

History

Interests of the West European Countries in Georgia in the Context of the Persian-Ottoman International Relations (from the 40s to the 60s of the 16th c.)

Tea Karchava^{*}, Murman Papashvili^{*}, Tea Tsitlanadze^{*}, Andro Gogoladze^{}**

^{}Department of the History of Middle Ages, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia*

*^{**}Institute of World History, University of Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia*

(Presented by Academy Member Liana Melikishvili)

The present paper is based on the European sources provided by Michelle Membre and Anthony Jenkinson who left important information about Georgians. The report of Membre, the Venetian author, who visited Safavid Persia via Georgia, provides descriptive information about Georgian people (life, clothes, housing, equipment, economic status and the situation in the war-ravaged political units, etc), while Jenkinson, the English author, who met Georgians in Persian capital and persian dominions, makes stress on the economic potential and political circumstances of the 16th century Georgian realms. Jenkinson depicts a wide profile of the English trade agents' journeys in the East, their diplomatic flexibility and insight into the essence of political situation providing the analysis of the cause and effect of the success or failure of the prospects/concrete steps. Venetian and English sources disclosed the historical fact that from the 40s to the 60s of the 16th century the political rulers of Georgia were interested in establishing political contacts with the Roman Catholic countries in the general context of the anti-Ottoman sentiment. In the anti-Ottoman plans of the Georgian politicians, the alliance with Habsburg was considered as a vital necessity that could not be compared to their interest in other Protestant states. © 2020 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Venetian merchants, English merchants, Safavid Persia, Europe, Russia, Georgian states, Relations

The struggle of Georgia fragmented into feudal kingdoms against Persia and later against the Ottomans throughout the 16th century [1: 341] caused global reactions in the countries of anti-Ottoman sentiment. The universal idea of Christianity regained sufficient power and Georgia occupied its place in the religious-political struggle against the Ottomans [2: 29]. This fact stipulated appearance of quite interesting European sources

concerning the domestic and foreign policy of Georgia, which are of great importance in terms of the scanty Georgian written sources of that time.

In the 16th century, Europe could either choose the way of confrontation or the way of cooperation with the Ottoman Empire stretching over three continents. The new geographical discoveries increased the economical interest of Western countries striving to find new markets. In the

context of confrontation, it was necessary to create the anti-Ottoman coalitions. In this regard, they considered Safavid Persia as the most relevant partner. As a matter of fact, the military threat from the Ottomans did not turn out strong enough for the West to stand together [3: 207]. On the contrary, while the Habsburgs were constantly confronted with the Ottomans, France entered into alliance with them [4; 5: 177-266; 6: 451-460]. Motivated by self-interests, Venice was changing its policy according to its self-interests, and the English were eager to take over new trade areas and roads in the Mediterranean [7: 205-2015; 8: 396-409]. They penetrated not only the area controlled by the Ottomans but also the Near East leaving interesting information for us. As for Venetians, they knew the Near East better than the others. They had more communication channels and had the access to the Safavids [9: 21-26].

In view of the above facts, it is important to study the up-to-now unknown reports of English Anthony Jenkinson and Venetian Michele Membré and to find out the motives and consequences of their visits to Persia and the Caucasus.

Venetian Michele Membré, a resident of Cyprus, arrived to the court of Shah Tahmasp I (1524-1576) through Georgia in 1539-1540. At first Membré travelled from Caffa to Anaklia and then to Samegrelo, Imereti and the Kingdom of Kartli as a merchant. [10: 14-20]. Great deal of his report is devoted to the description of the Georgian people and the political units of Georgia (life, clothes, housing, equipment, economic status and the situation in the war-ravaged political units). His information turned out very interesting not only for the Venetian rulers but also for Charles V of Habsburg.

As for the second source, we would say that in 1558-1581, before the English East-India Company became the warrant of economic power of the Empire, the "Muscovy Company" representatives paid seven visits to the East, including six visits to Persia. Their reports appeared in Hakluyt's well-

known works [11: 90-140]. The reports provide information on political, diplomatic and economic life not only about Safavid Persia but also about the peoples of the South Caucasus being under the control of that State [12: 94-120]. The historical value of those sources is that they allow us to understand the role and place of Georgia in the international policy of the East and Europe, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other hand. They are also important for us to analyze the current socio-political processes.

