

## Seljuk Traces in Medieval Georgia: Title of Atabeg<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Atabeg is a title used in the Seljuks and later Turkish states. This title started with the Seljuks in Turkish political life and then gained an essential place in the administrative structure of other principalities and states. This title was also used in the Georgian Kingdom. The Georgian Kingdom was in a feudal structure in the Middle Ages and was ruled by a feudal monarchy. This title, which found its place in Georgian political life when Georgian King Tamara gave the title of Atabeg to Ivane Mkhargrdzeli, was later used by members of the Mankaberdeli family. The title of Atabeg, which became obsolete towards the end of the 13th century, began to be used in Saatabago under the rule of the Cakeli family from the beginning of the 14th century. In this study, information will be provided about the title of Atabeg, which is historically significant for the Georgians and was an important political title for the Seljuks.

**Keywords:** *Seljuks, Georgians, Atabeg, Saatabago, Ivane Mkhargrdzeli*

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of Atabeg (اتابك), which emerged from the combination of the words Ata and Beg (Bey), was known by different names and forms of usage before the Seljuks in Turkish political history. However, it gained political and administrative meaning during the Seljuk period and was systematically used as a title and civil servant role. In the Seljuk Empire, the Sultans, after assigning various regions of the Empire's territory to their family members, appointed an Atabeg as a counselor to their younger family members, i.e., the princes. The Atabeg took care of the prince's education and controlled the region on his behalf. Atabegs were chosen among experienced and powerful emirs who had gained the Sultan's trust (Alptekin, 2021, p. 195).

There is no information on the use of the title of Atabeg in Muslim Turkish states such as the Karakhanids and Ghaznavids before the Great Seljuks (Köprülü, 1978, p. 712). The Seljuks were a community that continued the traditional life of the Oguz in every geography they traveled to. Although there are doubts that they created and used various political institutions and titles such as Atabeg inspired by ancient Turkish traditions, it is possible to say that the institution of Atabeg was established as a continuation of a tradition called "Atalık." It is known as a historical Turkish family tradition that the Turks, among different Caucasian communities, sent their children to another family at a young age for the purpose of upbringing and education, and the elder of the family was called Atalık. This institution established a kind of kinship law between the two families. There is an idea that the institution of Atabeg in the Seljuks may be related to "Atalık" (Alptekin, 2021, p. 195).

In the Seljuk State, the concept of Atabeg was used both as a title and as a high state official. According to the statement of MSrhând, one of the historians of the Timurid period, Atabegs were the border (serhad) emirs of the Seljuks, and the rulers gave the task of raising their children to these people (MSrhând, 2015, p. 100). Here, Atabeg appears as a civil service responsible for border security. When the Seljuk Sultans distributed the various regions of the Empire to the members of the dynasty, they appointed an Atabeg to educate and train the young Meliks (children of the rulers).

Apart from the Great Seljuks, the title of Atabeg was used in different states such as the Ayyubids, Anatolian Seljuks, Mamluks, the Rum State of Nicaea, and the Georgian Kingdom and was seen as an honorary title given to people at the military level (Cahen, 1987, p. 878). The term Atabeg was a title given to the commander of the Mamluk forces with the title of "Atabekü'l Asâkir ve EmSr-i KebSr" (Gezen, 2019,

p. 144). When Sultan Kılıçarslan I of the Anatolian Seljuks died in 1107, his wife Ayşe Khatun sent a message to Belek, the ruler of the Artukids. She asked him to be the Atabeg of her son, Sultan Tuğrul Arslan of Malatya. Accepting Ayşe Khatun's request, Belek ruled Malatya as Tuğrul Arslan's Atabeg and married Ayşe Khatun (Alptekin, 2021, p. 199).

In the early periods of the Atabeg, Ayyubids, and Mamluks, it was used as it was in the Seljuks. In the following periods, it turned into an army command. In the Halep and Damascus regions of the Mamluks, people appointed as Atabegs were also given the titles of "Atabeg al-Cüyoşun" and "Beylerbeyi." The institution of Atabeg, which somehow continued its existence until the 15th century, later lost its importance. In the Ottoman Empire, the institution of Atabeg was used as a title given to those who were in the position of teachers of princes in the palace rather than military leaders and continued its existence under the name of "Lala" (Baykara, 2003, pp. 70–71).

