

was underfunded and under-resourced. Moreover, because this project focuses on a much more limited ‘southern corridor’, it also lacked the Pacific-to-Atlantic scope that would have attracted more international support. While history and culture play a significant role in international relations, their importance should not be exaggerated.

This minor quibble should by no means detract from this volume’s remarkable merit as a compelling study of how objects and discourses about past events and people are being mobilised as part of the wider diplomatic relations and cooperation structures of the Belt and Road. Covering a panoramic scope of issues, *Geocultural Power* is well-suited for both introductory overview and scholarly reading. As China’s economy continues to grow and the BRI is in high gear, it is bound to inspire future studies on this highly interesting topic.

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From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus: The Soviet Union and the Making of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh. By Arsène Saparov. New York: Routledge, 2017. 200 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-65802-7. doi: 10.22679/avs.2022.7.1.011

The South Caucasus has come to the fore of international society and grabbed both policymakers’ and academics’ attention, firstly, following the skirmishes in Georgia in 2008 and then during the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War. Numerous observers have explained the causes of the ongoing conflicts by focusing on the historical and political legacy of the policies and their implementation during czarist Russia and the Soviet era. In contrast, relatively few studies have given priority to the effects of the creation of autonomies in the region and their status. In a similar vein, in *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus*, Saparov presents a valuable analysis of the historical record of the frozen conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh, emphasizing the ramifications of the political status of these areas throughout both the Russian Empire and the Soviet era. Drawing on comprehensive archival research, mainly through Russian and partly Armenian sources, the author elaborates on the underlying motives and the process of the establishment of autonomous political entities and institutions in the Caucasus and the effects of these mechanisms on both past and recent conflicts in the region.

The first chapter of the book briefly surveys the expansion of the Russian Empire towards the Caucasus from the beginning of the nineteenth century to 1918. The author asserts that dissimilar to the Ottoman and Iranian empires, Russian rule aimed at the political, social, and identity transformation of the region by imposing its power via transferring and incorporating administrative structures, despite the resistance of local elites (p. 20-21). The next three chapters examine the logic behind Soviet rule as it granted autonomy to Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh following the Russian Civil War. These chapters further

delve into the developments in the area and reactions from the newly established Caucasian states, namely Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, to the autonomies granted by Soviet rule. According to Saparov, contrary to what most observers argue, that the construction of these autonomies was a product of political manipulation and a divide-and-rule approach by the Bolsheviks, these implementations were mainly responses to the immediate needs for conflict resolution, the outcomes of the confrontations with local elites, and the realities on the ground due to the weak capacity of the Soviet regime during the early 1920s (p. 87).

The second chapter of the book coherently argues that the contradictions of Abkhazia's legal and political status, which was termed as a "treaty republic," led to the ethnic conflict with Georgia (p. 54-58), while the third chapter analyses how the early rebellions in South Ossetia evolved into a long-term conflict with the effects of autonomy along with its perceptions by the conflicting parts (p. 87). In the fourth chapter, Saparov interprets the Kavburo decision of July 4, 1921, which preserved Azerbaijani rule over Karabakh due to the complete Bolshevik conquest of Zangezur from the Armenian resistance rather than Stalin's influence over central authorities (p. 111-114). Additionally, the presence and policies of the great powers, such as Great Britain and newly-established Turkey, further boosted the Bolsheviks to formulate temporary solutions to the regional conflicts in the Caucasus (p. 122-123).

On the other hand, throughout the fifth and sixth chapters, Saparov asserts that the experiences of political-administrative autonomy and the Bolsheviks' supplementary policies, which bolstered the linguistic liberation and cultural empowerment of ethnic groups from the 1950s, paved the ground for the confrontations between the autonomies and their central states following the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s. As the seventh chapter of the book examines in length, in the aftermath of the Stalinist era, minority cultures were spurred for decades. Combined with the experience of autonomous administrative institutions, cultural development, discourse, and historical narratives evolved into the main pillars of the sovereignty campaigns against the host republics following the demise of the Soviet regime (p. 158).

The concluding chapter provides an integrative combination of the arguments laid throughout the book and briefly analyses the repercussions of the short-term solutions and contradictory policies of Soviet rule to the present conflicts in the Caucasus. Saparov contends that granting autonomy to Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh and following Soviet policies, including removing these autonomous structures, resulted from short-term goals rather than any long-term goals planning. Additionally, these implementations conflicted with the interests of the host republics and undermined the groups' demands populating the region.

Overall, *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus* is a significant contribution both to the historiography of the Caucasus and peace studies as the book provides an insightful and relatively nascent analysis by drawing on the history of the autonomous regions of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh rather than the pervasive explanations that put the policies of the host republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and also the Soviet

regime to the fore. Saparov coherently articulates his arguments and concurrently manages to interrelate them by offering extensive research mainly through Russian and Armenian archives. Furthermore, translations of the original concepts and idioms are brilliantly made; another feature that allows the reader to follow the text and clearly conveys the author's narrative and the context. However, it should be noted that the numerous grammatical and spelling errors that run throughout the book bear the risk of distracting the readers. All in all, *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus* is a valuable resource not only for political and historical studies researchers but also for those interested in seeking alternative ways of reading and understanding the history of the Caucasus.

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Christ Came Forth from India: Georgian Astrological Texts of the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries. By Timothy Paul Grove. Leiden: Brill, 2021. 463 pages. doi: 10.22679/avs.2022.7.1.012

The Caucasus is often overlooked by scholars engaged in tracing the dissemination of ancient knowledge from East to West. Yet an abundance of materials attests to the centrality of the Caucasus as a crossroads for the texts and traditions of many different civilizations, from South Asia to Africa. Among the materials that bear witness to this legacy is the anonymous *Balavariani*, a Georgian rendering of an Arabic work entitled *Bilanbar u Buddsaf*, which was itself a translation of a Pahlavi text that gathered together legends relating to the life of the Buddha.² Although this work does not correspond to a specific extant Sanskrit text, it is clearly indebted to the Indic hagiography of the life of Gautama Buddha. Georgian specialist David Marshall Lang introduced this neglected work to the Anglophone world with his translation in 1966. In the magisterial study that is the subject of this review, Timothy Paul Grove performs a similar feat by introducing us to the richness of the Georgian astrological tradition during the early modern period, a time when Georgia served as a crossroads for the transmission of scientific learning from the Muslim world into European languages.

Grove's book opens with an overview of astrology across multiple civilizations, all of which were in one form or another transmitted to the Caucasus: Babylonian, Hellenistic, Indian, Persian, Harranian (Sabian), Byzantine, Arabian, Medieval European, and Far Eastern. These sections place the discussion of Georgian astrology within a comparative framework and attest to the author's wide-ranging erudition. We then turn to early modern Georgia, an epoch that Grove refers to as Georgia's "Silver Age" while also calling it Georgia's "Late Mediaeval Period" (p. 24). This terminology seems rather idiosyncratic, given that during

² David Marshall Lang, *The Balavariani (Barlaam and Josaphat): A Tale from the Christian East*, translated from the Old Georgian (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966).