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Apolon Tabuashvili

**THE ISSUE OF GEORGIAN CAPTIVES IN THE CRIMEA
IN THE 18TH CENTURY***

Dagestani mountaineers were engaged in kidnapping people from eastern Georgia throughout the 16th — 18th centuries. Part of the population kidnapped by the Dagestani mountaineers was dispatched to Istanbul by Turk merchants and part was transported to the North Caucasus, but most often, to the Crimea. In the course of time, the number of Georgian captives for slavery in the Crimea reached several thousand. According to King of Kartl-Kakheti Erekle II, in the 70s of the 18th century, their number made 32 thousand. After the end of the Russo-Ottoman war of 1768—1774, Georgian captives gained their freedom. At the end of 1771, Erekle II sent his envoys to Russia. One of the purposes of this mission was to settle the question of Georgian captives liberated in Crimea. Thanks to direct involvement of King Erekle II and Georgian diplomats, a significant part of Georgian captives managed to return to their homeland. Some of them stayed in Russia that was in the interests of the Russian state. The data on the captives who returned from Crimea to their homeland are reflected in Georgian historical documents.

Key words: Georgia, Crimea, Russo-Turkish war, Captive, Erekle II.

About the author: Apolon Tabuashvili, PhD in History, Associate Professor, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

Contact information: 0128, Georgia, Tbilisi, 1 Ilia Chavchavadze ave, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University; tel.: (+995) 599-588168, e-mail: apolon.tabuashvili@gmail.com.

Аполлон Табуашвили

ВОПРОС О ГРУЗИНСКИХ ПЛЕННИКАХ В КРЫМУ В XVIII В.

На протяжении XVI—XVIII вв. дагестанские горцы занимались похищением людей из Восточной Грузии. Часть населения, похищенного дагестанскими горцами, отправлялась в Османскую империю посредством турецких торговцев, а часть переправляли на Северный Кавказ, но чаще всего в Крым. С течением времени число грузинских пленников, находящихся в Крыму, достигло нескольких тысяч. Согласно данным царя Картли-Кахети Ираклия II, в 70-х годах XVIII в. их число составляло 32 тысячи человек. По окончании русско-турецкой войны 1768—1774 гг. грузинские пленники получили свободу. В конце 1771 г. Ираклий II послал послов в Россию. Одной из целей этой миссии было разрешение вопроса освобожденных в Крыму грузинских пленных. При непосредственном участии царя Ираклия II и грузинских дипломатов значительная часть грузинских пленников сумела вернуться на родину. Часть же из них осталась в России, что входило в интересы Российского государства. Сведения о пленных, вернувшихся из Крыма, отражены в грузинских исторических документах.

Ключевые слова: Грузия, Крым, русско-турецкая война, плен, Ираклий II.

Сведения об авторе: Табуашвили Аполлон, доктор истории, доцент, Тбилисский государственный университет им. И.А. Джавахишвили.

Контактная информация: 0128, Грузия, Тбилиси, пр. И. Чавчавадзе 1, Тбилисский государственный университет им. И.А. Джавахишвили; тел.: (+995) 599-588168, e-mail: apolon.tabuashvili@gmail.com.

In 1461, the Ottomans conquered Trebizond and came close to the border with Georgia from the southwest. Since 1475, when the Crimean Khanate became a vassal of the Ottoman Empire, the

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Ottomans approached Georgia's border from the northwest too. The Ottoman Empire controlled the roads which connected the western and eastern countries with each other. Taking into consideration the large geographical discoveries and other circumstances, the old trade route linking the East and West was broken and a new system of communication was established. As a result, Georgia appeared to have been almost completely cut off from the new international trade routes that had a negative impact on the economic development of the country. In parallel with this, the unified Georgian monarchy fragmented into three kingdoms and principalities.

It was in the interests of the Ottoman state to weaken the economy of the Georgian kingdom, in order to induce local population to participate in captive trade. Indeed, in the 16th — 18th centuries the trade of captured for slavery acquired alarming scales in western Georgia. The Ottoman market was annually supplied by the population from western Georgia. At the same time, the influence of the Ottoman Empire in the North Caucasus increased. After the weakening and disintegration of the Georgian kingdom, economic, cultural and political ties with the peoples of the North Caucasus weakened. From the end of the 16th century, the raids of the Dagestanis started in eastern Georgia. The main purpose of these raids was capturing people. During the 17th century, the settlement of Dagestanis to the eastern part of the Kingdom of Kakheti was observed. In Georgian villages located near the Alazani River, the Dagestani population gradually increased, and in the 20s of the 18th century, the eastern part of Kakheti completely passed into the hands of the Djaro-Belokani agalars (Dumbadze 1973a: 421—428). From now on, the Dagestani inroads on eastern Georgia became more intense. There were cases when Dagestanis attacked eastern Georgia with a large army (Dumbadze 1973b: 627—629). This time the purpose of the Dagestanis inroads was again capturing people. Dagestanis were instigated by the Ottomans. Often the Ottoman sultan sent gifts and money to Dagestan to attack the Georgian provinces (Dumbadze 1973c: 703). Dagestanis, who intruded into eastern Georgia, wintered in the Akhaltsikhe vilayet occupied by the Ottoman Empire.