## **METHOD**

This study used the historical research method, as well as explanation, comparison, and critical and systematic analysis. The historical research method explains how social events occurred in the past (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 14). The historical sources used in the study were analyzed using document analysis. This paper focuses on the use of the concept of Atabeg, which has an important place in Turkish and Georgian administrative systems. The study employs qualitative research methods, particularly descriptive and historical event interpretation methods, to explain the different ways of using the title of Atabeg in the context of historical sources. Furthermore, through the analysis of primary sources such as Georgian and Islamic sources, this research attempts to explain the historical background of a title used by two neighboring nations in the Middle Ages.

## **RESULTS**

1. At the beginning of the study, the emergence and use of the concept of Atabeg in the Seljuk Empire was studied. However, the title of Atabeg emerged in 3 different ways according to its usage in both Seljuks and Georgians. What makes the study original is to identify these 3 different usage areas and to emphasize that this is common for both states in the light of historical sources. The first of these usage methods is that a powerful ruler delegated the administration of the

state to a person he appointed as an Atabeg in general terms. Another use of the term was when a young Seljuk prince was sent to a region as an administrator, or when an Atabeg was appointed to guide him in governance after he had taken over the administration. The last one is the elimination of the Seljuk princes in the region they were assigned to and the subsequent use of this title by the Atabegs to take over the administration semi-independently from the state center. Although these areas of usage are also seen in Georgian history, the details of these issues can be found in the discussion section.

2. The Seljuks influenced the communities they encountered politically and culturally. In this context, the Georgian Kingdom was also influenced by the Seljuks in terms of the title of Atabeg and its use. Georgian political life was affected by the introduction of the concept in the Georgian Kingdom.
3. By explaining the usage patterns of the Atabeg concept in the Seljuk and Georgian state structures, it was concluded that these two communities were influenced by each other not only in the context of war but also in political, administrative, and cultural terms in the Middle Ages.

## ***DISCUSSION***

### **Atabeg Title and Usage in Seljuks**

The Seljuks frequently used the title Atabeg, and in time, it became a concept with a broad range of usage rather than just a title. Prominent people within the administrative structure of the Seljuk State established many states under the name of Atabeg. The Seljuk sultans either sent loyal individuals to whom they gave essential duties at state levels to cities as governors or appointed them as Atabegs to ensure that their children gained experience in state affairs (Uzunçarşılı, 2014, p. 47).

Atabegs played an essential role in the struggles between Seljuk princes and in the fights for the sultanate. In addition to serving as advisors to princes, Atabegs also acted as provincial governors. Historical records provide examples of this. Semsettin Ildeniz was appointed as the governor of Azerbaijan by Gıyaseddin Mesud. Additionally, Damascus, Syria, Mosul, Erbil, and Artuk were small states established in this manner. Emir Atabeg İmadüddin Zengi, who fought against the Crusaders, was primarily one of the important Turkish governors and commanders in Seljuk history; he was appointed as an Atabeg by the Seljuk sultan (Cahen, 1987, p. 878).

The first person to use this title in the Seljuks was the great and famous politician Nizam al-Mulk. It is known that Sultan Alp Arslan appointed Nizam al-Mulk as

Atabeg for his son Melikşah after the Battle of Manzikert (Köprülü, 1978, pp. 712–713). Sultan Alp Arslan appointed Nizam al-Mulk with the titles of “ilig, ata hoca, and Atabeg” (MSrhând, 2015, p. 100). This office, which began with the appointment of Nizam al-Mulk as Atabeg by Melikşah, shaped Seljuk politics for many years and appeared in various forms during the periods when it was actively used.

It is possible to see three different forms of the institution of Atabeg, which are similar to those in the Seljuks, especially in the political life of Georgia and the South Caucasus (Subaşı, 2017, p. 509). The first use of the title of Atabeg was when a person given the title by a powerful ruler had a say in the administration of the state. This method, in which the person given the title of Atabeg shared the administrative powers of the Sultan, is evident in the relationship between Melikşah and Nizam al-Mulk. The first example of this usage in Georgia is the relationship between King Tamara (1184–1213) and Atabeg Ivane. Atabeg Ivane, with whom King Tamara shared her military and administrative powers in addition to her recognized power and authority in the region, was arguably the most powerful administrator of the period. With the title of Atabeg, Ivane fought important battles with the Georgian armies, where he served as commander-in-chief for many years, and later took his place among the essential figures in Georgian history (Kartlis Tskhovreba, 2012, p. 233).

