



KARTLI

KARTLI, region occupying most of eastern [Georgia](#). The original name of Georgia (Sakartvelo) and the Georgian people (Kartvelebi) derive from Kartli. According to the mythological tradition, the term “Kartli” comes from Kartlos, the first ruler of the Georgian people. Initially, the place where the legendary Kartlos lived was known as the Kartli mountain (later renamed Armazi; see *K’art’lis tskhovreba*, p. 8). The etymology of Kartli is still not ascertained. It is noteworthy that the toponym Gorjestān (Georgian Sakartvelo) was usually used in Persian in the narrower sense of Kartli.

Kartli is the ancient center of the settlement of proto-Georgian tribes. Although the geographical boundaries of the region varied with time, the name of its central part, Kartli, remained unchanged. Data about the relations between proto-Georgian tribes, who inhabited Kartli, and the Achaemenid empire is quite limited. Tribes inhabiting the southern part of today’s Georgia were subordinate to the Achaemenids, but the latter’s rule did not extend to most parts of eastern Georgia (Melikishvili, p. 236). After the conquests of Alexander the Great, the independent Georgian state was formed and consolidated. The first king of Iberia (ancient name of the whole of eastern Georgia), Pharnavaz, took the Persian governance system as a model for the country’s state organization. This was the result of Persian influence over the tribes residing in eastern Georgia.

From the third to the seventh century Georgian territory presented an arena for rivalries between Byzantium and Persia. Kartli, and generally eastern Georgia in that period, was under the Persian sphere of Influence. In the sixth



century the Sasanians abolished the kingdom of Iberia (Kartli), and Iberia became a province of Persia. The country was governed by a *marbzān* appointed by the Sasanian king (Berdzenishvili; Javakhishvili; Janashia, p. 109). Following the Arab conquest in the mid-seventh century, a Tbilisi emirate was created, which was abolished in 1122 by the Georgian King David IV. In the late medieval period, Georgia split into small kingdoms and principalities. From 1484 to 1762 Kartli was as a distinct political entity mostly dominated by Persia.

Following the creation of the Safavid state, relations between Persia and eastern Georgia acquired a new stimulus. Interactions between the Safavids and Kartli gradually developed into the system of vassalage. According to the Amasya Treaty of 962/1555 between the Safavids and Ottomans, Persia seized eastern Georgia (see Amasya, Peace of). Later on Kartli served as one of the warfare arenas between the two empires, but in the last years of Shah Abbas I Persia managed to regain its influence over Kartli. From the 1630s onwards the so-called “politics of compromise” was established between Kartli and Persia; this implied that Persia would leave Kartli’s socio-economic structure unchanged, and the Georgian dynasty of [Bagratids](#) would retain the royal throne with the condition of adopting Islam and remaining subordinate to the Safavid shah (Dumbadze, p. 312). In Georgian documents the Bagratid rulers are mentioned as kings who recognize themselves as vassals of Persia (Puturidze, 1955, p. 108), while Persian official documents refer to them as the *wālis* of Gorjestān, that is, the servants of the shah.

This politics of compromise came to an end in 1745, when, with the permission of Nāder Shah, Teimuraz I was coronated as a king of Kartli according to Christian tradition (Kutsia, 2002, p. 133). From 1748 onwards, the kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti were practically independent, but the formal side of vassalage was still observed. In 1762 the kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti were united. Attempting to restore Persian hegemony over eastern Georgia, [Āqā Moḥammad Khan Qajar](#) marched north and destroyed Tbilisi in 1795. Eastern Georgia had an important place in the Russo-Persian wars of the 19th century (see Sanikidze). After Persia’s defeats, its relations with eastern Georgia, and particularly with Kartli, were mainly of economical and cultural character.



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