

# *Alan women in the neighbouring foreign courts in the eleventh–twelfth centuries\**

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The territory of the Alans in the northern Caucasus was very important strategically in the Middle Ages. Historically, their kingdom lay at the crossroads of different empires. Therefore, they played an important role in the wars for the Caucasus between the seventh and tenth centuries. After the breakdown of the Khazar Empire in the tenth century, Alania was the most powerful authority in the northern Caucasus. Their most important stronghold \*Mağas has been identified with Nižnij-Arkhyz, a ruined fortress on the Bolšoi Zelenčuk in the Qaračaj-Čerkhes territory.<sup>1</sup> Presumably, they had control over some of the neighbouring Caucasian tribes.

Although the importance of the Alans decreased somewhat from the viewpoint of the Byzantine Empire,<sup>2</sup> they still played a considerable role in the Cauca-

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<sup>1</sup> Th. T. Allsen, "Mongols and North Caucasia," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 7 (1987–1991), 19. Minorsky earlier suggested that \*Ma ġas should be sought in the Čečen–Inguš territory. V. Minorsky, "The Alān capital \*Magas and the Mongol Campaigns," *Bulletin of School of Oriental African Studies* 14/2 (1952), 235.

<sup>2</sup> According to Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, beside the Uz (O ġuz), the Alans could also attack the great power in the area, the Khazars, in the tenth Century. Moreover, the Alans were already interfering at the turn of the ninth and the tenth centuries in the Khazar raids against the Crimea as necessary (Constantine Porphyrogenetus: *De administrando imperio*. (henceforth: DAI) 62–65, Greek text ed. by Gy. Moravcsik, English tr. R. J. H. Jenkins, Dumbarton Oaks 1967, 62, 64). The Cambridge document mentions the alliance between the Alans and the Byzantines against the Khazars (N. Golb, "The Schechter Text – An Anonymous Khazar's Epistle to Ḥasḏai ibn Šaprūt." in N. Golb, O. Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*. Ithaca–London 1982, 114–115; cf. P. B. Golden, *Khazar Studies. An historico-philological inquiry into the origins of the Khazars*. Budapest 1980, 94–96). The title of the Alan King was ἐξουσιοκράτωρ Ἀλανίας (DAI 62, 64), and he was the wearer of the estate, "spiritual son" of the emperor. Two other sovereigns who received the same title were the Bulgarian Tsar and the Armenian

sus in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>3</sup> This period in the history of the Alans can be characterised by stable foreign affairs without serious military conflicts. In their relations with the neighbouring powers, dynastic marriages became more frequent during this time.

The Alans had contacts with the previous great powers of this area, particularly with the Byzantine Empire. Despite the fact that the Byzantine sources in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries tell us that the House of Comnenus (1081-1185) recognized the importance of marriage with foreign dynasties, the emperors never married into the Christian Alan royal houses.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, dynastic and military relations with the Alans proved of great value for the Georgian Kingdom, beginning in the late eleventh and the early twelfth century. The Rus' Principalities also proved to be interested in Alan

King (D. Obolensky, *A Bizánci Nemzetközösség. Kelet-Európa 500-1453*. [The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500-1453.] Budapest 1999, 221).

<sup>3</sup> At the same time, namely in the eleventh-twelfth centuries, the Alan mercenaries played a significant role in the Byzantine Empire (Sz. Kovács, "Alán harcosok a bizánci hadseregben (1071-1185)," [Alan warriors in the Byzantine Army (1071-1185)] in *Abhivádana. Tanulmányok a hatvanéves Wojtilla Gyula tiszteletére*, ed. Sz. Felföldi, Szeged 2005, 219-225).

