

**THE ARMENIAN-GEORGIAN RELATIONS DURING THE FALL OF  
KARTLI-KAKHETI KINGDOM  
(According to Georgian Sources and Georgian Contemporary  
Historiography)**

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**Abstract**

The article presents the process of annexation of Eastern Georgia to Russia. The study of the relations between the Armenian and Georgian peoples has always been one of the most important trends of Georgian historiography. During the long-term absence of independent statehood, various parts of the Armenian people found themselves within the borders of neighboring states and were forced to live there following the laws of these states. In this regard, the events of the last quarter of the 18th century were no exception. Since the second half of the 17th century, the liberation expectations of the Armenian people had mainly been associated with the Russian Empire. This was due to the new political process that Russian Empire adopted after the annexation of Georgia. Thus, the matter of Georgia's accession to Russia was closely associated with the future of Armenia. This is the reason we discuss the matter of Georgia's annexation to Russia in detail, as it was a turning point for the Russian government and makes the leaders of the Armenian liberation movement face difficult task: that is what will be the future of Armenia.

**Keywords:** *Heraclius II, Russian Empire, Eastern Georgia, Ottoman Turkey, Transcaucasia, Simeon Yerevantsi I, Georgian lands, Paul I of Russia, the Meliks of Karabakh, Georgian historiography*

The study of the relations of the peoples of the Caucasus has always been one of the most important trends of Georgian historiography. In this regard, the events of the last quarter of the 18th century were no exception.

Nadir Shah, the ruler of Iran, was killed in Khorasan as a result of a treachery in 1747. Anarchy seized the country. Under Teimuraz II (1700-1762), the king of Kartli, and his son Heraclius II (1720-1798), there was a favorable situation for practically united Kartli-Kakheti, for implementing an independent policy.

Georgia was actively engaged in the struggle for supremacy in the Caucasus. Significant successes were already achieved in the 1740-1750s. The supremacy of Kartli-Kakheti was established in Transcaucasia under King Heraclius II in the 1760-1770s. The general crisis in Iran and the Ottoman Empire as well as the still unstable, gradually advancing positions of the Russian Empire in Transcaucasia greatly

contributed to the further prosperity of the country.<sup>1</sup> As N. Berdzenishvili mentions, “During this period, Eastern Georgia became both economically and politically powerful. The state revenues of Kartli-Kakheti increased significantly compared to the previous decades in the 1780s”.<sup>2</sup>

Concerned about the strengthening of the Russian Empire, Ottoman Turkey was willing to hand over Western Georgia to Heraclius II in exchange for an anti-Russian orientation,<sup>3</sup> on the other hand, it continued to support to maintain its dominance in the Caucasus.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, the Ottoman Empire was not sincere in this matter and was forced to take this step. If the Russian Empire had established itself in the Caucasus, this would have been difficult to stop it, therefore it would have been more beneficial for the Turks to hand over Western Georgia to Heraclius II than to lose this part of Georgian lands.

Kartli-Kakheti might have good possibilities for revival in the light of the Iranian-Ottoman Empire’s political fall. In addition, Transcaucasia and especially Kartli-Kakheti were gradually getting a place in the eastern politics of European countries due to the expansion of the Russian Empire to the south.

The situation within the kingdom was also becoming stable. By oppressing influential princes, Heraclius II strengthened the central power of the country. With the creation of the “service army” the security of the country’s borders was increased. The country returned to normal life, and the abandoned villages were restored.<sup>5</sup>

From the beginning of the 1780s, the situation in Transcaucasia became complicated again. The Russian Empire was trying to dominate first in Transcaucasia, and then in the Middle East with slow but confident steps, putting pressure on its opponents Iran and Ottoman Turkey. Not only Iran and Ottoman Turkey, and most of the Caucasian Muslim feudals but also the European countries who stands behind them were against this policy of the Russian Empire. In such conditions, the Kartli-Kakhetian Kingdom was of great importance, as the Russian orientation had a dominant position there. The Russian Empire desires Heraclius II to officially ask for her protection. According to the task put forward, “Catherine’s diplomats begin to act”. Various officials of the Empire, ambassadors, and “travelers” began to visit Heraclius II’s kingdom. All of them studied and explored Georgia. They quickly learned the circumstances under which Kartli-Kakheti could be included within the Russian Empire’s Middle Eastern strategy.<sup>6</sup> The actions of the Russian agency in Kartli-Kakheti grew stronger day by day.

