

УДК 930

DOI 10.24411/2219-8857-2017-00010

**Apolon Tabuashvili****THE IMPORT OF GUN BARRELS AND THEIR PRICE IN GEORGIA  
IN 17<sup>th</sup> — 18<sup>th</sup> CC.\***

Fire arms were manufactured in Georgia from 17<sup>th</sup> — 18<sup>th</sup> cc. Because of this the fire arms were widely spread among the population. The Georgians actively used guns in the 17<sup>th</sup> and especially 18<sup>th</sup> cc. Furthermore, the production from Tbilisi spread to the neighbouring countries. Flintlock guns consisted of three major details: barrel, flintlock mechanism, and stock. The sources confirm that the flintlock mechanisms and stocks were produced locally. As to the gun barrels, the situation was quite different. Imported gun barrels from Crimea were generally used to produce fire arms in Tbilisi and the rest of Georgia. It was because of Crimean gun barrels that the most commonly used term for a gun in Georgia was “Kirimim”/“Khirimi”. The Ethnology and Modern History Guns Fund of the Georgian National Museum (Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia) also hosts hundreds of guns with imported Crimean gun barrels produced in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. Tbilisi. The import of gun barrels was well documented in the Georgian customs tax tariff, which enables the scholars to establish guns’ prices in those times.

**Key words:** Georgia, Crimea, fire arm, Crimean barrel, Tbilisi, prices.

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**Аполлон Табуашвили****ИМПОРТ РУЖЕЙНЫХ СТВОЛОВ И ИХ ЦЕНА В ГРУЗИИ В XVII—XVIII ВВ.**

Огнестрельное оружие изготовлялось в Грузии с XVII—XVIII вв., в результате чего оно было широко распространено среди населения. В XVII и особенно XVIII веках грузины, в массе, пользовались огнестрельными ружьями. Кроме того, продукция, произведенная в Тбилиси, распространялась в соседние страны. В кремнёвых ружьях были три основных компонента: оружейный ствол, ударно-кремнёвый замок и приклад. Как свидетельствуют источники, в Тбилиси ударно-кремнёвые замки и приклады производились на месте. Что касается оружейных стволов, тут наблюдается другая картина. Обычно для производства огнестрельного оружия в Тбилиси и в остальной части Грузии использовались импортированные оружейные стволы из Крыма. Именно из-за крымских стволов в Грузии самым распространённым названием огнестрельных ружей было «Кирими»/«Хирими». В Оружейном фонде этнологии и новой истории Национального Музея Грузии (Музей Грузии им. Симона Джанашия) хранятся сотни ружей с импортрованными из Крыма оружейными стволами. Импорт оружейных стволов был хорошо документирован в грузинском налоговом тарифе, который позволяет ученым определить цены на оружие в те времена.

**Ключевые слова:** Грузия, Крым, огнестрельное оружие, крымский ствол, Тбилиси, цены.

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\* This work was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (SRNSF), scholarship № YS-2016-92 – “Prices in Feudal Georgia”.

Статья поступила в номер 15 мая 2017 г.

Принята к печати 02 июня 2017 г.

Fire arms were manufactured in Georgia from 17<sup>th</sup> — 18<sup>th</sup> cc. (Javakhishvili 1962: 281—282). This process quite naturally facilitated the spread of use of fire arms among the population. Imported gun barrels were generally used to produce fire arms in Tbilisi and the rest of Georgia (Javakhishvili 1962: 281). But first, in order to understand how valuable and tradable the gun barrels in 17<sup>th</sup> — 18<sup>th</sup> cc. were, it is important to look at how the fire arms were introduced into the Georgian military equipment and then to wider population.

The use of fire arms spread slowly in Georgia and the major reason for this was the lack of production capabilities. Nevertheless, guns and pistols still were finding their way into Georgia. This was possible through either military booty (trophies) as a result of looting or through an ordinary import. But booty and import could not cover those needs which already existed in the population. This is attested in various documents of this epoch. According to the Russian ambassadors' attestation, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the kingdom of Kakheti (which was the most economically prosperous in comparison with other Georgian kingdoms) had only 500 troopers equipped with guns, while the bulk of the troopers — 13 000 — were equipped with shields, sabres, bows, etc. (Belokurov 1889: 171). However, since Kakheti in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was not involved in wars with Iranians and Ottomans like other Georgian kingdoms, there could have been only a limited number of the looted guns.

