

*History*

## Georgian Kings Solomon I and Erekle II in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

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**ABSTRACT.** In the history of Georgia the 18<sup>th</sup> century was one of the hardest periods. Fortunately, in the second half of the century two prominent figures came to the royal throne - Erekle II in Eastern Georgia, and Solomon I in Imereti, Western Georgia. In 1762 Erekle II became the king of the unified Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. He spent all his life (1720-1798) struggling against the internal and external enemies. Similar situation was in Western Georgia. In 1751, Solomon I came to the royal throne in Imereti (1734-1784) and inherited disintegrated and fragmented kingdom, empty treasury, population hiding from Turks in the forests, renegade nobles and the Turkish guards fortified in the main fortresses of the kingdom. In 1757-1763, the Turks six times attacked Western Georgia. However the Georgians were defeated only once in the first attack of 1758. Solomon spent his life struggling against the Turk invaders and the treacherous princes, while Erekle had friendly relations with Solomon's opponents. Conflict of interests between Erekle II and Solomon I was often the reason of deterioration of their relations. However, it should be noted that they had never been enemies to each other. Erekle II dreamt of unification of Georgia. © 2019 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

**Key words:** Solomon I, Erekle II, Diplomatic missions, Akhaltsikhe pashalik

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the relationship between the Imereti and Kartli-Kakheti Kingdoms was mainly determined by the relations between Erekle II and Solomon I – two great personalities, great politicians and talented commanders reigning in Georgia in that period: Erekle II in Eastern Georgia and Solomon I in Imereti, Western Georgia. Both fought against the enemies of their Kingdoms and were confident in their action. They were allies in the struggle against the external enemy, but sometimes there was conflict of interests [1:166] that left a definite mark on the history of the country, on its political and

social development. The kings of Eastern Georgia Teimuraz II and Erekle II fought against external enemies, the rebel princes and noblemen all the time and, also, continuously paid attention to the events taking place in Western Georgia, although that region was in different political sphere. The kings of Kartli-Kakheti often acted as defenders of Western Georgia. The kings of Imereti and the princes of Western Georgia were happy for that but not always asked them for help. Kartli-Kakheti kings tried to expand their influence in Western Georgia as an initial condition for unification of Georgia. Therefore, they did not let any political

unit, especially Imereti Kingdom, to become so strong [1:167] to be able to suppress the idea of unification. They tried to maintain balance of power and to prevent the dominance of foreign power there, especially, the dominance of the Turks. Those factors determined the dual action of King Erekle II in relation to Imereti Kingdom. On the one hand, he sometimes supported the rulers or great feuds of Western Georgia who opposed Solomon I and, on the other hand, he often helped Solomon I in the struggle against the Turks.

The reign of two great kings occurred in different circumstances. Erekle II had his father Teimuraz II as faithful partner and supporter. Before Teimuraz II left for Russia as an ambassador, the father and the son fought together against the external and internal enemies. Teimuraz II left his son considerable political and military resources. In 1762, when Erekle II became the king of the unified Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, he was able to resist the Iranian influence. After that, his goal was to return the lands seized by Turkey. The King of Imereti, who inherited a ruined Kingdom, empty treasury, unfaithful subordinates and the Turk guards fortified in his fortresses, was in a completely different position. Based on this, the capabilities of the kings in Western and Eastern Georgia were different.

The famous Russian scientist O. Markova considers that during the 50-60s of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Transcaucasia the most powerful ruler was Erekle II. He was powerful not only with his military forces, but also with his inherent diplomatic talent. He instilled fear and distrust in the neighboring countries, and then acted as an intermediary between them [2:135]. He subjugated the khanate of Ganja, Yerevan and Nakhichevan and received tribute from them. Those territories were considered as the sphere of influence of Iran. Erekle's name was praised in Europe for his active intervention in the affairs of Azerbaijan and Iran. In 1762 Erekle became the king of Kartli-Kakheti. He had the title of "Gurdjistan Wali". He turned

Eastern Georgia into a powerful kingdom. It is noteworthy that Akhaltsikhe Pasha and Solomon accused Erekle of attempting to seize their territories of Akhaltsikhe pashalik. The military successes of Erekle II encouraged the Armenians, Assyrians, Yezidis, Greeks to establish close relationship with Georgia. Joseph Emin, the eminent representative of the Armenian bourgeoisie of India suggested the idea of creating a united Georgian-Armenian state. Kartli-Kakheti political importance increased among the Iraqi and Egyptian Mamluks, in historical Meskheta, Adjara and Lazika [3:1]. Erekle II actively intervened in the internal and external affairs of Imereti. According to the famous historian Mamia Dumbadze, in the 50s-60s of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Erekle II gradually increased his influence in Western Georgia, especially in Imereti Kingdom.