<sup>4</sup> The names of the girls who were married off to the neighbouring rulers denote their families' faith, but they were renamed after being married in the Byzantine Empire, according to the Orthodox canon law, which stipulates that they had to be converted to the Greek Orthodox faith (Jr. S. Vryonis, "Byzantine and Turkish Societies and their Sources of Manpower," in *War, Technology and Society in the Middle East*. V. J. Parry, M. E. Yapp, London 1975, 131). For instance, the daughter of (Saint) Ladislav I (1077-1095) Piroška of Hungary (Saint Irene), as wife of Ioannes II Comnenus (1118-1143) was renamed Irene ('peace') (Gy. Moravcsik, *Bizánc és a magyarság*. [Byzantium and the Hungarians] 2nd ed. Budapest 2003, 72). Another example is the case of Margaret, daughter of another Hungarian King Béla III (1172-1196), who was the wife of Isaac Angelus (1185-1195), known by the name Maria (Moravcsik, *Bizánc és a magyarság*, 91). For the Christianity of the Alans in the early period, see B. Fejős, "Az alánok és a kereszténység," [The Alans and Christianity] in *Nomád népvándorlások, magyar honfoglalás*, ed. Sz. Felföldi, B. Sinkovics, Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár 15, Budapest 2001, 36-44. It must be mentioned that the Alans were only partially Christianized in the thirteenth century. In the first half of thirteenth century an epistolary sermon, written by Bishop Theodore of Alania, described that the Alans worshipped some demons in high places. The Alans are only Christians in name. The Alans are only Christians in name" (A. Alemany, *Sources on the Alans. A Critical Compilation. Handbook of Oriental Studies*, Sect. 8, Central Asia, ed. D. Sinor, N. di Cosmo, Vol. 5, Leiden-Boston-Köln 2000, 239). This was also confirmed by a traveller Giorgio Interiano in the sixteenth century (H. Göckenjan, *Kelet-Európa népei a 13. századi magyar domonkosok útleírásaiban*. [East European peoples in the travelogues of 13<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian Dominicans] *Aetas Történettudományi folyóirat* 1997 [2-3]. 96-97). Amongst the Ossetians, descendants of the medieval Alans, "pagan rituals, deities [...] have survived [...] mixing with traditional Christian and Islamic beliefs and practices. This syncretic blend has resulted in a curiously unique and distinct Ossetian culture" (N. E. Leeper, "Ossetians," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-ROM ed. v.1.0. Leiden 1991, VIII: 179-180).

brides, as can be seen in the Russian sources. In this article, I am going to study the dynastic relations between the Alans and their neighbours (the Byzantine Empire, the Rūs' and the Georgian Kingdom) in the eleventh–twelfth centuries.

Our sources are tight-lipped about these women, but if we examine the records it seems that they played important roles in their new country, similar to their contemporaries in Western Europe. It is a well-known fact that Byzantine emperors rarely married into foreign royal houses before the eleventh century. Thus, Maria of Alania was only the third foreigner to reach the Byzantine throne in over 300 years in 1071.<sup>5</sup> Maria of Alania was the wife of Michael VII Ducas (1071–1078); after Michael's abdication, she went on to marry the Emperor Nicephorus III Botaniates (1078–1081). I speak of her here because she was the daughter of the Georgian King Bagrat IV,<sup>6</sup> but it is no accident that the Byzantine writers called her "the Alan". In Byzantine sources, Maria is invariably known as a beautiful woman<sup>7</sup> and we know that the Alan women were famous for their beauty. Therefore I am sure that the Byzantine writers knew about her mother, Boréna, who was of Alan descent. Consequently, Maria's nickname was presumably because of her extreme beautiful and her mother Boréna's origins.

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<sup>5</sup> The second wife of Justinian II (685–695; 705–711) was Theodora, a daughter of the Khazar Khagan. Constantine V (741–775) was married to Irene, daughter of the previous Khazar khagan in 732.

<sup>6</sup> Maria was born the princess Mart'a, daughter of the Georgian King Bagrat IV (1027–1072) and his second wife, the Alan Borena. Borena was the sister of Dorgoleli, the ruler of Alania (C. Toumanoff, *Les dynasties de la Caucasic chrétienne de l'Antiquité jusqu'au XIXe siècle*. Rome 1990, 134–135). The princess Mart'a became Maria perhaps at the marriage. According to Georgian sources, Bagrat and Borena had a daughter Mart'a, who was given in marriage to the King of Greeks (Alemany, *Sources on the Alans*, 319–320).

