



The battle for the royal throne in Imereti in the 80s-90s of the 18th century and the policy of Erekle II, the king of Kartl – Kakheti

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Abstract

In the presented paper, the struggle for the royal throne in Imereti in the 80s-90s of the 18th century and the policy of Erekle II is discussed and analyzed. It is noted that the death of Solomon I was followed by the activation of the influential feudal lords of Western Georgia. Individual groups of Imereti princes had a favourable situation to realize their political goals. They grouped around the two contenders for the throne - Davit Giorgi's son and Davit Archil's son. The latter was the grandson of Erekle II, which strengthened the position of his supporters. According to one part of the princes, the

enthronement of Davit (Archil's son) in Imereti would result in the strengthening of the influence of the king of Kartl-Kakheti in Western Georgia, which would ultimately lead to the abolition of the kingdom of Imereti and its merger with the kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti. Therefore, the mentioned group supported Davit (Giorgi's son), the cousin of Solomon I, to become king in Imereti, which was successfully achieved in the first stage of the political struggle.

In 1784-1789, Imereti was ruled by Davit (Giorgi's son). During his short reign, a very difficult situation arose in Imereti. Dissatisfied with his policy, the great feudal lords became active and started to fight against the king. They placed special hopes on Davit (Archil's son). With the active support of the influential feudal lords of Imereti and Erekle II, Davit (Archil's son) won the battle for the throne, who changed his name to Solomon II in honour of Solomon I. Davit (Giorgi's son) never stopped thinking about returning the throne and always tried to Solomon.

He would contact the opposing forces of Solomon II. The struggle for power in the kingdom of Imereti was accompanied by the strengthening of the feudal reaction. Anarchy engulfed Imereti. At the end of the 18th century, Solomon II was able to strengthen the central government, and the kingdom of Imereti was once again in the hands of a strong ruler.

Keywords: Erekle II; Solomon II; Davit (Giorgi's son); Davit (Archil's son); Kingdom of Imereti; Kingdom of Kartl - Kakheti.

Introduction

King Solomon I of Imereti died on April 23, 1784. He did not have a direct heir, because the only legal heir of Solomon - Prince Aleksandre died in 1780. Aleksandre had a son Giorgi from an illegal marriage, who would not have a legal right to the throne. Therefore,

Solomon I declared his nephew Davit (Archil's son), who was the grandson of Erekle II, as his successor.

The sudden death of the powerful king was followed by the activation of the influential feudal lords of Western Georgia. Individual groups of Imeretian princes had a favourable situation to realize their political goals. Davit (Archil's son), the official heir to the throne, who was 12 years old at that time, lived in Kakheti with his mother – Princess Elene (Batonishvili). Solomon II (Davit (Archil's son)) was born in 1772. His father, Archil, was the younger brother of Solomon I, and his mother, Elene, was the daughter of Erekle II. The marriage of Solomon II's parents was due to the closer proximity of the kingdoms of Kartl-Kakheti and Imereti and the prospect of more alliances. Solomon II Bagrationi was the last ruler in the history of Georgia.

Solomon II's father Archil, unlike his elder brothers, was not interested in political life. He did not want to interfere in state affairs. Archil was a tall, imposing and physically strong person. He loved Georgian table traditions very much. His circle of friends also consisted of Archil style people. Archil was distinguished by his quarrelsomeness. He was called "Insane" precisely because of such a pleasant and free character.

Once, when Archil was visiting his father-in-law - Erekle II, the Imeretian son-in-law, who had been drinking all night, was woken up by the loud prayer of mullah early in the morning in Tbilisi (Tbilisi was famous for its religious diversity and tolerance in all eras). Enraged by waking up early, Archil saw in mullah not a religious figure, but someone who awakened him in his untimely time, took out a gun and killed him, thus the "Insane" Imeretian son-in-law earned the great mercy of King Erekle.

