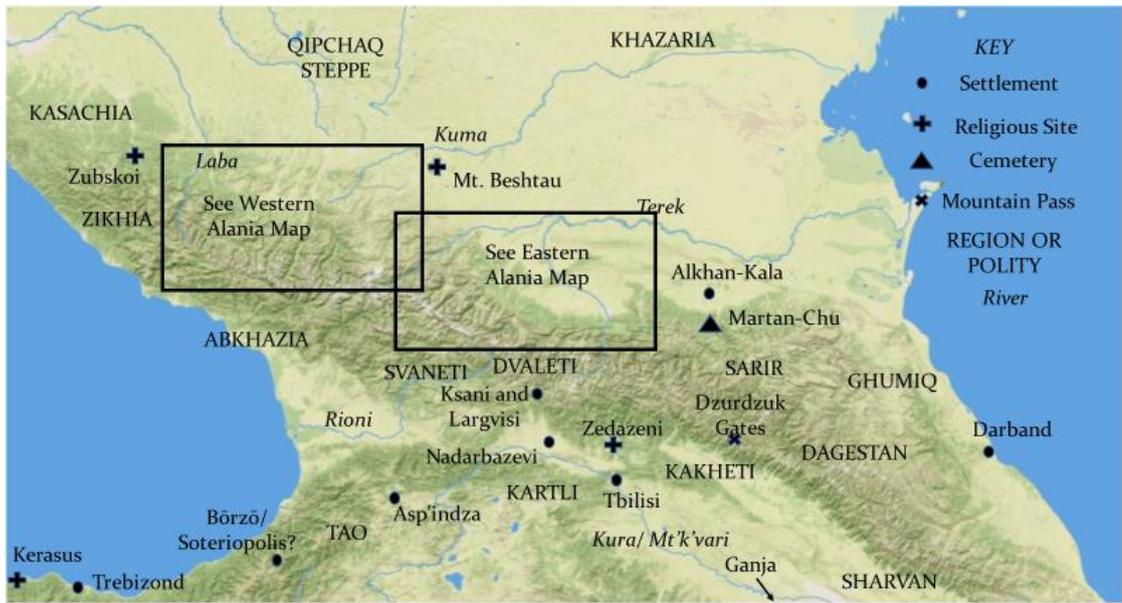
¹⁰⁸ Thomas J. Barfield, 'Tribe and State Relations: The Inner Asian Perspective', in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. by Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), pp.161-5.

status conducted negotiations with towns in order to achieve rulership over them.¹⁰⁹

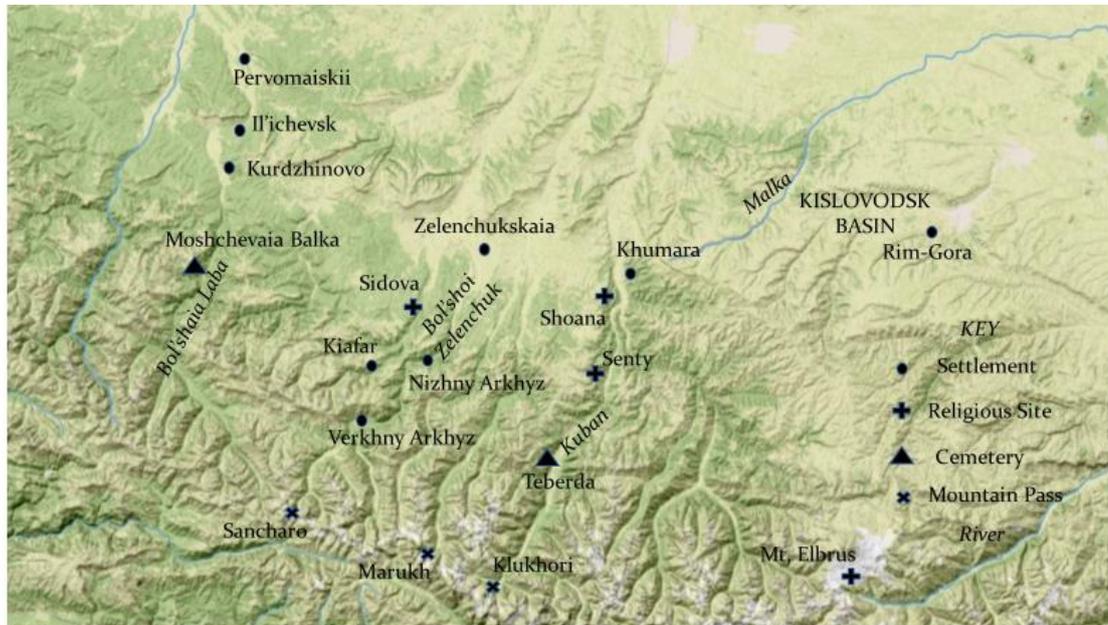
The case of Alania and the transmutation of symbolic power into 'everyday' political power helps us to rethink the place of ideology in the formation of complex polities. It seems clear that the Alan rulers' authoritative position was underpinned by a widely held belief in the importance of access of the outside world. This particular ideology, it seems, was sufficiently important to rebalance oral negotiations between North Caucasian social hierarchies, and to render unequal their relationships. The fact that symbolic power could have this direct effect can help us to reconsider just how important royal symbolism could be in the medieval period. Rather than being epiphenomenal, or an adjunct of materially rooted state power, this symbolism could create its own social realities.

¹⁰⁹ Simon Franklin, 'Kievan Rus' (1015-1125)', in *The Cambridge History of Russia. Vol. 1 From Early Russia to 1689*, ed. by Maureen Perrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.82-4. On the sacralisation of princely rule in Kievan Rus', see Jonathan Shepard, 'The Origins of Rus' (c.900-1015)', in *The Cambridge History of Russia. Vol. 1 From Early Russia to 1689*, ed. by Maureen Perrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.67-70.

Chapter Six. The ‘Fall’ of the Alan Kingdom: Decline or Adaptation?



Map 1: *The Wider Caucasus in the 10th-13th Centuries. Image: the author.*



Map 3: *Western Alania, with sites of the ninth to 14th centuries. Image: the author.*

Nizhny Arkhyz and the Decline of the Kingdom of Alania

In the Bol'shoi Zelenchuk valley of the Northern Caucasus, far from the tourist resorts of the Black Sea, lies the ruined medieval city of Nizhny Arkhyz. Today, the planned streets and markets have vanished: demolished in the 19th century as building material for a nearby monastery.¹ A visitor to the site is likely to only have their own company, and that of the wooded ridges of the Caucasus mountains which rise precipitously from the valley floor. The only substantial remnant of this city are its three magnificent, Byzantine-style churches.² Their interiors, once brightly decorated with images of saints and patron-donors, now stand bare, or blackened by graffiti and soot from tourists' fires.³ In a few corners stand candles and small images of saints, left by modern Christian devotees, who hark back to the glory days of this city.

A thousand years ago, Nizhny Arkhyz was not so quiet. For this city was once the largest for hundreds of miles, as were its churches and cathedrals. It stood astride the great trade route leading over the mountains to Abkhazia and to Byzantium.⁴ Its magnificent architecture proclaimed the ability of Alan elites to bring masons, architects and artisans over the mountains to do kings' and bishops' bidding, just as the magnificent silk fabrics of the powerful, and even the simple beads worn by non-elites, spoke of their access to the prestige of

¹ V. A. Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh: k istorii srednevekovykh gorodov Severnogo Kavkaza* (Stavropol': Kavkazskaia biblioteka, 1993), p.7.

² On the stylistic closeness of the Nizhny Arkhyz churches to Trapezuntine and Cappadocian examples, see D.V. Beletskii and A.Iu. Vinogradov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz i Senty- drevneishie khramy Rossii. Problemy khristianskogo iskusstva Alanii i Kavkaza* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), pp.146-51; V. A. Kuznetsov, 'Iuzhnyi zelenchukskii khram', *Sovetskaia Arkheologiya*, 71.1 (1971), 239-45.

³ On the churches' interior decoration, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.152-72.

⁴ On the direction of trade routes in this period, see V. A. Kuznetsov, *Alano-Osetinskie etudy* (Vladikavkaz: Severo-Osetinskii institut gumanitarnykh issledovaniy, 1993), pp.58-68; Iu.A. Prokopenko, *Istoriia severokavkazskikh torgovykh putei IV v. do n.e.- XI v. n.e.* (Stavropol': Stavropol'skii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1999), p.317.

outsiders.⁵ Through these and other demonstrations of privileged access, the Alan kings and elites had managed to construct a complex yet decentralised political network, a ‘multipolity’, courted by the great powers of the region and feared for its powerful army.⁶



Fig. 18: *The Central Church at Nizhny Arkhyz. Photo: the author.*

Despite its importance, the city of Nizhny Arkhyz was abandoned during the 12th century.⁷ This chapter will determine why this happened. In the process, it will explore the evidence for a wider collapse of the political system in which

⁵ On the popularity of Byzantine trade goods in the North Caucasus, see Irina Arzhantseva and Olga Orfinskaya, ‘The Cut of the Clothes of the North Caucasian Alans’, *Archaeological Textiles Review*, 55 (2013), 86–96.

⁶ For the concept of the multipolity, see N. N. Kradin and others, ‘Alternativity of Social Evolution: Introductory Notes’, in *Alternatives of Social Evolution*, ed. by N. N. Kradin (Vladivostok: Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2000), p.23.

⁷ On the date of Nizhny Arkhyz’ abandonment, see Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v ‘X-XII’ vekakh*, p.246.

this city had played a part. Through an examination of Latin, Byzantine, Georgian, Arabic, Persian, Chinese and North Caucasian written sources, this chapter will explore the decline of the hereditary system of rulership which had existed in the 11th century and the ideological system of kingship which had underpinned it.⁸ Furthermore, it will outline this hierarchical system's replacement by a more polycentric political system, based on a consanguineous clan ideology and lacking a mechanism of co-ordination between different social hierarchies.⁹ As we established in the previous chapter (pp.229-30), in the period of the Alan kingdom, this mechanism of co-ordination was a defining characteristic of the complex system of interaction between the various social hierarchies of the Central North Caucasus. This mechanism's disappearance and the end of hereditary Alan kingship are indicators of the disappearance of the Kingdom of Alania itself.

Contrary to previous explanations, this chapter will argue that the end of the Alan kingdom cannot be blamed on the Mongols, who invaded the North Caucasus in 1239-40, or on any other destructive invasion. By contrast, it will demonstrate that there is considerable evidence for cultural continuity in the 12th to 14th centuries, especially the survival of Christian belief. Finally, this chapter will suggest an alternative explanation for the end of the Alan kingdom. This is the decline in the prestige of Byzantium, access to which had underpinned the Alan kings' rule, and the emergence of an alternative, Qipchaq-style political

⁸ On the distinction between monarchy- the rule of one individual over a given territory- and kingship- the sacralised ideological system of royal mystique underpinning this rule- see Henry Allen Myers and Herwig Wolfram, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), p.1.

⁹ Ideology here is defined as a normative set of statements about the universe, which both claim to describe reality and aim to create the social reality that they claim to describe. See also Chapter One, pp.22-3.

system, which allowed subordinate leaders to express their power independently of a royal system. Consequently, as the ideological system which had underpinned the Alan kingdom gradually lost its power, the Alan kings' power disappeared as well.

Political Transformation in 12th Century Alania

Political Collapse and the End of Nizhny Arkhyz

The abandonment of Nizhny Arkhyz is currently unexplained. It has been suggested that it was destroyed by a Qipchaq or Mongol invasion, but there is no evidence to imply a violent end.¹⁰ There is no evidence of destruction layers, mass graves, or hastily-constructed fortifications. Indeed, whilst the city itself was abandoned, the cemeteries around its churches continued to be used in the 13th century.¹¹ This suggests that the site was still considered holy, but was no longer a viable location for a settlement.

This evidence is best explained by a collapse of the political world that had made Nizhny Arkhyz's existence possible. As we saw in the previous chapter (p.244ff), the metropolitanate of Alania based at Nizhny Arkhyz was deeply implicated in the political order of the Alan kingdom.¹² Moreover, the city's own position depended on this political system, since the city relied on food renders which must have been brought from elsewhere. Thus, a collapse of this political

¹⁰ For example, in Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh*, pp.246-7.

¹¹ Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh*, pp.246-8.

¹² For example, it apparently promoted a cult of Ss. Constantine and Helena, which attributed Christian conversion to royal initiative. For evidence of this cult from a wall painting at Nizhny Arkhyz, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.172.

system would have cut off this food source and would have led inevitably to the city's abandonment.

Moreover, our written evidence provides plentiful evidence for exactly this kind of political collapse. However, this written evidence must be treated with considerable care, due to the fact that it mostly originates from outside the North Caucasus. The following sections will therefore analyse these sources in detail. This analysis clearly demonstrates that the Alan kingdom, as defined by the presence of hereditary kings and a mechanism of co-ordination between social hierarchies, had disappeared by the early 13th century.

Evidence for Political Collapse: Julian of Hungary and Latin Sources

The most explicit source describing a collapse of the Alanic political order is a little-known account of the journey of Julian of Hungary, a Dominican friar sent on a mission to the Volga region around 1235-7, who was stranded in Alania for six months.¹³ This account was written in approximately 1237 by a certain Riccardus, who may have been a monastic librarian or an imperial notary.¹⁴ It was apparently synthesised from two accounts of the expedition, one by Julian

¹³ This work's description of Alania has never, as far as I am aware, been utilised by a non-Russian author; previous discussions in Western European works have centred on its sections on the Mongol advance. For example, it does not appear in Agustí Alemany's *Sources on the Alans: A Critical Companion* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). The exact date of Julian's journey is disputed, however, his departure from Hungary took place prior to the accession of Bela IV in September 1235. See Mary Dienes, 'Eastern Missions of the Hungarian Dominicans in the First Half of the Thirteenth Century', *Isis*, 27.2 (1937), 225-41; Denis Sinor, 'Un voyageur du treizième siècle: le Dominicain Julien de Hongrie', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 14.3 (1952), 589-602.

¹⁴ On the date of this account, see Dienes, p.228. For theories of Riccardus' identity, see Heinrich Dorrie, 'Drei Texte zur Geschichte des Ungarn und Mongolen. Die Missionreisen des Fr. Iulianus O.P. ins Ural-Gebiet (1234-5) und nach Russland (1237) und der Bericht des Erzbischofs Peter über die Tartaren', in *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. 1 Phil.-Hist. Klasse Jahrg. 1956 No.6* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), p.132; Sinor, p.590.

himself, and another by two other members of his expedition who reached Alania but went no further.¹⁵

Riccardus' account describes a polycentric, even anarchic, political system, lacking any single ruler and marked by endemic warfare between local communities. He writes:

“There are as many princes as villages, none of whom owes allegiance to another.¹⁶ The war there is incessant, leader against leader, village against village. At the time of ploughing, all the armed men of one village go to the fields together... And all who go outside the villages, whether to collect firewood or having other duties, always go armed and accompanied. It is impossible during the whole week for a few people to go out for any reason without danger to the person...”¹⁷

Riccardus' account presents a dramatic contrast with earlier descriptions of Alania, such as that of 'Alī b. Ḥusayn b. al-Mas'ūdī (332-6/ 943-7¹⁸), who described an Alan overlord (*ṣaḥīb al-Lān*) ruling over a network of sub-princes.¹⁹ As such, we must interrogate Riccardus' reliability. This is a particularly acute issue, given that Riccardus' description of Julian's journey shows a clear progression in religious customs, which become increasingly pagan and

¹⁵ On the composition of Riccardus' account, see Dorrie, p.131.

¹⁶ Literally: “... none of whom has a relationship of subjection to another.”

¹⁷ *Quot sunt villae, tot sunt duces, quorum nullus ad alium habet subiectionis respectum; ibi continua est guerra, ducis contra ducem, ville contra villam; tempore arandi omnes unius villae homines armati simul ad campum vadunt... et quicquid extra villas sive in lignis acquirendis, sive in aliis operis habent, vadunt omnes pariter et armati; nec postea ullo modo pauci per totam septimanam de villis suis quacumque de causa egredi absque periculo personarum...* *Vetera Monumenta Historica Hungariam Sacram Illustrantia. T.1. Ab Honorio PP. III usque ad Clementem PP. VI 1216-1352*, ed. by August Theiner (Osnabruck: Otto Zeller, 1968), p.152.

¹⁸ Charles Pellat, 'al-Mas'ūdī', *Elz*.

¹⁹ See 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa-Ma'ādin al-Jawhar* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijārīyah al-Kubra, 1958), vol. 1, p.194.

'barbarous' as he travels eastwards. Julian starts in Latin Christian Hungary, then travels to the unorthodox Christians of Zikhia, followed by half-Christian, half-pagan Alania. After this, Julian arrives in Islamic Vela, then travels to the Volga Bulgars and Hungarians, who are pagan but not idolators, and finally travels through the land of the pagan and utterly savage Mordvins.²⁰ In the light of this patterning, we must consider whether Riccardus also tailored his description of these peoples' political organisation, having been influenced by the idea that societal mores were defined by geography.²¹

While we cannot ignore the tropes of the 'barbarian' which colour this passage, Riccardus' account of the political situation should be accorded more weight than his description of religious customs. This is because, in contrast to the clear progression of religious customs as his party gets further away from Europe, there is no such pattern in his depiction of societies' social complexity. For example, the other region Julian visits in the North Caucasus, Zikhia, has semi-pagan religious customs, such as polygamy, but is ruled by a powerful royal family.²² Similarly, 'Great Bulgaria' is described as "a large and powerful country, having wealthy cities, but all [its people] are pagan."²³ As such, while Riccardus' account does show a clear patterning in its depiction of religious customs, it describes a variety of socio-political organisations, from organised kingdoms and cities to warring tribes, and does not describe all the peoples Julian encountered

²⁰ Theiner, pp.152-3.

²¹ On this idea in medieval Latin Europe, see Evelyn Edson and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2004), p.15.

²² ... *venerunt in terram, que vocatur Sychia... quorum dux et populi se christianos dicunt, habentes literas et sacerdotes Grecos. Princeps centum dicitur habere uxores... Deus autem dedit ipsis gratiam in conspectu domine, que super centum uxores regis maior erat, ita ut mirabili eos amplexaretur affecta, et in omnibus eis necessariis providebat.* Theiner, p.152.

²³ *Est vero magna Bulgaria regnum magnum et potens, opulentas habens civitates; sed omnes sunt pagani.* Theiner, p.153.

as stereotypical barbarians. Therefore, although we should not entirely take his description of Alania at face value, his general impression of a highly polycentric country cannot be discounted.

There are other indicators of Riccardus' reliability when describing Alania. The first is that certain elements of his account are corroborated by later ethnographic evidence. For example, he mentions that a cross carried on a staff was used as a symbol of neutrality.²⁴ This cannot be dismissed as a Christian writer emphasising reverence for the cross, as the same custom was recorded in the same region in the 18th century.²⁵ The second and strongest piece of evidence in favour of Riccardus' reliability is the fact that his description of a decentralised political system is corroborated by numerous other accounts from the same period. This includes not only other accounts by Catholic European travellers, such as Friars Plano Carpini, C. de Bridia, and William of Rubruck, who similarly do not mention any Alan ruler, but also unrelated Byzantine, Arabic, Persian, Sino-Mongol, and North Caucasian sources.²⁶ According to the principle of 'triangulating' different sources from different epistemes in order to determine their reliability, this gives a high likelihood that the Alan kingdom had indeed collapsed by the early 13th century.

²⁴ *Crucem in tanta habent reverentia, quod pauperes sive indigene sive advene, qui multitudinem secum habere non possunt, si crucem qualemcumque super astam cum vexillo posuerint, et elevatam portaverint, omni tempore secure incedunt.* Theiner, p.152.

²⁵ M.N. Lozhkin and S.N. Malakhov, 'Zhelezhnye kresty vizantiiskogo-kavkazskogo tipa iz otradnenskogo muzeia', *Istoriko-arkheologicheskii al'manakh*, 2 (1996), 202–9.

