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## **RECRUITMENT OF AVARIAN TROOPS BY SHAKI KHAN HUSSEIN IN 1771 AND EREKLE II**

The war having started between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1768 as well as the inclusion of Erekle II, the king of Kartli-Kakheti in this war, that was conditioned by the decision of St. Petersburg having its “subversive” purposes in the South Caucasus and the north-eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire, had more or less significant impact on the political relationships between the rulers of the East Caucasus. The situation was aggravated by the Porta’s appeals to the Caucasian Muslim governors motivating them to defend their faith and join the fight against the “impious” northern enemy. Such appeals from the Sultan himself or the eastern pashas, on the orders of the Sultan, were supported by abundant money given away to the addressees. The political relations between the Caucasian rulers were also rapidly changing as well. The old allies sometimes became enemies towards each other, and sometimes the other way around.

On November 14, 1771, the captain of the Terek army Khasbulat Shamurzin, who was in Russian military service, having returned from Dagestan reported to the commandant of Kizlar, Colonel F. Parker on the basis of the intelligence obtained by him: *“even before my arrival in Avaria, the brother of this khan and his greater son with their people gathered, at the request of the Shaki khan Husein, went to him for help against the Georgian king Erekle, where even now the Lezgins and Tavlinians<sup>1</sup> gather from all places in the mountains. And they say that the Shaki Khan promised the Avar [Khan] upon their arrival to send them 3 thousand rubles of money, and to give [them], and everyone in the future, a sufficient salary, and they will all spend the winter there, and fight the battle in spring.”* From the same report we learn that due to the mentioned, Erekle II turned back from the successful war campaign toward Akhaltsikhe and while recording the report he was already standing with his army “on the borders against

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1 The mountain people (Тавлинцы in Russian sources) living in the northern part of Dagestan were called Tavlins, in contrast to the mountain people of the southern part of Dagestan, who were called by a common name Lezgins).

Hussein Khan". The mercenaries who went from Dagestan to help Shaki Khan were going to winter there, so no significant attacks were expected on this side (i.e. on the borders of Russia – D.M.), added the captain of the Terek army (Gamrekeli 1968: 195-196; Gadzhiyev 1988: 138-139).<sup>1</sup>

It is worth noting that soon events unfolded quite differently from the plan described in the report: Hussein Khan sent his own and mercenary army not to the west, to the borders of the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom, but in the opposite direction to Shamakhi, in order to drive away Fath-Ali Khan (Fatali Khan) of Quba and Derbent, who had captured these lands. And for this reason, the Dagestan mercenaries did not have to winter in Shaki at all, and together with their allies they fought the battle against the army of Fatali Khan in December 1771 or in January of the following year (Merkviladze 2022: 184-185).

It is also worth noting that Erekle II had previously supported Hussein Khan in his confrontation with Khan of Quba. In 1768 having completely conquered Shamakhi, the extremely strengthened Fatali Khan made an attempt to subdue Hussein Khan, who participated in the conspiracy of Shamakhian noblemen intending to be liberated from Fatali Khan's dominance. At this time King Erekle not only rejected Quba Khan's appeal to jointly act against the Shaki Khanate,<sup>2</sup> but he sided with Hussein Khan and forced Fatali-Khan to reconcile with the latter.<sup>3</sup> Erekle II's support to Hussein Khan as well as his military assistance later provided to Karabakh khan Ibrahim (Tsagareli 1891: 108) were conditioned by the King's decision to prevent Fatali Khan's excessive reinforcements in the region (Merkviladze 2022: 177). Later, in the spring of 1770, Hussein Khan (along with Ibrahim Khan) offered the Georgian King to form alliance and applied for his assistance with the expulsion of Fatali Khan from Shirvan (Shamakhi) and the restoration of local power of Aghasi Khan having been deposed. Erekle II was driven by the same desire, but since he was already involved in the war against the Ottomans at that time, he refrained from directly participating in the afore-mentioned plan, although he declared his support and encouraged the Khans of Shaki and Karabakh.<sup>4</sup>

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1 In the collection of documents edited by Gadzhiyev, the entry of record is dated November 13. Translations of Russian-language sources here and below are ours (D.M.)

2 On September 10, 1968, the Russian consul Suliakov was informed about the conspiracy of Shemakhian nobles with Hussein Khan participating in this conspiracy and about the invitation sent by Fatali Khan to the King of Kartli-Kakheti and the Khan of Karabakh against Huseyn Khan. See the document (Abdullayev 1958: 159-160).