Davit (Archil's son) was 3 years old when his father died (he was given to anathema by Archil's brother, Joseph the Catholicos, and was not buried like a member of the royal family, but was buried outside

the walls). Solomon's mother - Elene married for the second time to Mourav of Kiziki, Kakhetian prince Andronikashvili, and Davit (Archil's son) grew up in Tbilisi, Kakheti and Kiziki. In the middle of the 19th century, the military governor of Kutaisi - Petre Demianovich Gnilosarov, gave interesting information about Solomon II. Solomon II was a man of medium height, of full build. The Russian historian emphasizes that he mostly wore Georgian (in this case, East Georgian) clothes, and instead of Akhalukhi, he wore a Zubun sewn from Imeretian striped brocade, and he always wore a Georgian Bokhoki on his head. Since Solomon was the grandson of the king of Georgians - Erekle, he brought Georgian rules to Imereti as well. The Russians called Georgia only Kartl-Kakheti. Division of Georgia into Georgians, Imeretians, Mengrelians, etc. is a characteristic feature of Russian historiography of the XIX-XX centuries (Kuprashvili, 2019: 98).

Methods

The scientific article presented by us is based on proven academic research methods in historiography. In particular, qualitative research method, which implies in-depth analysis, as well as comparison-contrast analysis is used in the paper in order to draw objective conclusions.

Result

In the 80s and 90s of the 18th century, the struggle for the throne of Imereti practically turned into a general Georgian conflict. The mentioned confrontation caused great damage to the kingdom of Imereti. Not only the political elite of the country, but also the population was divided into two hostile camps, and the Ottoman Empire was also involved in the conflict in the form of the Akhaltsikhe Pashate. The active intervention of Erekle II, the most influential monarch of the Caucasus at that time, played a decisive role in the conflict. He strongly supported his grandson, Solomon I's nephew Davit (Archil's son), known as Solomon II. Erekle, with his political influence and military power, together with a part of the

feudal lords of Western Georgia, managed to finally remove Davit (Giorgi's son) from the throne of Imereti. Despite the fact that the mentioned conflict lasted for a long time and cost a lot of economic and human resources, Solomon II managed to become a very influential ruler in the early 1890s and partially restore the authority of the time of Solomon I to the kingdom of Imereti. Nevertheless, the kingdom of Imereti, with its small resources, was powerless in the beginning of the 19th century before the conquering policy of the Russian Empire.

Discussion

Due to his young age, Davit (Archil's son) could not rule the country yet, but he was supported by a certain group of feudal lords, and most importantly, the position of his supporters was strengthened by the factor of Erekle II. Imereti According to other groups of influential feudal lords, the enthronement of Davit Archil's son in Imereti would result in the strengthening of the influence of the king of Kartl-Kakheti in Western Georgia, the limitation of the independent rule of the princes, which would ultimately lead to the abolition of the kingdom of Imereti and its merger with the kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti. Therefore, the said group supported the kingship of Solomon I's cousin Davit (Giorgi's son), who after the defeat of the 1778 conspiracy against Solomon I, moved to Eastern Georgia and was at the court of Erekle II (Essays on the History of Georgia, 1973: 740). Shortly before his death, Solomon I reconciled with Davit (Giorgi's son), allowed him to come to Imereti and returned his estates.

The group of supporters of Davit (Giorgi's son) was commanded by Commander-Treasurer Papuna Tsereteli and Police Chief Beri Tsulukidze. They were supported by the Prince of Samegrelo Katsia Dadiani (Dadiani, 1962: 181).

On April 26, 1784, Davit (Giorgi's son) took an oath before the feudal lords of Imereti, which actually represented the action program of the new king and his government. The new king promised the

feudal lords that he would leave the estates of Davit (Archil's son) and Giorgi (Aleksandre's son) intact (Rekhviashvili, 1982: 173). Davit (Giorgi's son) promised that he would steadfastly and firmly continue the course taken by Solomon I - he would fight against the purchase of captives, help strengthen the church and continue relations with Russia (Rekhviashvili, 2000: 178).

On May 7, 1784, on May 7, 1784, Erekle II wrote to S. Burnashov, the representative of the Russian government, about the coronation of Davit (Giorgi's son): "Solomon I passed away. As the successor of the king of Imereti, my grandson Davit (Archil's son) was chosen by Solomon, but they did not choose Davit (Giorgi's son), Solomon's cousin. I did not protest because Davit (Archil's son) is young and cannot lead the kingdom" (Macharadze, 1968: 44). On May 8, he informed P. Potemkin about the same issue: "I did not protest even with the opinion that Ottomans would not interfere in the affairs of Imereti and this would not cause Russia's displeasure. And then, when Davit (Archil's son) comes of age, I will do as the Russian government decides" (Macharadze, 1968: 44). Therefore, it is not a coincidence that Bagrat Batonishvili points out in his "New Story" that the Imeretians made Davit (Giorgi's son)"not as a king, but as a vicegerent, rather than Davit (Archil's son) before his upbringing" (Batonishvili, 1941: 59).