²⁶ See Friar C. de Bridia, *Historia Tartarorum*; Friar John de Plano Carpini, *Historia Mongalorum*; Friar William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium ad Partes Orientales*; all in Alemany, pp.148–55.

Byzantine Sources

The shift in Byzantine discourse about the North Caucasus is particularly significant, as in the 11th century, the Alans were generally presented as Christians with a prestigious, hereditary royal family.²⁷ However, from the 12th century onwards, this presentation begins to change. The last clear evidence that a ruler of the Alans was recognised by Byzantium comes from a seal of a certain John Khotesitan, dated to the 1150s and found in Istanbul.²⁸ This individual, identifiable with the Alan King Khuddan mentioned in Georgian sources, carries the Byzantine title of *exousiokratōr*, used by Alan kings.²⁹

Furthermore, one Byzantine source may directly record the collapse of the Alan kingdom, as opposed to its non-recognition: an anonymous astrological compilation of the 12th century, attributed to the Emperor Leo VI (r.886-912). One of the oracular prophecies within this compilation states that “Alania and Cumania will be without kings”.³⁰ The events presented in this compilation are likely to have been recent and recognisable events, as these would prove the

²⁷ As exemplified by the marriage of Isaak Komnēnos, brother of the emperor Alexios I Komnēnos (r.1081-1118), to Irene, daughter of the *exousiokratōr* (king) of Alania. See Nikēphoros Basilakēs, *In Ioann. Episc. Bulg.* 8, in Alemany, p.229.

²⁸ S. M. Perevalov, ‘Alanskaia epigrafika. 1. Katalog grecheskikh nadpisei’, *Vestnik Vladikavkazskogo Nauchnogo Tsentra*, 11.1 (2011), 2-10. The date of this seal is derived from the probable identification of ‘Khotesitan’ with ‘Khuddan’, an Alan king of the 1150s and father of Burdukhan, mother of Queen Tamar of Georgia. See *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. by Roin Met’reveli and Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), pp.228, 288.

²⁹ For example, in the Senty Inscription of 965. See Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.241.

³⁰ See M.V. Bibikov, ‘Vizantiiskaia “narodnoiazychnaia” traditsiia o Rusi’, in *XVII chteniia pamiati V.T. Pashuto. Ch.1.* (Moscow: Institut vseobshchei istorii RAN, 2005). I have been unable to locate this work; its conclusions are only accessible to me via F.Kh. Gutnov, ‘Feodalnye obshchestva Severnogo Kavkaza v predmongolskii period’, *Nartamonga: Journal of Alano-Ossetic Studies*, 5.1-2 (2008), p.223.

authority of these supposedly centuries-old prophecies. However, further study of this work is necessary to properly date and contextualise this information.³¹

This picture of political polycentricity is supported by the account of the Nicaean bishop Theodore, who travelled to Alania in c.1223.³² In this work, there is no reference to any secular Alan central authority to adjudicate competing claims to ecclesiastical authority. For example, rather than appealing his case to a secular ruler, Theodore claims that the only way he could prove his episcopal status was by showing off his insignia and official robes.³³ This situation contrasts markedly with the earlier Byzantine mission of Archbishop Peter, sent to Alania in 914-925 by the Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos. This earlier mission had a strongly top-down focus, aiming to Christianise the Alans' customs through advice to the royal family.³⁴ The lack of any such focus in Theodore's mission implies that by the early 13th century, there was no Alan ruler to appeal to.

³¹ Gutnov does not make the context of this passage clear, nor does he give much information about the source. It certainly is not one of the two better-known oracular compilations attributed to Leo VI. The first of these compilations does not mention the Alans at all, and although the latter does mention them, it says nothing about kings. See *The Oracles of the Most Wise Emperor Leo, and The Tale of the True Emperor*, ed. by A. F. van Gemert, Walter Gerard Brokaar, and Joke A. Aalberts (Amsterdam: The authors, 2002); Emile Legrand, *Les oracles de Léon le Sage: poèmes en Grec vulgaire* (Paris: Maisonneuve et cie., 1875), p.31.

³² On the date of Theodore's journey, see S.N. Malakhov, 'K voprosu o lokalizatsii eparkhial'nogo tsentra Alanii v XII-XVI vv.', in *Alany: Zapadnaia Evropa i Vizantiia*, ed. by A. G. Kuchiev, V. Kh. Tmenov, and V. A. Kuznetsov (Vladikavkaz: SONII, 1992), pp.167-8.

³³ *Egō de kai ta episēma tēs megalēs hierateias katelegon, hoposa te en amphiois haplōs kai hosa tou bēmatos, aper eidenai panta eikos, kakeithen ouk agnoein ton episkopon.* Bishop of Alania Theodore, 'Alanikos', in *Patrologia Graeca CXV*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Brothers, 1857), pp.403-4.

³⁴ *Ep. 133*, in Nicholas, Romilly James Heald Jenkins, and Leendert Gerrit Westerink, *Letters* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1973), pp. 281-7.

Georgian Sources

The Georgian evidence for the Alans' political structures in the 12th and 13th centuries is contradictory. However, when one analyses this evidence in the light of the circumstances of its production, a similar picture of polycentricity emerges.

The *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, the Georgian royal annals, provide some relatively early evidence for the decline of hereditary Alan kingship. In the *Life of David, King of Kings (tskhovreba mepet mepisa davitisi)* (c.1126³⁵), the anonymous chronicler mentions the submission of multiple “kings and *mtavaris*” of the Alans to David IV of Georgia (r.1089-1125), in approximately 1118-20.³⁶ While the aim of the chronicler is panegyric, rendering this claim of Georgian suzerainty questionable, there is no reason for this passage to state that there was more than one Alan ruler in this period.³⁷ If anything, a claim of a single, more powerful ruler submitting to King David would have further enhanced the Georgian king's authority. It is furthermore notable that this mention of multiple kings is a stable feature of the textual tradition. In the earliest known manuscript of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, an Armenian translation of 1274-1311, multiple kings of Alania are also mentioned in this section.³⁸ Moreover, this presentation is in marked contrast to older sections of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, notably the *Mat'iane Kartlisa* (c.1070³⁹),

³⁵ Cyrille Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1963), p.26.

³⁶ Met'reveli and Jones., p.178. For the date of the events in this passage, see M. D. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII Centuries*, trans. by George B. Hewitt (Tbilisi: Ganatleba Publishers, 1987), p.89.

³⁷ On the panegyric intent of the 'Life of David', see Donald Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History.*, 3rd rev. and expanded ed. (London: Garnett Press, 2010), p.101.

³⁸ *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles: The Original Georgian Texts and the Armenian Adaptation*, ed. by Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.326; for the date of the oldest MS, see p.xl.

³⁹ Rayfield, p.69.

which presents the Alan King Dorgholel as the near-equal of the Georgian King Bagrat' IV (r.1027-1072).⁴⁰ It therefore appears that, in contrast to 11th century records of a single Alan royal family, by the 12th century Alania's leadership was much more fragmented.

It should be noted that some other sections of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* present a different picture. Notably, the *Life of Tamar, Queen of Queens* (after 1236⁴¹) describes the Alan prince David Soslan, second husband of Queen Tamar of Georgia, as the son of the King of *Ovseti* (Alania).⁴² However, he is only described as such in sources written after his death, in a period in which the prestige of the Georgian queen, David Soslan's daughter Rusudan, was waning. This is in contrast to sources from Tamar's own lifetime, which diminish David Soslan's status. Although the *History and Eulogies of Monarchs* (c.1212⁴³) does mention his "royal parentage" in a non-specific manner, he is called a knight (*bumberazi*), rather than a prince (*tavadi*) or king (*mepe*). Moreover, the passage in which he is introduced calls him "the smallest among my brothers and youngest in my father's house": a clear reference to the biblical King David's non-royal origins.⁴⁴ This passage forms the culmination of a section in which several royal suitors are successively rejected by Tamar, and which draws an explicit contrast between their high status and David Soslan's lower one. While this passage also cannot be taken at face value, it does demonstrate that David's royal status was highly dependent on context: in the years when Queen Tamar was still

⁴⁰ See Met'reveli and Jones, pp.161-2. Specifically, a grand visit where Dorgholel was hosted by Bagrat' IV is presented as enhancing Bagrat's prestige, without any direct implication of the Alan king's subordination.

⁴¹ Rayfield, p.103.

⁴² Met'reveli and Jones, p.290.

⁴³ Rayfield, p.102.

⁴⁴ Met'reveli and Jones, p.247.

alive, his status was played down to avoid him becoming a rival to the queen as her first husband, Yuri Bogoliubskii, had been. In the years when David Soslan's daughter was on the throne, his royal status could be exaggerated in order to enhance his embattled daughter's legitimacy.⁴⁵ This implies that, if there was any royal family in Alania by this point, its status was uncertain enough that its legitimacy could be called into question when necessary. Once again, this is a major change from the 11th century, when the Alan royal family was considered sufficiently prestigious and its power sufficiently stable for two Georgian monarchs to marry into it.⁴⁶ While the Georgian sources do not tell us anything about the mechanisms of social co-ordination within Alania, the absence of a stable system of kingship is clear.

Arabic and Persian Sources

A major shift in the presentation of Alania also occurs in Islamic geographical and historical sources from the seventh century AH/ 13th century CE, which explicitly describe the Alans' political structure as polycentric. Moreover, these remarks cannot be written off as *topoi* in accounts of a barbarian region, since they represent a major shift in Alania's presentation. In the fourth

⁴⁵ For further analysis of this passage, see, see John Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or Two? The Question of a "Dual State" in the North Caucasus, 7th-12th Centuries in Russian and Western Historiography', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, forthcoming. Additionally, a marginal note in some editions of the collected *Kartlis Tskhovreba* give a genealogy of David Soslan's descent from the Alan kings Aton and Jadaron. However, this note only appears in manuscripts of the 18th century or later, and was probably intended to avoid suggestions of consanguinity between David Soslan and Tamar. This is apart from other significant problems, not least that it posits only three generations spanning a period of 170 years. See Met'reveli and Jones, p.6 for this note's textual history.

⁴⁶ These being Giorgi I and Bagrat' IV, who respectively married the Alan princesses Alde and Borena. See John Skylitzēs, *Synopsis of History*, in Alemany, p.222; Met'reveli and Jones, p.154

century AH/ tenth century CE, several Arabic and Persian geographical works describe Alania as a complex kingdom with a powerful king.⁴⁷ As we will see, these works remained in circulation in the sixth/ 12th and seventh/ 13th centuries. However, when authors updated their information, they made sure to mention that the Alans had now adopted a more polycentric system of government.

The best example of this process is Yāqūt al-Rūmī's geographical dictionary, the *Muʿjam al-Buldān* (615-625/ 1218-1228).⁴⁸ This work can be highly problematic: effectively a geographical equivalent of a biographical dictionary, the author has no compunction in repeating centuries-old and contradictory statements about the same subject. Amongst these contradictions is the issue of the Alan kingship. In one report, Yāqūt states that the Alans are ruled by a king who fights continually against the Khazars, a reference which dates this otherwise unknown report to the 10th century or earlier.⁴⁹ His second report is a word-for-word reiteration of the report of al-Masʿūdī, who wrote at length about the power and influence of the Alan king.⁵⁰ Rather, it is Yāqūt's third report which interests us. In it, he mentions that "[the Alans] do not obey a single king, and each tribe has its own particular chief."⁵¹ This report's importance is due to Yāqūt's twice-repeated statement that this information relates to the period in

⁴⁷ For example, see *Ḥudūd ʿal-ʿālam Min ʿal-Mashriq ʿila ʿal-Maghrib: kih bi-Sāl-i 372 Hijrī-i Qamarī Taʿlīf Shudah ʿast*, ed. by Manūchihr Sutūdah (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihirān, 1962), p.191; Aḥmad ibn ʿUmar Ibn Rusta, *Les atours précieux*, trans. by Gaston Wiet (Cairo: Publications de la Société de Géographie d'Égypte, 1955), pp.166-7; ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Masʿūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, trans. by Charles Pellat (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1962), p.173.

⁴⁸ Claude Gilliot, 'Yāqūt al-Rūmī', *EL*2.

⁴⁹ Charles Adrien Casimir Barbier de Meynard, *Dictionnaire Géographique, Historique et Littéraire de la Perse et des Contrées Adjacentes, Extrait du Moʿdjem el-Bouldan de Yaqout, et Complété a l'Aide de Documents Arabes et Persans pour la Plupart Inédits* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1861), p.503.

⁵⁰ Barbier de Meynard, p.52.

⁵¹ Barbier de Meynard, p.51.

which he was writing his dictionary. He explicitly states that this third report was based on information he was personally told by “a person who has travelled these countries.”⁵² This information, moreover, appears directly after his copy of Mas‘ūdī’s report. In effect, it acts as a ‘disclaimer’ that Mas‘ūdī’s description of the powerful Alan kingdom is out-of-date, and that the description of Alania as polycentric represents current information.

Corroboration of Yāqūt’s description is found in Persian sources on Mōngke Khan’s Mongol invasion of the Caucasus. While ‘Aṭā Malik al-Juvaynī’s account (c.649-658/ 1252-1260⁵³) of the capture of the Alan capital, **Magas*, is largely concerned with an extended pun on the animalistic nature of the land (*magas* translates to ‘fly’ in Persian), there is more detailed information in Rashīd al-Dīn’s *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh* (710/1310-11⁵⁴).⁵⁵ Rashīd al-Dīn gives relatively little information on the political structure of Alania, as opposed to invasions of it. However, in one passage he mentions that it was composed of multiple tribes, albeit with a single paramount leader, Ājīs (*mughdam-i aqvām-i ās ājīs*), who was captured by Mōngke.⁵⁶ We should not necessarily take this claim of Ājīs’ high status at face value, since it appears in the *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh*’s section outlining Mōngke’s credentials for rulership, where we might expect some exaggeration of the status of Mōngke’s prisoner. Nonetheless, Rashīd al-Dīn’s account does

⁵² Barbier de Meynard, p.52.

⁵³ ‘Aṭā Malik ibn Muḥammad Juvaynī, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. by J.A. Boyle (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1958), p.xxxvii.

⁵⁴ *Classical Writings of the Medieval Islamic World: Persian Histories of the Mongol Dynasties*, ed. by W. M. Thackston (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), p.x.

⁵⁵ Juvaynī, p.269. See also fn. 75 in Chapter Five.

⁵⁶ Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb, *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh* (Tehran: Nashr-i Alburz, 1994), p.825.

clearly corroborate Yāqūt's statement that Alan society was organised on a polycentric basis by the early 13th century.

Chinese Sources

This impression of a polycentric Alania is supported by sources from a further literary tradition: the Chinese. Surprisingly, the dynastic history of the Mongol dynasty of China, the *Yuan-Shi* (1369⁵⁷), contains biographies of several Alan commanders who served under the Mongols. The early sections of several biographies provide information about these Alan families' submission to the Mongols during the campaigns in the Caucasus. These biographies provide our best evidence for the operation of North Caucasian political systems in the early 13th century. It is therefore notable that they describe a system with multiple leaders acting independently of each other, with no central authority and no mechanism to co-ordinate their activities.

These biographies describe the numerous members of the Alan elite who took service with the Mongols during the campaigns in the Caucasus. For example, we are told that the three brothers Baduer, Wuzuoer Buhan and Mataersha submitted to Möngke during his Caucasian campaign, and that Mataersha took part in the assault on the Alan stronghold of *Magas.⁵⁸ Hanghusi, the "lord of the Alan country" submitted himself along with around 1,000 followers, including his son, Atachi, and his wife, Waimasi.⁵⁹ All of the above-

⁵⁷ E. V. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Fragments towards the Knowledge of the Geography and History of Central and Western Asia from the 13th to the 17th Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), vol. 1, p.180.

⁵⁸ *Yuan-Shi*, Chapter 132, 19, biography of Baduer, in Alemany, p.415.

⁵⁹ *Yuan-Shi*, Chapter 132, 19, biography of Hanghusi, in Alemany, pp.409-12.

mentioned individuals went on to found dynasties of up to four generations in imperial service, as did lesser leaders who submitted with small groups of followers (Yueludamou and Fudelaici).⁶⁰

These individuals were all rewarded for their service to the Mongols, particularly Hanghusi's family. Indeed, while we cannot take the Chinese terminology literally, it appears that Hanghusi was retroactively declared the ruler (*chu*) of the Alan state (*guo*).⁶¹ Other commanders were rewarded with titles, money, and prestige items such as gold tablets of office. Besides these, a plausible benefit for Alan leaders who sided with the Mongols may have been the fruits of the Mongol taxation system, which was extended to the North Caucasus in the 1250s.⁶² This new source of elite power was enforceable with the help of Mongol *tamma* security troops posted in the Caucasus from the 1260s, and an administrative arm of the Mongol state in the person of a *darugachi* (imperial legate), whose presence in the North Caucasus is recorded in the *Yuan-Shi*.⁶³ Independent toponym evidence from the North Caucasus provides further evidence for this extension of Mongol officialdom.⁶⁴

However, we should be aware that the image the *Yuan-Shi* gives is a partial one. Firstly, its biographies only describe selected members of the Alan elite who sided with the Mongols. Secondly, since these biographies largely consist of lists of awards of titles, money, and other honours, they tend to 'whitewash' the

⁶⁰ *Yuan-Shi*, Chapter 135, 22, biography of Shila Baduer, and *Yuan-Shi*, Chapter 132, 19, biography of Kouerji, both in Alemany, pp.416, 418-9.

⁶¹ *Yuan-Shi*, Chapter 132, 19, biography of Hanghusi, in Alemany, pp.409-12. See also Thomas T. Allsen, 'Mongols and North Cascaia', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 7 (1987), 5-40.

⁶² Allsen, p.33.

⁶³ Allsen, pp.31-2.

⁶⁴ For example, the place-name 'Nuzal' (North Ossetia), derived from Mongol *nuzul* (billet). See V. A. Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta* (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 1990), p.58.

careers of those who are recorded. For example, we are told that Atachi, son of the lord Hanghusi, was appointed to the palace guard twice, being “reinstated” the second time.⁶⁵ However, we are nowhere told of the reason for his prior demotion.⁶⁶ Finally, although their actions are shadowy, it is notable that other Alans chose not to side with the Mongols and the new political hierarchy. For example, the *Yuan-Shi* mentions that the forces of another Alan lord, Duerge, defeated and killed the son of Aersilan, a prominent noble who had sided with the Mongols.⁶⁷ It seems that this imposition of state structures on a highly polycentric society did not go unopposed.

The significance of these accounts, partial as they are, is that they show a number of leaders who acted independently of each other, without a mechanism of co-ordination comparable to that which existed in preceding centuries. For example, the submission of each of these leaders is recorded independently, and even after their submission to the Mongols, it seems that they continued to act autonomously. For example, whilst it appears Hanghusi’s ruling status was emphasised, there is no record of him commanding any of the other Alan leaders in Mongol service, nor is he connected to any Alan leader other than his own family. Indeed, the organisation of these biographies implies that kin-affiliation was the main organisational principle of these Alan elites. For example, upon Hanghusi’s death, it was his wife and son who defended his patrimony, rather than any official or appointee.

⁶⁵ *Yuan-Shi*, Chapter 132, 19, biography of Hanghusi, in Alemany, pp.409-10

⁶⁶ In any event, Allsen suggests this may have been the thinly disguised position of a hostage. See Allsen, p.31.

⁶⁷ *Yuan-Shi*, Chapter, 123, 10, biography of Aersilan, in Alemany, p.408.

The New System: Polycentric Alania in the 13th and 14th Centuries

Clans and Migration after the Alan Kingdom

Persian and Arabic historical and geographical traditions, Latin European travel accounts, Byzantine ecclesiastical and astrological sources, and Chinese biographies all give us an image of a polycentric North Caucasian society in the 12th to 14th centuries. Apart from the dubious evidence of the Georgian sources, the most hierarchical type of leader our sources describe is a kind of *primus inter pares*, the status of whom was perhaps deliberately exaggerated by Mongol-era writers due to his submission to the Mongol forces. Indeed, according to our most detailed source, the *Yuan-Shi*, political alliances were flexible, and the overall situation was highly unstable, with no mechanism of co-ordination between the various kin-based social hierarchies of the Central North Caucasus. In the case of some leaders, this included utilising the resources of foreign invaders in order to boost their own positions and those of their followers. This lack of solidarity provides the clearest demonstration of Alania's polycentricity in this period.

