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**THE PRINCIPALITY OF TAYK IN THE CONTEXT OF THE REGIONAL POLICY  
OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE DURING THE REIGN OF BASIL II\***

During the reign of Emperor Basil II, the Byzantine Empire intensified its policy of expansion in the eastern direction, thereby creating the prerequisites for the capture of new territories. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate and highlight the significant role of the Principality of Tayk in the context of this policy, and also to illustrate the diplomatic success of the Byzantine Empire in the capture of Tayk. The Principality of Tayk reached its apogee during the reign of David Kuropalates Bagratid. As a consequence of the latter's heirless state, King Bagrat III of Georgia was designated the successor to Tayk. As a result of Basil II's astute and forward-thinking policies, the territory of the Tayk principality was first expanded, and subsequently, Bagrat III was deprived of his inheritance. In the end, Basil II was declared the heir of the Tayk principality. Despite the efforts of the Georgian establishment, Tayk was annexed to the Byzantine Empire at the end of Basil II's reign.

**Key words:** Byzantine Empire, David Kuropalates, Armenia, Georgia, Bagratids, Bardas Skleros, Bardas Phokas, Gagik I, Bagrat III.

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**КНЯЖЕСТВО ТАЙК В КОНТЕКСТЕ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ  
ВИЗАНТИЙСКОЙ ИМПЕРИИ В ПЕРИОД ПРАВЛЕНИЯ ВАСИЛИЯ II**

В период правления императора Василия II Византийская империя активизировала политику экспансии в восточном направлении, создавая тем самым предпосылки для захвата новых территорий. Цель данной статьи — показать роль княжества Тайк в контексте этой политики и проиллюстрировать дипломатические успехи Византийской империи в захвате Тайка. Княжество Тайк достигло своего апогея во время правления Давида Куропалата Багратида. Вследствие бездетности последнего, преемником Тайка был назначен грузинский царь Баграт III. В результате дальновидной и прозорливой политики Василия II сначала была расширена территория Тайкского княжества, а затем Баграт III был лишен наследства. В итоге наследником Тайкского княжества был объявлен Василий II. Несмотря на усилия грузинского истеблишмента, в конце правления Василия II Тайк был присоединен к Византийской империи.

**Ключевые слова:** Византийская империя, Давид Куропалат, Армения, Грузия, Багратида, Бардас Склерос, Бардас Фокас, Гагик I, Баграт III.

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## Introduction

The Tayk region is situated on the south-eastern coast of the Black Sea, also known as the XIV Ashkharh of Great Armenia. Following the Anti-Arab uprising of 774—775, the region underwent a significant transformation. During this period, the Bagratids, a noble family with familial ties to the previous rulers, the Mamikonians, assumed control of the region. Ashot Msaker (Meat-eater) Bagratid, a prominent figure of the Bagratid dynasty, established himself in Chakq (a district within Tayk located near the village of Ishkhanats). In the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, Ashot Meat-eater Bagratid constructed the formidable fortress of Kaghmakhi, which testifies to his power.

The Bagratids ascended to power in Kgharjq, which was situated to the north from Tayk. Over the course of the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the principality gradually expanded its territories. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Principality of the Tayk Bagratids shared borders with the Kaysiks' (Marwanids) emirates and the Vanand district of Ayrarat in the south and southeast. To the northeast, the principality of the Tayk Bagratids was bordered by Georgia and the Byzantine Empire to the northwest. This expansion of power also resulted in the incorporation of some Georgian provinces, such as Meskheti, which contributed to the formation of a principality characterized by a diverse and mixed population (Tashyan 1921: 70).

During this period, the Bagratids of Tayk consolidated their position as a powerful state, strategically positioned between various neighboring entities. The principality's dynamic expansion and diverse population served to highlight its significance in the geopolitical landscape of the time.

## The Rise of Tayk's Principality

During the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenian and Georgian kingdoms had strong ties and close collaboration with the Tayk Principality. Tayk was of considerable strategic importance for both Byzantium and the South Caucasian countries, and was endowed with considerable local authority. This authority of the Tayk Principality reached its zenith under the rule of David Kuropalates (960s — 1001). Armenian historians, including Asoghik, Aristakes of Lastiver, and Matthew of Edessa, and Georgian chroniclers, glorified David Kuropalates for his notable achievements. Aristakes of Lastiver depicted him as a person of commanding presence, generous yet modest in his material wealth, and a true arbiter of peace (Aristakes of Lastiver 1912: 3). Matthew of Edessa further elaborated, describing David Kuropalates as a holy figure of God endowed with divine love (Matthew of Edessa 1898: 36). Georgian chroniclers regarded him as a benevolent and peaceful individual who supported monks, sponsored the construction of churches, and engaged in philanthropy (Tsulaya 1982: 57). According to Georgian chroniclers, David Kuropalates was a staunch advocate of the “united Georgian kingdom”. This is evidenced by the fact that, having embraced the Chalcedonian faith, David Kuropalates considered himself a Georgian by religion (Nazaryan et al 2023: 741).