In that sense examples of kingdoms of Imereti and Kartli are revealing. Along with traditional import, guns acquired as a military booty played a big role in spreading the use of guns in the kingdoms. In this period the sporadic use of Ottoman and Iranian cannons by the Georgians were also attested (Tsurtsunia 2014: 115—116).

The sources confirm that fire arms had significantly increased in numbers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Russian emissaries attested that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Imereti there were several thousand troops equipped with matchlock guns (Tsintsadze 1970: 153, 263).

Interesting information about the military equipment of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century East Georgian population is preserved in Saamilakhvro's (the estate of noble family of Amilakhvari in Shida Kartli) Register. The document gives the description of every inhabitant's military equipment. The register altogether has 901 households with 1326 troopers coming from there. Out of this number 442 troopers (1/3 or 33%) were equipped with guns (Kakabadze 1925: IV—V). It should also be noted that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Georgian army intensified the use of Ottoman and Iranian artillery (Tsurtsunia 2014: 126—130).

As to the 18<sup>th</sup> century the situation had changed completely. Although a historian E. Astvatsaturian claims, without citing any actual source, that 38% of the East Georgian population (kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti) had guns in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Astvatsaturian 1995: 153), Georgian sources of the same period give a different picture. According to various registers from the 18<sup>th</sup> century fire arms were quite widely spread. It is well attested in various censuses of Kakheti's population (Javakhishvili 1967: 7—104, 266—270; NCM. F. Hd, #1603, 1605, 1607, 1608, 1609, 1625, 5186, 6110). According to the names mentioned there, Academician Iv. Javakhishvili dates the register by first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Javakhishvili 1930: 17—18). According to the register, absolute majority of the population had guns. They were unavailable only to the poorest section of peasants. Overall, according to the data from the register, around 80% of Kakheti's population had fire arms in first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. Other military equipment is not mentioned in the register, which presumably means that military operations were carried out without any bows or spears. During hand-to-hand fighting daggers and swords were used. Almost similar situation was in the kingdom of Kartli. According to the document given by Vakhtang VI in

1720, which deals with mobilization military re-equipment of peasants, around 80% of the population had guns (Documents on Georgia's Social History 1940: 185; Tsurtsunia 2014: 131—132).

Military equipment was not mentioned in the registers of censuses conducted in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. In this period those who were liable to military service were obliged to have guns during military campaigns (Georgian Law Collection 1965: 439).

Numerous sources attest to the spread of guns among the population of Kartli-Kakheti in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. Among those sources are the references of Russian officials – captain Iazikov (Tsagareli 1891: 184—185), Mouravov (Tsagareli 1891: 72), and colonel Burnashev (Burnashev 1896: 6—7), as well as the information given by German traveler Jacob Reineggs (Reineggs 2002: 136). According to Iazikov, almost everyone in Kartli-Kakheti possessed a gun and was good at shooting. Similar data is preserved in the other above-mentioned sources.

The same authors confirm that the fire arms were widely spread in West Georgia in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. too. According to the sources, the spread of guns in West Georgia took place only through import. According to Maksime Abashidze's document (dated March 14, 1769) sent to the Russian imperial government: "Imeretians... get guns, swords and bullets from the Ottoman country, Kizilbashi, and Tbilisi" (Macharadze 1988: 301). All this makes us think that the spread of guns in the West Georgia was more limited in comparison to the East Georgia.

As to the artillery, cannons were already produced in Tbilisi in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. (Klimiashvili 1962; Tabuashvili 2010: 146—155; Tsurtsunia 2014: 137—169).

However, this does not mean that every local resident possessed a gun in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. As it was already said, peasants with no land and other poor sections of the peasant population did not have guns. Their number, attested by the above-mentioned data, was between 10—15%.

The spread of fire arms in the population was conditioned by volatile political situation which existed in that period. The 17<sup>th</sup> — 18<sup>th</sup> cc. "Iekianoba" (attacks by Daghestani mountain-dwellers to abduct and pillage Georgian population) and other foreign threats turned a gun into an object of necessity. Widespread use of guns was also facilitated by the fact that they were preserved from generation to generation.

