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## **MILITARY-POLITICAL CONFRONTATIONS IN THE KHANATES OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN 1768-1774 AND EREKLE II**

From the second half of the 1760s, significant political shifts started in the Khanates of the South Caucasus. This was manifested first by the considerable strengthening of Fatali Khan of Quba and his subjugation-oppression of the neighboring khanates, and then by forming various military-political coalitions against the strengthened khan, in which King Erekle II of Kartli-Kakheti was more or less involved.

As early as 1759, with the help of neighboring Dagestani leaders Fatali Khan of Quba, captured Derbent Khanate bordering to the North [15: 129; 1: 202].<sup>1</sup> Derbent Khanate could not boast of land space and population, but its strategic and economic importance was immense.

Later Fatali Khan turned his forces against Shemakha, aka Shirvan Khanate.<sup>2</sup> However, the success of Quba Khan in this direction was greatly hindered by the help of Hussein Khan of Shaki (1758-1780) to Shemakhians [13: 92]. But Fatali managed to win Hussein Khan over into his camp. Apparently, Fatali Khan put before Hussein Khan the prospect of getting a tempting share in the event of conquering the rich Shirvan Khanate - located between their possessions. In the summer of 1768, as a result of the complete mobilization of its own forces and those of the allies (including Daghestani mercenaries), Shemakha, attacked simultaneously from the west and east, surrendered. The brothers, ruling Shemakha, were captured (subsequently, Muhammad Said Khan was imprisoned in Derbent jail by Fatali Khan. Aghasi-

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<sup>1</sup> Different years are referred to as the date of Derbent capture by Fatali-Khan: 1758 [3: 78], 1760 [10; 6: 12-13], 1765 [7: 378; 8: 250].

<sup>2</sup> The khanate, with Shemakha as capital city, was also called Shirvan Khanate.

Khan, as a younger and more energetic opponent, had his eyes gouged out).<sup>1</sup> According to the agreement, Shirvan Khanate was divided between Fatali Khan and Hussein Khan and Naibs (governors) were appointed by the respective parties to govern each area. Very soon, Fatali Khan ousted Hussein Khan's Naib from Shemakha and took over the entire Shirvan. Thus making Shaki Khan his forever enemy [5: 160; 21: 11-12; 1: 224-225]. On 10 September, 1768, Temir Khamzin – the ruler of Enderey, wrote to Potapov – the commandant of Kizlyar, that a quarrel had broken out between Fatali Khan and Khan of Shaki and the governors appointed by the son of Haji Chalabi (Hussein) had been expelled from Shemakha [19: 121].

Fatali Khan was not satisfied with the conquest of Shemakha Khanate and set his sights on Shaki Khanate. In August or early September, 1768, the Khan of Quba and Derbent proposed to King Erekle II of Kartli-Kakheti and Ibrahim Khan of Karabakh, that each with his army, along with him, attacked Shaki Khanate from all sides.<sup>2</sup> Erekle II, for whom the appearance of an aggressive and dangerously growing state in the vicinity of his kingdom, was unacceptable, did not follow this insidious proposal of Fatali Khan. Ibrahim of Shusha also had an example of Shaki Khan, with whose help Fatali Khan took Shemakha, and then directed his forces against Shaki Khanate itself. Ibrahim Khan really had reasons for concern, as by annexing Shemakha (Shirvan) Khanate, Fatali Khan created an advantageous foothold against the Khanates of Shaki and Karabakh [1: 215]. Although Russian spies reported that they were unaware of the addressees' response to the offer, but subsequent events made it clear that this method of Fatali Khan did not work: he failed to involve either Georgian kingdom or Karabakh khanate in this adventure.

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<sup>1</sup> These stories are narrated in the works of different authors [7: 429; 5: 160; 10; 8: 253; 3: 79-80; 21: 10-11; 15: 130; 1: 217-222]. It should be noted that 1766 [7: 429], and 1767 [5: 160; 10; 3: 79-80] are mentioned as different dates for the taking Shemakha and conquest of the Khanate.