The organising principle of Alan society in this period appears to have been an ideology of consanguinity. Yāqūt and Rashīd al-Dīn both explicitly state that the Alans' leadership structure was based on headship of a given clan or clans. We may also point to Riccardus' comments that the basis of justice was retribution by kin, and was governed by customary practices, for example the suspension of blood-feuds on Sundays.⁶⁸ While we need not take Riccardus'

⁶⁸ ... *excepta sola die dominica a mane usque ad vesperam, que in tanta devotione apud illos habetur, quod tunc quilibet, quantumcumque mali fecerit, vel quotcumque habeat adversarios, securus*

account of the veneration of the Sabbath at face value, there is no reason for him to have invented the custom of kin retribution: indeed, a closer parallel to European legal norms would have better emphasised deficiencies in Latin Christians' religious observance.

Further indirect evidence for a clan-based organisation of Alan society is provided by the changing dynamics of migrations. Although Alan migration appears to have been common prior to the early 13th century, this occurred on an individual level, being conducted by royal wives, courtiers, mercenaries, and slaves.⁶⁹ By contrast, from the early 13th century forwards, we encounter increasing numbers of Alans migrating in large, cohesive groups up to 16,000 strong.⁷⁰ As we saw in the previous chapter (p.252), the best record of these migrations concerns the movement of an entire Alan clan, the Akhasarpakiani, into Georgia in around 1262.⁷¹ These migrating groups were sometimes settled by outside powers, for example Byzantium and the Georgian kingdom of Kartli, in return for military service.

There are further examples of these large groups of Alans outside the Caucasus in the early 13th century. One group of Alans, under the leadership of a

potest sive nudus, sive armatus, etiam inter illos, quorum parentes occidit, vel quibus alia mala intulit, ambulare. Theiner, p.152.

⁶⁹ For example, Irene 'of Alania', wife of Isaak Komnēnos; Constantine *Alanos*, the commander of a Byzantine attack on Dvin in 1045; a corps of mercenaries, claimed to be 6,000 strong, levied in c.1073 from the Alan ruler for service in the Byzantine army; and the Alan slaves reported by the *Qābūs-Nāmah* of Kay-Kā'ūs b. Iskandar (475/ 1082). See Nikēphoros Basilakēs, *In Ioann. Episc. Bulg.*, 8, in Alemany, p.229; John Scylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057*, trans. by John Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.411-12; Nikēphoros Bryennios 2, 19, in Alemany, p.233; Kay-Kā'ūs ibn Iskandar, *Qābūs-Nāmah*, ed. by Ghulam Ḥusayn Yusufi (Tehran: Shirkat-i Atsharat-i Ali va Farsangi, 1967), pp.115-16.

⁷⁰ This was the total number of a corps of Alan mercenaries, who hired themselves to the Byzantines in 1300, and their families. See George Pachymerēs, *Historical Accounts*, 10, 16, in Alemany, p.214-15.

⁷¹ Met'reveli and Jones, p.359. On the probable consanguineous organisation of the Akhsarpakiani, see Chapter Five (p.252); Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, p.110.

certain Qachir-Oqola, is recorded in the lower Volga region in 1237-8, according to Rashīd al-Dīn.⁷² Another group of Alan mercenaries, defending the Byzantine city of Cherson in the Crimea, is recorded by Theodore of Alania.⁷³ This group may be the same as that which William of Rubruck encountered in 1253.⁷⁴ Theodore, indeed, tells us that “the [Alan] people is greatly dispersed, and it extends from the Caucasus mountains up to the Iberias [Georgia], which was the ancient border of their country; but they have become accustomed to send out emigrants, so much so that they have filled nearly the whole of Scythia and Sarmatia.”⁷⁵ Yet another group fled from the Mongol advance into Hungary, where they became known as the Jasses and maintained a separate identity for a further 200 years.⁷⁶ The final group were those Alan families who were taken into Mongol service in China, as recorded in the *Yuan-Shi*. By 1309, at least on paper, 22,000 Alan households comprised two separate divisions (the *you* and *zou Asu wei*) of the imperial army.⁷⁷ Judging by the *Yuan-Shi*’s family-based biographies, kin-descent was also the main organising principle for groups of Alans who moved to China.

We may therefore suggest that these movements to the East and West constituted mass migrations of self-defined clan groups, willing to integrate themselves into the political structures of other political powers. Along with the

⁷² Thackston, pp.231-2.

⁷³ Theodore, pp.392-3.

⁷⁴ William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium ad Partes Orientales*, 11, 1-3, in Alemany, p.154.

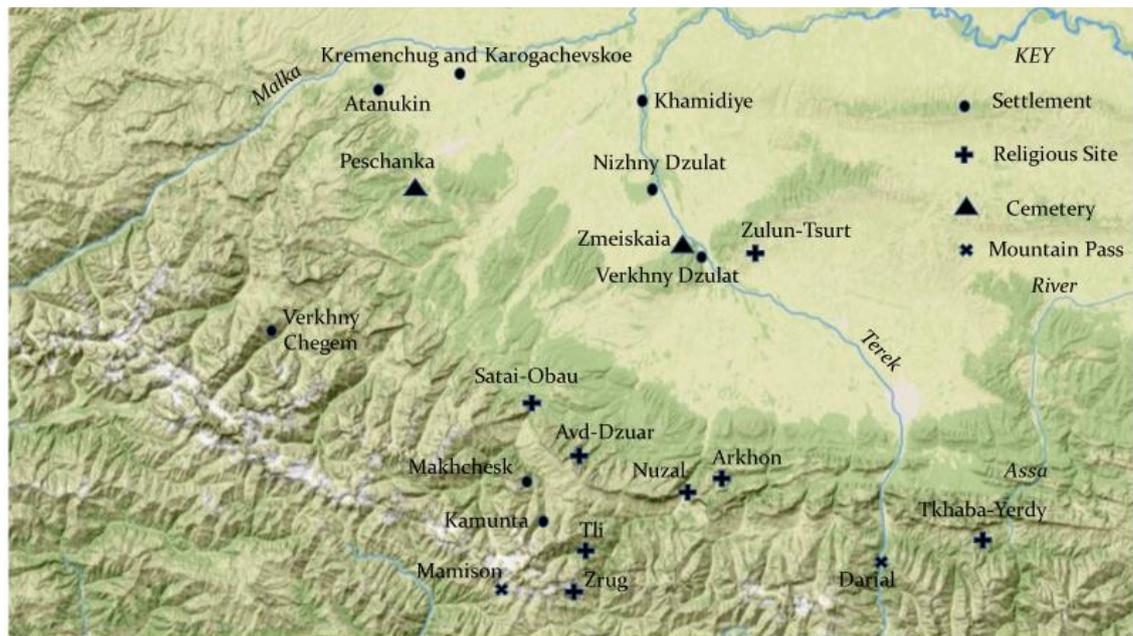
⁷⁵ Polyschides *gar to ethnos touto, kai diēkon men apo tōn Kaukasiōn orōn es Ibēras, to archaion kai patrion horion, agapa de kai metoikesias pollostōn tinōn pempein, hōs mikrou Skythikēn te pasan kai tōn Sauromatōn ekplēroun*. Theodore, pp.392-3. My translation from J.P. Migne’s Latin translation.

⁷⁶ See V. A. Kuznetsov and Iaroslav Lebedynsky, *Les Alains: cavaliers des steppes, seigneurs du Caucase* (Paris: Errance, 1997), pp.198-203.

⁷⁷ *Yuan-Shi*, Chapter 99, ‘Tract on the Army II: the Imperial Guard’, 47, in Alemany, p.407.

explicit evidence of Yāqūt, Rashīd al-Dīn and Riccardus, this implies that this clan structure had become the principal form of political organisation in the Central North Caucasus. Remarkably, we possess a unique inscription, from the chapel of Nuzal in North Ossetia, which gives us an insight into the historicising ideology through which this clan-based political organisation was constructed.

A Small Chapel in the Alagir



Map 4: Eastern Alania with sites of the ninth to 14th centuries. Image: the author.

High in the Alagir valley of North Ossetia, near the village of Nuzal, stands a small, unassuming chapel (**Fig. 19**). This rough-hewn construction may be no match in spectacle for the earlier churches of the Upper Kuban, but it nonetheless provides the best illustration of the new political world that came into being after the fall of the Alan kings. This was a world without a single king or ruler, yet where Christianity continued in its splendour, and the powerful continued to flaunt their access to the prestige and riches of the outside world.

For within its dry-stone walls, an artist named Vola Tliag, from the nearby village of Tli, painted a set of magnificent, Georgian-style religious paintings, which still survive in a good state of preservation.⁷⁸ Even more extraordinarily, on one wall of the chapel there was once an inscription in the Georgian language, which celebrated the glorious pedigree of the most prominent local family, the Tsarazonta. This document is unique in our study, as it is the only known document from the medieval Central North Caucasus that can be considered historical, in the sense of recording events in the past in a narrative format.

Unfortunately, this vital source is now lost, having been erased some time after 1870; however, at least four different copies were taken beforehand.⁷⁹ The majority of our extant copies, including one published and translated into French by Marie-Felicité Brosset in 1830 and another published in Russian by M.G. Janashvili in 1897, derive ultimately from a variant manuscript of the Georgian Prince Vakhushti's *Description of Georgia*, dated to 1817.⁸⁰ However, a number of further, independent copies were also made in the mid-19th century which differ from this version and clearly do not derive from it. Therefore, we can safely say

⁷⁸ Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, pp.72-3.

⁷⁹ The *terminus ante quem* is given by a version of the inscription published this year in the *Terskie Vedomosti* newspaper, which is clearly different from previously recorded versions (it has 13 verses instead of the more common nine). This thus represents an independent recording of the inscription. See Z. M. Salagaeva, *Ot nuzal'skoi nadpisi k romanu: problemy genezisa i stanovleniia osetinskoi prozy* (Ordzhonikidze: Ir, 1984), pp.112-13.

⁸⁰ See Marie-Felicité Brosset, 'Pieces diverses relatives a la Georgie, traduites par M. Brosset', *Journal asiatique*, 6 (1830), pp.310-12; M.G. Janashvili, 'Izvestiia gruzinskikh letopisei i istorikov o Severnom Kavkaze i Rossii', *Sbornik materialov dlia opisania mestnostei i plemen Kavkaza*, 22 (1897). On the inscription's textual history, see Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, pp.50-1.

that the inscription did exist at one time, and was not an invention of this particular manuscript's copyist.⁸¹

The date of this inscription is disputed. Since no definite record of the Nuzal Inscription can be found prior to the variant 1817 manuscript of Vakhushti, it has been claimed, most notably by Z.M. Salagaeva, that this inscription is a post-medieval forgery, perhaps of the 18th century, intended to bolster the genealogy of the Tsarazonta clan named in the opening line.⁸² However, a medieval date- at least, prior to the mid-15th century- is much more likely. Salagaeva bases her argument on the fact that the names which appear in the inscription also appear in a donor portrait in the chapel, and in a series of oral legends about the mythic ancestor of the Ossetians, Os-Baqatar. She therefore argues that the inscription was fabricated, using names already available in local folklore and captioning the images on the chapel wall. However, a recent re-examination of the wall painting, which still survives, has demonstrated that very few of the names in it correspond to those in the inscription.⁸³ By breaking the link between the donor portrait and the inscription's text, it undermines Salagaeva's argument that the latter was copied from the former. Secondly, Salagaeva's argument that the inscription copied its themes from a pre-existing

⁸¹ It has also been claimed that this inscription was entirely fabricated. The Russian traveller, Vasily Pfaff, claimed that the inscription was falsified as it did not match a genealogy of David Soslan, which was also recorded in Vakhushti. However, as mentioned above (fn. 45), this genealogy of David Soslan is itself far more suspect than the inscription. On this issue, see Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or Two?'

⁸² The inscription is also mentioned in the standard text of Vakhushti Bagrationi's *History of Georgia* (1745); however, this version of the inscription's text is completely different, being the dubious genealogy of David Soslan mentioned in the footnote above. See Vakhushti Bagrationi, *Histoire de la Géorgie, depuis l'antiquité jusq'au XIXe siècle*, ed. by Marie-Félicité Brosset (St. Petersburg: Imprimerie de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1849), p.421.

⁸³ See D.V. Beletskii, 'Eshche raz o freskakh nuzal'skoi usypal'nitsy', in *Severnyi Kavkaz i kochevoi mir stepei Evrazii: VI 'minaevskie chteniia' po arkheologii, etnografii i kraevedeniiu Severnogo Kavkaza*, ed. by A.A. Kudriavtsev (Stavropol': Stavropol'skii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2003), pp.92-5.

set of oral legends is undermined by the fact that these legends were only recorded after 1855, later than the first attestation of the inscription.⁸⁴ As such, her argument that these oral legends predate the inscription rests on the assumption that these legends are of great antiquity, rather than recent creations. Finally, the most significant evidence in favour of the inscription's medieval date is that a fortification mentioned in the text, the "gate of the bridge" in the Vale of Kasar, has been dated archaeologically to the medieval period, and was only used until the 15th century.⁸⁵

The text below is my translation of the earliest known recording of the Nuzal Inscription, known from Vakhushti, and reproduced by Janashvili and V.A. Kuznetsov. This includes emendations by Nikoloz Aleksidze from the Georgian text reproduced by Brosset.

"We were nine brothers- Charjolidze- Ch'arkhilani⁸⁶: the Os-Baqatar, David-Soslan, who [pl.] fought with four kingdoms; Pidaros, Jadaros, Sakur and George, who [pl.] threateningly met with [their] enemies; three of our brothers- Isaac, Romanos and Basil- became faithful servants of Christ. We defend the narrow roads which lead from the four corners. In Kasar I have a castle and a toll-house and here I guard the gate of the bridge; believing in the afterlife, I stand firm in this world; I have [so] much gold and silver-bearing land, [that it's] like water; I conquered the Caucasus, I fought with the four kingdoms. I stole the sister of the Georgian king (*bat'oni*), following our custom; he caught up with me, he broke his oath and took

⁸⁴ Salagaeva, pp.127-8.

⁸⁵ Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, pp.124-30.

⁸⁶ These are the names of two Ossetian noble families rendered into Georgian: the Ossetian forms are Tsarazonta and Tsakhilta, which will be used elsewhere in this chapter.

my sin upon himself. Baqatar was given up to the watercourse, indeed the Ossetian host was destroyed. Whosoever of you sees this poem, let him tell a little in remembrance.”⁸⁷

The format of the inscription is a poetic lament (*kharag*), written in a 20-syllable meter known elsewhere in Georgian literature.⁸⁸ It laments the death of a certain Os-Baqatar, a mythical ancestor-hero known widely from folklore in Ossetia.⁸⁹

The lament is split broadly into three parts: the first celebrates the family of Os-Baqatar; in the second, the person switches from a third-person to first-person narration, in which Os-Baqatar boasts of his power and qualifications for fame; and the final part narrates, in first- and then third-person style, the story of Os-Baqatar’s eventual defeat and death at the hands of the unnamed *bat’oni* (lord/ king) of Georgia.

As far back as Vasily Pfaff’s work of 1871, this third and final part of the inscription has been compared to the description of the Georgian king Vakhtang Gorgasali’s expedition into Ossetia, contained in his eponymous life within the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*.⁹⁰ Salagaeva has argued, however, that the Nuzal Inscription should be seen primarily as a literary document, rather than an explicitly historical one. As she puts it, “the author of the Nuzal Inscription was not so much a historian, as an artist”.⁹¹ She argues that the arrangement of factual and mythical elements comprised a deliberate schema; this arrangement itself, she

⁸⁷ Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, pp.78-9.

⁸⁸ Salagaeva, pp.134, 144.

⁸⁹ See Z. N. Vaneev, *Narodnoe predanie o proiskhozhdenii Osetin* (Stalinir: Gosizdat Iugo-Osetii, 1956), pp.3-4.

⁹⁰ See Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, p.94; Met’reveli and Jones, pp.80-4.

⁹¹ Salagaeva, p.122.

argues, constitutes useful historical evidence. This seems the most promising methodology for examining the Nuzal Inscription- to treat it as a historical document, but one which is useful for attitudes in its period of composition, rather than being an authentic record of actual events.⁹²

The Changing Face of Authority in the North Caucasus

If we see the Nuzal Inscription as a document of the 14th-15th centuries, and existing in a zone of cultural interaction with Georgia, its true value becomes clear. Its clear purpose is to glorify the ancestry of a noble family, and thereby legitimise their power. The inscription literally invokes the spoken authority of ancestors to promote the power of the two families named in its opening: the Tsarazonta and Tsakhilta. This genealogy is presented as simultaneous, rather than diachronic: all the pretensions to power it conveys are thus also claimed simultaneously. These claims are ambitious: the inscription boasts of the families' military might, wealth, and connections to the church. As such, it provides crucial evidence for the construction of authority in the mountains of the North Caucasus in this period, and for how this had changed since the Alanic period.

The first point to make, whilst obvious, is that Christianity was still a powerful force in the North Caucasus in the late medieval period. It was clearly still worthwhile for a noble family to go to the expense of commissioning a donor

⁹² Attempts to argue that the Nuzal Inscription records the genuine deeds of a real North Caucasian leader named Baqatar generally rely on the assumption that oral legends recorded in the 19th century are an authentic record of medieval history, rather than genealogical claims to contemporary political power. This is despite the fact that in some of these legends, Os-Baqatar features as a mythic ancestor of given clans or even of all Ossetians. See Vaneev, pp.3, 17-20; Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, pp.97-8.

portrait in a chapel. Moreover, according to the inscription, one-third of the mythical ‘nine brothers’ are depicted as becoming “servants of Christ”- presumably monks or priests. Both the wall painting and the inscription effectively attempt to create a social reality of aristocratic control over Christian sites: firstly, through the financial aspects of devotion, and secondly by projecting this patronage of the church into the past through the means of the inscription. This use of a Christian inscription to ‘freeze’ oral claims to power represents a continuity with the period of the Alanic kingdom; indeed, the use of religious inscriptions to demonstrate claims to authority would continue as late as the Kabardian Elkhtovo (1581) and Etokskii (1623) inscriptions.⁹³ These claims were iterated in a foreign (and thus universal) language, within a confined space unambiguously under elite control, as demonstrated by its decorative schema. This helps reinforce the exclusivity of these claims, as opposed to their placement on a cross or stele open and visible to all.

Although it would appear that the religious background to political power remained similar to the preceding Alanic period, there are major discontinuities in the construction of authority in the Nuzal Inscription. This provides *prima facie* evidence for the North Caucasus slipping out of the monarchical world in which it had previously been entangled.

The greatest change between the construction of Alanic royal authority and elite authority in the Nuzal Inscription is the lack of kings. At no point is Os-Baqatar defined as a ruler, nor does he possess any title whatsoever. Even David

⁹³ I.V. Pomialovskii, *Sbornik grecheskikh i latinskikh nadpisei Kavkaza* (St. Petersburg: Tipografia imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1881), pp.16-18. On these inscriptions’ date, see S.N. Savenko, *Vosstozdanie muzeia drevnostei pod otkryтым небом v Pyatigorske* (Stavropol’: Stavrolit, 2013), pp.28-39

Soslan, who also appears in the inscription, is not granted his historically attested title of King of Georgia.⁹⁴ Rather, the greatness of the Tsarazonta's and Tsakhilta's ancestors is established solely through their actions and possessions.

