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Research Article

Unlocking the Caucasus for Empire: Roots, causes and consequences of the Russian annexation of the East Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, 1801

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Abstract: The Russian annexation of the Eastern Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti at the outset of the 19th century ushered in a new stage in the history of the Russian expansion in the Caucasus. The growing Russian influence in the region depended on Russia's ability to find allies from among the local Caucasian peoples. In this respect, the Orthodox Georgians could be counted on by the Tsarist authorities as a potential ally in the area traditionally influenced by the Ottoman Empire and Persia. Gaining control over the Georgian lands lying to the south of the Greater Caucasus ridge was instrumental in providing the Russians unfettered access across the mountains towards the south. Obtaining such a foothold as Kartli-Kakheti in the Southern Caucasus would eventually help Russia to gain the upper hand over the mountaineers of the Northern Caucasus, as well as to advance its interests in the area between the Black and the Caspian seas. This article analyses the circumstances of the Russian penetration into the Southern Caucasus throughout the 18th century and assesses the Russian policies towards the Eastern Georgia at the time in question.

Keywords: Georgia, Caucasus, Russia, Georgievsk Treaty, Ottoman-Russian wars

İmparatorluk için Kafkasya'nın Kilidini Açmak: Doğu Gürcü krallığı Kartli-Kakheti'nin Rusya tarafından ilhakının kökenleri, nedenleri ve sonuçları, 1801

Öz: 19. yüzyılın başında Doğu Gürcü krallığı Kartli-Kakheti'nin Rusya tarafından ilhakı, Rusya'nın Kafkasya'daki yayılma tarihinde yeni bir aşamayı başlattı. Bölgede artan Rus etkisi, Rusya'nın yerel Kafkas halkları arasından bir müttefik bulabilme şansına bağlıydı. Bu bakımdan Ortodoks Gürcüler, genellikle Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve İran'ın etkisi altında kalan bölgede Çarlık otoriteleri tarafından potansiyel bir müttefik olarak görünmekteydi. Büyük Kafkas Sıradağları'nın güneyinde yer alan Gürcü topraklarının kontrolü, Rusların Kafkasya dağlarından güneye doğru engelsiz geçişini sağlayabilecekti. Güney Kafkasya'da Kartli-Kakheti gibi bir dayanak elde etmek, Rusya'nın Kuzey Kafkasya dağlıları üzerinde üstünlük kazanmasına ve Karadeniz ile Hazar denizleri arasındaki bölgede çıkarlarını ilerletmesine yardımcı olacaktı. Makale, 18. yüzyıl boyunca Rus nüfuzunun Güney Kafkasya'ya yayılmasını analiz etmekte ve söz konusu dönemde Doğu Gürcistan'a yönelik Rus siyasetinin değerlendirmesini sunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Gürcistan, Kafkasya, Rusya, Georgievsk Antlaşması, Osmanlı-Rus savaşları

The First Georgian contacts with the Muscovite principality

The first official Georgian diplomatic mission was sent to Moscow by Alexander I of Kakhetia in the reign of Ivan III as early as 1492. After the conquests of Ivan IV the Terrible (1533-1584), who took the khanates of Kazan (1552) and Astrakhan (1556), the Orthodox Muscovy gained a foothold on the Caspian shores and due to the common Christian faith was regarded by many Georgians as a potential ally. The Muscovite principality pursued pragmatic policies aimed at increasing its international prestige, while at the same time avoiding to enter into a direct confrontation with the mighty Muslim powers of the region. According to H.J. Armani, "Russia (i.e. late-mediaeval Muscovy) was bound to have developed an ambivalent Georgian policy, one which sought to make satellites of Iberia, Kakhetia and Imeretia, but which was reluctant to assume responsibility for direct involvement because of them" (Armani 1970, 61).

Muscovy sought, as would any other state, to strengthen its positions in the international arena. As regards the Southern Caucasus, this meant to gain control over the old trade routes extending across the region and, respectively, to diminish the influence of other influential actors in the area. To gain a foothold in the Caucasus, Muscovy needed to secure some local allies from among the motley Caucasian population. The Orthodox Georgians appeared to be suitable for that role.

The Muscovite Principality had diplomatic relations predominantly with Kakhetia, a small Caucasian state geographically adjoining Daghestan, which was anxious to conclude a protection treaty with Muscovy. However, throughout the 15-17th centuries, Moscow never had the necessary potential to organize a large-scale intervention in the Caucasian affairs. Muscovite-Kakhetian relations at that time implied nothing more than a somewhat irregular exchange of embassies, sometimes with intervals of 20-30 years. After the conclusion of the Moscovy-Kakhetian Treaty of protection in 1587, which for various reasons had never been fully realized, the Muscovites had the opportunity to include in the official titulary of Tsar Fedor I (1584-1598) the titles of "the ruler of the land of Terek, the Georgian tsars and the Kabardian land, Circassian and Mountain princes" (Bocharnikov, 2003). Initially, this title was a mere formality, which would later transform into more tangible steps and activities on the part of the Muscovite rulers in the Caucasus.

While the 17th century brought little change to the general balance of powers in the Caucasus, traditionally influenced by the Ottoman and the Safavid Empires, the 18th century proved to be more crucial in that sense. By the early 18th century, the two traditional regional powers – the Ottomans and the Persians – had both entered into hard times, whereas the old Muscovy, on the contrary, was gaining strength. During the long rule of its outstanding tsar-reformer Peter I the Great (1683-1725), the Muscovite principality increased its influence in the area. Starting with defeats (the battles of Narva (1700) and Pruth (1711) were a complete disaster for Peter), in two decades' time Moscow appeared to be another influential actor in the Caucasus and the Black Sea region. The old Muscovy turned into a newly established Russian Empire (since 1721) and emerged as the third influential regional power in the Caucasus.

