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Holy Men and Making of Georgian Identity[*]

Introduction

Phenomenon of *the holy* represents a key topic of the current cultural anthropology. Plenty of thought-provoking contributions were devoted to it. On the one hand, the abundance of literature creates favorable condition for further study of the problem as it provides firm ground for investigation. On another hand, just same fact makes greatest obstacle for a researcher. The remark from Peter Brown's book made with keen awareness of the problem outlines this situation with due clarity: ' To study the position of the holy man in Late Roman society is to risk telling in one's own words a story that has often been excellently told before'(Brown 1989: 103).

To avoid a risk identified by Brown, I am focusing solely one point; namely, I am investigating the role played by holy men in defining collective cultural identities as a base for consolidating ethnic and national communities. Of course, this aspect of a holy man's activity was not a fully neglected topic; however, as it seems to me, it lacks necessary insights. In the present work I will try to investigate above-mentioned social function of *the holy* through Georgian case study.

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Among many contributions devoted to medieval history of Georgia, investigations on the issue in question are missing. Grounded on Marxian sociology Georgian historiography of the Soviet period did not consider phenomenon of *the holy* as academic problem. This partially explains the existing gap. The same can be said on state of identity studies. Subjective factors in making of ethnic and national communities also were neglected. Decisive importance was attached to the economic factors.

As focal point of the investigation is chosen Georgian clergyman St. George of Mtatsminda (1009-1065). During many years he lived in Byzantium where was occupied in translating of church literature mostly from Greek to Georgian, but sometimes also vice versa. For a while (1040s-1050s) he was father superior of the Georgian Monastery Iviron at Mount Athos.

The main source of the investigation is *Life of Saint George of Mtatsminda*. Obviously, the author of the *Life* was an accompanying person and disciple of the holy father. Nowadays, it is as widespread opinion among Georgian scholars that the name of the compiler was also George. It is customary to call him George the Minor (Mtsire). However, I do not find this opinion sufficiently documented and, therefore, I refer to him as the *compiler* or the *hagiographer*.

For citations I am using the original of the old Georgian text published in the corpus of medieval sources *Monuments of Ancient Georgian Hagiographical Literature* (Abuladze 1967).

As theoretical basis for the investigation I use the ethno-symbolist approach to interpretation of nations and collective cultural identities in general, elaborated by some scholars and first of all by A. D. Smith.

In the main part of the paper, evidences of the primary source are grouped according to the following ethnic indicators: an idea of in-group electivity, a collective *ego* (forging sense of ethnic and national dignity and character), the belief in cultural uniqueness and sacral foundation of the community, a perception of *significant others*.

The results of the investigation show that St. George of Mtatsminda had played a decisive role in sharpening Georgian identity essential markers.

Idea of in-group electivity

During his residence abroad, St. George of Mtatsminda had to give clarifications on several issues. One of them was connected with apostolic origin of Georgian church. It was questioned whether any apostles had preached in Georgia. According to the *Life,* the holy father had an argument about this issue with patriarch of Antioch. The patriarch was told that Georgians were people with ignoramus and small congregation and that none of St. Apostles had preached in Georgia. Relying on this information, the patriarch demanded from the Georgian church to subordinate to his own apostolic see. In case of insubordination the patriarch threatened to impose penalty on the Georgians.

As it was already mentioned in scholarly literature, despite the fact that the subject of the polemic was ecclesiastical issue, the results of the dispute was important for Georgian state and Georgian community in general.

This demand of the patriarch received the following answer from St George of Mtatsminda:

"Thee, o my lord, might say: "I am occupying the apostolic throne of Saint Peter". But we are part of Saint Andrew the First Called being the Caller of his brother as well. We constitute his lot and parish being converted and enlightened by him. One of the twelve Apostles, I mean Simon the Cananean, was also buried in our country of Abkhaseti, at the place named Nicopsia. We were enlightened by these Saint Apostles; and since we became acquainted with one God, never repudiate from our faith and our people had never been fallen into any heresy. We curse all heretics and give to damnation the very basis of this and stand firmly on the true faith and tenets and preach of above Saint Apostles. Have we to

subordinate you?" (Abuladze 1967: 154).