In addition, the only character who appears with a title in the Nuzal Inscription, the Georgian *bat'oni* (king/ lord), appears as a negative figure, an oath-breaker who slays the hero of the piece. The abduction of the Georgian princess is here depicted as an act in accordance with custom and (by implication) right, rather than a *casus belli*. The message of the story of Vakhtang Gorgasali is thereby inverted; the king is a foreign, destructive force, rather than a hero.

The Nuzal Inscription's depiction of kings therefore marks a major shift in the construction of authority. Whereas in the Alanic kingdom authority was conveyed by hereditary titles and conspicuous access to the outside world that conferred them, in the Nuzal Inscription power is derived from actions *against* that same outside world. Moreover, legitimacy is explicitly conveyed here through ancestry and kin-affiliation, rather than access to the outside world allowing co-ordination between different social hierarchies. We therefore can see the Nuzal Inscription as a product of a society that had fallen out of the monarchical orbit in which the Alanic kingdom had operated.

The Nuzal Inscription may therefore be seen as a product of the polycentric political world described by Julian of Hungary and the *Yuan-Shi*. This bears a much closer resemblance to the political environment encountered by the

⁹⁴ For the attestation of this title, see (for example) Met'reveli and Jones, p.269.

Russians in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁹⁵ It is more than this, however: this is an indicator of the passing from the world of the Alan kingdom.

The Decline of the Alan Kingdom: Destruction or Continuity?

Having established that the Alanic political system had become considerably more polycentric by the 13th century, as defined by the lack of a single royal family and a mechanism of co-ordination between different social hierarchies, we may ask why this process occurred. The remainder of this chapter will address the major reason which has been proposed previously- foreign invasion. It will argue that this explanation does not fit our chronology, nor the textual or material culture evidence. This section will therefore propose an alternative hypothesis: that the decline of Alan kingship can be traced to changing styles of elite authority.

Foreign Invaders: Introduction

The decline of the Kingdom of Alania is generally attributed to invasions of steppe peoples. The most common candidates for these invaders are the Mongols, who campaigned in the Central North Caucasus in 1239-40, in addition to launching a reconnaissance mission in 1222-3, and later campaigns in 1262 and 1287-8.⁹⁶ Alternatively, it has been argued that the decline of Alania is better

⁹⁵ On North Caucasian political organisation in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Georgi Derluguian, 'The Forgotten Complexities of the North Caucasus Jihad', in *Caucasus Paradigms: Anthropologies, Histories and the Making of a World Area*, ed. by Bruce Grant and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (Berlin: W. Hopf Verlag, 2007).

⁹⁶ Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, pp.131-2; Irina Arzhantseva and Svetlana Ruzanova, 'The Problems of the Beginning of Medieval Towns in the North Caucasus', in *Making a Medieval*

explained by a war between the Alans and the Qipchaqs, a steppe confederation otherwise known as the Cumans or Polovtsy, in around 1120.⁹⁷ These explanations generally see these invasions as being extremely destructive, leading to not only the decline of the Alan kingdom, but also to mass migrations from Alania, and the destruction of the culture of the Alan kingdom, up to and including a decline of Christianity.

However, there are numerous reasons to re-think this picture. This section of the chapter will argue that not only is the evidence for this destruction very weak, these invasions occurred in the wrong time period to explain the decline of the Kingdom of Alania. Moreover, it will argue that there is not enough evidence of a dramatic cultural break to justify such radical conclusions.

Foreign Invaders: The Mongols

Let us start with our evidence for the Mongols' campaigns themselves. Although the above-mentioned wars were clearly destructive, many of these incursions were relatively brief. The 1222-3 campaign was essentially an extended raid and reconnaissance of the Caspian steppes. The campaign in Alania in 1239-40 lasted only one winter before the Mongol armies moved on to invade Russia and Eastern Europe.⁹⁸ The campaign of the Battle of the Terek (1262) was

Town: Patterns of Early Medieval Urbanisation (Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology, Polish Academy of Sciences, 2010), p.211; *Istoriia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza*, ed. by Boris Piotrovskii (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), p.197; A.V. Gadlo, *Etnicheskaia istoriia Severnogo Kavkaza X-XIII vv.* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo St. Peterburgskogo universiteta, 1994), pp.164-5; and perhaps most stridently, R.S. Bzarov, 'Alania and the Medieval History of Alania-Ossetia in Archaeological Monuments', in M. M Blied and R.S. Bzarov, *Sokrovishcha Alanii. The Treasure of Alania* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2011), p.11.

⁹⁷ Gadlo, pp.162-4; V. A. Kuznetsov, *Ocherki istorii Alanov* (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 1992), pp.319-20.

⁹⁸ Thackston, p.669.

primarily a Mongol civil war, although Alan troops were involved.⁹⁹ The campaign of 1287-8 also seems to have been a raid. This is because the city it was targeted against, Dediakov, was clearly not destroyed, since the same source that mentions this attack, the Russian *Resurrection Chronicle* (1541), mentions the same city's existence thirty years later.¹⁰⁰ The participation of several Russian princes in this raid gives a clear reason to exaggerate the scale of the victory.

Potentially more destructive were the long-running wars between a part of the Alans and the Mongols, as described by John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck.¹⁰¹ However, judging by the more detailed information of the *Yuan-Shi*, despite these conflicts, we see an actual increase in political complexity in this period, as measured by the establishment of state institutions- officials with defined responsibilities, royal personages, tax systems, and standing armies.¹⁰² This implies that we cannot automatically see the Mongols as responsible for destroying political institutions, but rather for changing the way in which Alan elites reproduced and reified their power.

Moreover, the archaeological record in this period simply does not bear out an image of widespread and indiscriminate destruction. Although sites such

⁹⁹ Met'reveli and Jones, p.359.

¹⁰⁰ The context is the death of Prince Mikhail of Tver, who was killed "beyond the River Terek, along the Sevents [Sundzha] River, near the city of Tetiakov" (*za rekoiu Terkom, na retse na Sevents, pod gorodom pod Tetiakovim...*). *Resurrection Chronicle*, 6827, in Alemany, pp.384-5.

¹⁰¹ John of Plano Carpini comments "these are the names of the lands which have manfully opposed them [the Mongols] and whom they have still not submitted:... a certain part of the Alans..." (*haec autem sunt nomina terrarum quae eis viriliter resisterunt, nec sunt adhuc subdite eis:... quedam pars Alanorum*). William of Rubruck mentions that "to the South we had very high mountains [the Caucasus], in which live... the Circassians and the Alans or Aas, who are Christians and up to now are fighting against the Tartars." (*habebamus autem ad meridiem montes maximos, in quibus habitant... Cherkis et Alani sive Aas qui sunt christiani et adhuc pugnant contra Tartaros.*) John of Plano Carpini, *Historia Mongalorum*, 7, 10, and William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium ad Partes Orientales*, 14, 3, both in Alemany, pp.151, 155.

¹⁰² On the definition of the state as a society resolving its disputes through institutions staffed by officials, see Elman R. Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization: The Process of Cultural Evolution* (New York: Norton, 1975), p.9.

as Arkhyz and the nearby fortified town of Kiafar (Karachai-Cherkassia) were abandoned in the 12th and early 13th centuries, there are no destruction layers consistent with a violent end: rather, these sites simply fell out of use.¹⁰³ It should also be emphasised that this picture of urban abandonment is not universal. For example, the city of Nizhny Dzulat (Kabardino-Balkaria), one of the largest sites in Alania, was occupied throughout the Alan period and into the 14th century. Indeed, in the Mongol period this town seems to have expanded in prestige. During the early 14th century, the largest central plaza at any site in the North Caucasus was constructed there.¹⁰⁴ Overall, the impression we get archaeologically is not one of widespread destruction of cities and populations, and is in no way comparable with other regions known to have been devastated by the Mongols, such as Khorasan.

However, perhaps the most convincing argument against the destructiveness of the Mongol invasions is that the end of Alan kingship and the adoption of a clan-based political organisation happened *before* the Mongol invasions. To start with, the last identifiable individual recognised as *exousiokratōr* of Alania is Khuddan/ John Khotesian, who seems to have ruled in the 1150s or 60s. After this, there is no firm candidate for an Alan king. Moreover, the most obvious indicator that the Alan kingdom had collapsed before the Mongol invasions is that the evidence we cited above (p.274ff)- the descriptions of Yāqūt, Theodore of Alania and Riccardus- all date to the period before the fall of *Magas.

¹⁰³ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.178; Arzhantseva and Ruzanova, p.221.

¹⁰⁴ I. M. Chechenov, *Drevnosti Kabardino-Balkarii. Materialy k arkheologicheskoi karte* (Nal'chik: El'brus, 1969), p.46.

In conclusion, it seems clear that the political situation within Alania was already highly fragmented before the Mongols arrived. While their arrival may well have accelerated this process of political fragmentation, to see their invasions as a near-genocidal annihilation of Alan culture misses the subtler dynamics of Alan-Mongol interactions.

Foreign Invaders: The Qipchaqs

Given that we can rule out the Mongols as the cause of the decline of the Kingdom of Alania, we can now turn to an alternative explanation: a war with the Qipchaqs. The Georgian *Life of David, King of Kings* directly states that a war between the Qipchaqs and Alans was ongoing around 1118-20. The *Life of David* claims that David IV intervened in the war so that he could negotiate a truce and allow a group of Qipchaqs to resettle in Georgia.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, this is the same passage which, as we saw above (p.279), mentions that the Alans had multiple “kings and *mtavaris*”.

However, the evidence linking the Alan-Qipchaq war and the fall of the Alan kingdom is very weak. Essentially, it consists only of this passage’s juxtaposition of there being a war and the Alans having multiple leaders, with no causal link made between the two factors. Moreover, as with the Mongol invasion, there is no direct evidence whatsoever for widespread destruction of settlements caused by a 12th century Qipchaq invasion. However, the most

¹⁰⁵ Met’reveli and Jones, p.178.

important objection to this theory is that the Alans' political structure had previously managed to survive a serious defeat by another steppe power. In the 930s, the Alans were defeated in battle by their northern neighbours, the Khazars. The Alan king was captured, but rather than being overthrown, he was granted the new title of **kar-kundaj* and a marriage alliance with the Khaqan's family: in effect strengthening, rather than weakening, the Alan king's position.¹⁰⁶ As this incident demonstrates, we cannot assume that a war with a steppe power would automatically lead to the destruction of a complex Alan polity.

Cultural Continuity: The Evolution of North Caucasian Christianity in North Caucasian Evidence

For the purposes of this debate, it is particularly significant that the Central North Caucasus shows numerous cultural continuities during the 12th to 14th centuries, despite the major political changes described in our textual sources. In effect, there is not the evidence for a 'clean break' caused by a destructive outside invasion or population replacement. The clearest example of this continuity is the continued significance of Christianity in both elite and non-elite cultures of the Central North Caucasus. This is particularly significant from a political point of view, since Christianity had been a major underpinning of the Alan kingdom in the preceding centuries: for example, Alan rulers depicted themselves as quasi-saintly figures on their seals and in artistic depictions.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ See Schechter Letter, lines 44-61, in Alemany, p.333.

¹⁰⁷ For example, the Alan King Urdure had himself depicted with the halo of a holy personage on a donor plaque at Zedazeni Monastery, and King Gabriel was depicted as being under the protection of the Virgin Mary on his seal. See Nina Iamanidzé, *Les Installations Liturgiques Sculptées des Églises de Géorgie (VIIe-XIIIe Siècles)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp.164-8; Werner

However, it seems that the political context of Christian belief altered significantly in this period.

The main evidence for the continuation of Christian belief in the North Caucasus is threefold: the continued use of Christian epigraphic formulae, primarily in Greek, the existence of a Christian manuscript tradition, and the continued construction of churches.

Firstly, the practice of Greek epigraphy continued throughout the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries. For example, a 1341 memorial cross of George from Sidova (Karachai-Cherkassia) continues to use the same Greek monogram opening, IX NIKA, as North Caucasian inscriptions of the 11th century.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, it is clear from the Elkhtovo and Etokskii Crosses (North Ossetia and Stavropol' Krai respectively) that the Greek language and Christian calendar remained in use until the early 17th century. Extraordinarily, the memorial formula used on the former cross (*mnēsthēti k[uri]e tēn psychēn tou doulou sou...*) is exactly the same as that known throughout the Alanic period, and even as early as the seventh- to eighth-century inscription from Rim-Gora (Stavropol' Krai).¹⁰⁹ This provides clear evidence for continuities in religious practice far beyond the end of the Kingdom of Alania.

Secondly, there is evidence of a North Caucasian manuscript tradition, which may have produced church books of a relatively high level of theological

Seibt, 'Metropolitan und Herrscher der Alanen auf byzantinischen Siegeln des 10.-12. Jahrhunderts', in *Sfragistika i istoriia kul'tury*, ed. by E.V. Stepanova (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2004), p.54.

¹⁰⁸ V. V. Latyshev, 'Kavkazskie pamiatniki v Moskve', *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva*, 1.2 (1886), p.4; for the use of this formula in the 11th century, see Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.49.

¹⁰⁹ Pomialovskii, p.16.

sophistication until the 18th century. The most famous of these is a recently-discovered Byzantine lectionary of 1275, which was used during the 14th century by a priest who spoke the Alanic language.¹¹⁰ He wrote a series of marginal notes in his native language, in order to quickly identify the festivals to which each reading related while he was skimming the text. However, it is clear that the priest had a good command of Greek and understood the theological meanings that lay behind the terminology, since the feast days' names were accurately translated and the related readings were left untranslated. For example, the entry for June 5th, a festival commemorating the Avar surprise attack on Constantinople in 617, glosses the Greek service title as “*avēnatē panē*”, “day of punishment”.¹¹¹

Our evidence regarding other North Caucasian books similarly suggests a continuation of Christian belief, possibly with a sophisticated liturgical and theological understanding. In the 1880s, the ethnographer Vsevolod Miller obtained a partial Greek copy of the gospels, dated by its palaeography to the second half of the 15th century. Its numerous grammatical mistakes allow us to surmise that this was a local copy of an earlier manuscript.¹¹² Two other books were obtained in the 1790s by the German adventurer, Dr. Jacob Reineggs, and brought back with him to Göttingen. The origin of these books is obscure, since Reineggs himself never visited the Senty church (Karachai-Cherkassia), but rather bought them from a Tatar who claimed to have stolen them from there. While little is known of these books, apparently one was a treatise on the dual nature of

¹¹⁰ Alexander Lubotsky, *Alanic Marginal Notes in a Greek Liturgical Manuscript* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015), pp.7-8

¹¹¹ Lubotsky, pp.35-6.

¹¹² V. F. Miller, “Terskaia Oblast’. Arkheologicheskii ekskursii’, in *Materialy po arkheologii Kavkaza Imperatorskago Moskovskago Arkheologicheskago Obshchestva I*, ed. by Countess P.S. Uvarova (Moscow: A.I. Mamontov, 1888), p.76.

Christ which, if genuine, would imply a relatively high level of theological sophistication on the part of its owner or copyist.¹¹³ The Russian traveller, Avram Firkovich, attempted to buy two Greek liturgical books in 1848 at Atanukin (Kabardino-Balkaria). Their owners, the Shogenov family, refused to sell them to him, due to the prestige they brought them via their miracle-working powers.¹¹⁴ Finally, a theological work in Georgian, originally from Tkhaba-Yerdy church (Ingushetia), was formerly held in the Checheno-Ingush ASSR museum in Grozny, although its current whereabouts are unknown.¹¹⁵ Although in all of these cases we are forced to rely upon second-hand reports of theological works, the impression we get is of a literary tradition continuing right up to the Russian conquest of the Caucasus. This may have included book copying, as well as the consumption of written material.

Thirdly, despite the abandonment of the city of Nizhny Arkhyz, Christian sites in the Central North Caucasus continued in use in the 13th and 14th centuries. Indeed, many new churches were built in this period. For example, all three of the churches known from the urban site of Verkhny Dzulat (North Ossetia) were constructed at this time.¹¹⁶ Other churches in North Ossetia can be firmly dated to this period or later, including Nuzal, Satai-Obau, the Avd-Dzuar shrine at

¹¹³ Jacob Reineggs and Friedrich August Marschall von Bieberstein, *A General, Historical, and Topographical Description of Mount Caucasus: With a Catalogue of Plants Indigenous to the Country* (London: C. Taylor, 1807), pp.306-7; S.N. Malakhov, 'O grecheskoi pis'mennoi traditsii u narodov Severnogo Kavkaza v X-XVII vv.', in *Mir pravoslaviia: sbornik nauchnykh statei* (Volgograd: Izdatel'stvo volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1997), p.37

¹¹⁴ Abraham Firkovich, 'Arkheologicheskiia razvedki na Kavkaz', *Trudy vostochnogo otdeleniia Imperatorskogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva*, 3,1 (1857), pp.125-6.

¹¹⁵ See L. P. Semenov, *Arkheologicheskie i etnograficheskie razyskaniia v Ingushetii v 1925-1932 godakh* (Groznyi: Checheno-Ingushskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1963), fn. p.61. Ninety per cent of Grozny was destroyed during the two Chechen Wars, which does not bode well for the book's survival.

¹¹⁶ V.B. Vinogradov and S.A. Tolovanova, 'O roli gruzinskogo elementa v istorii khristianskikh khramov Verkhnego Dzhulata (Dediakova)', *Mantse*, 2 (1981), 149-60; Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.287.

Galiat, Faraskatta church at Makhchesk, and the Mady-Mairam shrine at Arkhon.¹¹⁷

It is, however, notable that these churches demonstrate an evolution of cultural and religious practices. In some cases- for example Church No. 1 at Verkhny Dzulat- the design influence remains Byzantine.¹¹⁸ We may also note the fact that, despite a notable lack of maintenance, the cemeteries surrounding the Byzantine-style churches at Nizhny Arkhyz and Senty remained in use during the 13th century.¹¹⁹ However, in most cases, overt imitations of Byzantine styles of church decoration and construction were replaced by designs influenced by Georgian architecture and autonomously developed in the North Caucasus. For example, the last of a series of periodic redecorations of Senty church in current Byzantine style appears to have taken place in around 1050-70.¹²⁰ By contrast, a more Georgian-influenced style of architecture becomes prominent in the 12th-13th century, for example in a complex of churches at Verkhny Chegem (Kabardino-Balkaria).¹²¹ Even more dramatically, from the 14th century onwards, an indigenous, monoapsidal 'Caucasian style' developed all across the former territory of Alania.¹²² This implies that while belief in Christianity continued among at least a section of the population, this was no longer linked to the styles of Byzantium. However, the continuity in use of Alan kingdom-era religious sites, even those like Senty which had formerly been associated with Alan kings,

¹¹⁷ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.275.

¹¹⁸ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.287.

¹¹⁹ Kuznetsov, *Nizhnii Arkhyz v 'X-XII' vekakh.*, p.248; V. I. Markovin, 'Issledovanie sentinskogo khrama i nekropoliia u reki Teberdy v Karachaevo-Cherkessii', *Istoriko-arkheologicheskii al'manakh*, 2 (1996), 180-202.

¹²⁰ Beletskii and Vinogradov, p.237.

¹²¹ Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.270-2; Chechenov, pp.80-4.

¹²² Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.305-6.

demonstrates that this process was not a sudden one, caused by a destructive outside invasion. Rather, we are seeing a gradual reorientation of Christian culture.

Cultural Continuity: External Sources on North Caucasian Christianity

This reorientation of North Caucasian Christianity away from Byzantium is also recorded by Byzantine documentation. As we saw in the previous chapter (p.235ff), the metropolitanate of Alania, subordinate to Constantinople, was one of the most significant social hierarchies within the Alan kingdom's political system. Moreover, the symbolic power it embodied seems to have played a major part in supporting the Alan kings' rule. When studying the decline of this kingdom, it is therefore significant that this hierarchical organisation appears to have decayed during the 12th century.