Al. Orbeliani, the grandson of Heraclius II (1802-1869) mentioned in his letters that the Armenian grouping especially stood out in this regard.<sup>7</sup> The Armenians tried to

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<sup>1</sup> Jibashvili 2010: 44-46.

<sup>2</sup> Berdzenishvili 1973: 444.

<sup>3</sup> Samsonadze 1988: 209.

<sup>4</sup> Cheishvili 1982: 2.

<sup>5</sup> Berdzenishvili 1973: 455.

<sup>6</sup> Berdzenishvili 1973: 456.

<sup>7</sup> Jambakur-Orbeliani 1914: 42-52.

restore the Armenian statehood with the help of Russia. It is true that some Armenians recognized the patronage of Heraclius II, but the idea of restoring their own Armenian state under the patronage of the Russian Empire gradually became stronger. At that time, the Armenian people had one main political task—to unite their fragmented homeland. However, since there was no internal organizational force that could represent the interests of the united Armenian society, there was no common, consistent program for all Armenians to achieve this goal, and there could not exist. However, the uncertainty was overcome soon, and the idea of restoring the Armenian state took on a clear and stable form. Simeon Yerevantsi I, Catholicos of All Armenians, and one of the most active inspirers of all this was the one who played a very important role in the history of Armenia in the 18th century. As historian O. Gibashvili testifies, the Armenian national liberation movement entered a new quality phase with the consecration of the Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi I. This experienced figure began an indefatigable struggle for the restoration of the Armenian statehood from the very beginning. Despite unfavorable conditions, the Catholicos managed to gather numerous Armenians around him.<sup>8</sup>

To achieve this goal, Catholicos was oriented towards the Russian Empire. The program was supported by representatives of the rich class of the Armenian community of the Empire. Etchmiadzin became a loyal ally of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus and Transcaucasia. In order to maximize and trigger this intention, the spiritual leader of the Armenians of Russia, Archbishop Hovsep Arghutyan, in 1779-1780 signs an agreement between the Russian Imperial House and the Armenian people. On the basis of this agreement, the Armenian state was to be restored in a short while under the auspices of the Russian Empire. As V. Potton testifies: “Armenian regions have become more pro-Russian, their goal was to create a “Great Armenia” using the Russians and achieving dominance in Transcaucasia.”<sup>9</sup>

There is a viewpoint in Georgian historiography, according to which the “Armenian thron” poisoned Levan Batonishvili, the son of Heraclius II, in 1782 who was his father’s right-hand, a strong commander and a far-sighted politician. As a result, the kingdom of Heraclius II weakened.<sup>10</sup> Heraclius II soon succumbs to the expediency of receiving Russian patronage and rushes to sign the Treaty of Georgievk. Kartli-Kakheti enters the political orbit of the Russian Empire. The Armenians’ hopes are growing stronger that the empire will soon be established more firmly in Transcaucasia and help them to restore the Armenian state.

According to historians Tamar and Akaki Papavas, “Hovsep Arghutyan tried to restore the Armenian state at the expense of Georgian lands, he created a movement that aimed to relocate at least part of the old and lost “Armenia” to Georgia. Certainly, it was disturbing that the commander of the Russian army who was sent to seize Georgia

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<sup>8</sup> Jibashvili 2010: 101.

<sup>9</sup> Potto 1886: 718-720.