At the close of 10th c and beginning of 11th c. the new political body accommodated the Georgian in-group. In the special literature this state is designated as the United Georgian Kingdom. This was time of intensive in-group consolidation. The flourishing of Georgian medieval culture reached its peak.

In Christian oikoumene being the homogeneous religious space, a name of an apostle played role of identity marker. It is why the Georgian cultural elite looked for appropriated "candidate" for the "position" of Georgian church founder. In regard to Georgia historical sources provided evidences on several Apostles. It was necessary to select one with the well-documented "dossier". This was not easy task. Many aspects of societal life, politics, and, first of all, the problem of identity maintenance were determined by this choice.

Evidently, the way to the final decision concerning above mentioned issue, was relatively long. Before the choice fall on those being mentioned in above concerned dispute, several "candidatures" were considered. St. George Mtatsminda himself did not make up his mind right away: in the collection of church chants compiled by him sometimes reference is made to St Apostle Bartholomew, sometimes Bartholomew is replaced by St. Apostle Simon the Cananean.

By providing materials on apostolic origin of the Georgian church, St. George of Mtatsminda intended to make Georgians rightful members of the international Christian community. Moreover, his ambitious project was dealt with an ideal of Georgians' ethnic electivity and specialness, according to which the Georgians were ahead of others, they were a lot of the first (sic!) Apostle. As it has been established in specialist literature *myths of ethnic election* are of utmost significance for the self-preservation of ethnies:

"Yet what is even more important for ethnic survival is to cultivate a *myth of ethnic election*. Those communities that managed to formulate and cultivate such a belief have succeeded in prolonging of specific col-

lective life of the members over many generations. The creation and dissemination by specialists of the belief that' we are "chosen people" has been crucial for ensuring long-term ethnic survival" (Smith 1996: 189-190).

An initial version of Georgian ethnic electivity was created long before this time, namely, in 4th c. in epoch of adoption of Christianity as an official religion by Georgians. The Armazian community (the exclusive kinship-based unity marked by Armazi religion) was transformed into an inclusive spiritual communion in Christ. The land owned by this "special people" was conceptualized as an appropriate space for the "special" mission. As far as the land of the capital Mtskheta kept Lord's Robe, the most significant Christian "contact" relic, it seemed to be assumed a center of the universe. The design of the royal garden, where the Robe was buried, corresponded to its super-sacral significance. By means of mental images, principal markers of the apocalyptic mystic city – Heavenly Jerusalem – were reproduced. However, this project by the first Christian King of Georgians - Mirian, happened to carry a dangerous social charge due to its chiliastic hints in the world perception. Already in lifetime of Rev, Mirian's son, it was substituted by a more moderate project, presenting Mstkheta only as a replica of earthly Jerusalem by means of repeating of the Christian place-names of historical Jerusalem (Chkhartishvili 2009a; Chkhartishvili 2009b; Chkhartishvili 2009c).

The apostle-centered project by St. George of Mtatsminda represented new version of Georgian election ideology that was undisputedly more appropriate to the epoch under the consideration, than exceeding all bounds ideal of *Georgians inhabitants of Heavenly Jerusalem* being created and cultivated in the epoch of religious conversion.

National dignity and character

The dispute is also interesting with regards to making of collective

ego, in particular, the holy father's activities in coining of common character and cultivating sense of collective dignity.

Hagiographer states negative and domineering characteristic of Georgians by advisors of the patriarch. The domineering attitude to Georgians is also viewed in patriarch's words characterizing St. George of Mtstsminda. In the *Life* there are described two meetings of the holy father with patriarch. According to the hagiographer in both cases patriarch addressed St. George of Mtatsminda in the same way: "In spite of the fact, that you are a Georgian by origin, you are fully a Greek with regards to education" (Abuladze 1967: 151); "In spite of the fact, that you are Georgian by origin you are equal to us in regards to education and understanding" (Abuladze 1967: 153).