3 In the message sent to Graf Panin, Erekle II mentioned: when Fatali-khan "came with Dagestani army and occupied Shirvan. From there he came to Shaki Khan and defeated him. When this case was reported to us, that time we helped Shaki Khan with the army, and due to our help, Khan of Quba lost his desire and he decided to reconcile and they reconciled" (Macharadze 1988:359).

4 See the report of Consul Bogolyubov to the Collegium of Foreign Affairs of Russia

As regards Nursal-Beg of Khunzakh, i.e. Khan (//Nutsal) Mehmed (// Muhammad) IV of Avaria, after his unsuccessful large military campaigns in Georgia,<sup>1</sup> Erekle II had already settled relations with him years before and even found a kind of ally in him. In exchange for the service provided to the King of Kartli-Kakheti the ruler of Khunzakh was appointed the salary by the King: “he wanted to make peace with us, we have reconciled and we give a kind of salary to him” – Erekle II reported to the Russian government (Macharadze 1988: 360-361).

Taking into account the above-mentioned circumstances (the allied relations of King Erekle II with Shaki Khan Hussein and Nursal-Beg, the ruler of Khunzakh as well as the joint campaign of the latter against Fatali-Khan), at a glance it seems as if the report of the captain of Terek army to the commandant of Kizlar did not correspond at all to the political situation of that time. However, at the same time it is also worth noting that waging the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire and dragging the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in this war brought about the salient changes in intra-Caucasian political relations.

Already in October 1769, the first reports appeared, that Ottoman emissaries arrived in Dagestan as well as to Quba Khan in order to engage Dagestan commanders and Fatali-Khan in the ongoing war against Russia.<sup>2</sup> It soon became clear that Sultan Mustafa III received Haji Gerai (Aji Garay), the son of Gazikumukh’s ruler, in his palace, bestowed the title of Pasha upon him<sup>3</sup> and gave him a large sum of money to raise the army of Dagestan people, with whose help he hoped to defend the desolate north-eastern borders of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>4</sup> The similar invitation was

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(Macharadze 1997: 270-271). It should be noted that the said Russian consul advised the collegium of foreign affairs that the Russian imperial court should convince Erekle II not to annoy the (Iranian) lawyer (Kerim Khan) and Fatali Khan, the ruler of the Khanates adjacent to Russia, but despite the king’s own interests (intending to limit Fatali-khan’s strengthening), he should have only declared “discreet support” for the allied khans and refrained from the direct intervention, moreover, he should have taken care to resolve the conflicts between the Khans (Macharadze 1997: 27). This circumstance makes us think that the specified position of Erekle II had to be conditioned by the Russian factor.

1 Emphing the defeat of Nursal-beg’s troops by Erekle II and Teimuraz II near Mchadijwar in the Aragvi Valley in 1754; The unsuccessful attempt of Nursal-Beg to take the fortress of Kvareli by the united army of Dagestan and the army Jar Lezgins in 1755 and the defeat of his army during the last campaign in Georgia in 1758. About the last campaign see: (Orbeliani 1981: 246).

2 Erekle II informed A. Muravyov about it and the latter informed General Tottleben, the commander of the Russian army in Kartli-Kakheti kingdom. see the document (Macharadze 1988: 428).

3 As evidenced by Muravov’s report to Tottleben of April 30, 1770, the Sultan previously granted Haji Gerai the title of Tbilisi Pasha (Macharadze 1988: 575; 128).

4 On January 2, 1770, King Erekle wrote to Muravyov: “Son of Surkhavi Haji Garail was in Constantinople, Sultan gave him a purse of two thousand (money) and bestowed the title of Pasha. He sent a man to Dagestan, called on his brother and the Dagestan army to provide

also sent to the ruler of Khunzakh, who sent a messenger to Erekle II for advice on how to act in such a situation. The king restrained him from the participation in the event.<sup>1</sup>