The population driven away from western Georgia as a result of trading captives was mainly taken to the Ottoman bazaar. Part of the population from the eastern Georgia kidnapped by Dagestani mountaineers with the help of Turkish merchants was also taken to the Ottoman Empire and some captives were sent to the North Caucasus but mostly sent to the Crimea.

As it turns out from the sources, there were thousands of Georgian captives in the Crimea in the second half of the 18th century. There were cases when Georgian captives managed to escape from the Crimea and return to Georgia through Russia. Beginning from the middle of the 18th century, the Russian Empire being in opposition to the Ottomans facilitated the return of Georgian captives to their homeland. By the decree of December 9, 1758, the Russian government sent a special order to the governors of the remote provinces of the empire to facilitate the return of Georgians who had escaped from captivity to their homeland. The order obliged the governors to issue travel passports to former captives without delay, provide with accommodation, etc. (Macharadze 1997: 96). After the acquaintance with thousands of documents in the Russian archives, Professor V. Macharadze stated that the majority of Georgians who had escaped from captivity returned to their homeland (Macharadze 1997: 96). According to his observation, only few passports were issued to those who wish to stay, whereas hundreds of people registered for return to Georgia.

The facts of returning Georgian captives who fled from the Crimea are also reflected in Georgian historical documents. For example, Ioseb Mamatsashvili, in his petition of September 2, 1770, written in the name of Erekle II noted: "... one Javakh was lost in Javakheti and sold to the Crimea, where he was held captive. From there he came to Georgia" (Georgian Law Collection 1981: 164).

The issue of returning Georgian captives to their homeland became particularly urgent in 1771 and later in connection with the Russian-Ottoman war of 1768—1774. As is known, the second

army of Russia occupied the Crimea in 1771, as a result of which Georgian captives in the Crimea gained freedom. Before we consider this issue in detail, we will briefly discuss the issue of the participation of the Georgian kings in the Russian-Ottoman war.

Georgian kings - King of Imereti Solomon I (1752—1784) and King of Kartl-Kakheti Erekle II (King of Kakheti in 1744—1762, King of Kartl-Kakheti in 1762—1798) were involved in Russo-Ottoman war of 1768—1774. Solomon I hoped that with the assistance of the Russian army, the Ottomans would be finally driven out of the country. Erekle II agreed on participation in the war only on terms that Russia would send a certain number of troops to Georgia. With the help of the Russian army Erekle II expected to return Samtskhe-Saatabago occupied by the Ottomans, stop the raids of Daghestani mountaineers and subjugate Djaro-Belokani.

In April 1770, Erekle II together with the commander of the Russian southern corps, General Tottleben marched to seize the Akhaltsikhe vilayet, but in the middle of the way Tottleben changed the course and withdrew his troops. On April 20, 1770, Erekle II completely destroyed the Ottomans and Lezginis who had come to their aid in the battle of Aspindza, but due to Tottleben's treacherous position he was unable to advance further towards Akhaltsikhe. The relationship between General Tottleben and king Erekle became extremely tense. Since 1771, General Sukhotin was appointed the commander of the Russian corps and Tottleben was recalled from Georgia. Sukhotin also refused to accept Erekle's plan, that provided for the expulsion of the Ottomans from Akhaltsikhe, because he were instructed to incite the Georgian kings against the Ottomans and the Russian army had to avoid fighting (Paichadze, Chkhatarashvili 1973: 648—660).

Despite the fact that the king of Kartl-Kakheti did not benefit from the results of the military campaigns of 1770—1771, nevertheless Erekle II decided to send his envoys to Russia at the end of 1771. One of the goals of sending the envoys was to settle the issue of the released Georgian captives in Crimea.

Erekle II did hope to return the Georgian captives to their homeland that is reflected in the documentary material. In the order of Erekle II dated December 7, 1771 addressed to Revaz Amilakhvari (commander of one of the provinces), it is noted: "... when the army of Her Excellency completely took over the Crimea, thirty-two thousand of our captives with their families were liberated and brought out. They need help, this is a great thing to Georgia, and for this purpose His Holiness and Beatitude, Catholicos Anton and probably one of our sons will be sent (to Russia)... " (Javakhishvili 1974: 109-110).

As is seen, after the Russian army entered the Crimea, the king of Kartl-Kakheti did hope that the Georgian captives would return to their homeland and for this he even sent envoys to Russia. According to him, in the Crimea, there were around 32,000 Georgian captives who had gained freedom. In our view, Erekle II must have had an exaggerated opinion about the number of Georgian captives, but undoubtedly their number was several thousand, which is confirmed by various sources mentioned below.

In January 1772, the envoys headed by the son of the King, prince Levan and Catholicos Anton I left Kartl-Kakheti. It must be said here that the only purpose was not only to return captives from the Crimea — the envoys carried with them the message of Erekle II to the Russian government. Erekle II asked to take the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti under protection of the Russian Empire, provide military assistance, etc. Along with other issues, one of the main requests was granting the Georgian captives the right to return to their homeland. The envoys also carried Erekle II's letter dated December 30, 1771 addressed to Catherine II which also concerned Georgian captives: "... since by the will of God and the efforts of Your Majesty (Catherine II – A.P.) many of our captives were freed from the Crimea, we ask Your Majesty to give them the right to return to their country..." (Georgievski Treatise 1983: 59).