The goal of Membré's secret mission was to reach agreement with Shah Tahmasp to attack the Ottomans from the East [13: viii]. In this regard, Venice was quite active as its trade and sea power in the Mediterranean, Adriatic and Aegean was affected by the aggressive policy of the Ottomans [14: 1027-1127]. And the reason of the hostile attitude of Shah Tahmasp to Ottomans was the fact that he lost the territories during their military campaign in 1533-35. The success in that campaign opened the way for the Ottomans to Europe. In 1537 they were already attacking Calabria and Corfu [13: ix]. The close relationship of France with the Ottomans and the defeat of the Fleet of the Holy League (Pope, Spain, Genoa, Venice) in the naval battle of Preveza (1538), left Venice in hopeless situation. Therefore, the Republic tried to ally with Safavids in the East, as far as free traveling and economic gain depended on the Ottomans in the region.

Membré's report is one of the most informative and individual European sources about Persia of the 16th century. Mostly, it describes the daily life of Safavids. As for Georgia, the appearance, the clothes, the trade and communication, settlement and housing and military equipment of Samegrelo-Imereti population are described [10: 14-18]. He describes just the facts, but he does not assess or analyze them. However, the narrative leaves an impression that the Georgians were in some way isolated from European civilization. Since Membré's visit was not an official one to the Georgian

rulers with no special mission, he does not say anything about the role and significance of the Georgian state. In this context, we suppose that while traveling to Persia through Georgia he knew that the Georgian rulers were permanently trying to establish contacts with the West in the past. The fact that during his travelling on the territory of Georgia he masked his real purpose and never unveiled himself assures us that he was aware of the political context. Talking about human trafficking the author disclosed an unfamiliar and most important fact that on the ground of mutual consent the Jewish community used to buy Megrelian children to turn them into Jews [10: 15].

Unlike Membre, Anthony Jenkinson's report clearly describes the English trade agents' journeys, their diplomatic flexibility and insight into the essence of political situation and provides the analysis including the analysis of the cause and effect of success or failure of the prospects/or concrete steps. The details of everyday life and similar things that are prevailing in Membre's reports are insignificant for Jenkinson. He is seeking the ways to obtain precious raw materials at the lowest price for England, the areas for profitable selling of woolen cloth, the trade and economic routes. His reports are distinguished with much more analytical assessments.

The personality of Membre is very interesting as he was the only person who managed to visit Persia incognito so that the enemy was never suspicious of it. And Jenkinson, in order to deliver Queen Elizabeth's letters to Shah, had an audience with Ivan the Terrible and had to offer him his service to receive the permit for traveling to the Caspian Sea through Privolzh'ye. Jenkinson's report clearly shows that Ivan the Terrible was interested in possible economical and political prospects of Moscow in the south Caucasus and in the Caspian region. Moscow, which had good relations with the Safavids, was deemed to be a potential ally in the anti-Ottoman coalition. As for England, Russia considered it as a major trade

partner. The English "Muscovy Company" agents not only carried on the trade but also had diplomatic functions in the country. With the privileges granted by Ivan the Terrible, the English received the permit of free and tax-exempt trade in Russia, and later obtained the right for merchants to travel to Persia and Central Asia through Russia [15:18].

As any English trade agent, Jenkinson was well aware of the economical and political situation. His visit at the court of Shah Tahmasp coincided with the visit of the Ottoman Ambassador (1562) in Qazvin and the decision about Prince Bayezid's assassination. Jenkinson did not miss the intentions of the Ottoman Ambassadors, the results they achieved and their negative attitude to his visit [11: 103-104; 16:92]. According to his report, Venetians seemed to be the main competitors to him at the court of Safavids and he sought the ways to get rid of them, which was not so easy because they were firmly rooted in Tabriz [11: 104]. It is worth noting that Jenkinson was skillfully trying to win Shah's favor portraying the English as the adversaries of the Portuguese [11: 105-106]. He describes the raw materials available in Hereti-Kakheti kingdom, the trade and economic interests towards them and the prospects of winning the Georgian sovereigns' favor. The report is important for noting the interest Shah showed about the political course of European states and Moscow. It's also worth mentioning what Jenkinson thinks about the possible risks in case Georgians try to carry out an independent policy [11: 107-109]. He is well-aware of the fact that Georgian states were forced to subordinate to Persia and Ottoman, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the fact that the Kakheti kingdom had an attempt to ally with Russia to escape that subordination. In our opinion, Jenkinson shared the prudence of the Kakhetian Sovereign and carefully advised him by word of mouth via the mediator to establish contact with Russia. He even taught him the safe ways how to do that. Given the fact that in the 60s of the 16th century Kakheti kingdom established political relations with Russia

and the Georgian ambassadors followed the advice that is mentioned in the report, we can assume that the “Muscovy Company” trade agents played a certain role in establishing that relationship. All this sheds light on the fact that the Georgian Sovereigns were aware of broader international context and had the attempts to take advantage of the situation.