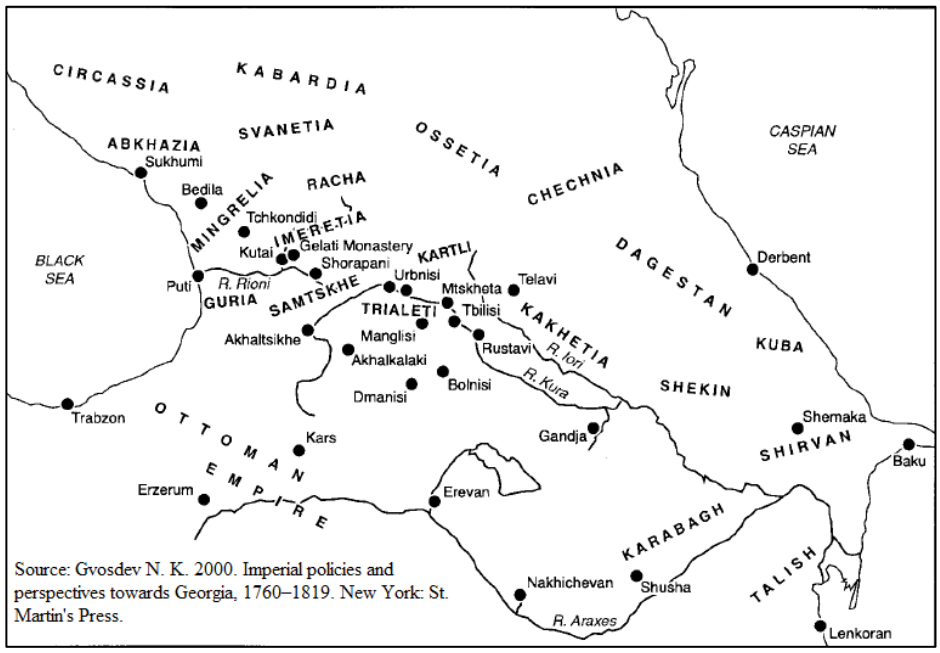

Figure 1 : The Georgian lands in the eighteenth century

The Persian campaign of Peter I and Georgia

Peter the Great's Persian campaign of 1722-1723 happened to be the first serious Russian undertaking in the Caucasus. After the signing of the Nystadt Peace Treaty (30 August, 1721), which ended the Russo-Swedish Northern War (1700-1721), Russia acquired the status of an important military power that had been further confirmed by Peter's adopting the title of Emperor in October of that same year. As a result, a new mighty Eurasian state, called now Russia, or the Russian Empire, emerged. At this point, while everything had been settled in the North, the South became the new strategic direction for Peter's endeavors.

The western littoral of the Caspian Sea, crossed by the key trade routes connecting Eastern Asia with Western Europe, caught the interest of the Russian emperor due to its strategic importance. Peter hoped to obtain control over the rich transit trade passing across the Eastern coast of Caspian, and, taking the example of West European countries in overseas colonies, to establish Russian trading posts in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, by gaining these territories Russia would be able to make a strong foothold in the region. Since Persia at that moment was experiencing a severe domestic crisis with the end of the Safavid dynasty, the planned action would also prevent the possible growth of the

regional influence of the Ottomans, who were then the primary Russian opponent in the Black Sea- Crimea-Caucasus area.

These were the general motivations behind Peter's Persian expedition, while the excuse arose after several Daghestani tribes mounted an attack against Shemakhi (the capital of Shirvan, one of the Caspian coastal provinces, inhabited predominantly by Turkic speaking Azeri people) in 1721. During the attack, some Russian merchants who traded there were killed, and their property looted. The total losses suffered by the Russians were evaluated in the range from 472,000 to 4,000,000 rubles (Lang 1952, 536). At the same time, as Atkin points it out, Russian merchants were not the main victims of the raid, as "Iranian officials and other Shia Muslims in the city fared still worse. Between 4,000 and 5,000 of them were massacred by the Sunni mountaineers in reprisal for Iran's anti-Sunni policies" (Atkin 1980, 4). As a result, the political skies over Persia turned cloudy. By August 1722, the Russian troops that were brought by Peter I down the Volga crossed the Caspian Sea and landed at the mouth of the Terek River. The Russian tsar and the Georgian king Vakhtang VI (1716-1723) agreed to conduct joint military activities in Persia. However, after taking the city of Derbent in September 1722, the Russians were forced to retreat due to a lack of supplies, widespread disease, and a desire to maintain stable relations with the Ottomans. Vakhtang VI, who had already entered the Persian lands, was never informed by his Russian allies about their decision to retreat. The Georgian king thus found himself in a difficult situation. The Ottoman forces under Ibrahim Pasha, encouraged by the Russian retreat and the dethronement of the Persian Shah, moved into Eastern Georgia, then the vassal of Persia, and occupied it.

The winners and the losers came to be known after the conclusion of the Russo-Persian (1723) and Russo-Ottoman (1724) treaties. Persia ceded to the Russians its territories on the western and southern coast of the Caspian Sea, and the Ottomans recognized the Russian control over the Caspian littoral, while Russia recognized the Ottoman control over the Western Persia (including the Eastern Georgia). Vakhtang VI fled to Russia in 1724 along with the members of some of Georgia's aristocratic families, who would be the first Georgian immigrants in Russia, and who would eventually become part of the all-Russian nobility (their number is reported to be more than 1,000) (Armani 1970, 107).

However, the Russian rule over the Caspian littoral proved to be not as easy and profitable as it was earlier expected by Peter. The local population deserted the Russian-occupied territories, while the Russian troops were suffering considerable problems with supplies, as well as sustaining heavy casualties from disease. Considering that the Ottomans were the main threat to Russian interests in the vast region extending from the Crimea to the Caspian Sea, the central

objective of the Russian policies towards Persia in the 18th century would be to maintain good relations with this country. In the end, after a decade of the Russian rule, the lands around the Western and the Southern Caspian coast were returned to Persia by Tsaritsa Anna (1730-1740), in accordance to the treaties of Rasht (1732) and Ganjeh (1735).

Though the Persian campaign of Peter I did not result in any radical changes in the Caucasus, it still revealed some key trends in Russia's Caucasian strategy. Moscow for the first time on a regular basis started to formulate a practical policy towards Persia and the Ottoman Empire. With the noticeable decline of both the Ottoman and the Persian power, along with the gradual rise of the Russian ambitions, the second half of the 18th century would usher in a new stage in the Russo-Ottoman-Persian rivalry in the Caucasus. In light of the traditional antagonism of these powers in the Caucasus, the Russian chances for success would have been significantly increased if allies could be found from among the smaller local states. This fact became especially clear during the reign of Catherine II (1762-1796).