<sup>7</sup> The portrayal of the empress is due to Anna Comnena, who was betrothed to the son of Maria of Alania, Constantine, who died in 1095/96, before the marriage took place. According to the educated Anna Comnena, "She was in fact very tall, like a cypress tree; her skin was snow-white; her face was oval, her complexion wholly reminiscent of spring flower or rose. As for the flash of her eyes, what mortal could describe it? Eyebrows, flame-coloured, arched above eyes of light blue. A painter's hand has many times reproduced the colours of all the flowers brought to birth each in its own season, but the beauty of the empress, the grace that shone about her, the charming attractiveness of her ways, these seemed to baffle description, to be beyond of the artist's skill. Neither Apples, nor Pheidias, nor any of the sculptors ever created such a work. The Gorgon's head, so they say, turned men who saw her to stone, but a man who saw the empress walking, or who suddenly met her, was stupefied, and rooted to the spot where he happened to be speechless, apparently deprived in that one moment of all feeling and reason. Such was the proportion and perfect symmetry of her body, each part in harmony with the rest, that no one till then had ever seen its like among human-kind – a living work of art, an object of desire to lovers of beauty. She was indeed Love incarnate, visiting as it were this earthly world" (*The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, tr. E. R. A. Sewter, Harmondsworth 1982, 107; Alex. III, 2, 4).

I have already mentioned in my work that the Byzantine Empire recognized the importance of marriage with foreign ruling houses during the reign of the Comnenus dynasty.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the first Alan woman in the Byzantine court was the mistress of Constantine IX Monomachus (1042–1055). Our main source about their love affair is Michael Psellus (1018–1096), one of the greatest courtiers and men of letters of the age.<sup>9</sup>

After his wife Empress Zoe died, Constantine adorned his Alan mistress with the title *sebasté*, the Greek translation of “Augusta”.<sup>10</sup> According to Psellus, they lived as a married couple. An imperial bodyguard was provided for her and the Emperor wanted to crown her. Two things restrained him from doing this: the law limiting the number of marriages (Empress Zoe was the third wife of Constantine) and Empress Theodora, who was Zoe’s sister and Constantine’s co-emperor and would never have tolerated this marriage. Michael Psellus in his *Chronographia* tells us that “two or three times every year envoys used to come from her father in Alania to this girl Augusta, and Constantine would show her off to them [...] proclaiming that she was his consort and empress”.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, he paid a fortune in order to please her: “For the first time in its history the land of the Alanians was surfeited with good things that came to it from our Rome” says our source.<sup>12</sup>

The situation was complicated because a minion of the wasteful and unheeding Constantine, Romanus Boilas the clown, fell in love with the young hostage and hatched a plot to kill the emperor.<sup>13</sup> The young princess was held as a hostage by the Byzantines from Alania (“a country of no great importance.”) Psellus mentioned with a measure of malice that the Emperor lavished gifts on the en-

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<sup>8</sup> A. Kazhdan, “The notion of Byzantine diplomacy.” in *Byzantine diplomacy. Papers from Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, ed. J. Shepard, S. Franklin, Aldershot 1992, 17–18; R. Macrides, “Dynastic marriages and political kinship.” In *Byzantine diplomacy. Papers from Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, ed. J. Shepard, S. Franklin, Aldershot 1992, 271.

<sup>9</sup> Psellus was very interested in love-stories, so that he dwelt extensively on Constantine’s romances (Я. Н. Любарский, *Михаил Пселл. Личность и творчество. К истории византийского предгуманизма*. Москва 1978, 216–220.)