The most widely used method in the Seljuks was the form of administration created by the Atabeg, who was appointed to guide the young Seljuk princes as regional administrators or to guide them in administration after they took over. These Atabegs, who were the educators and, at the same time, advisors of the princes and directly subordinate to the great Sultan, sometimes acted as the rulers of the significant administrative area they oversaw; all administrative and military authority was gathered in their hands. Additionally, sometimes the son of the deceased Atabeg was appointed as the new Atabeg (Köprülü, 1978, p. 713).

In Georgian history, an Atabeg title used this way is observed during the reign of King Demetre II (1271–1289). Sadun Mankaberdeli was appointed as an Atabeg by Abaka Khan to assist King Demetre II, who did not have enough experience in state administration due to his young age (Mikaberidze, 2007, p. 153). By appointing Sadun to a high rank, Abaka left the King under the rule of Atabeg Sadun, who soon became one of the most influential figures in Georgian history.

Another type of administration in the Seljuks using the title of Atabeg occurred when the Seljuk princes who continued their lives in their region disappeared for any reason, and the Atabegs took over the administration semi-independently from the state center using this title. This is how various Atabegs dynasties emerged in Turkish history when the Seljuk dynasty had not yet collapsed.

The Zengids, the Salgurids in Fars, and the Ildeniz in Azerbaijan were political structures that emerged in this way. This is the longest-lasting use of the title of Atabeg in the political life of the South Caucasus. After the death in 1308 of Beka, the ruler of Samtskhe, which the Ilkhanid ruler Abaka (1265–1282) separated from the sphere of influence of the Georgian administration centered in Tbilisi and connected to the Ilkhanid center in a semi-independent manner, Sargis II began to use the title of Atabeg. Due to the activation and use of this title in Samtskhe, the domain of Atabeg Sargis II was known as Saatabago for many years (Cavakhisvili, 1982, pp. 110–112). After Sargis II, the Atabegs belonging to the Cakeli family ruled in the Georgian administrative structure, sometimes under the Georgian Kingdom and sometimes semi-independently, in northeastern Anatolia and southern Georgia for centuries.

### **Atabeg Title and Atabegs in Georgia**

The Seljuks influenced many contemporary Christian states administratively, economically, and militarily. It can be stated that Georgian rulers established the title of Atabeg by taking the Seljuk organization as an example within the administrative structure of Georgia, and those who held this office managed all internal affairs just like the Seljuks. The office of Atabeg, which began to be seen in Georgian political life in the early 13th century, was generally passed from father to son and was actively used in political life by the feudal families of Mkhargrdzeli, Mankaberdeli, and Cakeli (Peacock, 2012, pp. 50–56).

The Seljuk incursions into Georgia in the 11th century had political, economic, and social effects, as well as cultural impact (for the economic impact, see Güven, 2022, pp. 99–126). The cultural impact refers to the process of integrating some of the terms used in the Seljuk administrative and military structure into the Georgian feudal structure. Another title used like Atabeg is Amirspasalar. As seen here, the Georgian Kingdom adopted and used Atabeg and other titles. Amirspasalar is generally defined as the commander-in-chief of the royal army, a position found in the medieval Georgian military organization. Amirspasalar is also referred to as the highest military position and the vizier of the King (Mikaberidze, 2007, p. 123). This title, like Atabeg, was used by important feudal families. Ivane Orbeliani, Sargis Mkhargrdzeli, Gamrekeli Toreli, Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli, and members of the Cakeli dynasty are known to have used this title. At the beginning of the 13th century, the title was divided between the brothers Ivane and Zakaria and continued among their descendants, and from 1334 it passed to the Cakeli family. The title was even preferred in this period as “Atabeg-Amirspasalar” (Ercan, 2022, p. 19).