The war of 1768-1774: The first direct Russian involvement in Caucasian affairs

There is some symbolism in the fact that the same year saw the ascension to the throne of the Russian and the Georgian monarchs, who both would rule their countries for more than three decades until the end of the century. In 1762, Catherine II became the Russian Empress. In that same year, Erekle II[1] of Kakhetia inherited the Kartlian throne after the death of his father Teimuraz II (1744-1762) of Kartli, thus having unified the whole Eastern Georgia into one kingdom, Kartli-Kakheti. As far as the Russian-Georgian relations are concerned, the time between early 1760s and late 1790s may be fairly called the epoch of Catherine II and Erekle II, both of whom would rule their countries for more than thirty years.

Soon after Catherine's enthronement, the Caucasus again began to attract close Russian attention. The decline of the neighboring Islamic powers and the speedy transformation of the Russian state provided St. Petersburg with an excellent opportunity to intervene. Although the strategic importance of the Caucasus (as a crossroads of trade routes and a prospective military base) had been always recognized in Russia, the practical realization of the plan to bring the area under Russian control could start only during the reign of Catherine II.

[1] King of Kakhetia since 1744, and in 1762-1798 the king of united Kartli-Kakhetian kingdom. I use the Georgian form of his name, Erekle, though in the Russian sources he is referred to as Iraklii

At this time, the primary goal of the Russian Empire was to neutralize the regional influence of the Ottomans, who were looked upon as the most serious rivals able to challenge St. Petersburg's great expansionist projects in the South.

The Russian government perceived the Orthodox Georgia to be its natural ally and planned to use it as a convenient political tool in the forthcoming struggle against the Ottoman Empire and Persia over the Caucasus. However, it is highly questionable whether Russia was interested in creating the strong and unified Georgian state. In Degoiev's opinion, "St. Petersburg willingly, still not unconditionally, supported it (Georgia) as an ally against Turkey and Iran, though only until the time when such an alliance would be useful for Russia. Sooner or later, independent Georgia would become an obstacle for the implementation of imperial plans of the Russian government in the Caucasus" (Degoiev 2001, 14). Russia did not want to harm its relations with the Ottomans or the Persians just for the sake of a sovereign Georgian state.

As for Georgia, the political and dynastic reunification of the Georgian lands started since 1762, when, as it has already been mentioned above, Kartli and Kakheti were united for the first time in centuries under the scepter of Erekle II. The ruler of Kartli-Kakheti was a strong and ambitious politician who dreamed of creating a strong Georgian state. In order to resolve the security problems and to expand the borders of his kingdom, Erekle needed some sort of military support, which he hoped to find in Russia. In the words of Rhinelander, "king Heraclius [Erekle] had begun to conceive of himself as the builder of a new state, the shaper of a new and viable Caucasian society, and he sought Russian support for his venture ... His [Erekle's] realm was a Caucasian state rather than a national Georgian kingdom" (Rhinelander 1972, 32). For these reasons, the Russian-Georgian relations could be described as allied, for each side needed the assistance of the other, though at the same time both countries had their own strategic aims that only occasionally corresponded.

Following the reunification of the Eastern Georgia in the last quarter of the 18th century, the Southern Caucasus witnessed further intensification of the Ottoman-Russian rivalry. The Russian expansion to the south in the Black Sea region as well as in the Caucasus raised the Ottoman concerns and finally resulted in the war of 1768-1774. During this campaign, using the appeals for help by King Solomon I of Imereti (twice, in 1760 and 1768) as a pretext, the Russian troops for the first time entered the Georgian lands.[2] It should be noted

[2] Captain de Grainy de Foix, a French officer in the Russian service, aide-de-camp and military secretary to this expedition's commander Major-General Tottleben has left his memoirs, See in detail: David M. Lang Count Tottleben's Expedition to Georgia 1769-1771

that in doing so, St. Petersburg intended not so much to help the Georgians, as to make use of the Georgian forces in the Caucasus to ease the burden of the main Russian forces fighting against the Ottomans in Poland and Ukraine (Gvosdev 2000, 30).

On 24 August 1769, a Russian expeditionary force of 411 men under the command of Count Gottlieb Kurt Heinrich von Tottleben crossed the Terek River and on 10 September arrived in Tiflis (Lang 1951, 883-885). The Russian force was far smaller than the Georgian side expected, even though Catherine decided to send additional 3,356 men under Tottleben's command (Gvosdev 2000, 34). St. Petersburg was not going to send more regular troops to what it considered to be the secondary theatre of operations. In other words, both Russians and Georgians hoped to use one another. The Georgian rulers Solomon I of Imereti and Erekle II of Kartli-Kakheti counted on the Russian army to free themselves from the foreign domination, while Russia was just going to use the Georgian forces in the Southern Caucasus in order to divert the Ottoman army from the main theatre of the war in the Crimea and Ukraine.

From the very moment of his arrival, the Russian general showed utter disrespect to the locals, including Erekle, the ruler of the Eastern Georgia. The never-ending greater and lesser disagreements between Tottleben and Erekle were detrimental to the military operations, one example of which was Tottleben's unwillingness to participate in the siege of Akhaltsikhe in spring 1770 (the main operation of the campaign) under the pretext that he was waiting for reinforcements. The united Russo-Georgian army moved towards Akhaltsikhe, but the moment it arrived at the fortress of Aspindza, Tottleben without consulting to his Georgian ally unexpectedly turned back to Kartli-Kakheti with all his forces. Erekle II thus was left without any support. On 20 April 1770, Erekle defeated the Ottomans in a battle near Aspindza, but in view of Tottleben's disloyal activities (the Russian general concluded a separate peace agreement with the Ottomans and started to occupy the cities and fortresses of Kartli-Kakheti), the Georgian king instead of pursuing the retreating enemy had to retreat himself. Obviously, the strained relations between the Georgian and Russian commanders would be detrimental to the entire Russian-Georgian campaign of 1769-1771. Along with that, the arrival of the Russian expedition to the Southern Caucasus, as H.J. Armani puts it, had "significant diplomatic implications, which, in a sense, outweighed the military side" (Armani 1970, 123).