<sup>10</sup> The title *σεβαστος* (‘venerable’) used by Greek authors in the first and second centuries corresponded to the Latin title *Augustus*. This reappeared as a title in the eleventh Century. Constantine IX Monomachus created the title *sebasté* for his former mistress Sclerena. Later, Alexius I Comnenus acquired it and in the reign of the Comnenus dynasty more than 90 percent of *sebastoi* belonged to the ruling family. The honorific epithet was debased by the end of the twelfth century. In the books of ceremony, it was only a low rank in the fourteenth century (A. Kazhdan, “Eirené,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, (henceforth: *ODB*) 3 vols. ed.-in-chief A. P. Kazhdan, New York–Oxford 1991, 1862–1863).

<sup>11</sup> Psellus 6, 155, cf. *Chronographia*. in Michael Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine rulers*, tr. E. R. A. Sewter, Harmondsworth 1966, 237.

<sup>12</sup> Psellus 6, 153, cf. *Chronographia*, 236.

<sup>13</sup> Psellus 6, 145–150, *Chronographia*, 231–232.

voys of the inconsequential country.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the sources do not record the Alan girl's name. Moreover, they do not mention who her father was. Thus, we have no information about her family.

There are two theories about the origin of this Alan girl. Before dealing with these problems, mention must be made of a hypothesis. There are those who think that the girl can be identified with Irene, who married Isaac Comnenus in 1071 or 1072. Nicephorus Bryennius says in his work that at the beginning of his rule Emperor Michael VII Ducas (1071–1078) brought back the Comnenus brothers from exile “and made them his kinsmen by means of a marriage; for, as he himself had previously taken as wife Maria, the all powerful daughter of the king of Georgia, he gave in marriage her niece, Irene,<sup>15</sup> daughter of the ruler of Alania, to Isaac”. This sentence of Bryennius is inconsistent with a relatively common opinion, namely that the Byzantines could not distinguish between the noble women coming to the Byzantine court from the Caucasus. The question arises: Why did Isaac married Irene? According to Barbara Hill, this marriage was to make amends to the Comnenus brothers for their exile.<sup>16</sup> Bryennius's story is in conflict with a comment of his wife, Anna Comnena, because she tells us the marriage was owing to Maria of Alania. It is a matter of course that the Emperor decided on the marriage under his wife's influence. Anna Comnena claimed that Isaac had got in with the Empress on account of the marriage. On the other hand, the brothers owed their lives to Maria of Alania. Ultimately, Alexius Comnenus got power by her help.

The age of the mistress of Constantine IX Monomachus is not known. According to Byzantine law, the minimum age for marriage was twelve for girls, but the most common age at marriage may have been close to fifteen or twenty.<sup>17</sup> This leads us to believe that the girlfriend of the Emperor was in her teens. Incidentally, according to Psellus, the beautiful hostage had several suitors.<sup>18</sup> Between the death of Constantine and her marriage to Isaac, 16 years passed. Consecutively, if Irene is identical with the mistress of Constantine, she was in her early

<sup>14</sup> Psellus states that the younger girl's father was king of Alania (βασιλεος) and Zonaras, whose source is Michael Psellus for these passages, writes “the daughter of one of their leaders” (ἀρχηγετούτες) (Alemany, *Sources on the Alans*, 225). According to Alemany “this term can be compared with the ruling class of Nicolaos Mysticos” (Alemany, *Sources on the Alans*, 189–190). Psellus 6, 145, *Chronographia*, 153–154, 231, 236.

<sup>15</sup> Irene is Zeus's daughter in the Greek mythology. She was the goddess of peace in Antiquity. Her name as a personal name was rare in the ancient times. After the Khazar wife of Constantine V. was given the name Irene, many foreign-born empresses were later to take this name, which means ‘peace,’ indicated the peaceful relationship between the two powers (*ODB* 1008). It is true that Irene was not an empress, but her husband was a very important person in the Byzantine Empire. Consequently, if the Byzantines held her as a hostage, her new name agrees with this theory.

<sup>16</sup> B. Hiel: *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025–1204. Power, Patronage and Ideology*. New York 1999, 144.

<sup>17</sup> A-M. Talbot, “Women.” in *The Byzantines*, ed. G. Cavallo, Chicago–London 1997, 121.