However, it is noteworthy that within the field of Georgian historiography, there exists an alternative perspective. Some scholars posit that chroniclers may have exaggerated Tayk's role, particularly under David Kuropalates, in the establishment of a unified Georgian state (Melikishvili 1973).

According to Georgian historical sources, in 975, Ivane Maroushis-dze — the *eristavi* (prince) of Kartli, was subjected to oppression by the lords of Kakheti. In response, he dispatched an envoy to David Kuropalates. As a diplomatic gesture, Ivane Maroushis-dze proposed that David would bring his forces to Kartli to govern it by himself or to pass it on to Bagrat — the son of Gourgen (the ruler of the northern part of Tayk) and Gurandukht — the daughter of the King of Abkhazia (Tsulaya 1982: 57).

David Kuropalates accepted Ivane Maroushis-Dze's proposal and established his authority over the central region of Kartli, specifically Uplistsikhe. David designated Bagrat as his successor with authority over Kartli, as he was heirless. He compelled the people of Kartli to recognise Bagrat as "the heir of Tao (Tayk), Kartli, and Abkhazia" (Kartlis tskhovreba 1955: 274), thereby consolidating Bagrat's position of authority.

These historical events, as outlined in Georgian records, are regarded as pivotal in the establishment of the unified Georgian state. In his historical analysis, I. Javakhishvili attributes the formation of the unified Georgian state to these events, marking a crucial chapter in the region's history (Javakhishvili 1960: 123—124). David Kuropalates developed his own imperial project, which was anti-Byzantine and pro-Bagratids. This is evident in almost all of his political actions up to 990 (Vinogradov, Kosourov 2019: 35).

In the late 970s, the Byzantine Empire encountered significant challenges. During the early years of Basil II Porphyrogenitus' (976—1025) reign, a rebellion led by Bardas Skleros, a prominent figure representing the Minor Asian nobility, erupted against him. Skleros was able to garner considerable support, which resulted in a significant portion of the empire's troops and almost all of Minor Asia being drawn into the revolt. In response to this challenge, the imperial authority mobilised all available resources to suppress the uprising. Meanwhile, the Arab emirates capitalised on the Empire's vulnerable position. During this pivotal period, the Marwanid emir Bat seized Manazkert.

In order to suppress the rebellion, Basil II requested the assistance of David Kuropalates. The noble Tornikios (Ioannis) Tornikian played an enormous role in the formation of this alliance (Asoghik 1885: 192). In return for David's support, Basil II promised him new territories, including Khaldoyarich, Klesura, Chormayri, Karin, Basen (Phasiane), the province of Mardali (or Sevuk Castle), Hark, and Apahunik (Asoghik 1885: 192), which would remain under his control until his death. David accepted the offer and, under the guidance of Lord Jojik and Tornikios Tornikian, dispatched a formidable military force of 12,000 troops in 979 to assist the imperial army. Tayk was a relatively minor power to have a military force of 12,000 troops. However, David Kuropalates demonstrated considerable diplomatic skills, enabling him to support the empire through his interactions with the Armenian and Georgian troops.

During the Battle of the Halis on the Saravane field, this military unit played a vital role. The engagement resulted in a significant defeat for Skleros' army, thereby demonstrating the efficacy of the alliance between Basil II and David in suppressing the revolt and maintaining stability on the Byzantine Empire's eastern frontier.

During Skleros' revolt, Basil II was confronted with considerable difficulties, yet he adopted a diplomatic approach that was characterized by nuance. The areas granted to David in recognition of his assistance were selected with a view to their strategic value. Some, such as Hark and Apahuniq, were not directly under Basil II's control. It is noteworthy that Khaldoyarich and Chormayri were possessions of the Tornikians, which added a layer of complexity to the territorial arrangements.