As a matter of fact, the time of the Russian expedition's stay in Georgia is usually more than with other things associated with the political intrigues

according to a French Eyewitness. Bulletin of the School of oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol. 13, No 4, 1951, pp.878-907 (original French text).

produced by Tottleben. Gvosdev describes Tottleben as "a bigoted, narrow-minded individual, incapable of adjusting to local conditions" (Gvosdev 2000, 35).[3] The Russian general supported the local opposition to the monarchs in both Eastern (Erekle II) and Western Georgia (Solomon I). The domestic Georgian opposition included the dynasts of Mingrelia, Guria and Abkhazia (Dadiani, Gurieli, Shervashidze) (Degoiev 2001, 17). Tottleben, just like before the battle of Aspindza, showed no respect for the royal dignity of Erekle and often treated the local Georgian authorities like they were not there at all, regarding the Georgian king as an enemy rather than a friend (Lang 1951). Tottleben hoped to depose Erekle, to send the princes into exile and to put the kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti under the direct Russian control. However, due to the enormous popularity of Erekle among the Georgians, these plans were too bold and untimely, and brought nothing but mutual discontent. Ultimately the Russian troops were withdrawn from Georgia in 1772.

The short-term Russian military engagement in Georgia brought no significant gains for the Georgian states when the peace treaty was concluded. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, signed on 10 July 1774, in one of its 28 articles, among other things refers to the Western Georgia (Imeretia and Mingrelia) stating that as regards these provinces Russia accepts *status quo ante bellum*, i.e., the Ottoman sovereignty over these lands remained unchanged. According to Article 23, the Porte retained its nominal suzerainty over Mingrelia:

> In parts of Georgia and Mingrelia, the fortresses of Bogdadchik, Kutatis and Shegerban, which were conquered by Russian weapons, will be recognized by Russia as belonging to those to whom they belonged since ancient times, so if these cities were under the possession of the Sublime Porte since ancient times or for a long time, they will be recognized as belonging to her; and upon the exchange of this treaty at an agreed time, the Russian troops will be withdrawn from the aforementioned provinces of Georgia and Mingrelia. (PSZRI 1830, 964)

As for the kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca did not mention it at all, and much to the disappointment of the Georgian side neither the Western nor Eastern part of Georgia gained any special political benefits arising from this treaty. All attention of the Russians and the Ottomans at this point was largely concentrated upon the areas to the north of the Black Sea and particularly the Crimean Peninsula. From the Russian point of view, one of the

[3] Count Gottlieb Heinrich Tottleben became known as a great intriguer far earlier, since the Russian siege of Berlin in 1760 (There is a masterly description of the episode of taking Berlin by Russians in V. Pikul's brilliant historical novel "Pierom i shpagoi"(By quill and sword)).

most important parts of the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty was Article 3 related to the independence of the Crimean khanate (PSZRI 1830, 959), which would soon bring about the annexation of the Crimea by Russia.

The Caucasian theatre of the war was clearly of secondary importance for St. Petersburg, and the Orthodox Georgians appeared to be just an instrument for the advancement of the Russian interests in the area. From the Georgian perspective, five years of war brought no real gains or successes. Moreover, the military alliance of the Georgian kingdoms with Russia posed a serious threat to their heretofore stable modus vivendi with all of their Muslim neighbors, who grew more hostile, all the more so that it was not them, but the Georgians who broke the peace (Avalov 2011, 105-108). At the same time, even the short-lived and rather limited Russian military presence in the Georgian kingdoms in the form of Tottleben's force laid the foundations for further Russian expansion in the Southern Caucasus.

The Russian unprotecting protectorate: The Treaty of Georgievsk (1783)

Both Georgian states, Imeretia and Kartli-Kakhetia, by the end of the century, remained in a state of stable instability, if one may put it that way. The Georgians continued to live under the influences of the big regional powers, namely Turkey, Persia and Russia, and were involved in a complicated system of relations with other small South Caucasian states, such as the khanates of Karabgi, Shirvan, Nakhchevan, Erivan, Gence, Derbent, Baku, Kuba, Nukha, and Daghestani Shamkhalate of Tarku. Russia, while busy with the Crimean question, adopted a cautious policy towards the South Western Caucasus and had no intention to actively interfere in local politics.

In spite of the previous contacts with their Orthodox co-religionists, the Georgians were not offered any specific security assurances on the part of St. Petersburg. Erekle II had to act in an atmosphere of uncertainty as regards the potential conduct of his supposed Russian allies. Even though Kartli-Kakheti was the strongest of all of the small local powers in the Southern Caucasus, Erekle II found himself, as Degoiev puts it, "between hammer and anvil" (Degoiev 2001, 27). Kartli-Kakheti had to be ready to face dangers from all sides, be it the Persians, the Ottomans, the Lesghian Daghestani tribes or the neighboring Turkic Azeri khanates. Erekle badly needed a strong ally and could only choose from among the three mighty actors in the area, i.e., the Ottoman Empire, Persia or Russia. Only after considering all the pros and cons did Erekle II take the final decision to accept the Russian protectorate over Kartli-Kakheti.

Erekle sent a formal request for Russian protectorate on 1 January 1783 (21 December 1782 by the Julian calendar) (Kardashev and Ryzhenkov 1983, 109),

hoping that Russia would recognize his rights over the Erivan and Gence khanates, and help him to seize the Akhaltsikhe and Kars pashaliks, as well as to protect the eastern parts of Kartli-Kaheti from the Lesghian raids. For his own part, Erekle pledged to support Russia should it enter a war against Persia or Turkey (Degoiev 2001, 27). As for Catherine II, now, when the Crimean question was about to be resolved (the Crimea was annexed by Russia in 1783), she could turn her attention to the Southern Caucasus. St. Petersburg looked upon Georgia as a well-located springboard aimed both for defense or attack against the Ottomans. For that reason, St. Petersburg was much interested in Georgia, so that to provide direct communication between the Crimea and the Caucasus, thereby strengthening the Russian clout in the region.