<sup>18</sup> Psellus 6, 151–152, *Chronographia*, 235.

thirties. Anyway, Isaac Comnenus' wife produced eight children, who became important persons later in the Byzantine Empire. If Irene is identical with the mistress of the Emperor, the question of whose daughter she was still remains.

As already mentioned, there are two theories about the origin of this Alan girl. According to the first hypothesis, she was the daughter of Demetrios,<sup>19</sup> the son of the Alanian Aldé<sup>20</sup> and the Georgian King Giorgi I.<sup>21</sup> Demetrios tried to acquire power from his step-brother Bagrat IV on several occasions. It is a well known fact that the Byzantine court supported the pretender.<sup>22</sup> In that case some new questions arise. Why did the Byzantine sources call him as Alan King? This was presumably because of his mother Aldé's origin, or because Demetrios took the Alan throne after he had left the Georgian Kingdom. Mention must be made of the fact that we know of only six Alan kings by name at this time, but Demetrios was not among them. According to the second theory, she was the daughter of Dorgoleli,<sup>23</sup> the brother-in-law of the Georgian King Bagrat IV. In either case, she was the niece of Maria of Alania.

As stated above, Alan women appeared in the neighbouring Georgian Kingdom too. From the eleventh century, our first data about Alan-Georgian contacts is a marriage. The second wife of the Georgian ruler Giorgi I (1014-1027) was the daughter of an Alan King, Aldé.<sup>24</sup> Their son was the above mentioned Demetrios, who tried to take power in the Georgian Kingdom. Both of them were adhered to their mothers, although Aldé helped Demetrios<sup>25</sup> and Mariam from Vaspurakan aided Bagrat.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> L. Garland, L., Jr. Stephen Rapp, "Mart'a-Maria 'of Alania'," In *De Imperatoribus Romanis. An Online Encyclopedia of Roman Emperors*, [http://www.roman-emperors.org/maroyal.htm#N\\_6](http://www.roman-emperors.org/maroyal.htm#N_6). 24 July 2007.

<sup>20</sup> According to Abaev, the Nart epic records a feminine Ossetic name *Eldæ*, *Aldæ* (V. I. Abaev, *Осетинский язык и фольклор*, Москва-Ленинград 1949, 42).

<sup>21</sup> Toumanoff, *Les dynasties de la Caucasic chrétienne*, 134.

<sup>22</sup> Ioannis Skylitzae: *Synopsis Historiarum*. Rec. Ioannes Thurn. Berolini - Novi Eboraci 1973, 389; Jean Skylitzés: *Empereurs de Constantinople*, tr. B. Flusin et annoté par J.-Cl. Cheynet, *Réalités Byzantines*, Paris 2003, 322.

<sup>23</sup> K. G. Doguzov, *Бизантийско-Аланские отношения (XI-XII вв.)*. Автореферат диссертации на соискание ученой степени кандидата исторических наук. Тбилиси 1987, 18; Alemany, *Sources on the Alans*, 320.

<sup>24</sup> Skylitzés 389, *Empereurs de Constantinople*, 322; Toumanoff, *Les dynasties de la Caucasic chrétienne*, 134.

<sup>25</sup> "Alda, wife of George of Abasgia but of Alan descent, rushed up to the Emperor and handed over the most strong fortress of the Anakop'i. The Emperor honoured her son Demetrios with the rank of *magistros*." (Skylitzes 389; Alemany, *Sources on the Alans*, 222; *Empereurs de Constantinople*, 2003, 322).