The first piece of evidence for this process is the unification of the sees of Alania and Soteriopolis, which occurred at some point between 1084 and 1105.¹²³ Although the precise interpretation of this act is contested, it seems that this represented a shift in the geographical focus of the see, since it is clear that by the late 12th century, the see of Alania was counted among those of Asia Minor (a synodal letter of 1172-5 has the Alan metropolitan's signature listed among

¹²³ The patriarchal act which united the two sees is dated only to the patriarchate of Nicephorus III (1084-1111), however there is a mention of John Monasteriotes, "metropolitan and archbishop of Alania-Stauropolis [i.e. Soteriopolis]" in 1105. See Giorgio Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica Orientalis: Series Episcoporum Ecclesiarum Christianarum Orientalium* (Padova: Messaggero, 1988), p.406; Jean Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Paris: Institut Français d'études Byzantines, 1981), p.127.

bishops of this region).¹²⁴ Similarly, in the 14th century, when a flurry of patriarchal acts are recorded, it is clear that the metropolitanate of Alania no longer referred to the North Caucasus, but rather was chiefly based in the region of Trebizond, where its principal church was located in an act of 1360.¹²⁵

Despite the gradual fading away of the official organisation of the Alan church, as we have clearly seen from the epigraphic, textual and architectural evidence from the North Caucasus, this did not equate to a general decline of Christianity. The two have frequently been confused due to the misinterpretation of several non-Alanic sources on Alan Christianity.¹²⁶ One of these is Riccardus' account, which described Alania's inhabitants as being a mixture of Christian and pagan.¹²⁷ However, as we have seen, this account's general presentation of Christian belief cannot be relied upon, as it was patterned in a quite deliberate way to show Alania as semi-Christian.

The source used most frequently to argue for a general decline of Christianity is Theodore of Alania's account. However, a close reading of the source's context refutes this conclusion. Most discussion of Theodore's work, a particularly difficult source which has never received a critical edition, has centred on one of its very few plain statements:

¹²⁴ For disputes over the significance of the act of 1105, see Malakhov, 'K voprosu o lokalizatsii eparkhial'nogo tsentra Alanii v XII-XVI vv.', p.159; Beletskii and Vinogradov, pp.62-3. The letter of 1172-5 was published in Jean Darrouzès, 'Questions de droit matrimonial: 1172-1175', *Revue des études Byzantines*, 35 (1977), 107-57.

¹²⁵ Franz Miklosich and Joseph Müller, *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi: Sacra et Profana, Collecta et Edita. Vol. 1-2 Acta Patriarchatus Constantinopolitani, MCCCXV-MCCCII* (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1860), V.1, p.478.

¹²⁶ Examples of these sources being taken at face value to show a general decline of Christianity include Iu.Iu. Kulakovskii, 'Khristianstvo u Alan', in *Izbrannye trudy po istorii Alanov i Sarmatii*, ed. by S. M. Perevalov (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2000), pp.177-9; Alemany, p.239; Gadlo, pp.167-9.

¹²⁷ Theiner, p.152.

“My flock prostitutes itself not only with the wood, as it is in scripture, but even with all stones and waters; [and] they do not prostrate themselves before idols, but before certain demons in high places. The Alans are Christian in name only.”¹²⁸

This has been taken as evidence of either the decline of Christianity among the Alans, or of it having never fully taken root in the first place.

However, this interpretation does not take account of the context in which this statement is made. Theodore’s account, apart from this passage and scriptural references, does not make much reference to paganism; rather, his major concern was that two different clergymen, representing Nicaea and Trebizond, both claimed to be Bishop of Alania. This Trapezuntine bishop, whom the Nicaean bishop Theodore calls the “man of Lazica”, had apparently ordained priests in an uncanonical manner.¹²⁹ Theodore claims that, faced with the populace’s ignorance of Christian doctrine, he was forced to reconfirm some of these appointments. Later on, it seems that accusations had been made that Theodore had also uncanonically ordained Alan priests by legitimising their previous ordination by the (supposedly illegitimate) rival bishop.¹³⁰ In any event, Theodore’s overriding concern is to demonstrate the necessity of his actions in

¹²⁸ ...*kai porneuei moi to poimnion ouk en tō xylō monon hōs gegraptai, ēdē de kai lithois pasi kai idasi, kai proskynousi men ou glyptois, daimoniois de tisin en tois upsēlois. Khristianoι de monon onomati Alanoi...* Theodore, pp.409-10; my translation from Migne’s Latin translation, with emendations after Alemany, pp.238-9.

¹²⁹ Theodore, pp.403-6. The term ‘Laz’ in this period was a derogatory nickname for a Trapezuntine. See Anthony Bryer and David Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1985), p.348.

¹³⁰ ...*kaiper hopoia philei symbainein en tous toioutois, allo heteron kai koine katēkrivōmenōs ouden, he pandēmos phēmē proferoi an.* Theodore, pp.389-90.

ordaining priests, on the grounds that “the harvest is great, but the workers are few” (Matthew 9:37).¹³¹

The reason for the seriousness of the accusations against Theodore was due to the political situation in the 1220s, where the Greek Empires of Nicaea and Trebizond were vying for the mantle of legitimate successor to the Byzantine Empire, following the capture of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204.¹³² In this context, we may see that Theodore’s allusions to Alan paganism can in no way be taken as an accurate description, but rather are polemical statements made in his own defence, in the manner of a trial. Moreover, this information is contradicted by the context of Theodore’s actions. He plainly tells us that the Alans had had at least three or four bishops, himself included, pass through in the preceding years.¹³³ This number presumably excludes the supposed Laz imposter. When one takes this into account, we receive a picture in which Christianity is a common fixture in Alania, but is subordinate to overlapping jurisdictions. This residual power of Christianity no longer supports a Byzantine-influenced, hierarchical political structure, however. Nor, judging from Theodore’s apparent lack of success, was this an environment in which access to Byzantium had the symbolic cachet it once had. Given this competition between the bishops over the supposedly unitary power of Byzantium, it is hardly surprising that the prestige of Byzantium declined in the North Caucasus. We can also consider the broader

¹³¹ *Ho gar therismos polus, hoi de ergatai oligoi*. Theodore, pp.407-8.

¹³² See Bryer and Winfield, pp.348-9; Malakhov, ‘K voprosu o lokalizatsii eparkhial’nogo tsentra Alanii v XII-XVI vv.’, p.168.

¹³³ *Kaitoi ge eisin hoposoi kai treis tōn episkopōn parēmeipsan, kai tetraton orōsin arti eme...* Theodore, pp.403-4.

background to this process: the decline in Byzantium's power in the Caucasus following the Battle of Manzikert (1071).¹³⁴

We can therefore see a clearer picture of cultural continuity emerging: despite the wars with the Qipchaqs and Mongols, religious practices of monumental epigraphy, manuscript copying and church building continued. As the evidence from the Nuzal Chapel demonstrates, these practices continued to be bound up with the reproduction of political power in the medieval North Caucasus. However, the religious institutions underpinning these practices were 'decoupled' from their Byzantine-influenced context.

This process suggests that, just as religious practices evolved away from Byzantine styles, so may wider political practice. Moreover, there is considerable evidence for a widening of acceptable practices of power in the Central North Caucasus in the 12th-14th centuries. This suggests that elites were no longer tied into the hierarchical power structure which had underpinned the rule of the Alan kings.

The End of the Kingdom of Alania as Adaptation: The Rise of the Qipchaq Elite Style

The evidence suggests that, during the 12th century, political authority in the Central North Caucasus was increasingly expressed in a manner similar to the

¹³⁴ For example, Georgian rulers of the late 11th century used royal portraiture and coinage to emphasise their equality with Byzantium, as opposed to their access to it. See Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p.43; Leri Tavadze, 'Online English-Georgian Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics', *Online English-Georgian Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics* <<http://geonumismatics.tsu.ge/en/catalogue/types/?type=48>> [accessed 8 December 2017].

Qipchaq confederation to the north. Whilst this may well have partially occurred due to military pressure, as we have seen, there is no dramatic cultural discontinuity in this period. This strongly implies that these changes were primarily caused by internal shifts in the Alans' political structure.

The principal evidence for the Qipchaq-isation of Alan elite authority is linguistic. It appears that by the early 13th century, in contrast to the earlier use of Byzantine titles, many Alan elites carried titles derived from Qipchaq Turkic. Among the first generation of Alans in Mongol service recorded in the *Yuan-Shi*, many carry Turkic (as opposed to Mongol) names and titles: Shila Baduer and Baduer (Batur, cf. Baqatar), Aersilan (Arslan).¹³⁵ Similarly, Altun, the Alan mistress of the Kartvelian King David VII Ulu (r.1247-70), carried a Turkic name or title.¹³⁶ Indeed, these two individuals named Batur may represent an early example of the apparent reintroduction of the ancient, Turkic-derived title *Baqatar*, which would become popular later in the 13th century.¹³⁷ By contrast, while plenty of these individuals carried Christian names (e.g. Niegula (Nicholas)), these were personal names, rather than titles. This implies that by the early 13th century, the titles carried by Alanic elites were Turkic, and the prestige they conveyed was thought of in Qipchaq-style terms. However, personal naming customs display the same cultural continuity as seen elsewhere in Central North Caucasian religious practices. This combination of Greek Christian names with Turkic titlature therefore implies a model of language replacement among

¹³⁵ Alemany, pp.428-32.

¹³⁶ See Met'reveli and Jones, pp.351, 397.

¹³⁷ For example, the Ossetian leader and legendary hero Os-Baqatar. See Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta*, pp.78-80.

elites, rather than the population replacement implied by the primordialist model of ethnic migrations.

It appears that the prestige of this language was such that the inhabitants of modern Karachai-Cherkassia and Kabardino-Balkaria ultimately ceased to speak the Eastern Iranian Alanic language. Instead, they adopted the ancestor of the modern Karachai and Balkar languages, members of the Qipchaq Turkic group.¹³⁸ Moreover, it seems clear that at least a part of the Alans adopted this new language but continued to identify by the term *As (people, tribe). This term appears to have been a synonym for ‘Alans’ by the 13th century: Friar C. de Bridia even mentioned the “Alans who call themselves As” (*Alani qui dicunt se Azzos*).¹³⁹ It is particularly interesting that a people calling themselves *al-As* were described as a Turkic-style culture by Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī (610-685/ 1213-1286¹⁴⁰), as quoted by Abūʿl-Fidā’s *Kitāb Taqwīm al-Buldān* (c.721/1321).¹⁴¹ These sources suggest that the process of linguistic and cultural ‘Qipchaq-isation’ was well underway by the mid-13th century. It is notable that despite this linguistic change, the term *As* has remained the endonym and exonym for the people of the former Western part of Alania up to the present day.¹⁴² Taken altogether, the evidence suggests that the prestige of Qipchaq Turkic-speaking elites was sufficient to

¹³⁸ There is plentiful evidence for an Iranian linguistic substrate in this region. The most direct evidence is the now-lost ‘Zelenchuk Inscription’, found near Verkhny Arkhyz (Karachai-Cherkassia), written in a proto-Ossetian dialect. See Ladislav Zgusta, *The Old Ossetic Inscription from the River Zelenchuk* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987), pp.60-1. In addition, for toponym and linguistic evidence of an Iranian substrate in Karachai and Balkar, see V. F. Miller, *Osetinskie etimologii. Ch. 3* (Moscow: Tip. E. G. Potatsova, 1887), pp.7-10.

¹³⁹ Friar C. de Bridia, *Historia Tartarorum*, in Alemany, pp.148-9. In general on this issue, see Latham-Sprinkle, ‘One Alania or Two?’

¹⁴⁰ Charles Pellat, ‘Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī’, *EL*2.

¹⁴¹ Abūʿl-Fidā, *Kitāb Taqwīm al-Buldān*, in Alemany, pp.248-9.

¹⁴² On the Karachai and Balkar endonym *As*, see Gadlo, p.160; this is also the Ossetian exonym for these peoples. See V. I. Abaev and others, *Istoriko-etimologicheskii slovarʹ osetinskogo iazyka* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1958), pp.79-80.

encourage a change in the region's language, but that this linguistic shift overlaid long-term cultural continuities.

In addition to this evidence from linguistics and elite titlature, there is evidence of changes in material culture which reflect a reorientation towards steppe styles. Notably, examinations of textiles preserved in graves by S.F. Lubova and Zvezdana Dode reveal a major change in female dress patterns from the late 11th century onwards, which become much more similar to Qipchaq styles.¹⁴³

It is significant that this evidence for cultural 'Qipchaq-isation' appears at a similar time to a new, polycentric, clan-based system of authority, which bears a strong resemblance to the Qipchaqs' social structure. In contrast to the hierarchical Byzantine and Mongol states, the Qipchaqs had many co-equal leaders, whom the Russian Primary Chronicle terms "prince" (*kniaz*).¹⁴⁴ I would argue that the presence of such a society provided an outlet for the classic Caucasian tension between subordinate leaders and the royal elite.¹⁴⁵ As we saw in Chapter Four (pp.210-11), it is possible that in the late 11th century, an influx of wealth into the North Caucasus led to increased competition between elites, as reflected in elaborate burial rituals.¹⁴⁶ With the rise in prestige of the Qipchaq-style system of power, these subordinate leaders now had a way of expressing

¹⁴³ S.F. Lubova, 'O tipologii kostiumov naseleniia raiona Kavkazskikh Mineralnykh Vod i Verkov'ev Kubani V-XIII vv.', in *Iz istorii kul'tury narodov Severnogo Kavkaza: sbornik nauchnykh statei*, ed. by Iu.A. Prokopenko and V.V. Vasilenko (Stavropol': Grafa, 2010), pp.50-1; Zvezdana Dode, 'Costume as Text', in *Dress and Identity*, ed. by Mary Harlow (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2012), p.13.

¹⁴⁴ According to the Russian Laurentian Codex's entry for 6611 (1103), twenty Qipchaq princes were killed in one battle alone. See *Povest' Vremennykh Let po Lavrent'evskoi Letopisi 1377 g.*, ed. by D.S. Likhachev and B.A. Romanov (Moscow- Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1950), p.184. In general on the Qipchaqs' social structure, see Gadlo, pp.138-40.

¹⁴⁵ For this central plank of medieval Caucasian politics, see Toumanoff, pp.34-40.

¹⁴⁶ See S.N. Savenko, 'Alanskie vsadniki v pis'mennykh istochnikakh i v arkheologicheskikh dannyykh: voprosy sravnitel'nogo analiza', in *Materialy po izucheniiu istoriko-kul'turnogo naslediiia Severnogo Kavkaza, vyp. IX*, ed. by A.B. Belinskii (Stavropol': Nasledie, 2009), pp.354-5.

their power without being tied into a hierarchical power structure headed by Alan kings. Given the simultaneous decline in Byzantine prestige, it appears that the ideological system which had enabled the rule of the Alan kings gradually lost its power and influence. Over time, the Alan kings' power would diminish also.

Conclusion: The Slow End of the Alan Kingdom

During the 12th to 14th centuries, the Kingdom of Alania, as defined by the presence of a single ruler and a mechanism of co-ordination between different social hierarchies, disappeared, and was replaced by a polycentric, clan-based political system. This is demonstrated by Latin, Byzantine, Arabic, Persian, and Sino-Mongol sources. None of these sources describe any Alan kings in this period, in contrast to preceding centuries, when Byzantine and Islamic sources described a powerful and respected Alan kingdom. Furthermore, some of these sources explicitly describe a clan-based and highly polycentric system, for example the *Muʿjam al-Buldān* of Yāqūt al-Rūmī (615-625/ 1218-1228), the Latin letter of Riccardus (c.1237) and the Chinese *Yuan-Shi* (1369). These describe multiple leaders competing for advantage, up to and including allying with invading armies to further their positions. It seems clear that the mechanisms of social co-ordination which had existed under the Alan kingdom had broken down.

Something of the ideology underpinning this new, clan-based system may be recovered from our only surviving medieval historical account from this region, the Nuzal Inscription (early 15th century?). This inscription glorifies a local clan, its ancestry and achievements; however, its power is conveyed through a

celebration of its deeds, not through titles or connections to foreign empires. Indeed, its presentation of kings, in contrast to earlier styles of authority, is hostile. This implies a turn away from a hierarchical system of royal power in the North Caucasus, and the institution of a clan-based system of power.

Explanations for this shift have generally attributed the demise of the Alan kingdom to Mongol or Qipchaq invasions. However, the evidence for this is very weak: the date of the end of the Alan kingdom is too early for the Mongols to be responsible, and there is little evidence relating to the conflict with the Qipchaqs. Moreover, there is considerable evidence of cultural continuity in this period, rather than the sudden cultural break we would expect in the case of a sudden invasion or population replacement. The best example of this is the continuation of Christian belief, as demonstrated by continuities in epigraphic and architectural practice.

These continuities, however, are mixed with a slow evolution of religious practice away from an emphasis on Byzantine styles. This suggests a similar development in political practices, given the deep investment of the Alan kings in symbolic access to the power of Byzantium. Just such a shift is attested by changing practices in elite titulature, which by the early 13th century appears to have been Qipchaq in origin. We may suggest that, with the prestige of Byzantium declining, a Qipchaq-influenced, polycentric political system allowed subordinate leaders to break free of the royal power structure of the previous centuries.

As we established in Chapter Three, the system of Alan kingship had depended heavily on symbolic access to Byzantium. This system was

underpinned, paradoxically, by the Byzantines' own conception of Alania in unitary terms: a single kingdom, with a single ruler, and a single archbishopric. This conception of power allowed for a concentration of symbolic power in the person of a single ruler: a concentration of symbolic power demonstrated by the Alan rulers' self-representation as divinely elected individuals, and which resulted in their ability to retain kingship within a single biological family. Faced with a polycentric political system like the Qipchaqs, however, this system yielded no advantage, especially in a period when Byzantine prestige was on the wane. Moreover, by representing themselves in the fashion of Qipchaq princes, subordinate Alan leaders were able to utilise a power structure independent of the hierarchical, Byzantine-influenced system of Alan kingship. As a result, the ideology which had underpinned the Alan kings' rule gradually lost its power, leading to a decline in their status and their eventual disappearance.

This hypothesis correlates with the evidence from written sources. Whilst the evidence from Georgian sources is problematic, they show a picture of fluctuating but declining royal power. In some periods, such as the Alan-Qipchaq conflict in 1118-20, there was no single Alan king; at others, such as King Khuddan's reign in the 1150s, a single king managed to re-establish his authority and gain foreign recognition. The result of this uncertainty was an opportunity for Georgian chroniclers to emphasise or play down Alan rulers' status, according to the demands of the current domestic political situation.

This picture of a gradual breakdown of the former political system correlates with Riccardus' evidence for sporadic outbreaks of intercommunal violence. It is plausible that this violence and the general decline of the former

political system made urban life unsustainable in some places, such as Nizhny Arkhyz and Kiafar. However, this process was not a full-scale civil war, and did not lead to the complete destruction of all urban life- for example, the towns of Nizhny and Verkhny Dzulat continued to flourish. The evidence for cultural continuity, whether the continued use of the Nizhny Arkhyz churches or continuities in epigraphic practice, show that this was a sporadic and gradual process of internal change. Nonetheless, by the time the Mongols arrived in 1239-40, the single Alan kingdom of 150 years before had been consigned to history.

In this context, we can see that the adoption of Qipchaq and Mongol elite styles was not the result of ethnic cleansing, but was a rational adaptation to a changed situation. The Byzantine-style structure of hierarchical kingship, which had enhanced the prestige and wealth of Alan elites in the preceding centuries, no longer delivered the desired results, and was abandoned. The radical changes undergone by Alan elite society in the 12th and 13th centuries demonstrate that, contrary to the primordialist view of the Caucasus as an “asylum” for lost nations, fundamental societal structures, such as language and conceptions of hierarchy, were not by any means immutable.¹⁴⁷ In this context, the Kingdom of Alania should perhaps be seen as an aberration, rather than a stage on an inevitable march of history. Rather than a fragility, we should perhaps see the North Caucasus’ polycentricity as its strength.

¹⁴⁷ For this terminology, see Miller, *Osetinskie etudy*. Ch. 3, pp.1-2.