Despite the transfer of these territories, David discovered that Byzantium was unable to cede any land to Tayk at that precise moment. This was due to the fact that Hark and Apahuniq were not within Basil II's immediate jurisdiction. Although Khaldoyarich and Chormayri were under the control of the Tornikians, David primarily gained control over neighboring territories lying southward towards Tayk, including Karin and Basen (Stepanenko 1973: 221).

Basil II's policy was characterized by a strategic approach, indicating that Byzantium retained the potential to gain these lands in the future. Supposedly David Kuropalates did not initially fully consider the complexities of Byzantine "compensation". However, he soon realised that, in exchange for his services, he held more of a right to occupy the rewarded areas than definitive ownership.

It was not until 990 that Hark and Apahuniq were officially transferred to David Kuropalates. During the siege of Manazkert, "Armenian Kuropalates David successfully occupied the region and resettled it with Georgians and Armenians" (Asoghik 1885: 266). This event marked a significant shift in the region's territorial dynamics.

### **Geopolitical Redistributions in the South Caucasus**

During the 980s, a conflict arose within the Byzantine Empire between opposing factions. David Kuropalates allied himself with Bardas Phokas, a prominent figure from the Minor Asian nobility who was opposed to the empire. The Kuropalates supported Phokas due to their close relationship, which had developed during Phokas' tenure as the "Khalikian duke" (Skylitzis 1979: 64). David's personal connection with Phokas was a key factor in his decision to join forces with him.

Nevertheless, the alliance was not solely based on personal relationships. David Kuropalates felt betrayed, as he had not received the compensation promised by Basil II for almost a decade. The opportunity presented itself for David to seek revenge, particularly given that Basil II's diminished influence over Tayk's ruler had compromised his capacity to make prudent decisions.

At the same time, relations between David Kuropalates and Bagrat III (975—1014) deteriorated. According to Georgian chroniclers, the cause was that Rati Baghvashi, one of the rulers of Kartli, disobeyed Bagrat, who held the title of "King of United Georgia". In response, the Georgian king entered Kartli with the intention of capturing Rati Baghvashi, further escalating tensions between David Kuropalates and Bagrat III. In 988, tensions between Bagrat III and David Kuropalates led to a major conflict. Rati Baghvashi sought David's help, claiming that the real intention of Bagrat III was to eliminate Tayk's ruler (Tsulaya 1982: 59). According to M. Lordkipanidze, historical sources suggest that Rati Baghvashi, who conveyed this information, did not fabricate the threat and that the invasion was in fact directed against David Kuropalates.

In 988, as the situation escalated, an open confrontation took place. David, who was in a precarious position, sought help from King Smbat and "all the kings" of Armenia, including those of Kars, Vaspurakan, Syunik and the ruler of Caucasian Albania. They joined forces and gathered in the village of Dlivek in Javakheti.

The clash between the troops of David Kuropalates and Gourgen — the father of Bagrat III, took place at Gardatkhili — on the border between Tayk and Shavshat. Gourgen's forces suffered a major defeat in this encounter. Bagrat III approached David after the defeat, explaining that his primary goal had been to punish Rati. He presented the conflict between him and David as a misunderstanding.

It is unclear whether David believed Bagrat III's explanation, but he released his forces upon hearing it. However, in exchange for granting freedom, David required Bagrat III to relinquish Sakureti Castle in Javaghq and surrender it to the Armenian king Smbat (Melkonyan 2003: 50).

Bagrat III's decision to invade David Kuropalates may appear unusual at first glance. David, an elderly figure, was set to eventually transfer his territories to Bagrat III, which raises questions about the motive behind such aggressive actions. This could be attributed to Bagrat's ambitious aspirations and the perceived vulnerability of David, possibly exacerbated by the latter's involvement in the Phokas revolt (Lordkipanidze 1974: 50). However, there is a speculative circumstance that is not explicitly mentioned in early sources but provides a logical explanation for Bagrat's actions. It is plausible that Bagrat's actions against David Kuropalates were orchestrated by Basil II, the Byzantine Emperor. It is possible that Basil II, who was in a serious state and seeking help from the Kievan Rus, extended his reach to Bagrat with a specific request (Lordkipanidze 1974: 50). This hypothesis proposes that Bagrat III's military actions were not solely motivated by personal ambition, but may have been influenced by a strategic alliance or

agreement with Basil II. If this hypothesis is indeed true, it could provide insight into the reasons behind the presence of Bagrat and his father Gourgen at Basil II's court following the death of David Kuropalates in 1001. The honours bestowed upon them for their previous services can be viewed in the context of their demonstrated loyalty and assistance to the Byzantine Emperor.