<sup>26</sup> *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles, the Original Georgian texts and the Armenian Adaptation*. tr. R. W. Thomson, Oxford 1996, 287-288. According to the author of the *Chronicle of K'art'li*, Queen Mariam, mother of Bagrat, went to Constantinople and made an alliance with the Byzantines. The Emperor Romanus III Argyrus (1028-1034) gave the title of *curopalates* and his niece Helena

no more is known about her than the fact that she, as dowager of Giorgi I, did everything possible for her son. According to Ioannes Skylitzes, Aldé handed over the strongest fortress in north-east Georgia, Anakop'i to the Emperor Romanus III Argyrus (1028-1034). The Emperor honoured her son, Demetrios with the rank of *magistros*<sup>27</sup> and the Byzantine army aided him several times, but he died after a few crude attempts in the Byzantine Empire.<sup>28</sup> It is to be noted that Alemany suggests the Ossetian prince Davit' Soslan, the husband of Queen T'amar, was a descendent of Demetrios.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the Byzantines had no interest in a powerful Georgian Kingdom, so they also supported the legitimate heir, Bagrat IV (1027-1072), who was married to Helena Argyropoulaina, the niece of Romanus III Argyrus in 1032/33 as his first wife.<sup>30</sup>

The next Alan woman to be considered is Boréna, the mother of the Byzantine Empress Maria of Alania.<sup>31</sup> Boréna was the sister of the well-known Alan King, Dorgoleli.<sup>32</sup> After his first wife's death, King Bagrat IV married Boréna in the 1030s. They had three children: Maria of Alania, the future King Giorgi II and Mariam. The Georgian Queen Boréna is primarily known as a patron of the Georgian Orthodox culture and monastic life. She sponsored with her daughter Maria the construction of the Georgian Kapata Monastery on Mount Zion at Jerusalem.<sup>33</sup> She is frequently identified with Borena who was the author of a passionate and moving hymn to the Virgin Mary.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, she presumably promoted the ecclesiastical authors and copyists. We know that, after Bagrat IV was unable to stop the emir of Ganġa, he called for the assistance of his brother-in-law, the Ossetian King Dorgoleli, who arrived with 40,000 warriors.

Argyropoulaina as a wife for her son Bagrat (*Rewriting Caucasian History*, 287-288; Skylitzes 378, *Empereurs de Constantinople*, 313).

<sup>27</sup> Skylitzés 389; *Empereurs de Constantinople*, 322; Alemany, *Sources on the Alans*, 222.

<sup>28</sup> M. Lordkiphanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XIIIth centuries*. Tbilisi 1967, <http://www.georgianweb.com/history/mariam/index.html>, 27 July 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Alemany, *Sources on the Alans*, 321.

<sup>30</sup> See Note 26.

<sup>31</sup> The first element in her name corresponds to the Digor dialect of Ossetian *bor*, Iron *būr* 'yellow' (Abaev, *Осетинский язык и фольклор*, 161).

<sup>32</sup> They were perhaps children of King Urdure, who was murdered by the King of Kaġeti' Kwirike III (1010-1029) in a battle (Бахушти Багратиони, *История Царства Грузинского*. Перевел, снабдил предисловием, словарями и указателем Н. Т. Хакашидзе. Тбилиси 1976, 128-129).

<sup>33</sup> Garland-Rapp "Mart'a-Maria 'of Alania'."

<sup>34</sup> M. Tarchnišvili, J. Assfalg, *Geschichte der kirchlichen georgischen Literatur, auf Grund des ersten Bandes der georgischen Literaturgeschichte von K. Kekelidze bearbeitet*. Città del Vaticano 1955, 451. "Thou who didst wipe out the guilt of Eve / When thou didst say to Gabriel, 'I am the / Lord's handmaid'; / Then the power, formerly drunk with blood / collapsed in ruin. / Me, thy vigilant one, walking upon the earth, / O Virgin. save me, Borena the much- / afflicted" (D. M. Lang, "Tarchnišvili, M.-Assfalg, J. *Geschichte der kirchlichen georgischen Literatur, auf Grund des ersten Bandes der georgischen Literaturgeschichte von K. Kekelidze bearbeitet*. Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1955. (Review)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19:1 (1957), 181).

