

Studying Non-Elites in the Medieval Caucasus Conference Programme

First International Conference of the Medieval Caucasus Network

U-Residence, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium, 13th-14th March 2026



Location: Green Room, U-Residence, Vrije Universiteit
Brussel, 2 Boulevard de la Plaine, 1050 Etterbeek, Belgium

Information and registration are also available at the following link:

<https://shoc.research.vub.be/en/registration-for-the-international-conference-studying-non-elites-in-the-medieval-caucasus-is-now>

Registration costs 10 euros for members of the public, students, and PhD candidates, and 20 euros for postdoctoral and permanent staff members. Online hybrid participation is fully available.



Day One—13th March

09.00- 09.30 Welcome and Registration

09.30 Introduction

Bart Lambert (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

09.45 Keynote 1

Nik Matheou (Edinburgh University)- “Run for the Hills”: Seeing Like a Subaltern in the Medieval Caucasus

10.45-11.15 Coffee Break

11.15-13.00 Session 1: Global Theoretical Perspectives on Caucasian Non-Elites

Panel Chair: John Latham-Sprinkle (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Nicholas Evans (Birkbeck, University of London)- ‘Weapons of the Weak? Resistance to Lordship in the Early Medieval Caucasus’

Ana Lomadze (Ilia State University)- ‘Neoplatonic Discourse in Medieval Georgia: A Weapon for or against Non-Elites?’

Samir Khotko (online) (Adyghe State University)- ‘Зерно и люди на экспорт: экономика черкесского вожества в миросистемной ретроспективе (XIV-XV вв.)’ (Grain and People for Export: The Economy of the Circassian Principality in World-Systems Perspective (14th-15th Centuries))

13.00-14.15 Lunch

A complementary lunch is provided for presenters and members of the Organisational and Scientific Committees at the VUB Restaurant (Building R). Other attendees are welcome to join us at their own expense. Details of other nearby restaurants and cafes may be found in the Practical Information section, at the bottom of this programme.

Day One—13th March

14.15-16.00 Session 2: Perspectives from Settlement Archaeology

Panel Chair: Nicholas Evans (Birkbeck, University of London)

Astghik Babajanyan (Armenian Academy of Sciences) – ‘Unearthing the Villages: Daily Life of Non-Elites in Medieval Armenia’

Patxi Perez Ramallo (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)- ‘Communities at a Crossroads: Diet and Movement in Medieval Armenia’

16.00-16.30 Coffee Break

16.30-18.00 Session 3: Dimensions of Interregional Mobility and Non-Elite Groups

Panel Chair: Bart Lambert (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Zohrab Gevorgyan (Armenian Academy of Sciences/ American University of Armenia)- ‘Women, Private Property and Power: How Trade Changed the Social Position of Women from Greater Armenia to Cilician Armenia (12th-14th Centuries)’

Tea Karchava (Tbilisi State University)- ‘Non-Elite Actors in the Anti-Ottoman Diplomatic Efforts of Uzun Hasan and Georgia’

Petra Kostalova (Charles University) (online) – ‘Armenians from Lake Van Region- Apostolic Armenians and their Interactions with Others’

Day Two—14th March

09.30-10.00 Welcome

10.00 Keynote 2

Irina Arzhantseva (Higher School of Economics)- ‘Non-Elites in the Early Medieval North Caucasus: An Archaeological Perspective’

11.00-11.30 Drinks Break

11.30-13.00 Session 4: Gender and Manuscript Production

Panel Chair: Emmanuel Van Elverdinghe (Université Catholique de Louvain)

Lusine Sargsyan & Shoghakat Devrikyan (Matenadaran)- ‘Visualising the Non-Elite: Women in Armenian Miniature Painting (13th-14th Centuries)’

Ovsanna Khachatryan (Matenadaran)- ‘Colophons in Medieval Armenian Manuscripts as Sources for the Social History of Non-Elite Groups’

Arpine Asryan (Matenadaran)- ‘Vague Existence: “Maids” and “Servants” Existence in 12th-14th Century Armenian Monuments’

13.00-14.15 Lunch- Polyvalent Room, U-Residence, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

A complementary sandwich lunch will be provided for all presenters and attendees.