The quotation from the source shows that the patriarch admired the holy father. However at the same time, he humiliated Georgians considering the holy father's attractiveness as only a personal quality and not a characteristic of all Georgians. According to him the St. Geotge of Mtatsminda is a full Greek, but the Georgians and the Greeks are not equal.

The holy father's harsh answer confirms the rightfulness of above interpretation: first of all, the issue of national dignity was concerned. In his speech, St George of Mtatsminda contrasted an educational superiority of Greeks with Georgians' superiority in ethical sphere and their devotion to the true faith.

By cultivating the sense of in-group superiority in ethical sphere, St. George intended to neutralize a discomfort emerged during the comparison of Georgian culture with Byzantine one. In this epoch of Georgian state headway, Georgians very often compared themselves with Byzantium as with a political partner and, at the same time, a competitor. Countless manifestations of splendid Byzantine culture and its prevalence throughout the Christendom challenged Georgian elite's ambitions and forced it to look for superiority in other spheres of social life.

The analogous attitude towards the superiority issues represents a

universal characteristic of nationalistic sentiments. As A. D. Smith puts it:

"The goal is to find that inner worth, to realize the dignity of the authentic self. This was sometimes expressed in the Asian phrase 'Western arts, Eastern morality' implying the innate spiritual superiority of Asia, despite western technological prowess. Such a stance safeguards the inner dignity of the humiliated" (Smith 2001: 30).

While coining common national ego, the holy father was able to reveal essential features of collectivity. According to him, Georgians were innocent, trusting and honest people and, for this reason, other nations were trying to harm them (Abuladze 1967: 123). Such self-image was reproduced for centuries: the same views are stated in the monastic regulation of Petritsoni Monastery composed in 1080s (Shanidze 1971: 109); and in writings on Lord Robe and Vivifying Pillar by Georgian Catholicos Nikoloz Gulaberidze (12th c.) (Sabinini 1882: 104), etc.

Referring again to the theoretical contribution by A. D. Smith, one will find out that the efforts for defining national character also fit well the wider context of the world experience in forging national identities:

"But the ideal of national identity is distinguished by its concern for collective character and its historical-cultural basis. Rousseau had the first quality in mind, when he wrote: "The first rule which we have to follow is that of national character: every people has, or must have, a character; if it lacks one, we must start by endowing it with one"… And he went to coursed both Corsicans and Poles about how to cultivate their respective national customs and life-styles and so to preserve the collective character of their nations" (Smith 2001: 27).

Thus, St. George had contributed to forging Georgian identity through the identification of Apostles, founders of the Georgian church and fostering a belief in the ethnic electivity of Georgians, coining and cultivating ideals of national dignity and character.

Linguistic marker

The importance of a language as identity marker is generally recognized. Language contributes to the rise of solidarity sentiments among the ethnic (national) communities through its communicative as well as symbolic functions. As it is well known, a political body needs to be also a cultural unit. A standardized language provides an appropriate channel for the spread of culture and creates necessary prerequisite for effective functioning of political institutions.

The development of grammatical thoughts, actualizing inner recourses of a language, successful codification and elaboration of linguistic forms are greatly favored by translating activities. That is why, historically, such activities often were related with national mobilizations and were accompanied by cultural renaissances.

In the epoch under the consideration the Georgian cultural elite directed its greatest efforts to the rendering of Orthodox ecclesiastical literature from Greek to Georgian. Orthodoxy was very important Georgian identity marker especially since 7th c. after the schism of the Georgian and Armenian churches. Activities concerned with translation of religious books often were initiated and supervised by Georgian kings.

St. George of Mtatsminda was one of the main actors of this enterprise. At first glance these activities served solely the strengthening of Georgian identity religious marker, however, its results affected Georgian in-group in general and a language fist of all. In the process of rendering the Georgian language reached the highest point of its development. It would be worthy to mention here that the contributors to the project realized the importance of these activities first and foremost with regards to the native language, and only then to religion. The Georgian language represented a main subject of national proud.