Conclusion

Far from the tourist crowds and the magnificence of the Winter Palace, down a set of back stairs and tucked away in a narrow corridor, lies one of the State Hermitage Museum's less-visited exhibits. Here, in glass cases in St. Petersburg, lie the remains of a number of Alans and the grave goods with which they were buried, far from the ravine of Moshchevaia Balka in which they were originally laid to rest. The treatment of these finds, squashed between the Central Asian and Golden Horde galleries, seems an apt metaphor for the way history has placed the Alans on the sidelines, lumped into a category of 'other', or considered as an adjunct to the history of more powerful peoples who decided their fate from afar.¹ It was this constant appearance as minor actors in others' histories that led Agusti Alemany to argue that the Alans played a "secondary role" in the history of other powers; that led Herwig Wolfram to lament that the Alans in the fifth century appear "everywhere and nowhere"; and that led Bernard Bachrach to claim that the defining characteristic of Alan culture was their ability to quickly assimilate into other, more powerful ethnicities.²

In this thesis, we have seen that this "secondary role" is more a consequence of historiographical traditions than a reflection of the Alans' own self-image. The lack of an indigenous written tradition has led to a reliance on

¹ Even the initial excavator of Moshchevaia Balka, N.I. Vesselovskii, was not particularly interested in his finds, which were placed in storage at the Museum of Ethnography and not examined for decades. See A.A. Ierusalimskaia, 'Le cafetan aux simourghs du tombeau de Mochtechevaja Balka (Caucase Septentrional)', *Studia Iranica*, 7 (1978), 183–211.

² See Agusti Alemany, 'Wer waren die Alanen?', in *Indoarisch, Iranisch und die Indogermanistik: Arbeitstagung der indogermanischen Gesellschaft vom 2. bis 5. Oktober 1997 in Erlangen*, ed. by Bernhard Forssman and Robert Plath (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2000), p.15; Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, revised ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p.238; Bernard S. Bachrach, *A History of the Alans in the West from Their First Appearance in the Sources of Classical Antiquity through the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), p.119.

outsiders' descriptions of the Alans, which provide a partial picture of their society. When the Alans do appear in foreign sources, they are interacting with people and groups the author identifies with: intermarrying, serving in armies, trading, being enslaved. At the same time, the material and ethnographic evidence from the North Caucasus has often been interpreted using theories designed for other regions and time periods. Four historiographical tendencies have resulted from these trends: a claim that Alania was an early state; a claim that loyalty to this state was determined by membership of longstanding and linguistically-bounded ethnic groups; a reliance on external influence as an explanatory factor in social developments; and an emphasis on the material causes of political processes.

However, the case of Alania's Christianisation demonstrates that external causes of societal change have been over-emphasised. Contrary to the claim that the Alans were principally converted due to Byzantine missionary efforts, a re-examination of Arabic and Persian geographical accounts, archaeological and epigraphic evidence suggests that the adoption of Christianity by Central North Caucasian elites was a slow, syncretic, and non-linear process. This implies that this process had an internal, Caucasian cause: the desire of Alan elites to link themselves to a more hierarchical worldview which limited access to the mechanisms of power.

Furthermore, we saw that Alania's rise to power can be connected to changes in elite ideology, drawing on the long-standing North Caucasian investment in access to outside powers. Alan elites demonstrated their power to their subjects not by a demonstration of defiance, nor of ethnocentrism, but by

the enthusiastic adoption of the symbols, religions and even language of their more powerful neighbours. By being seen to dress in the fashion of Byzantine rulers, by adopting their religion, by building churches and writing inscriptions in a manner which unmistakably linked them into the Byzantine world, the rulers of the Alans flaunted their access to and ability to negotiate with their powerful neighbours. This access to the outside world was important enough that all strata of society emphasised their connections with it: by ostentatious burials with entire cloaks of silk, so valuable that in Western Europe they were the sole preserve of the most magnificent of cathedrals, by the commissioning of funerary inscriptions written in the language of the holy church, or perhaps only by the wearing of a string of glass beads brought on the long journey over the mountains. As a consequence of this new system, access to the outside world- and therefore, access to power- became more tightly restricted, due in part to the hierarchical worldview of the powers with which the Alans interacted. As a result, a single royal family was able to monopolise legitimate rulership, backed up by the physical and metaphorical symbols of their access to the Byzantine emperor.

We also have seen that Alan rulers were able to direct the considerable military resources of the North Caucasus, leading major raids against the Muslim polities of the Northeast Caucasus- a power Byzantine and Georgian elites were willing to pay a high price for. This price included marriages between the Byzantine, Georgian and Alan ruling families, which had the result of influencing wider perceptions of the Alans. Since the Bagratid and Komnēnoi families commissioned many of our surviving sources from the late 11th centuries, it is unsurprising that their view of the 'new in-laws' in the North Caucasus became

more positive. This change was also enabled by the behaviour of elite Alans themselves, who, it seems, were not only aware of foreign perceptions of themselves, but manipulated these stereotypes to work in their favour.

Additionally, this thesis has determined that Central North Caucasian society consisted of semi-autonomous social hierarchies: clans, the Alan church, and urban organisations. This suggests the existence of a multiplicity, a type of complex non-state society. A crucial characteristic of a multiplicity is that its component social hierarchies can co-ordinate their actions. I argue that the mechanism of social co-ordination in Alania was a formalised system of oral negotiations, in which a principal determinant of status was one's access to the outside world. In such a system, the Alan kings held the highest position, granting them a greater level of authority than would otherwise have been possible.

Finally, we saw that by the early 13th century, Central North Caucasian politics was no longer dominated by a single royal family, nor did it display the same co-ordination between social hierarchies as in previous centuries. However, there is considerable evidence of cultural continuity, notably in religious practices and ethnonyms, which suggests that these political changes were not the consequence of destructive outside invasions or population replacement. Rather, the evidence points towards a decline in the prestige of Byzantine styles of authority, which removed a principal support of the Alan kings' power.

This analysis contradicts many prior assumptions regarding the history of medieval Alania. The presence of social complexity- for example, Alania's military strength- can be explained by non-state political mechanisms, rather than by the

existence of a state in the classic sense. While social hierarchies were clearly present within the Central North Caucasus, there is little to no evidence for these being defined by ethnicity or language, as opposed to imagined kin-affiliation or area of residence.

Although external influence was clearly very important in determining the structure of Alan society, the extent to which it has been overused as an explanatory factor is clearly demonstrated by the cultural elements which were *not* adopted from the outside world. Despite the Alans taking to some aspects of Byzantine culture with alacrity- for example, styles of architecture and epigraphy- others had little impact. The clearest example is that of writing. Whilst it seems that many Alans were literate, there is no evidence that this technology was applied to the economic or administrative spheres of life. As Fernand Braudel suggested, the elements of a foreign culture which were not adopted can be as informative as those which were.³

To understand these processes of cultural (non-)influence, we must turn to our fourth historiographical tradition: material causes of social change versus ideological causes. There was no necessary material reason why a written historical tradition or literate administration should not have been developed in the Central North Caucasus; rather, we must look at this region's cultural and ideological peculiarities. It is plausible that the lack of a single hegemonic indigenous language meant that a foreign language, not tied to any one social group, filled this role: in the case of the North Caucasus, Greek and Georgian. As a result, there was no incentive to translate the Bible into indigenous languages,

³ Fernand Braudel, *History of Civilizations* (London: Penguin, 1995), p.31.

and thus give rise to a native literary tradition, as happened in Armenia, Georgia and Caucasian Albania.⁴ The polycentricity of North Caucasian society helped give rise to the concept of the ‘power of the foreign’; and belief in the ‘power of the foreign’ in turn exerted a strong influence over this society’s development.

In summation, Alania goes to show that there was nothing pre-determined about processes of state formation along imperial peripheries. Although Alania did not have the apparatus of a state as we would recognise it, it could nonetheless act like one, in war, and in diplomacy, and be treated accordingly. Its rulers exerted a ‘gravitational pull’ on neighbouring corporate groups, whether these be clans, other regional kingdoms, or even the neighbouring great powers: Byzantium, Georgia, Khazaria.⁵ Its influence was sufficient that even its chauvinistic Byzantine neighbours were forced to modify their conception of the world, in order to recognise the independent influence of Alania. This was Alania’s particular contribution to medieval society: whilst its power structures were based on access to outside powers, this access could give its rulers the power to alter the perceptions and policies of those very same empires.

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We can close this thesis with a brief look at the implications of this study. Jacques Le Goff has argued that medieval European perceptions of India were, in fact, only a projection of Europeans’ fears and fantasies.⁶ If we see Eurasia as a

⁴ On the origin of South Caucasian literary traditions, see Donald Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History.*, 3rd rev. and expanded ed. (London: Garnett Press, 2010), p.17.

⁵ On the concept of a ‘planetary’ state which exerts a ‘gravitational pull’ on its neighbours, see O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, rev. edn. (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 1999), pp.27-9.

⁶ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp.195-7.

similar blank space to India, one can make the same point about the historiography of Alania: it reflects the material bias of the modern world back at us. As we have seen, Soviet historians attempted to apply Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism to the development of human society in the Caucasus, despite the lack of evidence for this as a causative factor in social development. Your author is not immune to this tendency. I started this project expecting to find that the key to understanding Alania lay in the flows of trade through the Caucasus, and the politics of their control. However, as we have seen, there is little evidence for elite control of these resources in Alania, whether through tolls or taxes. Rather, I have come to believe that these prestige items can only be understood in the context of the systems of signification and power in which they played a part.

Rather than showing the power of material wealth in medieval society, Alania demonstrates the power of ideas in creating hegemony, especially in situations not conducive to state development. The Alan kings were not in charge because they directly controlled resources, but because enough people agreed that they should be in charge. Their method of social control was not a direct one. For example, it is clear that the significance of Christianity was not as the medieval equivalent of a propaganda ministry for the Alan kings, but as the creator of the ideological environment in which their hegemony was possible. Byzantine recognition, similarly, only made sense as an ideological underpinning in the context of long-standing connections with the outside world, in which power could flow from these connections. The concepts of connectivity, of the search for the exotic and foreign, and ideas themselves, can at times be seen as rather

trivial, bourgeois, or epiphenomenal. Yet the example of Alania shows that it was possible to amass a tremendous amount of power through exactly these methods.

This understanding can help us understand other power dynamics, especially in the pre-modern world. As we can see through the comparison with 16th-18th century Kabarda, Alania was not an isolated case; moreover, many medieval kingdoms existed on the margins of statehood.⁷ It can therefore help us understand the importance of ideological hegemony elsewhere, especially along other imperial peripheries. One debate which may benefit in particular from the comparison is the early Islamic polity, due to its tribal base, longstanding connections with Near Eastern empires, and the ongoing debate over the significance of Islam in the Arab conquests.⁸ An appreciation of the importance of ideological hegemony may help us further understand the development of more ancient Near Eastern civilisations, and explain their devotion of massive resources to ceremonial monuments.⁹ Finally, it might also help us understand why the Great Khans of nomadic empires, such as the Mongols or Timurids, devoted such vast resources to displaying their heavenly mandate in material terms.¹⁰

Alania was a world constrained, naturally, by the sometimes-harsh environment in which it existed, and by the superior military and economic

⁷ See Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.57-9.

⁸ In general, see Fred Donner, 'Centralized Authority and Military Autonomy in the Early Islamic Conquests', in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East. III: States, Resources and Armies*, ed. by Averil Cameron (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995).

⁹ See Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.37-40.

¹⁰ See for example Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

wealth of its neighbours. Despite these environmental, economic and geopolitical limitations, it was possible for its people to demonstrate their ambitions, hopes and dreams. The ideas which they espoused are mostly lost to us: their echoes, in folklore, in the brief inscriptions they left behind, in the objects they produced and the buildings they built, are all that are left. Yet within these echoes, it is possible to distinguish ideas which gave meaning beyond the simply material: the ideas through which the Alans defined their world, and what it meant to rule it.

Appendix A: Note on Transcription

I have adopted the following transcription conventions:

Greek is transcribed using the American Library Association- Library of Congress System, with rough breathings marked by an initial *h* but accents unmarked.

Russian is also transcribed using the American Library Association- Library of Congress System- thus я is transcribed *ia* not *ya*. However, to aid readability on computers without Romanised Cyrillic unicode fonts installed, I have eliminated accent marks, for example over *ts*.

To aid pronunciation, Georgian is transcribed using the Georgian National System- thus ც and ბ are transcribed as *ts* and *kh* respectively, rather than *c* and *x*.

Arabic and Persian are transliterated using the American Library Association- Library of Congress System.

There are a few exceptions to these rules. Firstly, I have not altered book titles or author names transcribed in different ways to the above systems, in order to aid the reader in locating these works. Secondly, I have attempted to strike a balance between comprehensibility, accuracy and not being pretentious. Thus, I have adopted transcription systems which more closely reflect the pronunciation of languages for non-speakers. This has not always been possible- for example, the Russian word еще (again), transcribed as *eshche* in the ALA-LC system, is approximately pronounced as *yeshor*. In the same vein, I have transcribed names of people and locations by their commonly used English equivalent- hence Moscow rather than Moskva and Procopius rather than Prokopios.

**Appendix B: Translated Primary Sources on the Alans from the Ninth to
15th Centuries**

The purpose of this section is to provide a selection of key texts cited in the preceding chapters. The majority of these texts have previously been translated, and are brought together here for convenience. However, a number of these texts have not previously been published in English. In all cases, notes in round brackets are present in the original translations, those in square brackets have been added by me. [NOTE: SEVERAL OF THESE SOURCES HAVE BEEN REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS].

1. *The Invasion of Alania, in the Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali (early ninth century)*

“When [King] Vakht'ang [Gorgasali] was ten years old, armies of the Ossetians [Ovsi: the term unambiguously means ‘Alans’ in later sources], without number, came and captured Kartli from the head of the Mt'k'vari down to Khunani; they ravaged the valleys but ignored the fortress towns, with the exception of K'asp'i. They captured K'asp'i and devastated it; they took away Vakht'ang's sister Mirandukht', a three year old girl. Seizing the valleys of Kartli, and K'akheti, K'larjeti and Egrisi, they invaded Rani and Movak'an; after capturing these places, they passed through the Darubandi Gates, for the Darubandians themselves showed them the way, and then they returned victorious to Ossetia...

“Vakht'ang [grew to the age of 16, and convened his council. He] continued his speech before the nobles of Kartli: “...I cannot stand any more the Ossetians' mockery. I am setting my hopes upon the consubstantial Trinity, which gave birth to the infinity of God. Led by His cross, which He provides as a guide and weapon to those who keep it in their hearts, we are going to have revenge on the Ossetians... [Vakhtang convinces his councillors to attack the Ossetians]. Unable to dissuade him, all the nobles who were present agreed and said: “Be blessed, Our King, for ever! Let your plans be fulfilled, let the Lord send his angels to you for assistance, and let all your enemies fall, and your kingdom become strong.” They decided to campaign in Ossetia and parted for their homes to make preparations.

“And King Vakht'ang sent an envoy to his uncle Varaz-Bakar, the *eristavi* of Rani, to inform him of the campaign in Ossetia and asked for help. Varaz-Bakar responded gladly, for his country had also been ravaged by the Ossetians. Vakht'ang summoned the whole army of Kartli. They all gathered and set up

camps in Mukhrani and Kherk'I; along the banks of the Aragvi, there were one thousand horsemen and sixty thousand infantry; and Varaz-Bakar sent twelve thousand horsemen. King Vakht'ang set out from Mtskheta, replenished his army and advanced...

“Vakht'ang advanced and placed his troops in Tianeti. There he was joined by all the kings of the Caucasians – fifty thousand horsemen. With the name of God on his lips, he passed the Darialan Gates. On entering Ossetia, Vakht'ang was sixteen years old. Now the Ossetian kings gathered their men; they summoned some forces from Khazaria and met the Georgians by the river which runs through Darialan and into the Ossetian Valley. This river is also called the Aragvi, because the Aragvi of Kartli and the Aragvi of Ossetia originate from the same mountain. Both armies set up their camps on the opposite sides of the river, the steep and rocky banks of which were covered with meagre forest, and criss-crossed by valleys. They reinforced their positions and closed the passes, and so stood for seven days. Only the *bumberazis* [champions] were combating with each other at this time. There was a *goliath* among the Khazars, who were the Ossetians' allies; his name was Tarkhan. Tarkhan came forward and called out loudly: “I am challenging every one of Vakht'ang's men, any who is powerful enough to fight with me.”

“There was a soldier by the name of Parsman-Parukh among the Persian allies of Vakht'ang. To that day, nobody could stand up to him in combat, for he was catching lions with his bare hands. He came out to fight with Tarkhan. With loud cries they grappled with each other. And in the very first clash Tarkhan cleaved Parsman-Parukh's head down to his shoulders striking his sword upon his helmet. Vakht'ang and his men were sorrowful, for there was not one among them equal to Parsman-Parukh. Shocked by what had happened the soldiers were filled with grief. Night fell. Vakht'ang retired to his tent. He began to pray tearfully, appealing to God, pleading for His help until dawn. And with the help of the Lord he decided to engage in combat with Tarkhan, filled with the belief in God and his own power, for he was fearless, as if he were without a physical body.

“In the morning Tarkhan again came to the riverbank and mockingly asked for a rival, but there was not one among Vakht'ang's men willing to fight with him. Then Vakht'ang turned to his people: “I rely not on my strength and courage, but trusting the infinite God and the consubstantial all-powerful Trinity, I will fight with Tarkhan.” The nobles full of wonder, tried to dissuade Vakht'ang from this combat by every means, for he was young and they knew nothing of his experience. But Vakht'ang would not listen to them and decided he would fight. He dismounted his horse, prostrated himself on the ground, prayed to God and, lifting up his hands declared: “Oh, Lord! The Creator! He who increases the good and raises up those who trust Him! Be a support to me, send me your angel, strike this infidel and put to shame your defamers. I believe not in my powers, but in Your grace.” He rose, mounted his horse and said to his men: “Pray to the Lord and do not doubt.” Then Vakht'ang advanced, leaving his people behind shocked and excited; everyone was beseeching his God. Vakht'ang descended the slope on horseback, approached the river and stopped on the bank. Both the adversaries were armed with spears. Tarkhan looked at the King and said: “I am a

fighter used to battles with experienced *goliaths* and giants, not with youths, but if you want this, I will lower myself.” And with battle cries they rushed towards each other. In the very first clash Vakht’ang pierced Tarkhan with his spear in his loins. And his strong armor did not save him; the spear ran through him and killed him. The Georgians rejoiced and begun to cry in exaltation and offer thanks to God. And Vakht’ang himself dismounted his horse and fell on the ground and praying to the Lord said: “Blessed are You, the Lord, who sent me an angel and killed my enemy: you raise high those who trust you; you help those who fall to stand on their feet, and You raise the humble.” Vakht’ang cut off Tarkhan’s head and returned to his troops. His people glorified Vakht’ang, and with joyful cries they sent their thanks to God.

“The next day another giant, by the name of Baq’atar emerged from the ranks of the Ossetians. He was a *goliath*. When he mounted his horse nobody could withstand him. He killed all his adversaries in combat, for he fought with an arch [sic] of twelve spans length, and with arrows of six spans. Baq’atar approached the riverbank and called out loudly: “King Vakht’ang! Do not boast of your victory over Tarkhan, he was not considered a *goliath*, and that is why he was killed by a youth. If you engage in a fight with me, you will not escape bloody combat and you will find no escape. If you refuse, I am ready to fight with any of your men.” Vakht’ang answered Baq’atar: “I overpowered Tarkhan not by my strength, but by the power of my God. And I fear you no more than a dog, for the power of Christ is with me and His pure cross is my weapon.