The combined Alan–Georgian army ravaged the territory of Arrān and the Georgian ruler recaptured a number of towns and strongholds. It is interesting that the Georgian source hints that the Alan King was not treated as an equal partner in the war. He was subordinated to the Georgian heir, the future Giorgi II (1072–1089). In addition to that, after the struggle, the great King of the Alans requested an audience from his brother-in-law, a fact which suggests his dependence.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, I mention an Alan–Rus' marriage.<sup>36</sup> Vsevolod III Yur'evič, the first grand prince of Vladimir on the Klaizma (1177–1212), was married to an Alan princess, who is called Maria in the Russian sources.<sup>37</sup> We have no information about the circumstances of the marriage, but it probably happened in the 1170s.<sup>38</sup> There is a theory that Vsevolod spent his youth in Constantinople,<sup>39</sup> after being expelled from Rus' by his brother, Andrei Bogolyubskiy.<sup>40</sup> On his return from Byzantium to Rus in the 1170s, he supposedly visited Tbilisi and there the Georgian king, Giorgi III (1156–1184) entertained his nephew from Constantinople and married him to his relative, an Alan princess. We know that Vsevolod's step-brother Andrei Bogolyubskiy had an Alan wife too.<sup>41</sup> And according to the sources there were some Alans among Andrei's assassins in the year 1174.<sup>42</sup>

If we return to Vsevolod, Maria and Vsevolod had numerous children,<sup>43</sup> thus earning for himself the sobriquet Big Nest. One of them was Yuriy Vsevolodovič, who was killed in the battle of Sit' by the Mongols in 1238. Some of Maria and Vsevolod's descendents were canonized by the Russian church, including their grandson, Alexander Nevsky. The Saint Demetrius church in Vladimir was built with the support of the pious Maria and her husband. The Assumption (Princess) Convent was also founded by this princess. The cathedral became the burial place of the females of the princely families: the wives and daughters of Vsevolod and Alexander Nevsky were buried here. Maria, like her Western and Byzantine contemporaries, sponsored the ecclesiastical arts too.<sup>44</sup> After her death in 1206, she

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<sup>35</sup> *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 304–305. The Arab sources record this incursion in 1065 (V. Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*. London 1953, 22; text. 15\*–16\*).

<sup>36</sup> In the twelfth century, several Russian princes married Alan princesses.

<sup>37</sup> D. Dzanty, G. Vernadsky, "The Ossetian Tale of Iry Dada and Mstislav," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 69, No. 273, Slavic Folklore: A Symposium (July–Sept 1956), 219; B. A. Кузнецов: Огеркиистории Алан. 1984 134 It must be mentioned that, according to Nikiforovskaja Letopis, Maria was the daughter of Bohemian prince (*Полное Собрание Русских Летописей*. Т. 35. Б. А. Рыбаков, Москва 1980, 35, 19, 36)

<sup>38</sup> Dzanty–Vernadsky, "The Ossetian Tale," 219.

<sup>39</sup> According to Karamzin, Vsevolod's mother Helene was a Greek princess.

<sup>40</sup> A. A. Vasiliev, "Was Old Russia a Vassal State of Byzantium?" *Speculum* 7:3 (1932), 357.

<sup>41</sup> Dzanty–Vernadsky, "The Ossetian Tale," 219.

<sup>42</sup> *Полное Собрание Русских Летописей*. Т. 9–10. Ред. М. Н. Тихомиров, Москва 1965, 9: 249.

<sup>43</sup> They had eight sons and four daughters.

<sup>44</sup> S. Franklin, J. Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750–1200*. London–New York 1996, 316.

was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church,<sup>45</sup> which celebrates the date when she died on 1 April.<sup>46</sup>

In conclusion, I have enumerated several illustrative examples of marriages the Alans established with neighbouring states. Taking these data into consideration, the following results are worth mentioning. These records highlight the different important roles that Alanian women played in the foreign courts. For the Byzantine Empire, the Alans were not so important as in the tenth century. This can be demonstrated by the fact that the daughter of the Alan King was a hostage in Constantinople. And later on, when the Comneni recognized the importance of marriage with the Eastern ruling houses, they selected wives from among the Bagratids, because the Georgian Kingdom had become a great power in the Caucasus.