Atabeg was one of the influential and essential figures in the Georgian state structure of the feudal period. Georgian historians have put forward various views on the emergence of this concept in Georgia. Surguladze, who wrote the article “Atabeg” in the Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia, emphasized that the Atabeg was the teacher and protector of the Sultan’s son within the Seljuk state structure; after the weakening of the state, the Atabeg acted independently and served as the chief of a Samtavro administration (Surguladze, 1975, p. 222). Surguladze also stated that the Atabeg was one of the viziers in Georgia. Among the duties of the Atabeg was to place the person he had trained on the throne. Surguladze also stated that Atabeg emerged due to the strengthening of feudal lords against the centralized administration of the Kingdom in general. In 1212, the title was first associated with Ivane Mkhargrdzeli, which weakened the institution of the scribe “Mtsignobartukhutses-Chqondideli.” In the following period, the title of Amirspasalar was combined with Atabeg (Surguladze, 1975, p. 222).

Ivane Cavakhisvili stated that the first Atabeg was Ivane Mkhargrdzeli, who received this title from King Tamara in 1212 (Cavakhisvili, 1982, p. 179). Many scholars repeated this statement of Cavakhisvili after him. Bakhtadze put forward a different view, stating that it was difficult for Ivane to dare to ask Tamara for such a title in this period (Bakhtadze, 2011, p. 119). Bakhtadze also questioned whether, even if Ivane had dared to do such a thing, the King would have accepted this request from such an influential and powerful feudal lord for what purpose. He also discussed what the Georgian Kingdom would gain from introducing such a position, which was completely unnecessary regarding the administrative system. Indeed, as Georgian historiography emphasizes, the institution of the Atabeg became a natural competitor to the office of the clerk Mtsignobartukhutses-Chqondideli, which was unified during the reign of David Agmashenebeli (1089–1125) and corresponded to the office of the vizier, leading to the deterioration and even the disappearance of this vital and necessary institution (Bakhtadze, 2011, p. 119).

Shota Meskhia has the following to say about the title of Atabeg and its use by Ivane: “The institution of Atabeg, which was quite common in the Muslim world of the Middle East at that time, was alien to the Georgian official structure... Ivane used the office of Atabeg for his benefit. With the title of Atabeg, Ivane was to take the title of Royal Vizier and create another position in King Tamara’s court as the ‘father/patriarch’ of the prince. Only in this way would it be possible to weaken the role of the vizier and strengthen himself. In addition, Ivane adopted a different strategy; by introducing and having the Atabeg recognized, he achieved a powerful position by gathering the titles Amirspasalar and Mandartukhutsesi under himself. Ivane Mkhargrdzeli



grdzeli's demand for the establishment of the Atabeg institution was not motivated by a concern for the creation of an independent unit in the form of the Atabeg, but rather to achieve both main tasks" (Meskhia, 1979, p. 309).

M. Bakhtadze states that the first person to use the title of Atabeg in the Georgian Kingdom was Ivane/Ioane Akhaltsikheli, according to the Georgian chronicle *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Bakhtadze states that the first use of Atabeg in the Georgian administrative structure was as the ruler and protector of a particular region. After the capture of Kars by the Georgian army, Ivane Akhaltsikheli became the Atabeg of the region (Bakhtadze, 2011, p. 123). Subsequently, Ivane Mkhargrdzeli transformed the institution of Atabeg and changed the function of this title to something like "vizier." M. Bakhtadze provides interesting information about Ivane's taking the title of Atabeg. He emphasizes that Ivane received the title of Atabeg at the beginning of the reign of Giorgi IV Lasha and that the Georgian historical source *Histories and Laudations of the Kings* conveys false information about the granting of the title of Atabeg to Ivane by King Tamara (Bakhtadze, 2011, pp. 123–126).

The sources mention Ivane Mkhargrdzeli as the first Atabeg, who served as *Msakhurtukhutsesi* under King Tamara and was later given the title of Atabeg (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 2012, pp. 235–240). The son of Sargis Mkhargrdzeli, who shaped the political and military life of Georgia towards the end of the 12th century, Commander-in-Chief Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli, died in 1212. King Tamara was very saddened by Zakaria's death because he came from an old tradition and was the most precious and above all *mtavaris*. Since Zakaria's son was too young, the King summoned Zakaria's brother Ivane, the chief of the *Msakhuris*, and asked him to succeed his brother as commander-in-chief (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 2012, pp. 235–242).