14.15-15.45 Session 5: Non-Elites and the Formation of Religious Communities

Panel Chair: James Baillie (Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Alexander Kavtaradze (Ilia State University)- ‘Finger-Cutters and Sorcerers: Pre-Christian Religious Groups in Caucasian Albania’

Daniel Alford (University of Leicester)- ‘Non-Elites in Šahapivan: Constructing Christian Armenia in the Fifth Century’

Eka Tchkoidze (Ilia State University) (online)- ‘Non-Elite Monasteries in Medieval Georgia’

Day Two—14th March

15.45-16.15 Drinks Break

16.15-17.45 Session 6: Visual Sources and the Promise of Digital Humanities

Panel Chair: Whitney Kite (Mount Holyoake College)

James Baillie (Austrian Academy of Sciences)- ‘Complex Worlds in Structured Thought: Structured Data and Social Divides in the Medieval Caucasus’

Hamest Tamrazyan (EPFL)- ‘Cultural Significance of Medieval Armenian Tapanakars and Their Carvings’

Mohammed Abu al-Kheir & Lamia Abdelkreem (Fayoum University & Istanbul University)- ‘Female Patrons of Islamic Mosques in Dagestan’

17.45 Closing Words

John Latham-Sprinkle (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

19.30 Conference Dinner

Caucasian Experience, Rue du Progrès 5, 1210 Saint-Josse-ten-Noode

We invite all speakers and session moderators to join us for a Georgian meal. The cost of the meal for conference speakers and moderators will be paid by the conference organisers. Family members of speakers and moderators and other conference attendees are also welcome to join us at their own expense (the total cost of the meal will be around 55 euros). If you would like to join us for this meal, please send an email to mcnconference2026@gmail.com by Sunday 8th March.

The restaurant can be easily reached from the conference venue by taking Metro Line 5 from Pétillon (a 15-minute walk from the VUB campus) to De Brouckere station. The restaurant is a 10-minute walk from De Brouckere.

Notes & Maps for Attendees

International Transport

Brussels has two main airports: Brussels Airport, located at Zaventem, just outside of the city, and Brussels South-Charleroi, which is actually located in Charleroi, a different city around a one-hour drive south of Brussels. The former has regular flights to international destinations, whereas the latter is largely served by low-cost flights within Europe. Zaventem is easily accessible from Brussels city centre via rail connection, whereas from Brussels South-Charleroi it is necessary to take a Flibco shuttle (<https://www.flibco.com/en/shuttle/bus-brussels-charleroi-airport>).

Brussels is also well-served by rail connections. Direct trains run both within Belgium, and internationally to the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, France, and the United Kingdom.

Brussels is also served by an extensive network of long-distance buses.

Vrije Universiteit Brussel is accessible by road. Parking on campus is available; details may be found at <https://www.vub.be/en/about-vub/faculties-institutes-and-campus/our-campus/vub-main-campus-brussels/parking-vub-main-campus>.

Getting Around Brussels

Brussels has an extensive public transport network, run by STIB/ MIVB (<https://www.stib-mivb.be/home>). It is possible to pay on the metro, trams or buses either with a contactless bank card, or with a MOBIB card. MOBIB cards can be purchased at ticket desks at major Metro stations, such as those at Brussels' primary railway terminals.

Vrije Universiteit Brussel is located in the suburb of Etterbeek, to the southeast of the city centre. It is accessible via bus from Brussels South (Midi/ Zuid) or Brussels Central (Centrale/ Centraal) stations.

The easiest way of reaching VUB from Brussels Central is via Metro Line 5 (direction Herrmann-Debroux) to Petillon station, a 15-minute walk away from the VUB campus. From Thon Hotel Bristol Stephanie or Hotel Barsey, it's easiest to take Tram 8 or 93 to Legrand (direction Roodebeek), and then change to take Tram 7 to the VUB tram stop (direction Heysel).