In the aftermath of the Crimea annexation, finalized on 8 (19) April 1783, Russia also concluded a military alliance with Kartli-Kakheti (24 July (4 August) 1783), known as the Treaty of Georgievsk (Pod stiagom Rossii 1992, 238-247; Degoiev 2001, 28; Gökçe 1979, 75-76; Aydın 2001, 47). By this treaty, Russia assumed responsibility to protect Kartli-Kakheti against its enemies, i.e. the Ottoman Empire and Persia. In its stead, from now on the Eastern Georgia would lose some of its inalienable rights as a sovereign state.

According to Article 3, the kings (tsars in Russian text) of Kartli-Kakheti immediately after ascending to the throne were to send special envoys to the Russian imperial court to be confirmed in their royal office. In return, St. Petersburg would issue the confirmation and send the Kartli-Kahetian delegation back home with the royal insignia (banner, sabre and sceptre) designated for the Kartli-Kakhetian kings, starting from Erekle II (Pod stiagom Rossii 1992, 241). In addition to royal insignia, the imperial court in St. Petersburg sent Erekle II a crown made especially for that occasion (Additional article to Georgievsk Treaty). Article 4 stipulated that the Georgian state in the future could have no independent foreign policy (Pod stiagom Rossii 1992, 241). Russia also gained the right to keep a permanent representative in Tiflis – the capital of Kartli-Kakheti (Article 5). The Georgian Patriarch (Catholicos) became an ordinary archbishop of the Russian Orthodox Church (Article 8), while the Georgian nobility was equaled in its status to the Russian one (Article 9) (Pod stiagom Rossii 1992, 242-243).

All the Georgian side retained was the unrestricted right to govern its own internal affairs, including taxation and the administration of its criminal courts (Article 6) (Pod stiagom Rossii 1992, 242). To guarantee its obligations, Russia was to send to Kartli-Kakheti two infantry battalions with four pieces of artillery (Separate Article 2) (Pod stiagom Rossii 1992, 244). In October 1783, a few months after the signing of the Georgievsk Treaty, the promised Russian expeditionary

force arrived in Tiflis under the command of General Alexander N. Samoilov (Gvosdev 2000, 61). For Russia, to use Armani's words, the Georgievsk Treaty was nothing less than a "part of Catherine's plan to encircle and destroy the Ottoman Empire" (Armani 1970, 142).

Clearly, the number of troops sent by the Russian Empress to Erekle was rather symbolic, and in the event of a real threat, the limited Russian force would not be able to protect even the borders of Kartli-Kakheti, let alone enlarge the territory of Erekle's kingdom. The king of Kartli-Kakheti found himself in a difficult situation, relying mostly upon his own forces, resources and diplomacy. Diplomatically, however, Georgievsk became a good instrument for Erekle II to threaten the neighbors with the prospect of flooding the Eastern Georgia with the Russian troops should such a need arise.

While Istanbul and Isfahan were unsurprisingly anxious about the Russian-Georgian Treaty, the Georgievsk signatories placed their own specific expectations on the treaty. Erekle II hoped to obtain sufficient Russian military help and protection. Russians pursued their own aims and their interests only partly corresponded with those of the Kartli-Kakhetian ruler. From the Russian perspective, Georgia was viewed as a good base for spreading the Russian influence in the region and as a foothold for further expansion. Unless a change of circumstances would allow its more active interference in regional affairs, St. Petersburg had no intention to increase the anxieties of Turkey and Persia and to trigger an untimely war in the Caucasian theatre.

When the Russo-Ottoman tensions finally resulted in the new war, which started in August 1787, the Russian authorities, in violation of the Georgievsk Treaty, completely withdrew their expeditionary force from the Eastern Georgia. Despite Erekle's pleas for them to remain at least until spring 1788, the Russians left Tiflis in October 1787, crossed the Greater Caucasus ridge and arrived back in Vladikavkaz (Gvosdvev 2000, 63). Moreover, when some years later, the Western Georgian ruler Solomon II[4] asked the Russian authorities for military support against the Ottomans in November 1794, his request also remained unanswered (AKAK 1866, 553-554). As for Erekle, his two further calls for military support in 1792 and 1794 were in the same way repeatedly declined (Avalov 2011, 145). Russia consistently chose to ignore its obligations under the treaty of protectorate, and Erekle II was left without any real military assistance.

Such a policy on the part of the Russian empire could be explained by its relative weakness in the Caucasus (and particularly the Southern Caucasus) at this time. The gradual Russian advance in the area, including the foundation of

[4] The King of Imeretia in 1789–1810.

new fortresses and the construction of fortifications along the Caucasian Line had just started. The famed Georgian Military Road[5] was not yet built and any communication across the Greater Caucasus ridge was difficult and unsafe. The fortresses on the Georgian coast of the Black Sea (Poti, Anaklia, Sohum) were controlled by the Ottomans. Moreover, Catherine II fought a war against the North Caucasian mountaineers led by Sheikh Mansur and thus opted not to weaken her Caucasian force for the sake of her Georgian allies.

At the same time, the Persian rulers were not going to abandon their claims over the Eastern Georgia. By mid-1790s, having consolidated his power in Persia, Aga Muhammad Qadjar (the ruler of Persia in 1779-1797, and since 1796 the new Shah and the founder of the Qadjar dynasty) organized a punitive expedition to the Southern Caucasus with the aim to bring the breakaway province back under the Persian empire. The Russians arrived too late to prevent the capture of Tiflis by the Persians on 12 (23) September 1795, which resulted in the plunder of the Kartli-Kakhetian capital (Gvosdev 2000, 70). The State Council in St. Petersburg finally decided to send forces to counter the Persian attack on 3 (14) September 1795, while the commander of the Caucasian Line General Ivan Gudovich received this order on 1 (12) October 1795, almost three weeks after Tiflis had been sacked (Gvosdev 2000, 71; Avalov 2011, 146).