<sup>2</sup> on September 10, 1768 Russian Consulate Official I. Matveev, merchant S. Sharipin from Astrakhan and clerk E. Zamyatin sent to Shirvan to clarify Fatali Khan's plans reported to Russian consul Sulyakov concerning the proposal of Fatali Khan. Document see [2: 160].

Nevertheless, Fatali Khan did not give up his plans against Shaki and for this, he again resorted to the tried and tested path - he started recruiting Dagestani mountaineers against Hussein Khan.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, it was at this time that Shaki Khan asked King Erekle for help. Governor of Astrakhan reported about this request to the State Collegium of Foreign Affairs. It is also mentioned that “after that Erekle sent a man to Fatali Khan, to encourage him reconcile with Shaki Khan, but if he did not agree to that, Erekle would help Hussein Khan, no matter where they would fight each other”.<sup>2</sup> Apparently, in order to give more strength to the menace, King Erekle also prepared an army to be sent to Shaki. This gave relevant result: in the description of the environs of his state, which was supposed to be handed to Count N. Panin, in June 1769, Erekle II noted: when with the help of the Dagestanis, Quba Khan “took Shirvan, he attacked Shaki Khan and defeated him. When we heard about this, we helped Shaki Khan with army, and thanks to our help Quba Khan had to give up his intention he decided to reconciliation and they reconciled.” [16: 359].<sup>3</sup> Consequently, this time King Erekle announced military support to Hussein of Shaki in the event of Fatali Khan’s attack.

Besides Shaki Khan, Ibrahim Khan of Karabakh also asked Erekle II for help in case of Fatali Khan’s aggression. The king also encouraged him to provide appropriate assistance when needed.<sup>4</sup> Thus the political alliance of three rulers - Erekle II, Hussein Khan and Ibrahim Khan was formed, in order to stop the rise of Fatali Khan. The union was also joined by Aghasi Khan – former ruler of Shemakha. At the time, this deposed khan and his loyal supporters had settled on the banks of the Kura river (apparently, within the Karabakh khanate). G. Bogolyubov, the consul of Russia in the city of Anzali, reported on this alliance and its goals on 28 May, 1770: “When Fatali Khan of Derbent took over Shemakha in the last two years and announced his intentions to move further together with the Lezghins, the concerned Khans of Shaki and Karadagh (sic. should be Karabakh - D. M.) called on Erekle to unite and unanimously

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<sup>1</sup> Potapov, the commandant of Kizlyar, reported to the Foreign Ministry about this on September 17, 1768. See the document [19: 122].

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, G. Abdullayev, who refers to the quote from the relevant document, does not indicate the date of the mentioned report, see [2: 72], and we have not yet been able to see in full this document, stored at Russian archives (РГАДА, ф. Перс., д. 16, л. 279).

<sup>3</sup> For the Russian translation of the letter at the time, see [20: 435; 4: 93-97].

<sup>4</sup> РГАДА, ф. Перс., д. 17, л. 44 [2: 72].

demanded that Fatali Khan, although he kept Shamakhi under his subordination, would permit the robbed and expelled previous khan of Shemakha to be its proprietor and that in the case of resistance, the two mentioned [khans] with the common forces and especially Erekle himself, wanted to bring Fatali back within the borders of the old dominion and confiscate something more from them” [17: 270-271]. Thus, the goal of the allies, concerned about the unbridled aggression of Fatali Khan, was to restore the abolished Shamakhi Khanate, and return Aghasi Khan from exile as its ruler. If Fatali Khan agreed to this request, the allies would also agree to leave Shemakha Khanate in a position subordinate to Fatali Khan (of course, with the maintenance of complete internal autonomy), but if Quba Khan turned stubborn, with joint forces they would capture the territories conquered by Fatali Khan, i.e. return Quba Khanate into its former borders.