“Vakht’ang prepared his army for battle, mounted his horse dressed in armour, and protecting himself with a shield of dragon’s hide, which no sword could penetrate, he descended the slope and approached the river. He called Baq’atar and told him: “I will not cross the river, for I am a King. I will not approach the Ossetian troops, for if I die, my whole army will perish. But you are a slave, and your destruction will not harm the Ossetian army, just like the death of a dog. Cross the river and come to me.” Baq’atar, the Ossetian, obeyed, but said: “I am the one who will kill you, I will cross the river, but withdraw from the bank three *ut’evans* [about 600 metres].” Vakht’ang did as he was asked. Baq’atar crossed the river and began to let loose one of his arrows. But Vakht’ang evaded it adroitly, for his sight was keen and his mind alert, and his horse was fast, so he saw the flying arrow from far away and evaded it skilfully. On this and the other side of the river the troops were blowing trumpets and beating timbrels. The mountains and hills were shaking because of the violent cries of the soldiers on both sides – Ossetian and Georgian. Twice Baq’atar hit Vakht’ang’s shield with his arrows, but they did not pierce it. He shot another arrow and hit Vakht’ang’s horse. But before his horse fell, Vakht’ang pounced upon Baq’atar, struck his shoulder with his sword and cut down to his heart. After that Vakht’ang’s horse fell, but the King caught Baq’atar’s horse adroitly. At first Vakht’ang sank to the ground, and said his prayers yet more zealously than before. Then he mounted Baq’atar’s horse, came galloping to his troops and exclaimed in a loud voice: “Be of good cheer and take courage, for God is with us.” The troops advanced ready to fight: heavily armed cavalymen dressed in armour with metal helmets were in the front, after them came the infantry, and after the infantry, more cavalry. They attacked the Ossetians. The Ossetians took to the tops of the rocky mountains

and rained down arrows on their heads like rain. Vakht'ang with some chosen horsemen was in the rear of his army, reinforcing it and encouraging the soldiers. Heavily armed cavalymen navigated the rocky trail and entered the valley. After them came infantry and more horsemen. A fierce battle took place. Vakht'ang's assaults on the right shook the enemy on the left, and his attacks to the left shook it on the right. In the *mêlée* of fighting armies, Vakht'ang's cry was heard like a lion's roar. Two horsemen accompanied Vakht'ang in the battle: his foster brother Art'avaz, *sp'asp'et'* Saurmag's son, and prince Bivrit'ian. They also fought bravely. They overpowered the Ossetians and put their camp to flight. They destroyed them and took them prisoner. They caught most of the fleeing Ossetians to exchange them for Georgians captured before in another battle.

“Returning from the pursuit, they gathered in their camp. Resting for three days and offering thanks to God, they invaded Ossetia, seized the towns, took great spoil and many captives. They entered P'ach'anik'eti, because at the time P'ach'anik'eti was located on the other side of the Ossetian river bordering Ossetia; Jiketi was next to it. Much later the Turks threw out the P'ach'anik's [Pechenegs] and Jiks. The P'ach'anik's went west, and the Jiks settled along the borders of Abkhazia. Vakht'ang devastated P'ach'anik'eti and Jiketi, and on his return, again approached Ossetia. The Ossetian kings fled and hid themselves in the fortresses of the Caucasus mountains. They sent envoys to Vakht'ang to make peace with him. The Ossetians asked for thirty thousand Ossetians, select people whom they listed by name, to be returned in exchange for Vakht'ang's sister. Vakht'ang gave them thirty thousand prisoners in exchange for his sister and regained her freedom. Vakht'ang exchanged those Georgians who were taken captive by the Ossetians over six years ago, for an equal number of Ossetians. He took a hostage from the Ossetians and gave thirty eight thousand more prisoners for him. The captives ransomed in Kartli were three hundred and fifty eight thousand in number. There remained six thousand and fifty eight, not counting the P'ach'anik's and Jiks. All this was done in four months.” - tr. Roin Met'reveli & Stephen Jones¹¹

2. *The Alans in Epiphanius Monachos' Life of St. Andrew, c.820-43*

“[There is a tradition from Bishop Epiphanius of Cyprus] that the blessed Apostle Andrew taught the Scythians and Sogdians and *Gorsians, in Great Sebastopolis, in which there is the fortress of Apsaros, and the gate of Hysso, and the river Phasis, where the Iberians and Susi and Phusti and Alans dwell...” - my translation from J.P. Migne's Latin edition¹²

¹¹ *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. by Roin Met'reveli and Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), pp.80-5.

¹² Epiphanius Monachos, 'Peri tou Biou kai tōn Praxeōn kai Telous tou Hagiou kai Panegphēmou kai Prōtokantou tōn Apostolon Andreou', in *Patrologia Graeca CXX*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1864), p.222.

3. *Ibn Rusta on the Alans, c.903-13*¹³

"Travelling to the left (to the west) of the kingdom of the Sarir you journey among mountains and meadows for three days and arrive in the kingdom of al-Lan (Alan). The Alan king is a Christian at heart, but all the people of his kingdom are heathens worshipping idols. Then you travel for ten days among rivers and trees before reaching the castle called The Gate of the Alans'. It stands on the top of a mountain and under the mountain there runs a road. The castle is surrounded by high mountains and its walls are guarded every day by 1,000 men from among its inhabitants posted by day and by night. The Alans consist of four tribes but their honour and kingship (are concentrated) in one of them called DHSAS (**Rukhs-As*). The king of the Alans is called B.GHAY.R (read: **Bagatar*) which (name) applies to every one of their kings." - tr. Vladimir Minorsky¹⁴

4. *The Alans in the Letters of Nicholas Mystikos, 912-24*¹⁵

Ep. 79: to missionaries in a North Caucasian country, almost certainly Alania (912)

"... do you perform your proper task with yet greater zeal, drawing the darkness of impiety out of the souls possessed by it, and bringing them unto the dawning light of salvation, so that when through you the faith has been strengthened in that place, God may be glorified in them, and you too may be glorified in this life, and in the life to come with the divine and imperishable glory. I know that there are many things to afflict you and to obstruct your holy life, when I myself reflect, as I naturally do, on the desolate nature of the place and the kind of men you live with, and the strangeness of their manners, and am informed of these very matters by your own messenger. Nonetheless, the things of the present time are unworthy to be noticed by comparison with the future glory... And when you hand [the converts] over to those who will, in your stead, by their doctrine guide them to the sure path and lay hold of them, then, when that time comes with the Divine Approval, return to my Humility, to increase with your own words the joy I feel over those who are being led through Baptism to Christ our God..."

Ep. 51: to the Prince of Abasgia (913)

"... herewith I open correspondence with you in this letter, and, as though I were present, fold my son in my arms and embrace him with a paternal kiss. A proof of your piety in the godly zeal which you have displayed, and still display, for the salvation of, and for the adoption of the truth by, the nation of the Alans. For I learn from various persons who know your achievements that you have, under

¹³ Accepted date of Ibn Rusta's work: for more details of the precise date of this passage, see Chapter Two, p.9iff.

¹⁴ *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, ed. by Vladimir Minorsky (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1958), p.169.

¹⁵ I am utilising the recent revision of the letters' dates in Nicholas Evans, 'Mountains, Steppes and Empires. Approaches to the North Caucasus in the Early Middle Ages' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Wadham College, Oxford, 2016), p.214.

God, devoted much care to the enlightenment of the prince of Alania and of all those who with him have been found worthy of holy baptism. And of the worth of your character, and of your well-doing, what more striking proof can there be, or who will require further witness of them, when it suffices to consider the hospitality, the attention, and the general comfort, as much as could be provided, which you have manifestly bestowed, with all good will, on my Son, the Archbishop, most beloved by God...”

Ep. 133: to Archbishop Peter of Alania (914-18 or 919/20)

“Those parts of your letter which apprised me of your troubles and of your perilous situation grieved me at hearing of them, but with a grief not so sharp or inconsolable, inasmuch as expectation that anticipates every difficulty and distress and, as it were, trains the spirit by conversation with itself... But what I did find intolerable, what mortally wounded me, was that you should suppose, nay, more than suppose, that you should declare in writing your manifest supposition that you were cast out of my heart, and that memory of you had perished! [Nicholas continues to exhort Peter]. As regards the lawless marriage [practices of the Alans], if you can by advice and instruction dissolve the union, all thanks to God! But if the case is too strong to be opposed, then see at least that the evil goes no further, and in future do not permit the tribe to be polluted by such marriages. This you may do by continual advice to the chief of the nation and to the man whose union is condoned because of its previous consummation.”

Ep. 52: to Archbishop Peter of Alania (914-18 or 919/20; after Ep. 133)

“... But that your remembrance (my holy Son) is always in my heart, is known to Him who created it: and since you measure my affection by my letters, you must know that I have not been negligent here either. I have written, not once, but two and three times, although, it appears, my letters have not reached you: so do not make your absence, or anything else, into a cause of my ‘forgetting’ you. [A long series of apostolic exhortations and promises of spiritual reward follows]. As to what you write of matters respecting marriage which are opposed to the Church order, and of other habits which conduce to the more pagan character of those who indulge in them, your wisdom is aware that so sudden a conversion of pagan life into the strictness of the Gospel is not easily achieved. You should therefore continually apply your doctrine and salutary exhortation in a paternal and generous spirit; and where you find them obedient, give thanks unto Him who giveth grace by your teaching, especially if the disobedient belong to the upper class of the nation, and are not governed but governors. Towards their subjects you may perhaps be able to carry yourself rather more austere and despotically, and refuse on any account to put up with the irregularity; but towards the powerful ones, who have great power to counteract the salvation of the whole

nation, you must reflect whether, if we behave too harshly to them, we may not unawares exasperate them the more, and they turn everything upside down.”

Ep. 118 and 134: to Archbishop Peter of Alania (921)

[Nicholas assures Peter that his efforts are not forgotten]

Ep. 46: to the Prince of Abasgia (923-4)

“I send you a mantle with my benediction. But, as touching the Archbishop of Alania (my Son), I do not know what to write. [Nicholas requests aid for the archbishop]. And if in that foreign nation and strange land he is in need of anything essential or tending to bring comfort to his life, you will provide it willingly...”

Ep. 135: to Archbishop Peter of Alania

“In your painful circumstances and the affliction of distresses (my holy Son) I ought not to be offering written consolation but should rather (if only it were possible) be with you myself and bring to you by word of mouth such consolation as Christ our God might suggest... You write that your sorrows are many, and great is the affliction of your evils; but that, since I have no experience of exile, I do not appreciate these. This is what you say in effect, even though your letter obviously understates your meaning. [Exhortations]. I now speak of another matter. I exhort and urge you now more than ever to make use of your invariable and characteristic mildness and generosity and your humility for Christ, to see to it that the evil one can sow no discord between your virtue and my most pious Son, your brother, Master Euthymius, nor may (as is his wont, for he is resourceful in malice and has from the beginning introduced enmity between God and His creation) devise some hidden obstacle to your unity and love in the Lord; but, as truly a man of God, who knows how to win over all men, pray make it a resolve of the first importance to conciliate Euthymius and his companions, so that no excuse for quarrelling or division shall occur anywhere. The man is in any case pious and a worker of virtue, and for this reason should be treated with all respect and honour; but especially so because he was your predecessor as herald of piety to that nation, and himself sowed the seed of doctrine, and has undertaken the journey to you to be your collaborator and- God willing- to lighten the burden of your labours by participating in your spiritual endeavour...”- all letters tr. Romilly Jenkins and Leendert Westerink¹⁶

¹⁶ Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Letters*, ed. by Romilly James Heald Jenkins and Leendert Gerrit Westerink (Washington, D.C.: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1973), pp.265-7, 279-81, 281-7, 335, 407-9, 433-43.

5. *Mas'ūdī on the Alans, c.947*

“Beyond [Darband] lies the country (*mulk*) of GHUMIQ. Its people are Christians who do not obey any king but have chiefs (*ru'asa*) and live in peace with the kingdom of the Alan...

“Then follows the kingdom of the *ALAN (*al-Lān*) whose king is called K.rk.ndaj (?), which is a common name of all their kings, just as *Filan (Qilan?)-shah is the name of all the kings of the Sarir. The capital of the Alan is called *Maghas (spelt: *Ma'as*), which means "a fly." The king possesses castles and pleasantries besides this town and (now and then) he transfers his residence thither. Between him and the king of the Sarir there are now links of marriage, each of them having married the sister of the other. After the spread of Islam and under the Abbasids the kings of the Alan professed Christianity, whereas before that they had been heathens. After 320/932 they abjured Christianity and expelled the bishops and the priests whom the Byzantine emperor had previously sent to them.

“Between the Alan kingdom and the mountain Qabkh there is a castle and a bridge over a large river (Terek). This is the castle called "the Alan castle" (*qal'at al-Lan*). It was built in the days of old by an early Persian king called Ispandiyar b. *Bishtasf. He garrisoned this castle with men whose (duty it was) to prevent the Alans from reaching the mountain Qabkh. There is no other road for them except by the bridge below the castle. The castle stands on a hard rock and there is no way of conquering or reaching it, except by agreement with the garrison. This castle built on this rock possesses a spring of fresh water, which coming from the top of the rock, emerges in the centre of the castle. The latter is known for its inaccessibility among the fortresses of the world. In their poems the Persians mention (this castle) and how Ispandiyar b. *Bishtasf built it. (This) Ispandiyar waged many wars with various nations in the East. He went into the lands of the most distant Turks and destroyed the Copper Town which was extremely inaccessible and unconquerable, (the strength of) its castle being proverbial with the Persians. The exploits of Ispandiyar and what we have mentioned of him are described in the book known as *Kitab al-*Paykar* ("Book of battles"?) which. Ibn al-Muqaffa translated into Arabic. When Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwan reached this country and subdued its people, he settled some Arabs in this castle, and to our days they have guarded this place, and their provisions are from time to time brought to them by land from the Tiflis March. Between Tiflis and this castle there is five days' distance (amidst) infidels (*kuffar*; E, *al-kibar* "five long days"?). Even a single man posted in this castle could prevent the (armies) of all the infidel kings from passing through this place, because the latter is (almost) suspended in the air and commands the road, the bridge and the river.

“The Alan king (can) muster 30,000 horsemen. He is the possessor of strength, courageous, and embodying the political power of the princes (*al-mulūk*). His kingdom consists of an uninterrupted series of settlements: when the cocks crow (in one of them) the answer comes from the other parts of the kingdom because the villages are intermingled and close together.

“There follows on the Alan a nation called KASHAK (*Kasak? i.e. Cherkes), which lives between Mt. Qabkh and the sea of Rum. This is a cleanly people following the Magian religion... The Alan are more powerful (*mustazhim *ala*) than this nation, which could not cope (*la tansasif miri*) with the Alans, were it not for the protection of the forts on the sea-coast...

“A nation adjacent to the Alan is called ABKHAZ. They follow Christianity and now have a king but the Alan king prevails (*mustazkir*) over them. They live close to Mt. Qabkh.”- tr. Vladimir Minorsky with emendations by Christopher Bahl¹⁷

6. *The Senty Inscription, 965*

“The Church of the Most Holy Mother of God was dedicated and restored in the reign of the Emperor Nikephoros and the Augusta AS (?)..., and David, *exousiokratōr* [of Alania], and Maria, the *exousiokratorissa*, on 2 April, on the Day of Holy Antipaschus (?), by the hand of Theodore, established as Metropolitan over Alania, in the year 6473 AM [965 CE]. Written by the hand of N., *apokrisiarios* and *patrikios*.”- tr. Nick Evans¹⁸

7. *Gardīzī's Zayn al-Akhbar on the Alans, c. 440-3/ 1049-52*

“From the Sarir it/he [i.e. the road, traveller] goes [literally: went] out for three days into the mountains and meadows until it reaches the Alans. The King of the Alans is a Christian and all the inhabitants of his kingdom are pagans, idol-worshippers. From its frontier go 10 days amongst woods and rushing streams¹⁹ until it reaches the castle which people call the Gate of the Alans. And it is located on the top of a mountain, and under the mountain there is its road. And all around it are high mountains, and there are 1,000 men who hold the watch day and night for the protection of this castle, [watching] over the way.”- tr. the author²⁰

8. *The Arkhyz Bronze Cross Inscription, 1067*

“... of this cycle... The restoration of the honoured cross by the God-loving monk Thomas, presbyter. In the year from Adam 6575, fifth indiction.”- tr. the author, from E.Ch. Skrzinskaia's Russian edition²¹

¹⁷ Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, pp.155-160.

¹⁸ Evans, p.245.

¹⁹ A loose translation of *juyihaye-khorram*.

²⁰ Original text: ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ibn al-Zaḥḥāq Gardīzī, *Tārīkh-i Gardīzī*, ed. by ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībi (Tehran: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, 1984), p.595.

²¹ E.Ch. Skrzinskaia, ‘Grecheskaia nadpis’ iz srednevekovoi Alanii’, *Vizantiiskii vremennik*, 21 (1962), 118–26.

9. *al-Bakrī on the Alans, 1067-8*

“After a journey of three days is the country of the king of the Alans. He is a Christian but the majority of inhabitants of his state worship idols.” - tr. the author, from Baron V. Rosen’s Russian edition²²

10. *The Kartlis Tskhovreba on Urdure’s Campaign in Kakheti, c.1070*

“A little while later, [the semi-independent *eristavi*] Lip’arit’ advised [King] Bagrat’ [IV, of Georgia] to capture Tbilisi. The troops of the King of the Abkhazians closed in on Tbilisi on this side of the Mt’k’vari – upstream and downstream; on the other side of the river – from Isani – came the troops of the K’akhis and the Hers. At that time the great King K’virik’e of the K’akhis was killed by a certain Ossetian [i.e. Alan] slave, for in a battle King K’virik’e had slain Urdure, King of the Ossetes. King K’virik’e was killed by the Ossetian slave through a blood feud during a hunt in the Pidrazi hills.” - tr. Roin Met’reveli & Stephen Jones²³

11. *The Kartlis Tskhovreba on Dorgholel, Great King of the Alans, c.1070*

“Bagrat’ [IV, of Georgia] brought Dorgholel, King of the Ossetes [Alans] with forty thousand of his troops, put his own son, Giorgi the Kuropalate at their head, and ravaged Gandza. He took innumerable prisoners and spoils, then sent them to his kingdom. After this, Dorgholel, the great King of the Ossetes, wished to visit his brother-in-law Bagrat’ the *Sebastos*, and requested an audience with him. Bagrat’ assented and the King of the Ossetes set out joyfully with all the chiefs of Ossetia and, taking the road of Abkhazia, arrived in Kutatisi. He saw his sister the Queen [Borena], mother of Giorgi the Kuropalate. Giorgi the Kuropalate had been granted the title earlier. The King (of the Ossetes) was brought to Kartli. The King was stationed in T’iniskhidi forest, at Nadarbazevi. He met the Ossetes with great pomp and honours. They got together at K’ezuni. There was great joy and a terrific sound of trumpets and tambourines. They spent twelve days together, sporting in great peace and joy. But they cut short the visit owing to the approach of winter. Bagrat’ gave gifts and presents to the King and all the nobles of Ossetia. He sent them away, and they departed joyfully.” - tr. Roin Met’reveli & Stephen Jones²⁴

²² ‘Izvestiia al-Bekri o slaviankakh’ i ikh’ sosediakh’, ed. by Baron V. Rosen, *Zapiski Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk*, 32.1 (1878), p.64.

²³ Met’reveli and Jones, p.155.

²⁴ Met’reveli and Jones, pp.161-2.

12. *The Ta'rikh Bab al-Abwāb on the Alans, c.468/1075*

From the chapter on Sharvan:

“In 423/1032 the people of the Sarir and the Alans made an agreement, raided Sharvan and took Yazidiya by force. There and in other parts of Sharvan they killed over 10,000 people and stayed ten days digging the earth and extracting from it the money and goods which the inhabitants had hidden in it. When their hands were full of Muslim booty, they went back to their country, but on their reaching the Wooden Gate (*Bab al-*khashaby*)- the people of the March of al-Bab attacked them, barred the roads and the defiles to them, and killed a great many of them- (a slaughter) the like of which has not been recorded. They took from them all the Muslim property, animate and inanimate, which they had carried off from Sharvan. Only a small party, including the lord of the Alans, escaped with their lives. Again in 424/1033 the lord of the Alans came to take his revenge on al-Bab but this time too, with God's help, he was defeated.”