During the short reign of Davit (Giorgi's son), a very difficult situation arose in Imereti. Dissatisfied with his policy, the big feudal lords became active and started fighting against the king. The country was engulfed in feudal civil strife. They placed special hopes on Davit (Archil's son). The attacks of the Ottomans became more frequent, which King Davit successfully repulsed. The Russian government was interested in maintaining peace in Imereti and therefore supported King Davit in every possible way, who, according to the Russian government, was the only force capable of establishing political order in the kingdom of Imereti after the death of Solomon I. The Russian

government was also worried about Ottoman interference in Imereti's internal affairs and establishing influence. In 1784, P. Potemkin wrote to Burnashov: "You must try very hard to ensure peace in Imereti... Persuade the nobles and the king to agree, watch so that the Turks do not gain influence over them" (Rekhviashvili, 1982: 182).

Colonel Zhegulin was sent from St. Petersburg to Imereti to help the son of Davit (Giorgi's son), who was supposed to call the son of Davit (Archil's son) to go to Russia and ask for the patronage of Catherine II. But he did not accept the advice of the representative of the Russian government and energetically continued the struggle to occupy the throne of Imereti.

In 1788, the Prince of Samegrelo, Katsia Dadiani II, died, and his eldest son, 18-year-old Grigol, took the throne. It seems that the new Prince was not an acceptable candidate for the king of Imereti, and King Davit invaded Samegrelo. Niko Dadiani writes: "Two months after the death of Dadiani, the people of Imereti were gathered, King David attacked Odishi and burned and captured many Odishars and Grigol Dadiani's brother Manuchar and other princes and went to Imereti with many captives" (Dadiani, 1962:184).

Grigol Dadiani fled to Lechkhumi. He was supported by his cousins, Lechkhumi commander Kaikhosro Gelovani, Samegrelo principality chieftain Giorgi Chikvani and other influential feudal lords. They asked Erekle II to send Davit (Archil's son) to Lechkhumi. Erekle II was looking for an opportune moment to crown his grandson in Imereti, and of course, he immediately agreed to this request of the representatives of the Odishi principality.

In Lechkhumi, in Muri Palace, Davit (Archil's son) was married to Grigol Dadiani's sister - Mariam. On July 11, 1789, Grigol Dadiani and Davit (Archil's son) defeated Davit (Giorgi's son) with the army of Samegrelo and Kartl-Kakheti near Matkhoji. The allies against King Davit were supported by Zurab Tsereteli and other nobles of Imereti,

in particular "men of the oath", who represented the military aristocracy from the nobility of the throne in Imereti.

Davit (Giorgi's son) was supported by a part of the nobility of Imereti. Based on them, the former king continued to fight in Imereti, but to no avail. He was forced to flee to Akhaltsikhe.

Davit (Archil's son), who turned 17, became king in Imereti. He changed his name to Solomon II in honour of Solomon I. He considered the foundations of the domestic and foreign policy of the Great King of Imereti to be exemplary, and throughout his reign he unwaveringly tried to continue the course taken by his outstanding predecessor, the goal of which was the final expulsion of the Ottomans and the unification of Western Georgia. The new king always treated the name of Solomon I with awe, calling him the great and famous king "given by God as the saviour of the country", "the fundamental exterminator of the unrighteous Muslims and the one who shed blood many times for the country, the second Builder of the country" (Kakabadze, 1921: 94-95).

A very noteworthy moment of the period of the struggle for the throne is the attempt to unify Georgia. When the internal wars between Davit (Giorgi's son) and Davit (Archil's son) were going on in the kingdom of Imereti, the endless feud of the rivals, the use of mercenary military force, sometimes the conquest of one and sometimes the other corner, shook the country. Tired of all this, the nobles of Imereti decided to appeal to the highest-ranking ruler of the Caucasus - Erekle II, with a proposal for the unification of Georgia. In 1790, King Erekle was visited by an embassy of the most respected people of Western Georgia: Euthymi Gelateli, Dositheos of Kutateli, Commander Kaikhosro Tsereteli, Paata Mikeladze, Zurab Tsereteli, the head of the palace, Sekhnia Tsulukidze, Ioane Abashidze, Ioane Agiashvili, Kaikhosro Chijavadze and the oath takers: Lortkipanidze, Ioseliani, Avaliani. The aforementioned embassy asked Erekle to join Imereti not only on behalf of the high clergy and aristocracy, but the