Following the defeat of Phokas by Basil II, David Kuropalates found himself in a challenging position. He was compelled to seek reconciliation and thus approached Basil II, expressing remorse, pledging obedience and submission. In response, Basil II demonstrated his diplomatic skills by granting David Kuropalates the right to occupy Hark and Apahuniq, which allowed the principality to expand its borders.

Basil II demonstrated a strategic understanding of the situation through his diplomatic manoeuvre. He permitted David to expand his territory, but on the condition that David Kuropalates would be willing to cede Tayk to the empire. This stipulation was predicated on the fact that David lacked a direct successor, as he was heirless. The relationship between David Kuropalates and the potential heir, Bagrat III, was characterized by a certain degree of tension, which presented an opportunity for Basil II to intervene.

This illustrates Basil II's astute diplomatic acumen. The Byzantine Empire achieved two significant outcomes: firstly, it eliminated Bagrat III as a real contender, and secondly, it solidified its rights over Tayk. This diplomatic manoeuvre may be seen to have manipulated the conflict between Bagrat and David, thereby demonstrating Basil II's ability to navigate complex political situations and to secure advantageous outcomes for the Byzantine Empire.

Following the demise of Armenian king Smbat II in 990, a close inter-allied relationship rapidly emerged between the ruler of Tayk and the newly-crowned king of Armenia — Gagik I. This alliance was founded upon their shared opposition to their common adversary, the Arabian Caliphate.

In the same year, discontent arose among the Arab population who had been displaced from Manazkert. This discontent was further exacerbated by the occupation of Manazkert by David Kuropalates. During the period of unrest, Atropatena's emir Mamlan exploited the situation to present himself as a protector of the Arabian elements in Armenia. He deployed his military forces against David, leading his army to the district of Tsaghkotn. Nevertheless, upon becoming aware of the numerical superiority of David Kuropalates and Gagik I, Mamlan's forces withdrew from Armenia during the night (Leo 1947: 626—627).

David Kuropalates was aware that upon his death, Byzantium without shedding a drop of blood could potentially gain control over all the territories he had acquired through many long-term wars. Despite this awareness, he sought to negotiate and alter some of the terms outlined in the forced peace treaty agreement imposed upon him after the defeat of Phokas. David Kuropalates demonstrated a strategic mindset and commitment to safeguarding the interests of his principality by navigating diplomatic challenges.

The clear fact that Bagrat and Gourgen would not be the heirs of David Kuropalates became evident around 987—988, resulting in minimal contact between David and his former heirs during this period. In this context of diplomacy, Gagik I emerged as a potential heir to David's territories, given the strong allied bonds between them and the Principality of Tayk, which primarily consisted of Armenian lands.

Under the spectrum of the prevailing political and military circumstances, Bagrat III demonstrated a willingness to align with the endeavours of David and Gagik, potentially influenced by directives from Basil II. This decision could prove advantageous for Bagrat in a number of ways: a) He could actively participate in the initiatives led by Tayk's ruler and the Armenian king, b) This would enhance his international standing, c) As a Georgian king, he could gain closer insight into the inner workings of Armenian and Tayk's rulers, d) Bagrat may have the opportunity to repair relations with the ruler of Tayk and potentially reclaim the position of direct heir, e) in case of necessity, Bagrat could prevent any actions taken by Gagik I and David Kuropalates towards him.

In the winter of 997, David Kuropalates implemented an active military policy and sent troops to invade Khlat. However, this campaign resulted in defeat for David. Subsequently, Arab emirates

attempted to regain territories previously taken from the Marwanids, with Apahuniq being a primary target. However, in 998, the joint forces of Tayk, Armenian, and Georgian powers defeated the Arab forces led by Atropatena's emir Mamlan, near Tsumb village, preventing their attempt to reclaim the territories.

### **The issue of the succession of David Kuropalates in the first quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century**

According to Asoghik, David Kuropalates died during the Easter day of the Armenian year 449, specifically on 31 March 1001. Aristakes of Lastiver and Matthew of Edessa posit that Georgian archbishop Illarion played a controversial role in David's demise. Their sources allege that Illarion mixed poison into the liturgy eucharist, which David consumed. When the poison proved ineffective, Illarion was said to have strangled David on the day of Good Thursday (Aristakes of Lastiver 1912: 3). As a consequence of his actions, Illarion faced punishment from Basil II (Matthew of Edessa 1898: 38).