In fact, brothers Zakaria and Ivane oversaw the internal affairs of the Kingdom and ruled the country with King Tamara in a compelling way. These two administrators brought the Kingdom to the highest level under Tamara. Zakaria and Ivane continued to manage the affairs of the Kingdom and command the armies for some time. In 1209, Zakaria crossed the Aras and entered the territory of the Atabegs of Azerbaijan, where he took the cities of Marand and Erdebil and returned to Georgia with large booty. Zakaria's death in 1212 (some sources say 1211) shook the King deeply. Afterward, his brother Ivane continued to rule Georgia with various titles. One of these titles was Atabeg (Martin, 1818, p. 381).

After Tamara invited him, Ivane made an interesting request to her, asking her to give him the title of Atabeg because Ivane cared about this title (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 2012, pp. 134–138). King Tamara accepted Ivane's request. With Tamara's acceptance of this title, the institution of Atabeg was added to certain significant offices in the Geor-



gian administrative structure as of 1212. The institution of Atabeg had military and administrative content, but military duties were more important. As a matter of fact, Atabeg had taken its place in Georgian history as an institution accepted by the King from the state level (Köprülü, 1978, p. 717). After Ivane, this title was inherited by his son Avag in 1227 and then by his nephew Zakaria in 1250. The Mkhargrdzeli family, serving as Atabeg-Amirspasalar, commanded the Georgian armies during the Khwarezmshah and Mongol invasions in 1221–1235 but lost this influential position in 1272 (Mikaberidze, 2007, p. 153).

Ivane Mkhargrdzeli's knowledge of the Atabeg title and its strong and widespread use is undoubtedly related to the Ildenizli Atabeg, with whom the Georgians had established relations. Şemsettin İldeniz, appointed as the governor of Arran by the Iraq Seljuk Sultan Mesud, succeeded in putting Arslanşah on the throne in 1160 during the throne disputes that broke out after the Sultan's death. Arslanşah, in turn, gave İldeniz the title of "Atabeg-i Azam." As a result, an atabegdom called "İldenizids" or "Azerbaijan Atabegs" emerged in a large part of Azerbaijan and Arran (Bünyadov, 2017, pp. 38–45). After the death of İldeniz, Cihan Pehlivan, who succeeded him, declared himself Atabeg and started to interfere in the political and administrative affairs of the Iraqi Seljuks (Kayhan, 2016, pp. 80–81). As can be seen, first İldeniz and then Cihan Pehlivan gained legitimacy in their administration with the title of Atabeg and reached a strong position. In the following period, the brothers Zakaria and Ivane, who were aware of these events taking place near them, recognized the title of Atabeg, its power, and its sphere of influence.

From 1190 onwards, the Mkhargrdzeli family rose rapidly through the ranks of the Georgian state. It is known that Sargis' sons Zakaria and Ivane Mkhargrdzeli commanded the Georgian army. Thanks to the success of these commanders, Georgian armies achieved great victories in about three decades. These victories were Shamkor in 1195, followed by Basiani, and in 1210 in Northeastern Anatolia. Zakaria later took the title of Mandartukhutsesi, an important position in the Georgian administrative structure, while his brother Ivane served as Msakhurtukhutsesi. These brothers ruled all North and South Georgia for a time and amassed great wealth; Zakaria and his descendants ruled Ani and its environs, while Ivane and his children ruled Eastern Armenia, including the city of Dvin (Peacock, 2012, p. 53).

In 1213, after Zakaria's death, his brother Ivane united the two powerful positions of Atabeg and Amirspasalar. This move undoubtedly made Ivane the most powerful person in the Georgian country after the King at that time. The Mkhargrdzeli family retained its power in the mid-13th century, resisted the first Mongol invasions in 1221, and fought against the forces of Jalaluddin Khwarezmshah in Garni and Bol-

nisi in 1225–1226. At the end of the 13th century, Zakaria's son Shahinshah became Msakhurtukhutsesi, and Ivane's son Avak became Amirspasalar and Atabeg of the Georgian armies. In the 1300s and later, there is very little information about the Mkhargrdzeli family (Mikaberidze, 2007, pp. 152–153).