main population of Imereti and Western Georgia were primarily interested in this union. This kind of request was due to the high authority of Erekle and Kartl-Kakheti kingdom. At that time, the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti represented a powerful state across the Caucasus, whose vassal status included even Muslim political units. Erekle entrusted the resolution of the issue of the unification of Kartl-Kakheti and Imereti to the Royal Hall. There were supporters and opponents of the idea of reunification at the Royal Hall. Among the supporters were Secretary Chabua Orbeliani, Anton Catholicos, Davit Orbeliani, Solomon Lionidze and the heir to the throne of Kartl-Kakheti - Giorgi Batonishvili. Erekle's wife Darejan Dadiani and Erekle's son-in-law - Ioane Mukhranbatoni came out against the union. The ambassadors of Imereti understood that one of the decisive positions of queen Darejan was to meet Erekle's wife, but they could not hear the goodness of the union. When Erekle took his turn on the 2nd, he answered the ambassadors like this: "I am asked to join Imereti, but I cannot accept this request; I have an enemy standing at my door; I cannot become an enemy of my grandson, who is being prepared for the throne of my ancestors."

The idea of a union failed. Georgia did not have such a chance after the infamous Royal Hall decree of 1490. However, in the words of Giorgi Batonishvili: "Joining Imereti to Kartli is the strength of the reign, that is, you want the invincibility of the country against our enemies" (Kuprashvili, 2016: 38).

Davit (Giorgi's son), who escaped to Akhaltsikhe, was gathering support forces to return the government, which gave the Pasha of Akhaltsikhe a convenient excuse to interfere in the domestic affairs of Imereti. In 1790 Davit (Giorgi's son) invaded Imereti with the army of Ottomans and Lekis (from Dagestan). Solomon II quickly gathered an army and fought Davit (Giorgi's son), but was defeated and had to take refuge in the palace of Papuna and Zurab Tsereteli. From here he moved to Eastern Georgia and asked Erekle II for help. The king of

Kartl-Kakheti led Solomon II's army under the command of Ioane Batonishvili. Solomon was also supported by the head of Samegrelo, Grigol Dadiani. Davit (Giorgi's son) was defeated and decided to reconcile with Solomon II through the mediation of Akhaltsikhe Pasha. In 1791, he met Erekle II. The king of Kartl-Kakheti accompanied Anton Catholicos to Davit and sent him to Imereti. According to the agreement reached between Solomon II and Davit (Giorgi's son), Solomon returned principedom estate to the former king, and the latter swore allegiance to the new king of Imereti.

The agreement between the adversaries turned out to be temporary. Soon it was revealed to me that Davit Giorgi's son was preparing a conspiracy against the king together with the traitorous Abashidzes, and the conspirators intended to kill Solomon II. But their plans were revealed and Davit Giorgi's son had to swear loyalty again. This time, the seeker of the throne was forced to give his three-year-old son Konstantin as a hostage to the king as a sign of loyalty. Solomon locked the hostage in Mukhuri prison.

Davit (Giorgi's son) never stopped thinking about returning the throne and always tried to connect with the opposing forces of Solomon II. At that time, the relationship between the chief of Samegrelo and the king of Imereti became strained. Solomon II was supported by a part of the influential feudal lords of Samegrelo (Lechkhumi Moravian Kaikhosro Gelovani, the prince's brother Manuchar, etc.) and in 1792 Grigol Dadiani was deposed from the throne. Manuchar Dadiani became the head of Samegrelo, and Grigol, who was deposed from the throne, took refuge in Samurzakhan.

Davit (Giorgi's son) got in touch with Grigol Dadiani, also the seeker of the throne of Imereti had a secret relationship with Pasha of Akhaltsikhe. All this became known and Solomon decided to punish Davit (Giorgi's son), but he managed to escape to Akhaltsikhe.