According to the hagiographer translating was the holy father's most important pursuit. The compiler describes the contribution of St. George of Mtatsminda's in this sphere with overwhelming admira-

tion:

"Saint father never made break and day and night long created honey of divine books, by which had sweetened and beautified our language The Church was in abundance and wealthy with gold of his writings. He was like chemists, craftsmen, who by their wisdom are obtaining gold from the bosom of the earth and through smelting it in the fire revealing its splendour. Just in the same way the mind of Saint father became master of melting of this gold of words separating gold from slag and earth in the fire of Holy Ghost" (Abuladze 1967: 154).

King Bagrat IV called the holy father as *new Chrysostom* (Abuladze 1967: 154). Bagrat felt the greatest appreciation to him and expressed his gratitude in the special epistle (Abuladze 1967: 155).

The holy father himself considered activities in sphere of translation first of all as favorable for his native language development. This attitude is well expressed in the description of his predecessor St Eqvtime Atonite. St. George of Mtatsminda devoted hagiographical writing to St. Eqvtime and his father St. John Atonite, where St. Eqvtime is characterized in the following way: "He served as adornment for our people and, like St. Apostles, he had illuminated the Georgian language and the country" (Abuladze 1967: 41).

St. George of Mtatsminda contributed to the forging of Georgian identity through the elaboration of his native language and strengthening symbolic function of Georgian in the value system of Georgian community.

Sacral Communion

According to the hagiographer, the holy. father obeyed king Bagrat's insisting entreaty to help him in domestic affairs and came back to his native country giving up his beloved translating activities. He stayed in Georgia (or in the *East* as at the time Georgia was referred by the

Georgians living in Byzantium) five years and left it after long supplication to the king to let him go back to Byzantium, so that he could die in "the country of his strangeness".

This episode of the story naturally raises the question: why would an autocrat king with full political authority feel a necessity to assist a monk without any political power?

An answer to this question could be found in the activities of the holy father during his stay in Georgia. As the compiler puts it, the holy father directed his care to ethical aspects of societal life and tried to improve the existing situation. The process of purification initiated by him concerned all social strata without exceptions:

"King, Catholicos, priests, deacons, monks, grandees and dukes, rich men and paupers, all of them began confessing to him. This enabled the holy father being enlightened by God to enlighten the entire East and eliminate all obvious or hidden unlawfulness there. First of all he openly and without fear began denouncing of those being in power revealing all aspects of their amorality. In particular, he demanded from them to avoid giving of Episcopal Sees to the amoral and uneducated men penetrated with this worldly aspirations and brought up out of a monastery and select (for this position) respectful men (originally) fostered as monks". (Abuladze 1967: 162).

What does this initiative might mean in the context of Georgian identity forging?

Communities emerged on a ground of collective cultural identities are marked by longevity and great inner resources for survival. As it was already mentioned in academic literature, the reason for this lies in sacral foundations of communities themselves: they are perceived as sacral communion of members predestinated by Lord's will. Accordingly, ethnic or national communities represent collectives of shared ethical obligations. Common values strengthen in-group bonds and contribute to the process of cultural homogenization: 'At such moments, we can grasp the nation as a "sacred communion of citizens" (Smith 2001: 35).

One more quotation regarding the same issue:

"Yet, that the world is divided into communities of nations which posses their own territories or homelands, their own histories and their particular destinies – these are beliefs that are rarely questioned by most people. These form what one might term the 'sacred properties' of the nation or more accurately, the basic properties of the nation conceived as a sacral communion of its members" (Smith 2001: 144).

In socially stratified feudal Georgia, Christian ethics and shared values grounded on it represented only a channel through which in-group solidarity sentiments could circulate. King Bagrat IV realized that for maintaining a success in political sphere it was necessary that the borders of his multiethnic state coincided with the territory covered by Georgian culture. In order to achieve this goal, he undertook decisive measures and supported translating activities promoted by Georgian clergymen both within in Georgia and abroad. Afterwards, evidently he realized that for maintenance of the kingdom it was necessary to create a community with shared moral obligations, as it would strengthen social cohesion among his subjects and consolidate poly-ethnic population of medieval Georgia.