The anti-Persian campaign started by Russia in April 1796 aimed to restore its shattered imperial prestige. Quite soon, however (in November 1796), Catherine II died and Russian commander Valerian Zubov received orders from the new emperor Paul I (1796-1801) to leave the Southern Caucasus. As Degoiev observes, Georgia was to become a victim of Russia's larger-scale European politics, focused upon the uncompromising struggle against the revolutionary France (Degoiev 2001, 49).

The Russian protectorate over the Eastern Georgia against its enemies proved to be particularly inefficient and did not save the Georgian side from foreign aggression. Accordingly, the Georgian population reduced by half between 1783 and 1801 (Avalov 2011, 175; Bregvadze 1983, 84). The calamitous Persian invasion seriously undermined the ability of Kartli-Kakheti to resist the encroachments of its neighbors. Neither Catherine nor Erekle, who died respectively in 1796 and 1798, were destined to see how soon the new and more active phase of Russian interference in the Georgian affairs would start with the remarkable changes that were just about to take place in the European politics.

[5] The Georgian Military Road runs between Tiflis (Georgia) and Vladikavkaz (Russia), stretching for about 220 kilometers through forests, mountains and mountain passes. It has been built by the Russians between 1799 and 1863 and follows the traditional route used by invaders and traders throughout the ages.

Towards the outright annexation

The last decade of the 18th century was a time of crucial political and social changes, triggered by the French Revolution. The events in Paris in the spring-summer of 1789 put the entire European continent in motion, and had enormous worldwide repercussions that reached far beyond the traditional borders of Europe. That time, known as the epoch of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, brought about a heretofore unthinkable military alliance between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. In the aftermath of Napoleon's invasion of the Ottoman Egypt the Sublime Porte and St. Petersburg found themselves fighting on the same side. This quite unexpected alliance directly affected the relations between the two Empires in the Southern Caucasus.

In words of Armani, "the Porte, which needed Russia's assistance to protect its frontiers from possible French invasion, was expected to pay the price of this aid by recognizing Russian suzerainty over Georgia. Russia, on the other hand, while sorely tempted to seize Poti, Sukhumi, Akhaltsikhe, in addition to Imeretia and Mingrelia, was compelled by its other interests, to keep the trust of the Ottoman government" (Armani 1970, 193). The potential economic, political, and strategic benefits justified the expansion in the Southern Caucasus in the eyes of the Russian state officials. Along with the practical aspects, many Russian officials and military commanders did sincerely believe in the special nature of their mission, which was to bring the backward savage peoples of the Caucasus into the daylight of progress and civilization.[6] Of course, despite this belief, the Tsarist officials never forgot the fundamental interests of the Russian Empire. Finally, though almost everyone considered the advance in the Caucasus to be quite useful for Russia, there were certain concerns about the possible international consequences of such a step. Therefore St. Petersburg had to act with the utmost cautiousness in that respect.

Upon the death of Erekle II, his older son Giorgi inherited the Georgian throne and was crowned as Giorgi XII (1798-1800). The new king found himself in a precarious situation, as Kartli-Kakheti lacked an efficient army that would be fit for action, the treasury was empty and king's own brothers did not recognize him as the only legitimate ruler. The country remained the scene of chaos, anarchy and utter decline. Soon after his succession to the throne, Giorgi XII sent Prince Garsevan Chavchavadze as his ambassador to St. Petersburg, who in December 1798 requested for a permanent Russian military force to be placed

[6] Alexander I's orders *(Vysochaishii reskript*) are very remarkable in this respect: "The Russian tsar took the mission to care about Georgia exclusively out of pity for poor Georgian people", see: "Aleksander to Knorring (September 17 [29], 1801)", *AKAK*, Vol. I, p.562.

in Kartli-Kakheti. Apart from that, the new king of Kartli-Kakheti wanted his son David to be officially appointed as his successor by the Tsar (Gvosdev 2000, 77-78). In April 1799, Paul I decided to confirm the Georgievsk Treaty of protectorate and to send Petr Kovalenskii as the Russian ambassador to Georgia (AKAK 1866, Vol. 1, 93). In addition, by the end of November 1799, a corps of 3,000 men under the command of General Ivan Lazarev entered Kartli-Kakheti (Degoiev 2001, 50). Kovalenskii prepared an extensive report on the general situation in Georgia upon his arrival. He describes it in the following way:

> "The situation in Georgia at this time was of the most critical character ... disagreement in opinion among people of all social groups, and even in the capital itself, the small size of the Russian army and the constant impossibility of getting supplies from Russia; the lack of provisions in the capital ... all this taken together caused total fear and despair everywhere" (AKAK 1866, Vol. 1, 115).

The general situation in Georgia grew even worse when Fatkh Ali Shah decided to restore the lost Persian influence in Kartli-Kakheti. In the summer of 1800, the Persian ruler demanded from Giorgi XII to send his eldest son as a hostage to the Shah's court. At the same time, a Persian army began to assemble on the Georgian borders (Baddeley 1999, 60). It is worth noting that Giorgi XII received Fatkh Ali's envoys not in his own palace, but in the residence of the Russian representative Kovalenskii, beneath a large portrait of the Russian tsar (Aydın 2001, 53). Accordingly, the answer of the Kartli-Kakhetian king was known before the negotiations began. Encouraged by hopes for Russian support, Giorgi XII rejected the demands of Teheran (the new capital of Persia under the Qajar dynasty). Rather than entering into a direct confrontation with Russia, Fatkh Ali Shakh decided not to risk attacking his disobedient vassal. Along with that, Teheran could not simply renounce its traditional sphere of influence to the Russian newcomers, so the threat of the Persian invasion of the Southern Caucasus remained.

The threat of foreign aggression and the deep ongoing internal crisis compelled Giorgi XII to look for two things to be preserved: 1) the integrity for his kingdom and 2) the throne for his family. The king of Kartli-Kakheti decided to save both by paying the price of independence and complete submission of his kingdom to the control of St. Petersburg. According to the king's plan, Kartli-Kakhetians would be governed by Russian laws. At the same time, it was requested that Giorgi and his descendants would be retained as the autonomous heads of the domestic Georgian government (with the title of King of Georgia) (Rhinelander 1972, 39-40). In other words, the king of Kartli-Kakheti viewed his

kingdom as an integral part of the huge empire, which, however, would be autonomous in its internal affairs and would retain its own ruling dynasty.