In 1794, Davit (Giorgi's son) entered Imereti with the help of the Lekis. To help him, Grigol Dadiani went with the Samurzakhan

army and camped near Bandzi, which weakened the positions of the allies - Solomon II and Manuchar Dadiani. The king of Imereti was attacked from one side by Davit (Giorgi's son) with Lek's army, and from the other side, Grigol Dadiani with Samurzhakhano's army. The supporters of the king of Imereti were able to correct the situation with a well-planned military plan. Kaikhosro Gelovani and Kaikhosro Tsereteli attacked the opponent's army camped in Marseille and defeated it. Grigil Dadiani fled to Abkhazia. Davit (Giorgi's son), who was going to march on Kutaisi, was forced to retreat to Matkhoji and camp there, while the army of the Lekis fortified itself in the vicinity of the ruined church.

After some time, Grigol Dadiani arrived in Matkhodi and promised Davit (Giorgi's son) that he would bring the chief of Abkhazia to help him, which he did and agreed to help the chief of Abkhazia. The army of Davit Giorgi's son's allies camped near Khibula.

Erekle II actively intervened in the affairs of Western Georgia. He sent the Kartl-Kakheti army with artillery to Imereti under the command of Aleksandre Batonishvili. King Solomon and his allies camped near Nakhakhulevi. Before the start of the battle, the king's supporters bribed the leader of the Lek army and he betrayed Davit (Dadiani, 1962: 187). The seeker of the throne was defeated and retreated to Khibul. Davit's defeat frightened the chief of Abkhazia and immediately returned. Davit was forced to return to Akhaltsikhe, where he died of smallpox on January 11, 1795. His son - Konstantine Batonishvili remained a hostage with Solomon II, and Queen Anna took refuge with Erekle II.

This is how another Bagrationi, fighting for the title of Imereti's crown prince, succeeded, and this time the throne of Kutaisi was finally and firmly occupied by Solomon II, who could not imagine that exactly twenty years later he would share the inconsolable fate of his defeated and expelled rival (Datuashvili, 1993: 43).

The king's victory did not bring peace to Imereti for a long time.

A new successor appeared to Solomon II, the illegitimate son of the son of Solomon I - Giorgi (Aleksandre's son). He was married to Darejan, the nephew of the Gelati Metropolitan, the daughter of Eristavi of Guria. Metropolitan of Gelati and a part of princes from Imereti contacted Grigol Dadiani in Akhaltsikhe. Their goal was to overthrow Solomon from the throne and make Giorgi (Aleksandre's son) king. Grigol Dadiani marched towards Imereti with his army, but the conspiracy was soon revealed. Solomon II imprisoned the Imeretian princes involved in the conspiracy. Grigol Dadiani had a daughter-in-law in Kutaisi, and therefore he was forced to live with Solomon II. The king also imprisoned him, but soon he managed to escape from captivity, deposed his brother Manuchar and regained the throne of the prince. Solomon II tried several times to depose him, but to no avail.

Conclusion

The struggle for power in the kingdom of Imereti was accompanied by the strengthening of the feudal reaction. The feudal lords attacked each other, using Ottomans and Leks as helpers, which put the country in a difficult situation. Anarchy engulfed Imereti. Solomon II was able to strengthen the central government at the end of the 18th century, but the country's situation was difficult.

Upon becoming king, Solomon II tried to continue the political course of his famous uncle - Solomon I. The king tried to suppress the disobedient feudal lords and, like his uncle, claimed the leadership of all Western Georgia. Solomon dismissed his brother-in-law Grigol Dadiani from the government of Samegrelo, but the king still failed to subjugate Samegrelo, and in December 1803, the principality of Samegrelo came under the protection of Russia, thus finally rejecting even the meager idea of forming Western Georgia into a single state. Solomon II took back Sachilao given to Samegrelo by Davit (Giorgi's son) and took control of Chvishi Castle.

Solomon helped his grandfather - Erekle in the battle of Krtsanisi. Almost half of Erekle's small army consisted of the warriors of the King of Imereti. Among the numerous descendants of Solomon II Erekle belonged to those units who found themselves at the side of the legendary king in the most decisive battle of his life.

In 1801, Russia abolished the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti. This is the period in the history of Georgia, when a part of the representatives of the Kingdom of Imereti tried to at least partially preserve the independence of their country. The foreign political background was very difficult for the small Georgian kingdom. After the political events of 1801 (abolition of the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti), Solomon II was less able to resist the intention of the Russian Empire to subjugate the entire South Caucasus with the small political, economic and military resources of the Kingdom of Imereti. The royal court of Imereti tried to neutralize the Russian military and political aggression with right diplomatic efforts (Kuprashvili, 2016: 40).

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