St. George of Mtatsminda, as a holy person respected in the Georgian society, could not have any competitors for realizing this project.

At the time, the holy father's efforts were concerned not so much with strengthening the boundaries with the outer world, as it was with identification of Apostles and definition of national character, but elimination of the inner divisions as far as it would be possible in a medieval society with social rankings. "In regard to God all are equal", this consolidating idea is viewed in the last quotation from the source. The hagiographer also believed that origin from lower stratum represents no obstacle for obtaining supreme power or prophetic ability. He referred to biblical stories creating by this method an appropriate background to the practical steps undertook by the holy father (Abuladze 1967: 170).

The most important element of sacral foundation of the ethnic (and also national) communities is kingship, more precisely sacral nature of

kingship. It is especially obviously in the Middle Ages, when modern institutions are missing and political loyalties are centered exclusively on a king. It is why kings and ruling houses served as identity markers.

The history Georgian kingship is sufficiently elaborated issue in Georgian studies. The characteristic feature of its historical development is Bagrationi dynasty and its durability throughout the centuries. This fact had great consolidating impact for Georgian community. The members of this royal family considered themselves (and also were considered by their subjects) as descendants of Biblical David.

The royal ideologies grounded on Davidic paradigm of power being designed according to identical patterns have been investigated through many case studies. Now I refer to I. Biliarsky's paper devoted Ethiopian case revealing general features of kingship in medieval societies:

"The significance of the descent from Shem, the blessed son of Noah, is very important to this, but the main reason is that they keep the faith and continue the salvation Mission of Christ. So, this Mission is in the hands of the righteous kings, blessed by God's presence... .Thus, the mission of the kingdom is connected to the Christian sotirology and the return to the primordial communion with God before the Fall, and so with the idea of the *Renovation"* (Biliarsky 2008: 41).

The above assertion is very useful for characterizing Georgian case too. A special attitude to a king is expressed in the monument under the consideration. The holy father addressed Bagrat IV in the following way: 'O, King I look at Thee and see your face is as face of Christ, Thee are devoted servant of God and are protected by God' (Abuladze 1967: 126).

In the *Life* one can find many other cases where Bagrat IV is attributed as 'God's servant':

"By this time the King gained victory over his opposition and arrested sons of Abai who, as you all are well aware, wanted to detain the King. These very powerful men were taken by the King (as easy) as powerless and little babies. And this had happened during the month after

our arrival. (It is why) as soon as they were arrested the king invited the monk. The monk congratulated king the victory, however, the King, being believer and God's servant, said to him: 'O, St father, it would be impossible to win without your grace and prayers of yours for us'' (Abuladze 1967: 160).

As the reader was able to see, the holy father stands for the king and shares his main political principles: It is why the king considers his victory against his political opposition as a result of the monk's spiritual assistance.

This collaboration between the king and the holy man was not similar to the interrelations between the political partners. It was not grounded on principle of mutual benefits. St. George of Mtatsminda needed nothing from the king. He had come back to Georgia only after he had been assured that he would not be forced to occupy any ecclesiastical position. The monk backed the king not for his personal features. First and foremost, he backed the king as a sacral centre of the community. A sacral centre strengthened ties between the in-group members as well as their attachment to this center. Loyalty to kings affected the process of merging of the Georgian community. The holy father contributed to the cultivation of idea of the royal divinity.

The above data might be compared with many other historical experiences. Let us take Serbian case: the first kings of united Serbia were saints revealing universal feature of medieval worldview on sacral origin of power, however, the Georgian and Serbian cases are not identical: in Serbian case *holiness* and *kingship* coexist in one person (Popović 2000), whereas in story on St George of Mtatsminda and king Bagrat IV, the holy man and autocrat ruler are collaborators.

Significant others

The ethnies and nations are defined by a set of markers among which *others* are of principle importance. The concept of *others* delimi-

tates the concept of *us*: by asserting *who we are*, we assert *who we are not*. We can consider *us* as a response to a challenge of *others*. For nations and ethnic groups, *others* are manifested in neighboring peoples. Usually identities in "contact" serve as *others*.