Meanwhile, conspiracies of the locals against the rule of Fatali Khan did not subside in Shemakha. Behind these conspiracies were the restless Aghasi Khan, on the one hand, and Hussein Khan of Shaki, on the other hand. In the summer of 1769 after suppressing one of the conspiracies, Fatali forced Hussein Khan to swear allegiance to degrading conditions, which also included the obligation to protect the borders of Shemakha Khanate appropriated by Fatali Khan.<sup>1</sup>

By this time, the Russian government had already managed to persuade Erekle II to get involved in the Russian-Ottoman war. Because of this, the king’s activity in the ongoing confrontation between the khans became a matter of concern for Russian diplomacy. It was for this reason that in May of the following year, consul Bogolyubov advised the Council on Foreign Affairs that the Russian imperial court persuade King Erekle not to interfere directly in the confrontation between the neighboring khans and to be satisfied with only moral support for the khans of Shaki and Karabakh. It is noteworthy that at the same time the consul understood perfectly well that the interests of Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom demanded that Fatali Khan not be further strengthened by the conquest of Shaki and Karabakh and he even emphasized this in his letter. In addition, G. Bogolubov believed that the king should care about establishing peace between the Khans, not about kindling enmity [17: 271].

From the above, as well as from the situation of the time, it can be concluded that the advice of the Russian consul was based on two

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<sup>1</sup> This was reported to the Russian Foreign Ministry by Sulyakov - the Russian consul in Salyan. See the document [2: 163].

circumstances: 1. At that time, Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom was an ally of Russia in the war against the Ottomans and its military activity, even formal, within Iran's sphere of influence, could have irritated Karim Khan, neutral in the ongoing war, which was undesirable for Russia. Neutrality of the Iranian ruler was important for Russia under the ongoing war with the Ottomans; 2. Fatali Khan was considered a political friend and economic partner of Russia and St. Petersburg was interested in maintaining his benevolence to Russia. The Ottomans tried very hard to turn the Daghestani and Transcaucasian rulers against Russia. In this regard, any, more or less large-scale action, would have been impossible without Fatali Khan's participation.

Hence, the difficult situation in the region significantly increased Fatali Khan's political weight [15: 132]. King Erekle was well aware, that Fatali Khan was trying to establish himself the name of a reliable ally for Russia, which was accompanied by a certain restriction by Russia on the King's activity against strengthening of the Khan. The desire to undermine Fatali Khan's credibility in the eyes of the Russian government must be explained by the emphasis in Erekle' letter to the Imperial Court during the Russo-Ottoman War that Quba Khan had conquered Shemakha under Ottoman sanctions on the condition that the Khan would reinforce naval fortresses [16: 359]. Presumably, the King's words imply that Fatali should close his ports in the Caspian Sea for Russian warships.<sup>1</sup>

Erekle II placed a bet on the Khan of Karabakh, counterbalance to Quba Khan dangerously ascending in his neighborhood. Fatali Khan was able to more or less annex almost all the Transcaucasian khanates north of the Kura river and also extended his influence to West Caspian Khanates south of the Kura (Javad and Talish or Lankaran Khanates). Karabakh Khanate hindered Fatali Khan's expansionist plans for the other Khanates in the South Caucasus [1: 514]. Therefore, in addition to Shaki and Shirvan, it was necessary for him to conquer Karabakh as well [cf. 8: 253]. But the military-political alliance of King Erekle and Ibrahim Khan posed an insurmountable obstacle to Fatali Khan's plans. Thanks to the support of the Georgian king, Ibrahim Khalil Khan turned his Khanate, located between the lower reaches of the Kura and Araks rivers, into an impregnable fortress inaccessible to Fatali Khan and extended its influence to other neighboring khanates (Ganja, Karadagh). Consequently, Fatali was very hostile to Ibrahim Khan of Karabakh, an ally to the King of Kartli-Kakheti.

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<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to say how true this statement of Erekle II was. It could have been a diplomatic maneuver.