The demise of David Kuropalates has prompted investigations into the individuals who may have benefited from his demise. As previously indicated in early sources, Kuropalates was already of mature age, which could have provided a motive for those seeking to eliminate him. However, historical records do not provide complete information on the circumstances of his death, leaving room for speculation.

One potential scenario is related to the intricate political manoeuvring orchestrated by Basil II during Bardas Skleros' rebellion in the 970s. The relationship between the Armenian king and David Kuropalates in the 990s may have constituted an obstacle to Basil II's plans for Tayk. Following the demise of Tayk's sovereign, it is conceivable that Basil II may have sought a "legal" means to procure the territories, thus circumventing protracted and potentially intricate scenarios.

In this context, the Georgian archbishop Illarion could have been a mere instrument or a witness, possibly used to execute or cover up the act. If one were to posit that David Kuropalates' demise was intended to further a political agenda, Illarion's involvement could be viewed as a means to an end, whether as an active participant or a figure manipulated for that purpose. Academician Bartikyan is also a proponent of this standpoint, considering that the death of David Kuropalates was accelerated by the Byzantians that longed for invading Tayk (Bartikyan 1970: 81—92).

Following the death of David Kuropalates, Basil II undertook a visit to Armenia, during which he visited the newly achieved territories of Hark, Apahuniq, and Tayk. During this visit, Basil II proceeded to take possession of several districts, fortresses, and towns. In the Ekeghian district, the local population greeted him with enthusiasm. Bagrat III and his father Gourgen presented themselves to the Emperor. In recognition of their status, Basil II bestowed upon Gourgen the rank of magistres and conferred upon Bagrat III the title of kuropalates (Sumbat Davitis-dze 1979: 57).

It is also possible that David abandoned his intention to leave Tayk to the empire and chose a new heir. It is not excluded that David Kuropalates made a new will in favour of Armenian king. This hypothesis is confirmed not only by the good relations between Tayk and the Armenian rulers, but also by the fact that at the end of his reign the history of the "Copper City" David Kuropalates financed the translation from Arabic into Armenian. This arrangement also posed a threat to Bagrat III's interests. He had made a deal with Basil II during the revolt of Phokas, resulting in the loss of the monopoly on the heir of Tayk. Consequently, Bagrat would be disinclined to relinquish his last opportunity to secure his "piece" from Tayk, which was directly related to the transfer of Tayk to Byzantium.

As part of the territorial arrangement, a portion of David Kuropalates' areas was granted to Bagrat III "for use until death". However, in the winter of 1001—1002, Gourgen attempted to seize additional parts of Tayk from Byzantium, dissatisfied with the unfair share of Kuropalates' heritage. Gourgen's military actions in Tayk were met with considerable resistance from the town of Ughtik. In response, Basil II dispatched Nikephoras Kanikles to confront Gourgen. Subsequently, negotiations were held, during which the Byzantine side eventually agreed to Gourgen's territorial demands. This resulted in the expansion of his areas at the expense of David's former territories

(Takayshvili 1952: 63). Nevertheless, the precise delineation of the surrendered territories remained a challenge due to the inherent difficulty in distinguishing between the lands of David and Gourgen.

The sources indicate that Gagik I did not participate in the division of the territories of David Kuropalates. The reason for Gagik's absence is not explicitly stated in historical records. The reasons for Gagik I's reluctance to visit Basil II remain unclear. One possible explanation for his absence is that he was reluctant to adopt the titles of "kuropalates" or "magistres" which were accepted by Bagrat III and Gourgen. Alternatively, there may have been other factors at play. In 1001, Gagik I was involved in pressuring the rebellion of David Anhoghin (Landless), the king of Tashir-Dzoraget.

The political manoeuvring and territorial requisition of the Tayk Principality had a significant impact on the future of the South Caucasus. The alliance between David's Principality and Gagik I was regarded as a significant factor in resisting Byzantium's, the emirates of South-Western Armenia and Atropatena expansionary policies.

Following the death of Gourgen in 1008, the territories of David Kuropalates, including Tayk, were transferred to Bagrat III. Following the latter's passing in 1014, Giorgi I (1014—1027), Bagrat's son, was required by Basil II to return the domains that had been granted to his father for everlasting usage. Giorgi I, "who was proud of his upbringing, asserted that he would not relinquish any of his father's properties, including a single house" (Aristakes of Lastiver 1912: 7). Naturally, Basil II found this response challenging, but the astute emperor was not in a hurry to resolve the matter.