From the chapter on Darband:

“In 423/1032 the amir Mansur with the ghazis of the Islamic "Centres" led a great expedition. This was because the Rus had raided the territories of Sharvan, ruined and plundered them, and murdered or made prisoner a great mass of the inhabitants. As they were returning, their hands full of booty and captives, the ghazis of al-Bab and the Marches, with the amir Mansur at their head, occupied the defiles and the roads and put them to the sword so that few escaped. They took from their hands all the booty, animate and inanimate, which they had captured in Sharvan. Then the Rus and the Alans (returned) with the intention of revenge. They gathered together and jointly set off in the direction of al-Bab and the Marches. First of all, in 424/1033 they moved to *al-Karakh where there was only a small group (of warriors) with Khusrau and Haytham b. Maymun al-Ba'i (?), chief of the tanners. And (the latter?) fought (them) with the help of the people of *Karakh, and God let victory descend on the Muslims and they wrought great havoc among the Alans and the Rus. The lord of the Alans was beaten off from the gate of *Karakh, and the infidels' greed for these Islamic "Centres" was extinguished absolutely.

“In this year [456/1064] the Alans took many of the lands of Islam.”

From the chapter on the Shaddādids:

“In this year 454/1062 the Alans passed through the Alanian Gate (i.e., Darial) and penetrated into the territory of Aran and killed many people there, capturing more than 20,000 persons alive, male and female, and children of both sexes.

“When on his arrival he [Abū'l-Aswār, Amir of Ganja] dispersed his troops to their homes, the Alans appeared in great force at the Alanian Gate in Dhul-qa'da/October 1065 and passed through the territory of Shakki and Khazran

(**Jurzarit*). Then, together with the unbelievers of * Shakki, they invaded the territory of Aran and infiltrated through the gaps. They raided Aran, killing the inhabitants and plundering the plains and highlands, and they encountered no obstacle. At the gate of the frontier-town (*thaghr*) of Shamkur they did to death more than 200 of the volunteer-fighters for the faith. They extended their raids up to the gate of Janza [Ganja] and murdered whomsoever they found in the villages. Abul-Aswar, with his generals, was in Janza, but they dared not come out and engage the enemy. Then the accursed invaders went on to Barda'a, at the gate of which they halted for 3 days; they plundered its districts and occupied them (all) so that they reached Khanaqm* in the neighbourhood of the Araxes. They took a huge number of prisoners in Aran, both Muslims and their allies beyond measure or reckoning.” - tr. Vladimir Minorsky²⁵

13. *Anna Komnēnē on Irene of Alania, c.1148*

“[Anna Dalassenē, mother of Alexios and Isaak Komnēnos, seeks refuge in Hagia Sofia and demands a guarantee of her safety from the incumbent emperor, Nikēphoros III Boteniatēs]. Her daughter-in-law, Isaac’s wife [i.e. Irene of Alania] (she had come into the church when the gates opened for the morning hymn), removing the veil that covered her face, spoke to them [Nikēphoros’ envoys]: ‘Let her go, if she wishes, but we are not leaving this church without a guarantee, even if we have to die.’ The envoys therefore went away and told the emperor everything. They saw how determined the women were and how their behaviour grew more reckless; moreover, they feared a commotion. Nicephorus was a good man and touched by the women’s words sent her the required cross and with it a complete reassurance.” - tr. E.R.A. Sewter²⁶

14. *Yāqūt al-Rūmī on the Alans, c.626/ 1218*

“Allān:

“Name of a vast country inhabited by a numerous population and situated near to Darband, in the mountains of Qabq [the Caucasus]; it does not possess any important city. Among its inhabitants there are some Muslims, but the majority is Christian; they do not obey a single king, and each tribe has its own particular chief. Their mores are uncouth, their character is rude and rapacious. The son of the qadi of Tbilisi told me the following tale: ‘One of their chiefs having been struck down with illness, I inquired about the nature of this malady, and they replied to me that it was an infection of the spleen. As soon as I came near to him, I saw him grab a knife, make a large incision in his side and tear out the

²⁵ Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries*, pp.32, 47, 51; Vladimir Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (London: Taylor’s Foreign Press, 1953), pp.20, 22.

²⁶ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. by E. R. A. Sewter (London: Penguin, 1967), p.85.

spleen with his own hands; but, having ruptured one of the vital organs in this operation, he died almost immediately.”

[Then follows an abridged version of Mas’ūdī’s account, with the following notice:]

“Thus are the own words of Ali, son of Husayn [al-Mas’ūdī]; as for the information given at the head of this article, I gathered them from a person who has travelled these countries.”

[Third entry on the Alans:]

“Lān (Alans):

“Name of an important country situated near to Armenia, and in the vicinity of the Bab al-Abwab [Darband]; the inhabitants of this country wage war continuously on the Khazars. People vulgarly call them a’lān (علان), which is an error; they profess the Christian religion. This country furnishes robust slaves.”- my translation from Barbier de Meynard’s French edition²⁷

15. Theodore of Alania on the North Caucasus, c.1226

“The [Alan] people is greatly dispersed, and it extends from the Caucasus mountains up to the Iberias [Georgia], which was the ancient border of their country; but they have become accustomed to send out emigrants, so much so that they will have filled nearly the whole of Scythia and Sarmatia... The Alani also live near Cherson, no less desired than wanted, as they act like a kind of defensive ditch around that city and [are] guards. I saw them, and they were very happy. They were heading back to the shepherd of their fathers, were gathering around him, and taking us to their domains to be shown hospitality, they overlooked no person of rank. We in turn were employing word[s] of exhortation, so that they could live suitably in Christ’s vocation. But, I’m not afraid to say or afraid of giving offence, the flock wander[ing] in the mountains and deserted places and into pitfalls, having neither sheepfold nor pen, and therefore having been abandoned to the devouring of the sword.

[Theodore arrives in Alania after a considerable journey from Crimea and discovers that a rival bishop from Trebizond has already arrived there].

“The church of the Alans was one despoiled... by a priest, I say, by that shepherd, who was pathetically impersonating an apostle. For in that place [i.e. Alania] he who had discharged the function of high office had finished his life [i.e. the previous bishop had died]... Do you [really] want me to tell you about [his] other

²⁷ Yāqūt b. ‘Abdullah al-Rūmī al-Hamawī, *Dictionnaire géographique, historique et littéraire de la Perse et des contrées adjacentes, extrait du Mo’djem el-Bouldan de Yaqout, et complété à l’aide de documents Arabes et Persans pour la plupart inédits*, ed. by Charles Adrien Casimir Barbier de Meynard (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1861), pp.51-2, 503.

pastoral acts? For what [about] that teaching of Paul, that “do not lay hands lightly upon any man”²⁸ [i.e. do not ordain priests lightly]? For in these few days, he [the apparently false bishop] sent out priests like a swarm of ants... a few [were appointed] by murmurs between [his] teeth, intelligible to no-one, and surely without moving his lips much. Another forty [he ordained] while chewing his food at his table, and holding his wine glass in his hand; others while lying in his bed at night. For there were those who confirmed with dire oaths that he didn’t even rise from his bed [to do so]. But why should I investigate [when] it’s not easy for me to say, let alone [it being] intolerable for you having heard it? Finally, after he’d done this, he ran away to Lazica, desiring his hoe once again [i.e. wanting to take up his former menial profession?] He is not, I think, a man unknown to several merchants who travel there...

“I didn’t believe it at once either when I heard it; I first understood it through quiet contemplation, then I realised it by asking many things. But in this way he was willing to deceive, and like sheep were followed by wolves, when no-one has ever seen the shepherd and no-one has heard his voice. So what then?... The matter [was] certainly not unclear nor not manifest to the many; even if not by everyone, certainly by the priests who received ordination from him [i.e. it was known by the priests that the other bishop was ordaining that the bishopric was vacant]. It has to be one or the other: either they didn’t know, which is implausible, for who could be ignorant [of this], who is wise. Alternatively, [the explanation] is [that] they knew the matter [i.e. the see’s vacancy]; and why did they spurn such a great matter of anointing [i.e. the fact that he had not been properly anointed?], and accept favours from him, [that man] who had no sense? Especially [i.e. this is especially egregious] because there were several of them who had seen the succession of three bishops, and now me [as well], the fourth. I also kept showing them the insignia of the great priest [i.e. the bishop], whether clear in clothing or in the ornateness of the pulpit; they were showing these to everyone openly, so that they could know the bishop from that time onwards...

[Theodore debates whether he should reconfirm the priestly ordinations of the Lazic bishop].

“But because no-one was going along the road [to Nicaea, presumably], and the business was urgent, [and] danger hung over the community of the church, thus entirely enfeebled, and no-one being already suitable for priestly office (I say, and please do indulge me): not without great thought, nor [overly] swiftly, I finally laid hands upon these people [i.e. I ordained the priests in question]; first showing that they had condemned their prior opinion [i.e. of having been ordained by the ‘imposter’ bishop], and that they reconciled themselves to the God of mercy... Nor did I ordain everyone, but [only] those the life of dignity did not refuse [i.e. those worthy of priesthood]...

²⁸ 1 Timothy 5:22.

[Theodore laments the poor quality of the Alans' Christianity, which necessitated the previous action].

“Woe is me, because the field brings forth thorns and weeds²⁹! While the wandering flock follows thorny error, [there will be] damnation on account of renouncing God; [and] while it prostitutes itself not only with the wood, as it is in scripture, but even with stones and waters³⁰; [and] while they not only worship idols, but also certain demons in high places. The Alans are Christian only in name. But if the part of Jacob is anywhere anyhow, the hostile man sowed weeds over the top of it.”- my translation from J.P. Migne's Latin translation³¹

16. *Riccardus on Julian of Hungary in Alania, c.1235*

“Finally, [Julian and his companions] came to a land called Alania where Christians and pagans are found together. There are as many princes as villages, none of which owes allegiance to another. There is constant warfare, leader against leader and town against town. In the time of ploughing, all the armed men of one village go to the fields together. They reap at the same time and they cultivate a contiguous piece of land. All who have to collect firewood or have other duties outside the villages always go armed and accompanied. It is impossible for a small group to go out in any manner or for any reason without personal danger throughout the whole week. The Lord's day alone from dawn to sunset is an exception for it is observed with such devotion among them that at that time anyone, no matter how great a wrong he has done or how many adversaries he may have, may walk about safely, whether defenceless or armed, even among those whose relatives he had killed or upon whom he had inflicted other wrongs. Those who call themselves Christians observe the following rules, they do not drink or eat out of a vessel in which a mouse had died or from which a dog had eaten unless it is first blessed by their elder and whoever does differently is held a stranger to Christianity. If anyone of them kills a man for any reason, he receives neither blessing nor penitence on this account. Indeed, homicide is considered nothing among them. They hold the cross in such reverence that beggars, whether natives or strangers who are not able to have the multitude on their side may go about securely all the time if they place some kind of a cross on a javelin with a banner and hold it aloft. The brothers were not able to procure companions to proceed with them from this place on account of the fear of the Tartars who were said to be near. For this reason two of them

²⁹ Cf. Genesis 3:18.

³⁰ Paraphrase of Jeremiah 3:9.

³¹ Bishop of Alania Theodore, 'Alanikos', in *Patrologia Graeca CXL*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Brothers, 1857), pp.209-217. As can be easily determined from the many uncertain translations, this is an exceptionally difficult passage, hence the necessity of translating from the Latin, which is also confusing in many places. I have, however, confirmed the sense of these passages from Iu. Kulakovskii's Russian translation (see Bishop of Alania Theodore, 'Episkopa Feodora "Alanskoe poslanie"', in *Izbrannye trudy po istorii Alanov i Sarmatii*, ed. by Iulian Kulakovskii and S. M. Perevalov (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2000)).

returned. The other two remained in this land in the greatest penury and delayed six months. During this time they had neither bread nor drink except water. But one of the brothers, a priest, prepared spoons and certain other things for which, once in a while, they received some millet which was not sufficient for their needs no matter how sparing they were. For this reason, they decided to sell two of their number on whose price they could finish the proposed journey; but no buyers appeared because they did not know how to reap or grind in a mill. Thus, compelled by necessity, two of them returned from that place to Hungary; the others remained there and refrained willingly from the completion of the journey. Finally, having obtained the company of certain pagans, they undertook the journey and went through the solitudes of the desert in thirty-seven days.” - tr. Mary Dienes³²

17. *Aṭa-Malik Juvāynī on the Capture of Magas, 1252-60*

“XXXIX. Of the Conquest of Bulghar and the Territory of the As and the Rus.

“When [Ogodei] Qa’an held the great *quriltai* for the second time, they deliberated together concerning the extirpation and subjugation of all the remaining rebels; and it was decided to seize the land of the Bulghar, the As and the Rus, which bordered on the camping grounds of Batu; for they had not completely submitted, being deluded by the size of their territory. [Ogodei] therefore deputed certain princes to aid and assist Batu, viz Mengu Qa’an (Mongke) [and other commanders]. [They conquered Bulghar]... and from thence they proceeded to the land of the Rus and conquered that country as far as the city of Magas³³, the inhabitants of which were as numerous as ants or locusts, while its environs were entangled with woods and forests such that even a serpent could not penetrate them. The princes all halted on the outskirts of the town, and on every side they built roads wide enough for three or four wagons to pass abreast. And they set up mangonels opposite the walls, and after a space of several days left nothing of the city but its namesakes³⁴ and took great booty. And they gave orders to cut off the right ears of the people, and two hundred and seventy thousand ears³⁵ were counted.” - tr. J.A. Boyle³⁶

³² Mary Dienes, ‘Eastern Missions of the Hungarian Dominicans in the First Half of the Thirteenth Century’, *Isis*, 27.2 (1937), 225-41.

³³ The geography of this passage is rather confused, and incorrectly implies that Magas was a city in Rus’.

³⁴ I.e. flies.

³⁵ Probably a mistake for 2,700, according to Vladimir Minorsky. See Vladimir Minorsky, ‘Caucasica III: The Alān Capital *Magas and the Mongol Campaigns’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 14.2 (1952), 221-238.

³⁶ `Aṭā Malik ibn Muḥammad Juvaynī, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. by J.A. Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), pp.268-70.

18. *The Yuan-Shi on the Capture of Magas and Alans in Mongol Service, 1369*

(Ch.2) “In the winter, in the 11th moon (27th November- 26th December 1239), the army under the command of Mangu [Mongke] besieged the city of the As, Magas, and took it after three months.”

(Ch.122). “Shiri-Gambu, a person from the Tanguts....

In the winter, in the 11th month of the year Tszi-Khai (27th November- 26th December 1239), (Shiri-Gambu) arrived at the Alan city Magas, which was well-protected by nature [lit: placed on natural strongholds] and was not surrendered for a long time. In the initial moon of spring of the following year (6th- 24th February 1240), (Shiri-) Gambu led a squad of ten brave volunteers, mounted a siege ladder and first mounted (the wall), took 11 people into slavery and loudly exclaimed thus: “The city is crushed!” The (rest of) the army covered (the walls) like ants and climbed up [them], after which the city was taken.” - my translation of Russian personal communication from Andrei Vinogradov³⁷

19. *The Nuzal Inscription, early 15th century (?)*

“We were nine brothers- Charjolidze- Ch’arkhilani: the Os-Bagatar, David-Soslan, who [pl.] fought with four kingdoms; Pidaros, Jadaros, Sakur and George, who [pl.] threateningly met with [their] enemies; three of our brothers- Isaac, Romanos and Basil- became faithful servants of Christ. We defend the narrow roads which lead from the four corners. In Kasar I have a castle and a toll-house and here I guard the gate of the bridge; believing in the afterlife, I stand firm in this world; I have [so] much gold and silver-bearing land, [that it’s] like water; I conquered the Caucasus, I fought with the four kingdoms. I stole the sister of the Georgian king, following our custom; he caught up with me, he broke his oath and took my sin upon himself. Baqatar was given up to the watercourse, indeed the Ossetian host was destroyed. Whosoever of you sees this poem, let him tell a little in remembrance.” - tr. the author from Russian transcription by M.G. Dzanashvili³⁸; with corrections by Nikoloz Aleksidze from Georgian text published by Marie-Felcité Brosset.³⁹

³⁷ These two sections in the Yuan-Shi are contained in a Word document in Russian translation. Neither Andrei Vinogradov nor I are sure of the original translator of this document. However, it is probably reliable as the other sections of the Yuan-Shi translated in this document correspond exactly with sections translated in Alemany and summarised by Thomas T. Allsen (see Thomas T. Allsen, ‘Mongols and North Caucasia’, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 7 (1987), 5-40).

³⁸ Reproduced in V.A. Kuznetsov, *Rekom, Nuzal i Tsarazonta* (Vladikavkaz: Ir, 1990), pp.78-9.

³⁹ Marie-Felcité Brosset, ‘Pieces diverses relatives a la Georgie, traduites par M. Brosset’, *Journal Asiatique*, 6 (1830), pp.310-12.

20. *Selections from the Dzegli Eristavta, c.1405*

“In that time there was a great chaos in the country of the *Ovsi* [Ossetians/Alans], and the blood of the King of the *Ovsi* ran freely. The sons of the oldest brother emerged as victors, and the children of the youngest crossed mount Zakhs- Rostom, Bibily, Tsitlosana and their sons with 70 good servants and arrived in the country of Dvaleti...

[The Dvals initially accept the brothers and baptise them as ‘Bibilurami’. However, they start to fear the brothers’ growing power].

“We see what those *Ovsi* kings have started to build for, and although we baptised them as Bibilurami, the name cannot disguise their clan and origin; and after some time they will control all our country; so before the chicks and fledglings [hatch], we will drive out this double-headed snake from our womb...

[The Dvals drive the brothers out, but they later help them to take a Georgian fortress. The Dvals declare their loyalty].

“Then said all the Tskhrazmis-Khevtsy [Dvals]: ‘From henceforth we shall never estrange from us such a person, a *goliath*, and we shall do all that he wishes.’... Then the *mamasakhli* [spiritual father] of Largvisi, Khytsiandabidze, said [to the brothers], ‘Suppose that you should make a claim for this country, establish your family tomb in this monastery, as all the family tombs of *didebulis* and *aznauris* [types of Georgian lord] are located here; and if God is kind, you shall be leader of this village, established by the God-crowned Justinian the Builder. [Rostom agrees and establishes his tomb] in the best place, on the right side of the altar...

“The people said to Rostom, ‘What is acceptable to you, that we will do for you?’ And so he required of them an ancestral tomb in Largvisi and a house for the residence of [his own] among the children of the church [clients of the monastery]; and in Tskhrazma an estate, which is under the power of the *tsikhistava* [castellan]. And the Tskhrazmis-Khevtsy in the centre of Tskhrazma gave all this... Then they began the construction of fortresses and great houses. And if raids were undertaken there, [the brothers] stood as leaders of those who were fighting, and no-one could be found who equal in battle to Rostom. And the whole nation of Tshkhrazmis-Khevtsy came to love him...

“Then the emperor Justinian ordered to summon all the Tskhrazmis-Khevtsy before him. [The emperor asks to whom the highest honour among them belongs, and they indicate Rostom, as he has a tomb to the right of the altar in the monastery of Largvisi]. Then them emperor said, ‘what do the people want?’ And he came to know that all the Khevi wished to have [Rostom] as ruler among all Khevi. Then he called Rostom before him... Then he... named him *eristavi* of the Tskhrazmis-Khevtsy. And he invested [Rostom] in the garb in which the emperor had [himself] been invested, and granted him a seal, a buckle and his

own belt, arms and an armoured horse, a banner and spear.”- tr. the author from S.S. Kakabadze’s Russian edition⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *Pamiatnik eristavov*, ed. by S. S. Kakabadze (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1979), pp.21-4.

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List of abbreviations:

DME = *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982-7)

*El*₂ = *Encyclopaedia of Islam II* (Leiden: Brill, 1960-)

*El*₃ = *Encyclopaedia of Islam III* (Leiden, Brill, 2007)

ODB = *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander Kazhdan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

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