Haji Gerai along with the other Dagestan leaders died in the famous battle of Aspindza on April 20, 1770.<sup>2</sup> Having taken offence at this fact and in order to take revenge Khan of Gazikumukh - Muhammad (1743-1789) urgently embarked on the attempts to form a large military coalition with the participation of Dagestan's and other Caucasian Khans against the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. Then Nutsal of Khunzakh (Avaria) informed King Erekle of this news and added that he had already responded to the proposal, "that the brotherly and faithful friendship had been established with us and Erekle Khan and we will never break it."<sup>3</sup> However, after the appearance and activation of the Russian army in the South Caucasus, the peculiar hesitations and signs of double game could be observed in Nursal-Beg's actions. He sent his son to the sword-wielding Gazikumukh Khan to avenge the Georgians and justified his conduct before Erekle II by saying that he had learned about Muhammad Gazikumukh Khan's goal to launch the military campaign against Georgia and involving Avaria in this event from his son only after having sent him there and therefore, he responded to Muhammad Khan with a firm refusal.<sup>4</sup> In the tense political situation created in the Caucasus due to the Russian-Ottoman war, Nursal-Beg also made attempt to raise the price for his "loyalty" towards Erekle II and thereby gain new benefits. "When the Sultan demanded to come to Akhaltsikhe with my army through his ambassadors, I sent my envoy to you, who having returned told me the following: "the King declared that if Nutsal wants, he will give him the estate", that's why I gave up my intention to go to Akhaltsikhe," – Nursal-Beg wrote to the King of Kartli-Kakheti (Macharadze 1997: 305). Thus, Nursal-Beg, using a kind of diplomatic language, even demanded from Erekle II to grant him the estate as a source of additional income. Later, in summer of 1771, he called on the

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Ottomans with help. In addition, all the commander men in Dagestan, from the vizier and Akhaltsikhe Pasha, everyone received letters asking for help with armies."(Macharadze 1988: 521).

1 Erekle II wrote Gen. Tottleben on December 27, 1769. See doc. (Macharadze 1988: 492).

2 Although the body of Haji Gerai was not found among those killed, in his letter of May 12, 1770 addressed to N. Panin, Erekle II named Aji Gahrai, the son of Prince Kumukh to whom Sultan himself bestowed the title of Pasha, among the Dagestani "splendid and noble man" killed in the battle, since his horse without a rider was brought to the king: "His death is more evident than he alive, for the reason [that] his saddled horse was brought to us," Erekle added there (Tsagareli 1898: 31).

3 The letter was apparently written on June 4, 1770. See (Macharadze 1997: 305). This letter, along with his own letter, was sent to N. Panini by Erekle II. doc. see (Macharadze 1997: 290).

4 The Russian translation of Nursal-beg's letter to Erekle II was published in V. Macharadze's "Materials" (Macharadze 1997: 305).

Chechens to revolt against Russia. The Commandant of Kizlar, Neimch also reported that Nursal-Beg was recruiting the army to attack Dusheti (probably meaning Tusheti) (Macharadze 1997: 673). It is not surprising that under these circumstances, the extent of trust of King Erekle in Nutsal of Avaria had been significantly diminished.

From September 1770, at the instigation of the Ottomans, on the one hand, and obsessing with the desire for revenge the leaders of Gazikumukh, on the other hand, the Lezgins (the latter had been reconciled with Erekle II at that time), who had settled in Jar-Balakan, launched the attacks on the border lands of Kakheti. This presented the king with the new challenge: to firmly resolve the issue of Jar-Balakani Lezgins, so as to ensure the suppression of attacks in the rear of his kingdom from the most vulnerable side during the hostilities with the Ottomans.<sup>1</sup> Hussein Khan of Shaki was deemed to be a reliable ally of the Jar Lezgins. Occasioned by this fact Erekle II made efforts to establish the allied relations with Fatali Khan of Quba (“to reconcile”), so that it could be hard for Jar Lezgins “to get help and thus, their strength would decrease.”

On November 2, 1770, Erekle II instructed his envoy to Russia, Zaal Orbeliani, to ask the “first Minister” of the Empire (Count Nirita Panini) to mediate between the King of Kartli-Kakheti and Khan of Quba Fatali to resolve the relationships (Macharadze 1997: 485; Tsagareli 1898: 67-68). Erekle II should not have found it difficult to achieve this goal. The Georgian king’s victory at the Battle of Aspindza put an end to Fatali-Khan’s aggressive plans against the Shaki and Karabakh khanates (Macharadze, 1983: 76). Therefore, Quba Khan should have been content if the King of Kartli-Kakheti, whose authority was raised due to the successes achieved in the battle against the Ottomans, had desired to enter into the alliance with him, all the more so, if this bond was directed against any Khan of his concern. Indeed, the new alliance was formed: Quba Khan, faithful to the Russian monarch, sent me a letter, “he decided to confirm the union between us by oath and thus the alliance was established”, – Erakle II wrote to Russian General Sukhotin on August 21, 1771 (Macharadze 1997: 706). “Quba Khan, i.e. Fatali Khan, and Ganja Khan, and we are reconciled on the firm oath”, Erekle wrote in the following letter to General Sukhotin. As regards, who the new coalition was created against, it can be seen in Erekle’s following words: “This Hussein Khan is the enemy of ours and Fatali Khan, and Ganja Khan as well, and he is allied with the Jar Lezgins” (i.e. Jar Lezgins) (Macharadze 1997: 719).