Finally, it's possible to reach the VUB campus from either Brussels South, Central, North, Schuman or Luxembourg stations by taking the train S8 to Etterbeek station (every hour). It's necessary to buy a ticket before boarding.

Nearby Restaurants and Cafes

Masala Box: A small, friendly Indian snack bar serving wraps, snacks and curries.

Bar Pilar (only open on Friday): An inexpensive but nice coffee bar, serving sandwiches, soups and salads.

Le Quartier Latin (only open on Friday): A longstanding VUB favourite, this restaurant serves both lighter meals and larger portions of traditional Belgian food.

Lloyd Coffee: A well-known and highly-regarded Belgian coffee chain, serving sandwiches and cakes.

Mili Restaurant: An excellent, authentic Chinese restaurant with good prices. Highly recommended!

Accommodation

The following hotels are located within an easy tram ride or walk from Vrije Universiteit Brussel:

Thon Hotel Bristol Stephanie (https://www.thonhotels.com/hotels/belgium/brussels/thon-hotel-bristol-stephanie/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=infoboks&utm_campaign=GMB). The principal conference hotel, this four-star hotel is conveniently located for major train stations in Brussels, and is a 30-minute tram or bus ride from the conference location at the U-Residence, Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

Hotel Barsey (https://www.warwickhotels.com/hotel-barsey-by-warwick/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=local&utm_campaign=seo). This four-star hotel also has a convenient location for the conference, and is slightly cheaper than the Thon Hotel.

Adagio Aparthotel (https://all.accor.com/hotel/B5M6/index.en.shtml?utm_campaign=seo+maps&utm_medium=seo+maps&utm_source=google+Maps). This apartment hotel is a convenient 15-minute walk from the conference venue, on the other side of the campus of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (VUB's Francophone sister institution).

The following hotels are located more centrally in Brussels, although they are a longer distance away from Vrije Universiteit Brussel:

Hotel Ibis, Brussel Zuid/ Midi Station (https://all.accor.com/hotel/3152/index.en.shtml?utm_campaign=seo+maps&utm_medium=seo+maps&utm_source=google+Maps) (right next to Brussels Zuid/ Midi Station, as such not indicated separately on the map above)

Motel One Brussels (<https://www.motel-one.com/de/hotels/bruessel/hotel-bruessel>).

Map One: VUB within Brussels

- Conference Location**
 - 📍 U - Residentie

- Transport**
 - 📍 Brussel-Centraal
 - 📍 Brussel-Zuid

- Hotels**
 - 📍 Thon Hotel Bristol Stephanie
 - 📍 Hotel Barsey by Warwick
 - 📍 Aparthotel Adagio Access Brussels Delta
 - 📍 Motel One Brussels

- Restaurant for Conference Dinner**
 - 📍 Caucasian Experience

Map Two: VUB Environs

- Eating Establishments**
 - 📍 VUB Resto
 - 📍 Bar Pilar
 - 📍 Le Quartier Latin
 - 📍 Lloyd Coffee Eatery Université
 - 📍 Mili restaurant 宅小馆 now opens from 12 n...
 - 📍 De MASALA BOX

- Conference Location**
 - 📍 U - Residentie

- Transport Options**
 - 📍 Petillon
 - 📍 Etterbeek Gare
 - 📍 VUB

Childcare Arrangements

Unfortunately, due to limitations on funding, we are unable to provide childcare during the course of the conference. However, we can recommend the following locations for attendees with children:

Children's Museum, Rue du Bourgmestre 15, 1050 Ixelles- located a 20-minute walk from VUB or a 20-minute tram ride from the Thon Hotel Louise Stephanie.

Pause & Play, Rue du Magistrat 2, 1050 Ixelles- a well-regarded indoor play area which also serves food. Booking in advance is required.

Lego Discovery Centre, DOCKS, Bd Lambermont 1, 1000 Bruxelles- a 40-minute tram ride from Thon Hotel Louise Stephanie.

Any Questions?

Inquiries can be directed to the conference email at mcnconference2026@gmail.com