While such agreements were possible within the Persian political tradition, for Russia to give special status to one of her provinces would be unprecedented[7] as St. Petersburg's primary aim in domestic affairs was to attain a state homogeneity and thus to create a highly centralized imperial administration.[8] By the mid-summer of 1800, the ruler of Kartli-Kakheti was keen to realize his vision of the Georgian kingdom incorporated into the Russian Empire. Giorgi XII thought it to be the only possible way to save Georgia from chaos, while the Tsarist government in St. Petersburg had certain doubts about the international consequences of such a step and was in no particular hurry to respond.

In the end, on 22 December 1800, Paul I signed the Manifesto on the incorporation of Kartli-Kakheti into the Russian Empire. That Manifesto, however, was not ratified by Giorgi XII, who died one week later (on 28 December 1800) and the news about the Russian tsar's decision never reached him. The news of the Manifesto that was officially announced to the Georgian public on 18 January 1801, came as a bolt out of the blue for Giorgi XII's successor David. General Lazarev, the Commander of the Russian army in Kartli-Kakheti, declared that Paul I would not appoint a successor to the Georgian throne, as Paul I had ordered the Russian military forces stationed in Georgia to annex the country and dissolve the monarchy (Armani 1970, 145). Accordingly, going against the hopes of deceased King Giorgi, Prince David was not allowed to be crowned as the next king of Kartli-Kakheti.

However, in less than two months, on 12 March 1801, the Russian tsar was assassinated during a court coup on 12 March 1801. This unexpected and shocking event put the ultimate fate of the Georgian question into a state of confusion. The new tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) was initially uncertain on the subject and delayed the final decision concerning the future of the Georgian monarchy until a thorough discussion of this issue would be made in the State Council.

Some high-ranking tsarist officials believed that the Caucasus was not worth aggravating relations with other strong European powers. For example, Viktor

[7] Incorporation of Finland in 1809 and its autonomous status within the Russian Empire, along with the Constitution granted to the Kingdom of Poland by Alexander I in 1815, should be considered as exceptions, concerning the highly developed parts of the Empire, located in full sight of the entire Europe

[8] In this way, and following the same pattern, the Russian political and administrative institutions and practices replaced during the 2nd part of the 18th century the unique institutions that existed in the newly subjugated Baltic, Belarusian, or Ukrainian territories.

Pavlovich Kochubei[9] and Nikolai Nikolaievich Novosiltsev[10] preferred to act with caution in the Caucasus in an attempt to avoid any complications in relations with Britain (Fadeev 1960, 102). It was obvious, though, that it would be in Russia's best interests to strengthen its presence in the Southern Caucasus and to acquire a valuable foothold in the area.

The incorporation of the Kartli-Kakhetian kingdom was discussed twice in the State Council, on 10 and 15 April 1801 (Fadeev 1960, 106). At that very time in April, Alexander I dispatched Commander-in-Chief of the Russian forces in the Northern Caucasus Lieutenant-General Knorring to the Eastern Georgia to assess the situation (Rhinelander 1972, 41-42). The Russian emperor was still unsure whether to make Georgia a Russian protectorate or to abolish its monarchy and incorporate it as a part of the empire (Rhinelander 1972, 44). After much deliberation, the Russian emperor finally chose to annex Georgia, signing on 12 September 1801 the Manifesto (AKAK 1866, Vol. 1, 432-433) on the abolition of the Georgian kingdom. The document stated that the main reason for annexation was Russia's attempt to preserve peace in Georgia, to save this country both from external threat and the royal princes' struggling over the throne (AKAK 1866, Vol. 1, 432-433).

It came as no surprise that a large segment of the population of Kartli-Kakheti met the news with open hostility. Even though the vast majority of Georgians were in favor of a close alliance with Russia, they could not imagine that their country would just turn overnight into an ordinary part of the Russian Empire and lose at once its centuries-old royal dynasty, autonomy in internal affairs, and the status of the protected ally. The numerous princes of the Bagratid dynasty, the Georgian nobility, the clergy and the peasantry, all in their own way not only met with hostility the declaration made by General Knorring, but also formed an extensive opposition to the Russian administration. The numerous Bagratid princes hoped to restore the monarchy and their dynastic rights to the throne, while the Georgian noblemen tried to restore their influence in the state apparatus, for at the moment they had for the most part been replaced by Russian bureaucrats, lost their traditional prestige and, more importantly, the source of income they had previously enjoyed while in the service of the state. Furthermore, their pride was hurt by the arrogance of many Russian officials,

[9] A personal friend of emperor Alexander I who served as a diplomat in the Russian Embassies in Stockholm, London and Constantinople; the Russian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire (1792-1797); the Vice-Chancellor of Collegium of the Foreign affairs; the Minister of Internal Affairs (1802-1807); the State Chancellor (1834) of the Russian Empire

[10] Also a personal friend and adjutant for special missions of Alexander I, the President of the Russian Academy of Sciences (1802–1810), since 1831 a member of the State Council and its president

who treated the natives as savages, since most Georgians usually did not speak Russian or French.

The Georgian autocephalous Church was eventually absorbed by the Russian Church,[11] and subordinated to the Synod.[12] From now on, the Church services, if not instantly, but gradually were to be switched to the Russian language, just like in any eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church. Thus, the Georgian clergy, fairly proud of their Church as one of the most ancient in the Christian world, [13] could not stay aloof from the forces of anti-Russian opposition.

The princes, brothers and children of Giorgi XII were expected to lead the anti-Russian opposition, but for many members of the royal family, however, the most important issue was the struggle for the throne. Among the two moderate parties that emerged within the Georgian nobility, one supported Giorgi XII's elder son David, and the other acted in the name of prince Iulon, the brother of the deceased king and David's uncle. The leaders of the first party agreed to establish a Russian administration in Georgia, while the second party sought to retain extensive internal autonomy ("own king" and "own laws"). The open opposition to Russian rule grouped around Erekle II's son, Prince Aleksandr (Fadeev 1960, 97).