The reason for this was that the wife of Giorgi I, who was the sister of Gagik I and the daughter of King Sennacherim of Vaspurakan, had a strong ally in the Armenian king Gagik I, with whom he was also related by kinship (Stepanenko 2003: 267). One of the primary reasons Basil II delayed assuming control of Kuropalates's inheritance was the influence of king Gagik. However, upon the demise of Gagik I in 1021, the emperor redirected his armies towards the East, prioritising the succession disputes pertaining to Vaspurakan and David Kuropalates.

A contingent of Byzantine troops has established a camp on the field of Karin. The envoys dispatched by the emperor to demand allegiance from the Georgian king returned from their mission with no success. Furthermore, the town of Ughtik and its surrounding lands have been pillaged and devastated by Giorgi's troops, who have not inflicted any physical harm upon the local population (Aristakes of Lastiver 1912: 12). The army of Giorgi I subsequently withdrew from Ughtik to Kogh (Kola) and then to Vanand. With the assistance of his military forces, the emperor successfully locates and overcomes the Georgian monarch in 1022, in the vicinity of the Shghpa location in Arsharunik — near Paghakatsis (Childir) lake. The Georgian monarch requests peace, but in exchange, he surrenders his three-year-old son Bagrat to the Byzantine Empire, surrenders 14 castles to Byzantium, and gives over David Kuropalates' holdings in Tayk, Javakhk, Ardahan, and Basen (Tsulaya 1982: 63).

Following the conflict in 1022, a distinct administrative territory within the Tayk — the Iberia region — was established in the Byzantine Empire (Arutyunova 1972: 91—102). The subsequent logical step for the Byzantine Empire was to incorporate the entirety of the Georgian kingdom into its domain. Another possible explanation is that the monarch of Georgia declined Basil II's request to draft a will that favoured Byzantium.

In the succession conflict that ensued following the demise of Gagik I, Giorgi advocated on behalf of Crown Prince Hovhannes-Smbat. He provided military supplies to the Georgian king in exchange for Giorgi's support during the conflict for the Armenian Crown, which coincided with the war between Georgia and Byzantium for Tayk and had a detrimental impact on Bagratid's kingdom of Ani.

As a result of Georgia's military defeat, king of Armenia Hovhannes-Smbat was forced to concede the capital Ani to Byzantium, thus confirming the demise of Ani's Bagratuni kingdom. Towards the end of December 1021, Catholicos Petros Getadardz, the Armenian king's envoy, visited Basil II in Trebizond. The emperor's wishes were carried out during the discussions. The same strategy that had been adopted at the outset of Basil II's Eastern strategy was also endorsed. In return for his compliance, Hovhannes-Smbat was bestowed with the titles of Master and

Permanent Archon of Ani and Mets Hayk. The Armenian king designated the emperor as his successor of his own volition, as he was without heirs, thereby justifying this point of agreement (Leo 1947: 673—674).

As a consequence of the fifty-year policy pursued by Basil II, the Byzantine Empire not only inherited David Kuropalates' estates with minimal effort, but it also successfully established the foundation for the subsequent and successful annexation of Ani — the capital of Bagratuni Armenia, to the empire in 1045.

### Conclusion

From the latter part of the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Byzantine Empire pursued a more active foreign policy in the South-Eastern Black Sea region. The plan of annexing Armenia to the Byzantine Empire was consistently pursued by the emperors, most notably by Basil II. One of the most significant elements of this strategy was the incorporation of the Principality of Tayk, which would reinforce the eastern frontier of the empire. David Kuropalates Bagratid established a principality that extended beyond the geographical limits of Tayk. Having secured the support of Basil II, David Kuropalates proceeded to conquer neighbouring territories, reaching as far as Hark, Apahunik and Manazkert. As David Kuropalates had no children, he designated Bagrat III, the first king of unified Georgia, as his successor. Geopolitical events and the cunning policy of Basil II resulted in Bagrat being disinherited and Tayk being bequeathed by David Kuropalates to the Byzantine Empire. Among the potential successors to the Tayk principality was the Armenian king Gagik I. However, he did not participate in the division of Tayk following the death of David Kuropalates, as he was preoccupied with suppressing internal unrest. The final annexation of Tayk to the Byzantine Empire occurred following the demise of Gagik I in 1022. During his 50-year reign, Basil II not only expanded his territories at the expense of Armenian principalities, but also prepared the legal basis for the annexation of the kingdom of Ani to the Byzantine Empire, which was successfully implemented in 1045.

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