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1 Jar Lezgins “now started enmity with us because of our going to war in Akhaltsikhe and they are supporting the Ottoman with great zeal” and “they are the big reason and helpers for the union of Ottomans and Dagestanis” – wrote King Erekle to Nikita Panin on October 10, 1770 and suggested launching a month joint campaign against Jar Lezgins. See the doc. (Macharadze 1997: 453).

Therefore, the alliance between King Erekle and Fatali Khan, which also includes Ganja Khan Muhammad, was directed against Shaki Khan. The above mentioned letters evidence that Quba Khan and Ganja Khan were planning to go to war against Shaki Khan and, before recruiting their army for this purpose, sent the envoys to King Erekle in Tbilisi (Macharadze 1997: 719), apparently, to determine in what form and extent the king would participate in this event. Based on the mentioned, it can be inferred that another influential political player in the region, Ibrahim Khan of Karabakh, was a reliable ally (“bound by oath”) of Erekle II, although there existed big discontent between Ibrahim Khan, Fatali Khan and Ganja Khan. At the same time, Ibrahim Khan had only a “little friendly relationship” with Hussein Khan (Macharadze 1997: 719). According to the description of political relations between the South Caucasian rulers, it can be concluded that the Karabakh Khan had to take a neutral side in the expected war against Shaki Khan.

In the summer of 1771, General Tottleben’s successor, Russian general Sukhotin reproaches Erekle II with his intention to send 400 warriors to his allies against Shaki Khan and strictly and abusively forbids the King from doing so (Macharadze 1997: 684).<sup>1</sup> It is true, due to this fact, the King no longer sent support to his allied Khans,<sup>2</sup> but it was clear that the former allies – King Erekle and Hussein Khan were already clearly opposed to each other, and the old rivals – Erekle II and Fatali-Khan turned into the allies of each other.

Therefore, Hussein Khan’s invitation of Avarian army for the joint campaign against Kartli-Kakheti was not excluded at all, especially, when, at that time, Erekle II with his army was encamped in Akhaltsikhe. However, as we can see, Khazbulat Shamurzin’s messages failed to materialize. It is difficult to imagine that the secret intelligence obtained on the spot were so confusing for the captain sent to Khundzakh on a special mission. It is quite possible that he was deliberately provided with the incorrect information about the time and direction of launching the campaign. Ad-

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1 Sukhotin assessed the King’s actions as “apostasy” and warned: both the imperial court and I know that you are driven by the desire to glorify your persona and annex new provinces and cynically called on the king to “act in favor of Christianity,” and turn away from his new regional allies, so that the latter can sort things out with each other themselves. In the response letter, Erekle II had to make excuses: I act only against the Lezgins, and as regards others “we will not show evil neighborliness with anyone if they do not show it themselves.” (Macharadze 1997: 704).

2 Erekle II promised that he would not send the promised army to the allies until receiving the Russian general’s relevant permission, for which he still did not lose hope, since, according to him, he was going to send this army only against Lezgins in the Khanate of Hussein (Macharadze 1997: 696). It seems that Erekle failed to obtain permission to help his allies, moreover, he was instructed to resolve the conflict between the Khans. It must be assumed that King did not do anything for this, as it was not in his interests either, although he notified the Russian officials that he did everything to fulfill the task, but still in a vain attempt.

mittedly, this disturbed Erekle II and the King, who was on the campaign against the Ottomans in the region of Akhaltsikhe, was forced to immediately return to his kingdom so as to reinforce its eastern borders and get ready to face the impending threat. On the other hand, the campaign of Shakians and Avarians to Shamakhi was unexpected for Fatali Khan. Despite the success achieved at the initial stage, the mentioned campaign, commanded by Nursal-Beg's brother and son (Bulach and Muhammad-Mirza) from Avars' side, eventually ended in a heavy defeat, and both Avarian commanders were killed on the battlefield.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on this campaign and its results, see (Merkviladze 2022: 184-184).