Quba Khan was also very dissatisfied with the fact that King Erekle zealously sought to subjugate some of the Khanates (Ganja, Yerevan, Nakhichevan) south of the Kura.

It was not difficult to see that having neutralized the resistance from the Khan of Shaki, Fatali Khan took up arms against the Khan of Karabakh. As M. Sulyakov – the consul of Russia in Salyan noted in his report, after receiving the oath of allegiance from Hussein Khan, Quba Khan ordered his troops to be ready for a “secret operation”, and this operation most likely meant a campaign against the Karabakh Khanate [2: 163].

Despite warnings from the Russian authorities, Erekle II could not carelessly watch how Fatali Khan’s campaign in Karabakh would end. How important it was for the king to protect Karabakh from Fatali Khan is also evidenced by the fact that in March 1770, when the King of Kartli-Kakheti and his army set off to campaign against the Ottomans in Akhaltsikhe pashalik, he still managed to send his another army of 4,000 to Ibrahim Khan to repel Fatali Khan’s impending attack. According to Erekle II himself, this army consisted of the Armenians, Tatars and a small number of Georgians [16: 546].<sup>1</sup>

The sources have it that Fatali Khan campaigned in Karabakh in early April 1770. On 12 April Bogolubov, the consul of Russia in the city of Anzali, reported to the Russian Foreign Ministry, that Fatali Khan had crossed the Kura and was ravaging the villages of Karabakh with the army of the Lezghins. He even approached the city of Shusha to besiege it. Quba Khan pursued very far-reaching goals. According to consul Bogolubov’s same report, there were rumors that after taking Shusha Fatali Khan was going to continue his way to Tabriz or even directly to Karim-Khan’s domains themselves [16: 566].<sup>2</sup>

For his part, Fatali Khan indignantly wrote to Queen Catherine II that when he sent the troops assembled from various places against the Khan of Karabakh, to help the latter, Erekle II sent his son with the Georgian army (РГАДА, ф. Перс. д.15, л.135) [2: 72].

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<sup>1</sup> In his report to Count N. Panin from 5 April, 1770, Nobleman Mouravov wrote about this assistance provided to Ibrahim Khan by Erekle [20: 216; 16: 555].

<sup>2</sup> G. Abdullayev, quoting a small passage from this letter, points 15 June, 1770, as the date of Bogolubov’s report. Apparently, he did not use the original document, unlike V. Macharadze, who points to the archival data different from Abdullayev’s when publishing main part of the report, where it is stated that the document is the original.

Undoubtedly, the above-mentioned military assistance provided by the King of Kartli-Kakheti was the reason why Fatali Khan's campaign in Karabakh ended in failure. This is why upon his return to Shemakha the unsuccessful Khan, by threat and force took from the locals the money to pay the mercenary army [17: 459]. Military assistance of Erekle II to the khans opposed to Fatali Khan did not end there. The South Caucasian khans, opposed to Quba Khan, had a new ally in the person of the Khan of Avaria. On 15 December, 1773, nobleman Andrei Filatov, informed the Commandant of Kizlyar that Erekle sent his subordinate *Tatars called Borcahly Kazakh* (Борчалы Казак) to help the Khan of Avaria, when the latter, together with the Khans of Shaki and Ganja and Aghasi Khan campaigned against Shemakha. However, the number of these auxiliary troops remained unknown to the Russian officer. Besides, he seems to have heard that the King's son was with them as well.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the above reference G. Abdullayev dates these events to the end of November or December 1773. In his words, the leaders of the Avar army, Bulach Mirza and Muhammad Mirza, were killed on the battlefield during this unsuccessful expedition [1: 520-522].<sup>2</sup>

Here G. Abdullayev makes two important inaccuracies. 1. Date of the battle. It is known that Transcaucasian Khans organized two joint campaigns with the participation of the Avar army to expel Fatali Khan from Shamakhi. In the first campaign the Avars were indeed commanded by Bulach and Muhammad.<sup>3</sup> At that time the Avars were hired by Hussein Khan of Shaki and by November 1771 they had already arrived in Shaki [9: 195; 19: 138-139]. Before February 6, 1772 a decisive battle had already been fought between

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<sup>1</sup> See the relevant document in the book: [2: 167].

