

Stephen Rapp, Jr.,

Sam Houston State University

“Sasanians” of the North: Strategies of Kingship in Early Christian Georgia

In my book *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes* (Ashgate/Routledge, 2014), I demonstrated the fundamental Iranian— and especially Iranic/Persianate—character of Georgian society from the Iron to the medieval ages. When combined with the research of scholars like Cyril Toumanoff, Nina Garsoïan, and Mzia Andronikashvili, it becomes clear that the whole of Caucasia, and not just its Armenian elements, were embedded in the Iranian cultural world stretching from Central Asia to Anatolia. The proposed paper will extend these arguments through a careful study of the image of royal authority in the early Christian kingdom of Kartli in eastern Georgia. Mirian/Mihran, the first Christian Kartvelian monarch, was in fact an acculturating Parthian Mihranid who had recently migrated from northern Iran. The dynasty he founded, the Chosroids (Xosroianni), governed until the suppression of the local monarchy by the Sasanians in the sixth century. Specialists have long stressed the Christian affiliation of the Chosroids (and have assumed a close connection with Byzantium on the basis of shared religion), but the family’s Parthian background and broader associations with Iran have been neglected. In terms of kingship, the Chosroids took the helm of an evolving royal tradition that could be traced back to the time of Alexander the Great. From its foundation by Parnavaz, Kartvelian kingship—both real and imagined—had been fundamentally Iranian. It featured an Iranian onomasticon, the notion of the hero-king, *xwarrah*, Zoroastrianism, and an understanding of history paralleling the Iranian epic. Chosroid royal authority retained many of these qualities, though obvious Zoroastrian strands gave way to Christian ones. Finally, I shall emphasize how the Chosroids came to depict themselves not as acculturated Parthians but as the legitimate and displaced main branch of the Sasanian family.