At the same time, the Alan Kingdom was an important ally of the kings of Georgia in their struggle against the emirs of Ganġa and the Seljuks.<sup>47</sup> The marriage between the Georgian King Giorgi III (1156–1184) and the beautiful Burduġan,<sup>48</sup> the daughter of the Alan King Xuddan (d. 1172), is another argument for the importance of the Alans.<sup>49</sup> From this marriage T'amar, the great Queen of the Georgians, was born. Incidentally her second husband was the Alan David Soslan. He was very important in establishing the power of the Georgian Kingdom.<sup>50</sup>

Relations between the Alans and the Rus' are characterized by peaceful dynastical ties in the eleventh–twelfth centuries.<sup>51</sup> In this period our first data is a marriage in 1116.<sup>52</sup> At this time Yaropolk, a son of Vladimir Monomakh, came back from a campaign against the Cumans and Alans with a "very beautiful"

<sup>45</sup> *Полное Собрание Русских Летописей* 10, 49–50.

<sup>46</sup> И. М. Карамзин, *История государства Российского, 1816–1829*, [http://www.magister.msk.ru/library/history/karamzin/kar03\\_03.htm](http://www.magister.msk.ru/library/history/karamzin/kar03_03.htm). 5 August 2007; V. T. Dadianova, „О Марие-Ясыне - великой просветительнице земли русской.” *Ярославская культура* 1–2 (2004), 21–22.

<sup>47</sup> Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI–XIIth centuries*. The Alans attacked the Ganġa capital of Arrān in 1062 (Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 15§; text. 14\*). Arrān at that time was a vassal of the Seljuks. This assault was perhaps a response to the aggression of Alp Arslan (1063–1072), who ravaged Georgian territory (C. E. Bosworth, "al-Ĥabk," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-ROM ed. v.1.0. Leiden, 1991, IV: 347). A second Alan raid took place in 1067/8 (Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 22; text. 15\*–16\*; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 304–305).

<sup>48</sup> *The Gregorian Chronicle. The period of Giorgi Lasha*. Text by S. Qankhchishvili, trans. K. Vivian, Amsterdam 1991. 54, 57, 107, 110. The Georgian Chronicle states, "... she excelled all other women in virtue" (Georg. Chron. 57). "...Burdukhan, in whom all the graces of womanhood were found" (Georg. Chron. 107).

<sup>49</sup> "And however many thousand men of Ovseti and Qipchaqs he summoned, they came ..." (Georg. Chron. 53).

<sup>50</sup> Georg. Chron. 67–68, 73, 78, 82–83, 88, 118, 121, 124, 127–128, 129–131.

<sup>51</sup> de N. Baumgarten, "Généalogies et Mariages Occidentaux des Rurikides Russes du Xe au XIIIe siècle." *Orientalia Christiana* IX, 35 (1927), 70.

<sup>52</sup> *Полное Собрание Русских Летописей*. Т. 2. Ред. Д. С. Лихачев, Москва 1950, 284.

princess who became his wife in Kiev.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, it is not clear if these Alans were the Cumans' allies or subjects or if they were Alans of the Don region.

The Alans served as intermediaries between the Rus' Principalities and the Georgian Kingdom. At the same time, it is obvious why Vsevolod III was married to an Alan princess, because of the strategic and diplomatic importance of the Alan Kingdom as a potential ally against the Cumans.<sup>54</sup>

Unfortunately, in most cases we do not know exactly what political circumstances led to these marriages. An even more interesting thing is that these matrimonial ties were one-sided, since the daughters of Alan Kings married neighbouring rulers, but we have no information on the Byzantines, Georgians or Russians giving any brides from their ruling houses to the Alans.

It is well known that during this period women were primarily identified by their affiliation to men. Therefore we have scanty information about these women. Actually, as my illustrative examples show, these women who descended from a semi-nomad yet Christian dynasty played a significant role in the patronage of the church and ecclesiastical arts, as did their Western contemporaries. In addition they were exceptionally literate.

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<sup>53</sup> *Полное Собрание Русских Летописей*, 2: 284.

<sup>54</sup> G. Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia*. London 1951, 358.