St. George of Mtatsminda contributed to the elaboration of the concept of *Georgian significant others*. The evidence for this is provided by the *Life* in the episode (Abuladze 1967: 176-180) concerning holy father's meeting with the Byzantine emperor Constantine Ducas (1059-1067).

When after five years in Georgia, the holy father was returning to Byzantium as a Georgian ambassador, accompanied with some other people, he was carrying Bagrat's letter to the emperor. This was the time when the Georgian Princess (daughter of the king Bagrat IV) - Mary (Martha) was officially introduced to the court as future daughter-in-law of the emperor. When after a long journey, the holy father had reached the imperial city of Constantinople, the emperor appointed a reception on next day.

The compiler describes the first audience of St George of Mtatsminda with the emperor in detail: as the holy father entered the imperial apartments, he had bowed to the ground before the emperor, eulogized him and offered prayers for him and for his son being to all requirements of royal court regulations. As the emperor, surrounded by some Romans and Armenians, liked the St. George of Mtatsminda's magnanimity and peaceful time also disposed to deep inquiries very much, he began the conversation with the spiritual issues and rules of faith. Firstly, he was concerned with the Georgian faith and showed an interest in the reasons distinguishing the Georgian faith from that of Orthodox Greeks.

Of course, it was not a question of a mere curiosity. Byzantine and Georgia from open rivalries (such as military campaigns) or invisible ones (such as supporting anti-royal conspiracies and uprisings) of previous period, switched to large-scale political collaboration and it became necessary to straiten all the ideological principles and find points for joint

efforts.

According to the compiler the holy father displayed in full the *Georgian Faith* stressing its dogmatic similarity with of Greeks'. At the same time he pointed out that with regards to historical experience there was an essential discrepancy. The Georgians had never changed the original faith; while in Byzantium Christianity has been involved in heresy at multiple occasions. In a best manner of the Byzantine diplomacy St. George of Mtatsminda elucidated the problem to his listeners. St. George of Mtatsminda had linked heresies not with contemporary Byzantium, but with its past realizing that Constantine Ducas – the founder of a dynasty – was not responsible for the past. The hagiographer shows that the emperor was not insulted by such explanations of the holy father. Impressed by the speech, the emperor praised God and continued his inquiries. His next question concerned the faith of the Romans and Greeks. Again, he received a diplomatic answer. The discrepancy between the liturgical practice of the Romans and Greeks was explained by different historical experiences: while the Greeks had the history of cultivating the heresies, the Romans have never had accommodated them. Therefore, they managed to retain the original ecclesiastical practice. The holy father stressed that unimportant differences should not cause a division among the true believers.

This answer represents a topic of debates among Georgian scholars. Some think that the holy father gave a preference to Latin Christology, that his aim was to bring the Georgian Church into the bosom of Latin Church, and that he wanted to please the Romans as he saw that Byzantium was already weakened and the previously existing balance between the Greek and Latin Christology in the Georgian church had been destroyed in favor of Romans by this time.

I think such an interpretation of the passage is misleading. Obviously some scholars do not understand the so called *Eastern Schism* and the very character of the Byzantine-Georgian interrelations in the middle of the eleventh century. This was not a period of rivalries between

the two countries, but the time of collaboration. Besides, from outside, it was impossible to notice the unsolvable problems facing the empire; after all this was heyday of Byzantine culture.

As for *Eastern Schism*, the significance of the events in 1054 was certainly not recognized at that time. It has been exaggerated only later. Excommunications of particular patriarchs or popes had occurred in many times before (as well as afterwards): "The dispute between Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Kerularios represents only one incident in a process of cultural and political separation which had begun much earlier" (Cunningham 1999: 91).

Therefore, the contemporaries of the event did not find it fatal; they considered controversies as occasional transient happenings, a fault of certain unbalanced persons. There can be no doubt that personalities of the leading contenders in this debate contributed to its bitterness (Cunningham 1999: 90).

The emperor Constantine Ducas and, St George of Mtatsminda were among those who did their best to save the situation.