<sup>10</sup> Jibashvili 2010: 58-69.

was the Armenian General Ivan Lazarev, and this appointment was the deed of Arghutyan and his fellows”.<sup>11</sup>

As Simon Quarriani writes: “The Armenians also played a negative role for Georgia during the battle of Krtsanisi (1795). They pursued a double policy at the time, lighting a candle to both the devil and God. That is, they were sympathetic to Kartli-Kakheti but invited Russians to Georgia as owners while sending money and presents to Agha Mohammad Khan, the Shah of Iran, to conquer Kartli-Kakheti at the same time.<sup>12</sup> Javakhishvili sarcastically mentions that Ghukas Karnetzi I, the Catholicos of All Armenians, gave “probably out of fear”, 100,000 manat to Agha Mohammad Khan to cover military expenses during military campaigns to Georgia in 1795”.<sup>13</sup>

Alexander Jambakur-Orbeliani talks about the events in Krtsanisi: “Throughout the whole of Georgia, the enemies of Heraclius II silently wandered and frightened the people. Agha Mohammad Khan comes with two hundred thousand soldiers, run and save yourself. Orbeliani considers Armenians to be the leaders of spreading panic and destabilization. By spreading panic, they deliberately prevented Heraclius II from gathering his troops and practically left the country almost undefended.<sup>14</sup> Despite Heraclius II had little forces, he was able to repel the Shah of Iran, due to his skillful command and selfless struggle of the Georgian warriors. However, the treacherous Armenians – Artyom Ararattsi and Hovsep Behbutov, who were in Tbilisi at that time, release the imprisoned Persian ambassador and inform the Shah that the Georgians had a small army and they must attack immediately. Inspired by all this, Agha Mohammad Khan attacks and defeats Georgians in a fierce battle by looting, destroying houses and Orthodox churches. According to the conclusions of Georgian historians, the defeat in Krtsanisi, which happened because of the “betrayal” of the Armenians caused great damage to Eastern Georgia, as Kartli-Kakheti suffered great losses in material and human potential. The country was in crisis and became easily accessible to the enemy.

It is also interesting that not only the Armenian refugees who had flown from Karabakh, but also a lot of meliks found “temporary” asylum in Kartli-Kakheti, which was devastated by Agha Mohammad Khan.<sup>15</sup> Armenian meliks who had been oppressed in Karabakh turned to Heraclius II for help, who settled them in the territory of Georgia. A small nobility was created, led by the evicted Armenian meliks - Melik Abov, Jimshid and Fridon. In fact, these meliks became Georgian princes. Their legal status was much higher than that of the meliks of the Karabakh Khanate.<sup>16</sup> However, the Armenian meliks Jimshid and Fridon, circumventing the king of Kartli-Kakheti, sent a secret

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<sup>11</sup> Papava and Papava 1956: 85-86.

<sup>12</sup> Kvariani 1919: 12.

<sup>13</sup> Javakhishvili 1919: 31.

<sup>14</sup> Jambakur-Orbeliani 1914: 2-3.

<sup>15</sup> Gugushvili 1949: 79.

<sup>16</sup> Lomsadze 1975: 344.

petition to St. Petersburg on behalf of the meliks of Karabakh. They asked Emperor Paul I to let them settle in Kvemo Kartli and take it under the control of the Russian Empire. Enraged by the Armenian meliks' dishonesty, I.V. Javakhishvili writes: "Undoubtedly, this was completely an unbearable behavior. With the fall of Georgia's independence, Armenians found refuge in the same Georgia, fleeing from forced destruction, but instead of expressing their gratitude they tried to interfere in Georgia's internal affairs, and they wanted to get land and water in our country, accepting Russian subordination and defense".<sup>17</sup>

After all this, Paul I "asked" George XII to grant the Armenian meliks lands on favorable terms. As it is stated "Armenians receive Georgian lands". It is preferable, that the Armenian communities should be in vassalage to Georgia and pay taxes to the king and help in the defense of the country. It can be assumed that in this case the restoration of the Armenian state should have begun at the expense of Georgian lands. The Armenians took advantage of the Russian Empire's increased interest in the Caucasus and tried to get use of it. They tried to prove their loyalty to the empire in all the possible ways, and with the help of the latter to gather their dispersed population in Kartli-Kakhet. In the future it would help to easily seize the Georgian territories and begin the restoration of the Armenian state from here.<sup>18</sup>

As we learn from another Georgian source: "After the death of Heraclius II, the anti-Georgian Armenian circles became more active, since George XII was not as powerful king as his father. The Armenians tried to break Kartli-Kakhetian with the help of the Empire, and settle there, as it was already weakened by the defeat at Krtsanisi. Armenian merchants and clergymen living both in the Empire and in Georgia showed great interest in this matter".<sup>19</sup>