<sup>2</sup> A. Murtazaev also dates this battle to 1773 [18: 148]. In the earlier published work, G. Abdullayev dated the campaign, supported by Erekle II, to 1774: "In 1774, the combined forces of the Shaki and Karabakh Khans, the former Aghasi Khan of Shirvan, and a number of feudal lords of southern Dagestan, with the support of Erekle II, came out against Quba Khanate. Severe battles took place at Shemakha springboard. Quba was the winner." [2: 73].

<sup>3</sup> They are often referred to as the sons of the Khan of Avaria [3: 80; 14: 376; 15: 131], also as the brothers of the Khan of Avaria. [5: 160]. However, Muhammad-Mirza was a younger brother of Muhammad-Nutsal IV and the co-ruler of Avar Khanate. And Bulachi (junior) – his son. [12]. The fact that these individuals were the brother and nephew of the Khunzakh ruler is confirmed by primary and more reliable data [9: 195; 19: 138-139].

them and Fatali Khan. On this day - Shamkhal of Tarki Murtazali informed the Governor of Astrakhan about the battle and its consequences [19: 139-140].<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this battle is presumed to have taken place not in 1773, but earlier, in the winter, December-January 1771-1772.

2. The issue of Erekle's military assistance to the Allies. From Nobleman Filatov's above-mentioned letter it is clear that he refers to the second campaign to Shemakha, when Avar Khan Muhammad-Nutsal IV (1735-1774), aka Nursal-Beg the ruler of Khunzakh,<sup>2</sup> also driven by the thirst for revenge, participated in the subsequent campaign to Shemakha with his army. According to Filatov, King Erekle sent part of his army to Avar-Khan, as help. Initially the allies managed to take Shemakha, but later they were defeated by the strengthened army of Fatali Khan. Earlier, the Khan, who was invited to the negotiations in enemy's military camp, was treacherously killed.<sup>3</sup>

Nobleman Filatov's letter does a great service in dating the aforementioned events. It shows that at the time of writing the letter i.e. by 15 December, 1773, the allies had already taken Shemakha, and Fatali Khan had sent a courier to Shamkhal of Tarki to hire Dagestani mercenaries, in order to expel his opponents from Shamakha. Therefore, taking Shemakha away from Fatali Khan with the participation of the troops sent by Erekle is really possible in November or early December 1773 (during the expedition led by Muhammad-Nutsal and not by Bulach and Muhammad), but Fatali Khan may have got Shemakha back in early 1774. Consequently, dating of Avar Khan's expedition to 1774 does not seem justified cf. [15: 132; 2: 73; 1: 522; 11: 107-108].<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On 2 March, 1772, Muhammad-Nutsal-Khan, the ruler of the Avaria, himself wrote to Commandant Parker of Kizlyar,

<sup>2</sup> "Nutsal" was the title of Avar Khans, the variety of which is "Nursal" in Georgian sources. However, it sometimes became a supplement to a proper name. In such cases, in neighboring countries, "Nutsal" was often considered a proper name. P. Butkov also refers to the above-mentioned Nutsal as Mersel-Khan. As for Khunzakh, it was the center of the Avar Khanate and because of this the whole region was referred to by that name.

<sup>3</sup> We get detailed information about these events from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century authors [5: 161; 10: 3: 81].

<sup>4</sup> We also encounter 1773 as a general date for the campaign of the Nutsal of Avaria [14: 376]. P. Butkov incorrectly appropriates the mentioned events to 1772 [8: 254].