When Solomon I came to the royal throne, he met strong opposition and in 1751-52 he was overthrown. The young king asked Akhaltsikhe Pasha for help and retook his throne. After that, he intensively fought against the rebel noblemen and princes. He expelled Mamia Gurieli from Guria and gave his principality to his brother George [4:636]. Solomon I actively tried to punish other rebellious princes. Although Teimuraz and Erekle helped Solomon to return the throne, Solomon I did not always like the intervention of the kings of Kartli-Kakheti in his affairs, but he did not protest it openly because he knew that only Eastern Georgia could help him in the fight against the Turks. Thus, he did his best to have a good relations with Teimuraz II and Erekle II.

### **Alliance between the Kingdoms of Imereti and Kartli-Kakheti**

In his letter of August 29, 1757, Teimuraz II referred Solomon I as "a reliable and benevolent brother" [5:229] and soon after that in 1758 a defensive alliance about mutual assistance against the external enemy was signed between them in Gori.

Imeretian warriors often fought against the Lezgins invaded in Kartli. In 1759 Solomon actively helped Erekle II in the fight against the Lezgins at Atotsi. Also, in 1760 the Imeretian king greatly helped Kartli-Kakheti in the fight at Ganja, where the troop of 5,000 warriors of Western Georgia fought in support of Erekle [6:414]. However, different attitudes of Imereti and Kartli-Kakheti kings to the Turks had a bad influence on the relationship between the Georgian Kingdoms. Solomon I fought against the Turks, while Erekle II had peaceful relationships with the enemy of Imereti. After the unification of Kartli and Kakheti into a unified kingdom, the attitude of Erekle II towards Imereti King changed. Their relations became quite cool.

In 1765 Erekle II did not allow the Akhaltsikhe Pasha's troops to pass through the territory of Kartli to invade Imereti to punish Solomon. However, in 1766 Solomon did not approve his action, when Erekle II negotiated with the Sultan about the tribute annually sent to him. According to Metropolitan Maxim sent to Russia as the ambassador in 1768, Solomon had not given a permission to Erekle II for such negotiations with Porte [7:16].

In most cases, Erekle II remained neutral in the struggle between the King of Imereti and his disobedient princes, but with his actions it seemed that his sympathy was on the side of Solomon's opponents.

In 1766 Solomon was overthrown again by the the Tuirks, but Erekle II did not help him at the initial stage (he did that later). After returning to throne Solomon began to punish the traitor princes, but Erekle II secretly began to act against it. Having settled the internal problems himself, Solomon I no longer paid attention to the Kartli-Kakheti King. Relations between them gradually escalated. When Solomon I began to struggle with Rostom, the prince of Racha, the latter turned to Erekle II for help.

In the 60-70s the relation between Erekle and Solomon seemed to be all right but later it deteriorated again. However, from May 21 to June 4, 1769, Solomon I was in Tbilisi and worked with Erekle to plan a joint action in the Russo-Turkish War. After the negotiations, Erekle convinced Russia that there was no misunderstanding and disagreement between them and they were going to fight together for the Orthodox faith. But as it appeared soon, it was not the case. They had conflict of interests in regard of the Akhaltsikhe pashalik and also, in relation to Dadiani, the prince of Samegrelo.

The above facts show relation between the Georgian kings Solomon I and Erekle II in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It can be concluded that although they were allies against the external enemy, they were also rivals.

ისტორია

## სოლომონ I და ერეკლე II XVIII ს-ში

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საქართველოს ისტორიაში XVIII საუკუნე ერთ-ერთი უმძიმესი პერიოდი იყო. საბედნიეროდ, საუკუნის მეორე ნახევარში ქვეყანაში ორი გამოჩენილი პიროვნება გამეფდა: აღმოსავლეთ საქართველოში ერეკლე II, ხოლო დასავლეთ საქართველოში, იმერეთში – სოლომონ I. 1762 წელს ერეკლე II ქართლ-კახეთის გაერთიანებული სამეფოს მეფე გახდა. მან მთელი ცხოვრება (1720-1798) შიდა და გარე მტრებთან ბრძოლას შეაღწია. მსგავსი ვითარება იყო დასავლეთ საქართველოშიც. 1751 წელს იმერეთში სოლომონ I (1734-1784) გამეფდა. მას მემკვიდრეობით ერგო დაქუცმაცებულ-დანაწევრებული სამეფო, დაცარიელებული ხაზინა, თურქთაგან ლტოლვილი, ტყეში გახიზნული მოსახლეობა და სამეფოს მთავარ ციხე-სიმაგრეებში გამაგრებული თურქი მეციხოვნეები. 1757-1763 წლებში, ოსმალებმა ექვსჯერ ილაშქრეს დასავლეთ საქართველოში, თუმცა ქართველები მხოლოდ ერთხელ, 1758 წლის პირველ შეტაკებაში დამარცხდნენ. ინტერესთა კონფლიქტს ხშირად გაუმწვევებია ურთიერთობა ერეკლე II-სა და სოლომონ I-ს შორის, თუმცა უნდა აღინიშნოს, რომ ისინი ერთმანეთის მტრები არასოდეს ყოფილან. ერეკლე II საქართველოს გაერთიანებას ესწრაფოდა.

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