The Russian authorities intended to send all members of the former ruling dynasty to St. Petersburg in order to prevent the potential civil unrest. On 19 April, 1803, while trying to arrest the widow of Giorgi XII Tsaritsa Mariam in an attempt to send her off to Russia, the commander of the Russian army in Georgia Ivan Lazarev was stabbed to death (Fadeev 1960, 64-65). Apart from Mariam, two sons of the last Kartli-Kakhetian king (the heir to the throne Prince David and Prince Bagrat) and their uncle Prince Vakhtang were also forcefully sent to St. Petersburg (Rheinlander 1972, 87). The widow of Erekle II Queen Darejan and her two sons Princes Iulon and Parnaoz were sent off soon after (Rheinlander 1972, 87). The other children of Erekle II, Princes Aleksandr and Teimuraz, fled abroad looking for asylum and support, first in neighboring Imeretia and then in Persia. Only one son of Erekle II, the Catholicos of the Georgian Church Antoni, remained in Georgia (Rheinlander 1972, 87).

On 12 September 1801, along with the Manifesto of Alexander I, another decree was issued defining the status of local Georgian administration (AKAK

[11] Since 1811 the Georgian autocephalous Church ceased to exist, when it became an exarchate within the Russian Orthodox Church.

[12] The highest state organ of the church administration, created by Peter I in 1721, with the civilian official (Ober-Prokuror) appointed by the emperor.

[13] The Georgian Orthodox Church got its autocephalous status in 487, when it separated from the Patriarchate of Antiochy.

1866, Vol. 1, 437). The Eastern Georgia ceased to exist as an individual political administrative unit and its lands were split into a few provinces within the Russian Empire. On 8 May, 1802, the so-called Supreme Georgian Government ("Verkhovnoe Gruzinskoe Pravitelstvo") was established, with four departments ("expeditions"): the Executive *(ispolnitelnaiia)*, the Treasury *(ekonomicheskaia)*, the Criminal *(ugolovnaia)* and the Civil *(grazhdanskaia)*. The Civil Director of Georgia, the heads and counselors of departments formed the Supreme Georgian Government. The general assembly of the members of this government constituted the highest decision-making body (AKAK 1866, Vol. 1, 437). As a matter of fact, all real power belonged to the Civil Director of Georgia *("pravitel' Gruzii")* Petr Kovalenskii, who was subordinated to the Chief Commander in the Caucasus General Knorring (Fadeev 1960, 107; Rhinelander 1972, 66). The Eastern Georgia thus became a Russian territory ruled by Russian officials.

The annexation of the Kartli-Kakhetian kingdom by Russia came about as the logical final outcome of the earlier Russian advances in the Caucasus that had been taking place throughout the 18th century. For another thing, the favorable international conjuncture by the end of the century, along with the Russian defensive alliance with the Ottoman Empire concluded as a consequence of the French expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean, guaranteed the Ottoman non-interference in the Georgian affairs and therefore facilitated the Russian expansion in the Caucasus. This process did not end with the annexation of Kartli-Kakheti. For most of the 19th century, in Rhinelander's words, "... the whole Southern border of the Empire was fluid and would remain so for time to come" (Rhinelander 1972, 45). Acquiring a valuable foothold in the Southern Caucasus beyond the Caucasian ridge at the very beginning of the 19th century thus marked a crucial milestone in the history of the Russian conquests in the Caucasian region.

Conclusions

By the end of the 18th century, such traditional regional actors in the Southern Caucasus as the Ottoman Empire and Persia suffered a deep socio-political decline. As a result, Russia attempted to take advantage of the relative power vacuum in the region for its own ends. It stands to reason that St. Petersburg could not assert total Russian influence in the region overnight. This massive task required both resources and time that could not be spared while the tsarist government was dealing with one of the most crucial issues in Russian foreign policy in the second half of the 18th century, which was the "Crimean question." For all that, the Russian presence in the Caucasus was growing ever more visible.

The king of Kartli-Kakheti Erekle II had a chance to unify the Eastern Georgia and create a rather stronger Georgian state, in a sense even a small South Caucasian Empire (only half of Erekle's subjects were Georgians, the others being Armenians or Azeri Turks (Rheinlander 1972, 33)). At the same time, Kartli-Kakheti never enjoyed internal unity, staying weakened by continuous domestic feuds among the noble families. Besides, in terms of military strength, Erekle's kingdom by no means could be compared to its huge imperial neighbors, so it had to rely on the support of at least one of them. Though Erekle II understood full well the possible consequences of his decision to apply for Russian protection, the Treaty of Georgievsk seemed to be a rational choice, all the more that the majority of Georgians largely idealized Russia as a powerful protector of the Orthodox Christian faith.

To the disappointment of the Georgian side, the Russian obligations to protect the Eastern Georgia under the Treaty of Georgievsk remained largely unfulfilled. A few years after the Treaty of Georgievsk was signed, the small and rather symbolic Russian force was withdrawn from Kartli-Kaheti. Erekle's kingdom was thus left defenseless in the face of a foreign aggression. Before long the Persians invaded the country in the mid-1790s and sacked its capital. The area had not yet recovered from the devastation of the Persian attack when Erekle II died and his heir Giorgi XII took the fateful decision to make Kartli-Kakheti a part of the Russian empire. In this way, even though at the cost of sacrificing the Georgian sovereignty, the new king was desperately trying to preserve at least the two most fundamental aspects of the Kartli-Kakhetian statehood, which were the internal autonomy and the ruling dynasty.

These expectations, however, appeared to be at odds with the general line of the Russian imperial expansion and the efforts of St. Petersburg to create a highly centralized and uniform state administration all over the empire. From the Russian perspective, the incorporation of the Eastern Georgian lands was a crucial turning point that paved the way for further Russian expansion in the Caucasus. In the long run, it allowed St. Petersburg to encircle and subjugate the North Caucasian mountaineers, to extend the area of the Russian conquests towards the shores of both the Black and Caspian seas and further into Central Asia, and eventually to assert its hegemony over the whole Caucasus.

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