On February 5, 1774, Georgian envoys prince Levan and Catholicos-Patriarch Anton II received an official refusal to accept the Kartl-Kakheti Kingdom under the patronage of the Russian Empire and soon they were sent to their homeland. Before returning to Georgia, prince Levan requested to let Georgian captives released in the Crimea go to their homeland, to which members of the Imperial government replied that the issue was solved positively and the relevant order had already been sent (Macharadze 1997: 86).

Despite the fact that the envoys left the capital of the Russian Empire without result, it seems that at least the issue of prisoners was solved positively.

Based on the information protected in the Russian archives, V. Macharadze concludes that in 1760—1770 no village left in Kartl-Kakheti where the captive would not return. The absolute majority of them were peasants. For example, 200 Georgians returned in 1772 (Macharadze 1997: 96).

Professor V. Macharadze, based on archival materials at his disposal, considered that the Russian government allowed Georgian prisoners to return home without any hindrance and even contributed to this matter (Macharadze 1997: 96—98), but it should be noted that there were various circumstances that prevented Georgian prisoners from returning to Georgia. There were also such cases when Russian officials prevented Georgians from returning to their homeland. For example, part of Georgian captives released in Crimea in 1772 was detained by some city commandants and allowed them to go to Georgia only after the intervention of the ambassador to Russia prince Levan (Macharadze, 1997: 97).

Another factor preventing the return of Georgian captives to their homeland was the decision of the Russian government to establish a Georgian settlement. In the 60s of the 18th century, after the construction of the fort at Mozdok, the Russian government started to settle Georgians there. Georgians from Kizlyar and nearby places were settled to Mozdok.

The materials found in the Russian archives of academician N. Berdzenishvili show that the Russian government was more interested in settling Georgian captives who had fled from Kabardia, Chechnya and Dagestan, as well as the Crimea to Mozdok rather than their return to homeland, and often settled them there (Berdzenishvili 1967: 167).

The Georgians who had been in captivity received an opportunity to stay in Russia if they wished. Accordingly, there were also such cases when part of the Georgians refused to return to their homeland at their own will.

Consequently, the Georgian monarch or envoys needed a lot of effort to obtain the right for the liberated Georgian captives to return to their homeland. Hence, the expectation that tens of thousands of captives would return to the country failed to be realized, but a significant part of them managed to return to their homeland.

The Georgian historical documents preserve interesting records about captives returned from the Crimea to Georgia. For example, there are some of them — in 1772 a peasant Giorgi Meunagrishvili in a petition sent to Erekle II stated: "...I was held captive in Crimea for thirteen years, by the grace of God and mercy of Her Excellency great sovereign, thanks to your support I am free ... " (Georgian Law Collection 1981: 216). As is seen, the peasant sold in captivity to the Crimea for his release and return to his homeland thanks the "great sovereign" and the Erekle II. Clearly, under the "great sovereign" is meant Russian Empress. In a court sentence of March 22, 1780, there is an interesting information about Georgian captive who returned to Georgia from the Crimea. The peasant Basila Zeigidze stated: "I was 6 when I got lost and sold to Crimea; I got married there and had got two children, I will go to Georgia, I sent my child with Vasil Takashvili, I will also go" (Georgian Law Collection 1974: 106; NCM. F. Hd, # 14199).

This mentioned document is interesting by the fact that a six-year-old captive managed to preserve his national identity and return to his homeland. Apparently, a Georgian child in captivity grew up surrounded by other Georgian captives.

After the Crimea was annexed by the Russian Empire, Georgian captives not only gained their freedom, but the captives who escaped from Turkey passing through Crimea started to return to Georgia. Material confirming this fact can be found in historical sources. For example, in a petition dated June 16, 1789, Avtandil Babalashvili wrote about his servant: "... Kakhishvili Ivane from Vakhan with his wife and child was kidnapped by Lekhi and sold in Istanbul. There he took his four-year-old son and went to the Crimea. In Russia he came to my brother David" (Georgian Law Collection 1981: 810).

It is interesting to note the fact that the surname Kirimeli (Crimean) and Kirimashvili (son of Crimean) is spread in eastern Georgia. To date, several hundred of people are the bearers of these surnames. In our opinion, the origin of the aforementioned surnames is associated with Georgian captives for slavery in the Crimea. The surname of a part of the Georgian captives who returned from the Crimea became precisely Kirimeli and Kirimelashvili.

As can be seen, a substantial part of the population kidnapped by Dagestani mountaineers from eastern Georgia appeared in Crimea. As a result of the Russo-Turkish war of 1768—1774, the Georgian captives were liberated. Thanks to the efforts of the king of Kartl-Kakheti Erekle II and Georgian envoys, a significant part of them managed to return to their homeland and part of them remained in Russia, which was in the interests of the Russian Empire.

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