On this occasion, priest P. Karbelashvili published a series of articles in the newspaper "Samshoblo" in August 1916, entitled "Armenians in Georgia" (historical documents), in which he tells about "disloyalty and betrayal of Armenians towards Georgia." The Armenians desired to restore the Armenian kingdom, so they did not help Heraclius II, on the contrary, they contributed to the weakening of Georgia".<sup>20</sup>

Thus, as W. Shubitidze notes: "It can be concluded that the Armenians played an unworthy and unreasonable role in the fall of Georgian statehood. The Armenian circles which had anti-Georgian views, accepted the abolition of the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom with great joy. It was a new opportunity for them to settle Armenians in Kakheti. On this occasion, led by the newly appointed Armenian Catholicos Hovsep Arghutyan, the Armenians who lived in Tbilisi celebrated the fall of the Kartli-Kakheti kingdom in the temple of Zion (with 74 priests and 8 archimandrites) with the presence of numerous Armenians."

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<sup>17</sup> Javakhishvili 1919: 1-34.

<sup>18</sup> Tetvadze, Tetvadze 1998: 53-54.

<sup>19</sup> Javakhishvili 1919: 40-47.

<sup>20</sup> Karbelashvili 1916: 11-18.

According to the prevailing viewpoint in Georgian historiography, the Russian Empire properly appreciated the loyalty of Armenians and settled hundreds of thousands of Armenians on the territory of Georgia, who were expelled from the Ottoman Empire and Iran in the 19th century. Armenians started a demographic annexation of Georgia. The ambition to take over Georgian territories, culture, and history has become stronger as the numbers of the Armenian population had increased in Georgia. This idea of reestablishing the Armenian state at the expense of Georgian territory was therefore strengthened and developed further.

So, in the 20s of the 18th century Georgia took a fatal step by creating an alliance with Russia. Both Ottoman Turkey and Iran were engaged in hostile actions against Georgia, occasionally adopting a rude position. The latter, in order to free itself from the Iranian-Turkish conquerors, pinned his hopes on Russia, considering the latter its real ally. However, the Caspian expedition, which was conditioned by military-political and economic interests and was organized by Russian Empire in 1722, considered its main goal not to liberate Georgia, but to establish its own domination. Georgia was only an appendage to the implementation of this program. The Russian Empire would never have faced its enemies Turkey and Iran, fighting for the liberation of the Georgian people without having any benefit.

Nevertheless, from the events that took place during this historical stage, the Georgian people could not make the right political decision, which became disastrous for the Georgian statehood. The study of the events of the annexation of Eastern Georgia to Russia manifested that if the Armenian people could free themselves from Turkish and Persian tyranny on their own and create their own independent national statehood, this would undoubtedly be the best way to resolve the issue of national liberation. However, a specific historical situation developed in such a way that the Armenian people could not achieve victory and restore their independence on their own.

During the long absence of independent statehood, various parts of the Armenian people found themselves within the borders of neighboring states and were forced to live according to the laws of these states. Therefore, with its rich experience of fighting for its freedom and independence, Armenians came to the firm conviction that it was possible to free themselves from the ruinous domination of the Persian khans and Turkish pashas only with the military help of Russia. This expectation of the Armenian people had a real and solid base. It was undermined by the power of the Russian state, its policy of affirmation and strengthening in Transcaucasia. It was based on into the power of the Russian state, its policy of becoming more stable and powerful in Transcaucasia. If during the 18<sup>th</sup> century the emphasis was on the Armenian statehood, the restoration of Georgia and the strengthening or the establishment of the united Georgian-Armenian Christian state, then in 1801 this policy took a different direction.

The annexation of Eastern Armenia to Russia, which began at the beginning of the 19th century and ended with the Turkmenchay Treaty of February 10, 1828, signed

between Persia and Russia became one of the most remarkable pages in the history of the Armenian people.

Thus, we believe that the study of Armenian-Georgian relations is still relevant and very necessary, in order to understand the political goals of our neighbors in future.

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