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

The compiler remarks: the Roman noblemen were very happy as involved in debates concerning this very issue many times and for their ignorance they were not able to answer. The Romans, according to the compiler, expressed even a desire to present St. George of Mtatsminda to the pope. The Byzantine emperor had not been offended by such behavior of his guests. Quite on the contrary: with obvious hint of an inner satisfaction, he continued his query. This time he was concerned with the Armenian faith. He asked whether the Armenians bear any relation to Christianity. Actually this was a question containing the respond (Abdalaze 1988: 114). As we know, one of the main characteristics of the eleventh-century Byzantine policy was a renewal of persecution of monophysite Christians. This represented a reversal of the more tolerant poli-

cies of the previous century. Under the patriarch Constantine Leichoudes (1059-1064) Byzantine patience gave out and the persecution began in the attempt to force the Armenian and Syrian churches into communion with Constantinople (Angold 1997: 41-42). Patriarch John Xiphilinos (1064-1075) undertook to drive out monophysite influence within the empire. In 1064 and 1065, Xiphilinos summoned various monophysite hierarchs to Constantinople for questioning, including both secular and religious leaders of the Armenians (Cunningham 1999: 91-92).

The positions of Georgians and Byzantines on the issue of the *Armenian faith* coincided. As it was already mentioned, at the close of 10th c. the most of Georgian lands were incorporated into a new political body – United Georgian Kingdom. The eleventh century was an epoch of developing and fixing of previous century political achievements. The king of the United Georgian Kingdom had many non-Georgian subjects, among them Armenians. It is for this reason that "the Armenian question" was so topical for the Georgian state and that is why the Georgian state ideology in the period is characterized by anti-monophysite propaganda.

Correspondingly, Georgian ambassador's answer on the last question of the emperor was laconic and simple: "One can not label evil faith as faith at all".

According to the compiler, this respond had exposed the Armenians to shame while the emperor was extremely pleased and had tendered thanks to God and praised the holy father for his ability to explain fairly and concisely the issues being so complicated and difficult for understanding. He repeated his promise to render assistance to the holy father in all his initiatives.

Thus, St. George of Mtatsminda tried to establish a view, according to which the Georgian experience in preserving of the faith was unique: Georgians were Christians, but they were different from Armenians, Romans, and also Greeks. These peoples constituted the realm of *others*.

The above displayed efforts by St. George of Mtatsminda for inten-

sifying sentiments of in-group solidarity, fostering collective character, formulating and cultivating an ideal of communal dignity in many respects predetermined consolidation of pre-modern Georgian nation in 11th-12th cc. Ascetic mode of life and an opportunity to view the native country from a certain distance enabled the holy father to play the role of a social catalyst.

"Saint was ideal for our forebears and Saint should remain ideal for us too if we would like to preserve our national identity and culture today against the ocean that swallows national features and nuances. The nation which would lose faith and cultural dominance against the conqueror will be defeated. Saint was and is ideal of enlightened humanity" (Gamsakhurdia 1991: 365).

These words by Zviad Gamsakhurdia – the leader of national-liberation movement in 1990s and then the first president of Georgia – characterize the recent history of Georgia. Gamsakhurdia has managed to awake not only national, but also religious sentiments in the mind of most Georgians. He made national and religious indivisible whole, thus giving great potency to national-liberation movement of 1980s-1990s. Z. Gamsakhurdia associated Georgian national character with Christianity. He argued for uniqueness of Georgian experience in preserving Christianity. In this context he cultivated an image of holy men as safeguards of Georgianess.

Many Georgian writers and public figures, as actors in the process of making Georgian modern nation in the 19th c., had been canonized recently and are venerated as saints of Georgian church. Catholicos Patriarch Georgia Ilia II is respected as a holy man for his contributions in keeping national identity during many years.

However, let us return to the medieval source under the consideration. The obtained data is one more evidence for well known regularity of societal development, namely, the fact that *the holy* creates a very important social niche; besides, the results of the investigation allows to conclude that holy persons are main forgers of collective cultural identities.

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