Atabeg Avak held the position of Atabeg for 23 years during the Mongol invasion, when significant events that shaped Georgian history took place. Avak was the last member of the Mkhargrdzeli family to use the title of Atabeg and to take full advantage of the power of this position and to use the privileges it offered them without hesitation (Kartlis Tskhovreba, 2012, p. 176). Avak's lack of male children prevented the continuation of the title within the family. For a long time, until the appointment of Sadun Mankaberdeli as Atabeg, the institution of the Atabeg remained silent in the South Caucasus.

During the reign of Georgian King Davit VII, Sadun Mankaberdeli established himself in Georgian political life. It was under Davit VII that Sadun became an essential figure in the region (Cavakhisvili, 1982, p. 111). Davit VII, aware of Sadun's power, left him many lands in Avak's hands. Sadun managed to gain the trust of Abaka Kagan, as he had with Hulāgū. In 1271, Demetre II's accession to the throne and the subsequent appointment of Sadun Mankaberdeli by Abaka to advise the King led to his growing power in the region. Eventually, in 1272, Abaka gave him the title of Atabeg. Sadun continually added to his fortune whenever he had the opportunity and became one of the wealthiest men of his time. Of course, Abaka's trust in him and giving him the title of Atabeg played an essential role in this. Georgian researchers also call Sadun "the ruler of the modern country" (Cavakhisvili, 1982, p. 110).

Sadun Mankaberdeli's rise to power was not only economic but also political, and in 1278, he captured regions such as Telavi and Belekan from Demetre. Sources say that Sadun settled in Kars with his wife Tamara after a while. Atabeg Sadun died in Kars in 1282 (Kartlis Tskhovreba, 2012, p. 218). After Sadun, his son Kutluk Buga received the title of Amirspasalar from Demetre II. Kutluk Buga hoped that he would be given the title of Atabeg. However, Sadun's growing power in the Georgian land and in the eyes of the Ilkhanids frightened the King, and he gave Kutluk Buga a title that was, in some sense, inferior to Atabeg. However, it seems that the concept of Atabeg continued to live on in Georgia. King Demetre gave this title to Tarsaich Orbeliani. This move of the King provided the Orbeliani dynasty, which had been away from the Georgian dynasty for a long time, with the opportunity to regain their lost influence (Cavakhisvili, 1982, p. 114).

However, it is known that Kutluk used the title of Atabeg for a while. After the death of Kutluk Buga, who served as an Atabeg for a while, the institution of Atabeg be-

came silent again in the political life of the South Caucasus. However, after Abaka Khan showed great merits in the wars with the Golden Horde ruler Berke, a new and more powerful structure emerged when Sargis Cakeli and his family separated the Samtskhe region from the Georgian Kingdom and connected it directly to Mongol rule (Peacock, 2012, p. 54). During this period, the rapid and unstoppable rise of the Cakeli family began in Samtskhe-Saatabago, which was detached from the Tbilisi-based Georgian sphere of dominance and completely connected to the Ilkhanid center.

Sargis and his son Beka soon owned Tasiskari, Karnukalaki, Samtskhe, Ajara, Şavşat, Klarceti, Göle, Karnipor, Valarshavan, Ardahan, Nigali River, most of Tao, and many villages in Javakheti. With the help they received from Abaka in return for their services to him and during their stay under King Demetre II, the power of this father and son grew significantly. After Sargis, his son Beka ruled the inherited lands until 1308 (Kartlis Tskhovreba, 2012, p. 217).

After King Vakhtang III of Georgia died in 1307/8, Beka, the ruler of Samtskhe, died in the same year. After Beka, his country was divided among his three sons, Sargis, Kvarkvare, and Shalva. Sargis Cakeli II (1308–1334), who was the eldest son after his father, began to rule a significant part of Saatabago and began to use the title of Atabeg. In fact, his father Beka was known as Samtskhe Mtavari (მთავარი) since the reign of Abaka Khan, but he was never referred to as Atabeg.