It seemed remarkable to G. Abdullayev, that in order to prevent strengthening of Fatali Khan, Erekle II even supported Avar Khan, even though the latter “constantly bothered Georgians with his attacks” [1: 520]. In this case, apparently, it has not been considered that after the second campaign of the Dagestanis to Georgia under the command of Muhammad-Nutsal which ended in failure (at Kvareli fortress, 1755), Nutsal decided to reconcile with Erekle II and later he even received wages from the king [16: 360-361; 20: 437].

It is noteworthy that Muhammad-Nutsal had already been to Djaro-Belokani a year earlier to take revenge on Fatali Khan. At that time due to the lack of food caused by bad harvest, Avar Khan was forced to withdraw most of his accompanying army. So he asked King Erekle for food and auxiliary troops against Quba Khan [20: 491]. Erekle II did not refuse, but he set his own conditions. It became difficult to reach an agreement between the King and the ruler of Khunzakh. Due to the lack of sufficient military forces, Muhammad-Nutsal demanded monetary compensation from Fatali Khan in exchange for the blood of his killed relatives and, in case of refusal, threatened to attack in future [20: 492]. As it turns out from subsequent events, Fatali Khan did not agree to pay the compensation, and Nutsal returned the following year with a large army, in search of revenge. It is noteworthy that Russian military officials in Georgia demanded from Erekle II “not to touch the Persian Khans for any reason” [20: 492]. Presumably because of this situation, King Erekle sent a detachment of Muslim Borchaly Kazakhs against Fatali Khan, so that in this way his participation in the anti-Quba coalition would be less noticeable. However, as we have seen above, even this covert military move by the King did not go unnoticed by Russian intelligence.

Fatali Khan’s revenge on Muhammad-Nutsal in an unacceptable manner gave an additional excuse for the unification to Dagestani leaders, who had already kept eyes on the lands of the neighboring Khanates (Nukha, Quba, Shemakha) of the South Caucasus, against the Quba Khan. Eventually, most of the Dagestani rulers: Muhammad Khan of Kazi-Kumukh (1743-1789); Omar Khan of Avaria (1774-1801 – the son and heir of the murdered Nutsal); Muhammad Tishsiz (toothless), the ruler of Kazanish; Rustam Kadi of Tabasaran and others, gathered around Amir Hamza [15: 133].

In the same 1774 on Gavdushan valley this alliance of the Dagestanis severely defeated Fatali Khan, who lost most of his possessions.

It is incorrect to name Erekle II, who allegedly “opposed Fatali Khan in alliance with the Khans of Karabakh and Shaki“, a member of the union of

Dagestani leaders, united against Fatali Khan [შოდრ. 14: 377]. It should be noted that there is no indication on the basis of which source this conclusion was made. It is noteworthy that the King of Kartli-Kakheti and his allies (the Khans of Shaki and Karabakh) are not at all mentioned when talking about subsequent expeditions against Fatali Khan with the participation of the Avars. Apparently their names were mistakenly associated with a later expedition.

Historical sources do not confirm King Erekle's participation in the Dagestani allied war against Fatali Khan (e.g., the battle of Gavidushan, etc.) after the death of Muhammad Nutsal.

Thus, strengthened Fatali Khan became main rival of Erekle II in the fight for supremacy in the Eastern Caucasus. Therefore, after Fatali Khan became a sole ruler of Shemakha and posed a threat to the Khans of Shaki and Karabakh, King Erekle expressed political support for the latter and even provided military support to Ibrahim Khan, during Fatali Khan's attack on Karabakh. The Georgian king is also believed to be in the alliance of the Nutsal of Avaria and rulers of the South Caucasus, aimed at expelling Fatali Khan from Shemakha. The army sent by King Erekle also participated in the battle that took place at the time, though somehow disguised, because the Russian government called on him to refrain from interfering in the confrontation between the Transcaucasian Khans. But at the same time, participation of Erekle II in the second coalition, formed against Fatali Khan, in which the leading forces were entirely Dagestani rulers, is not observed.

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