According to Jenkinson, on November 20, 1562, he met the renegade Georgian Prince at the court of Shah. About his identity the researchers have two different viewpoints - some believe that he was Jesse, the son of the Kakhetian king Levan, and the others think that he was the Prince of Kartli – David (Daud-khan). Having trade privileges from Shirwan Shah, Jenkinson had an attempt to meet the king of Georgia on his way back. In both cases the English must have had a contact with the Kakhetian representatives [3: 221-229].

Thus, the diplomatic contacts of the English were bound up with their trade interests. In those days, sericulture was a very popular activity in Kakheti-Hereti kingdom and in Shirwan [17: 309-312]. Supposedly, the Englishmen intended to settle in Kakheti, the economically wealthiest

Kingdom of Georgia [3: 228]. According to the report, Shirwan and Kakheti must have been the first, which tried to establish relationship with Russia. In our opinion, such possibility existed as far as the Safavids had a cooperative relationship with Russia in conditions of the anti-Ottoman alliance before Shah-Abbas [18: 67 -68].

For the Georgians, who tried to use the anti-Ottoman context to maintain contacts with Europe, the political contacts were of higher priority rather than the economic. In that epoch, when the leader of the entire Christian West was the Pope, naturally, the Georgian rulers were striving for relationship with those countries. In the 16th century the reformational peripeteia and the contacts with the Protestant countries were, of course, less interesting for them. And after the Habsburgs became the leader and flagman of united West against the Ottomans, the Georgians gave them the advantage.

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ისტორია

დასავლეთევროპული ქვეყნების ინტერესი საქართველოსადმი სპარსეთ-ოსმალეთის საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების კონტექსტში (XVI ს-ის 40-60-იანი წლები)

თ. ქარჩავა*, მ. პაპაშვილი*, თ. წითლანაძე*, ა. გოგოლაძე**

**ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახ. თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, შუა საუკუნეების ისტორიის კათედრა, თბილისი, საქართველო*

***საქართველოს უნივერსიტეტი, მსოფლიო ისტორიის კათედრა, თბილისი, საქართველო*

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ლ. მელიქიშვილის მიერ)

ნაშრომი ეფუძნება დღემდე უცნობ ევროპულ წყაროებს (მიკვლე მემბრე, ენტონი ჯენკინსონი), რომელთა ავტორებმა დატოვეს საინტერესო ინფორმაცია ქართველების შესახებ. ვენეციელი ავტორის, მიკვლე მემბრეს (რომელმაც იმოგზაურა სეფიანურ სპარსეთში საქართველოს გავლით) რელაციონი დესკრიფციული ხასიათის ინფორმაციას გვაწვდის (ყოფა-ცხოვრება, ჩაცმულობა, საცხოვრისი, აღჭურვილობა, ეკონომიკური მდგომარეობა, ომგამოვლილი პოლიტიკური ერთეულების მძიმე ვითარება), ინგლისელი ავტორის ჯენკინსონის რელაციონი კი, რომელიც შეხვდა ქართველებს სპარსეთის დედაქალაქსა და მის დომინიონებში, ყურადღებას ამახვილებს ქართული სახელმწიფოების ეკონომიკურ პოტენციალსა და პოლიტიკურ ვითარებაზე. რელაციონი ნათლად წარმოაჩენს ინგლისელი სავაჭრო აგენტების მოგზაურობების ფართო პროფილს აღმოსავლეთში, დიპლომატიურ მოქნილობასა და პოლიტიკურ ვითარების არსში წვდომას, რომელიც პერსპექტივების/კონკრეტული ნაბიჯების მარცხისა თუ წარმატების მიზეზ-შედეგობრივი ანალიზით ხასიათდება. მათ საფუძველზე ისტორიის მეცნიერებაში პირველად იქნა გარკვეული, რომ XVI საუკუნის 40-60-იან წლებში ქართველი პოლიტიკური მესვეურები საერთო ანტიოსმალურ კონტექსტში დასავლეთის რომაულ-კათოლიკურ სივრცესთან დაინტერესებულნი იყვნენ პოლიტიკური კონტაქტების დამყარებით და მას არანაირად არ ენაცვებოდა პროტესტანტულ ქვეყნებთან ეკონომიკური კავშირების განვითარება. ქართველი პოლიტიკოსების ანტიოსმალურ გეგმებში ჰაბსბურგებთან მოკავშირეობა სასიცოცხლო აუცილებლობად მიიჩნეოდა ვიდრე პროტესტანტული ქვეყნებისადმი ინტერესი.

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