The use of the title of Atabeg by Atabeg Ivane and his son Avak of Mkhargrdzeli and Atabeg Sadun and his son Kutlug Buga of Mankaberdeli before the Cakeli family paved the way for the emergence of a political organization that would last for hundreds of years in the history of the South Caucasus (Kakhaber, 2019, pp. 76–78). Although the adventure of Atabeg in these two families was short-lived, Sargis Cakeli II's revitalization of the institution of Atabeg ensured the existence of a regional power that would last for hundreds of years in the South Caucasus, especially in the geography known as the Land of Atabegs.

In the Caucasus, under Ilkhanid rule, there were prolonged struggles with the Golden Horde. However, the loss of power of the Ilkhanids from the first quarter of the 14th century onwards benefited the Georgian King Giorgi V. After the death of the last great Emir of the Ilkhanids, Emir Çoban (1327), the remaining statesmen and the military class gradually distanced themselves from Abu Saïd due to his young age. Some emirs went to Iran, Khorasan, Iraq, and Azerbaijan, while others went to Anatolia. Meanwhile, Giorgi V cleansed the Georgian region under his rule of the Mongols, sometimes with money and weapons. He subjugated all the Eristavis, especially those in Kartli.

After securing the region, the King succeeded in bringing the whole geography up to Derbend under Georgian rule. Then Giorgi V went to Atabeg Sargis II, agreed with him, reunited all the factions, and entered the Arran region without encountering any resistance. He then moved on to Shirvan and, from there, returned to Tbilisi. In fact, this initiative was of great importance for reorganizing Georgian political unity. However, although it is stated that they were included in the Tbilisi-based administration, the ruling class of Saatabago never stopped using the title of Atabeg, and this institution was passed down from father to son and maintained its place in the political life of the region for many years.

After Atabeg Sargis II's death in Samtskhe in 1334, King Giorgi V appointed Sargis II's son Kvarkvare to succeed his father and gave him the title of Atabeg. He then settled in Klarjeti, Ispir, Kalmaki, Ardanuc, Ardahan, and the Samtskhe region in his name, along with the Eristavis, the uncle and cousins of Atabeg Kvarkvare, and connected these regions to the center (Kartlis Tskhovreba, 2012, p. 225).

In 1334, after King Giorgi V Brtskinvale gave Sargis II Cakeli the title of Atabeg, the region under his rule became known as Samtskhe-Saatabago. Before 1334, terms such as Samtskhe Lordship/Beylik appear in Georgian sources. The concept of Saatabago emerged not in 1268 with Sargis I but by 1334. This structure, which rose on the territory of historical Meskheta, is mentioned in the sources as Samtavro (Principality) (Tao-klarjeti istoriul kulturuli narkvevi, 2018, p. 137). With the title of Atabeg, the Atabegs, who struggled with the Timurid Empire, Aq-Quyunlu, and Qara-Quyunlu States in the territory of Tao-Klarjeti, continued this struggle with the Ottoman Empire but eventually came under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

## **CONCLUSION**

Atabeg, an indispensable institution of the Seljuk state organization, made significant contributions to the development and growth of the state since it was first used effectively and ensured that administrative matters were concluded quickly. As the Seljuks influenced the Turkish communities that came after them, they also profoundly affected the Christian societies and states with which they were in constant communication and interaction. It is a natural consequence of this interaction to find Seljuk traces in the political structure of the Georgian Kingdom in the Caucasus. The institution of Atabeg, shaped by the Seljuks, entered the political life of the South Caucasus with the appointment of Ivane from the Mkhargrdzeli family as Atabeg by Tamara in 1212. Atabeg Ivane remained in this position until his death in 1227. After his death, his son Avak was appointed as Atabeg and endeavored to

keep this office alive under Mongol oppression during perhaps the darkest years of Georgian history.

In 1250, the death of Atabeg Avak without leaving a male child behind meant the end of the Atabeg's influence for the Mkhargrdzeli family. Thus, the institution of Atabeg remained in deep silence in the South Caucasus until 1272. However, this silence ended when Abaka Kagan appointed Sadun Mankaberdeli as Atabeg to the Georgian King Demetre II. After the Mankaberdeli family, which operated in Georgian territories until the execution of Atabeg Sadun and then his son Kutlug Buka, Sargis II of the Cakeli family, who formed the ruling class of the Samtskhe region, started to use the title of Atabeg in 1308. For more than a century, the institution of Atabeg, a Seljuk heritage in the South Caucasus, made its influence felt in all political events.

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