Therefore, the Georgian population actively used guns in the 17<sup>th</sup> and especially 18<sup>th</sup> cc. Furthermore, the production from Tbilisi spread to the neighbouring countries. This points to the fact that the gun barrels and, generally, fire arms, were in a high demand in Georgia.

The Georgians must have obtained the technology to produce guns and pistols from the Ottoman Empire, which was far more advanced in fire arms production. The Constantinople-produced items were of high value. The gun production in Georgia started in the 17<sup>th</sup> c. Initially it must have been matchlock guns. However, probably from the late 17<sup>th</sup> c., flintlock guns were being produced. The Ottoman army moved to the use of flintlock guns from the late 17<sup>th</sup> c. and this was followed with the spread of this type of weapons in the Caucasus. In Georgia, as in the Ottoman Empire and the wider Mediterranean, the earliest type of flintlock guns — miquelet lock — was produced. The miquelet lock was invented in Spain in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. and was widely used in the entire region till the 19<sup>th</sup> c. (Tsurtsunia 2014: 135). In the 18<sup>th</sup> c. a certain version of the flintlock gun was produced in Georgia and during the century the matchlock guns were replaced by flintlock guns.

Guns and pistols production places in Georgia were Tbilisi, Samegrelo, Svaneti (Lambert 1991: 135) and, from the 18<sup>th</sup> c., the Machakhela Gorge (Kakhidze 1974). Surely, one of the major factors in the spread of fire arms were the craftsmen in Tbilisi.

Flintlock guns consisted of three major details: barrel, flintlock mechanism, and stock. Expensive guns were encrusted by gold, silver or other valuable material. The stock was sometimes made of ivory.

Craftsmen of flintlock mechanisms, stocks or generally guns are often mentioned in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. sources. For example, in the purchase dated by 1766 a certain “gunsmith Mkrtycha” is mentioned (Documents for History of Tbilisi 1962: 304); in the document dated by 1767 — “flintlocksmith Arutina” (Documents for History of Tbilisi 1962: 310); in 1774 census register gunsmiths “Avetik”, “Oqroa”, “Martiruzza”, “Gogia”, “Ioane” are mentioned (Javakhishvili 1967: 145—156). In the document dated by 1778, “gunsmith Khechatura”, “gunsmith Marqara”, “gunsmith Mikirticha” are mentioned (Javakhishvili 1974: 140). These are only the names of those gunsmiths, who are accidentally mentioned in the registers and other documents. In reality there should have been a bigger number of gunsmiths. Names of gunsmiths were also mentioned outside Tbilisi. For example, in one of the registers dated by 1781, there was a gunsmith living in Tskhinvali by the name of “Golinashvili flintlocksmith Gaspara” (Tabuashvili 2013: 60). In the Kakheti census of 1801—1802 a certain “flintlocksmith Noné” from village Shilda is mentioned (Bochoridze 1927: 177). In the 1804 census of the Telavi uyezd a “stockmaker” living in Telavi is mentioned (Bochoridze 1927: Tab. #4). Quite naturally gunsmiths must have been in other places as well. As we have seen, flintlock mechanisms and stocks were produced in other regions, beyond Tbilisi, too.

As to the gun barrels, the situation was quite different. According to various sources, it is confirmed that in certain regions of Georgia the gun barrels also were produced. Ethnographic material and the heritage objects of material culture confirm that in Machakhela Gorge, Svaneti, and in Kartli’s Mtianeti gun barrels were indeed produced (Cholokashvili 1953: 198; Kakhidze 1974: 92—109). However, it should also be said that unlike the gunsmiths and makers of flintlock mechanisms and stocks, no mention was made of gun barrel makers in Tbilisi. Most probably, local production of gun barrels was not widespread and could not satisfy the demands of the local market.

As it was mentioned above, in the 17<sup>th</sup> — 18<sup>th</sup> cc. Georgian gunsmiths used imported barrels for gunmaking. Massive import of gun barrels into Georgia is well reflected in the custom tax tariffs made up by Russian officials, which represent the situation that had existed during the reign of Georgian kings Erekle II (king of Kakheti — 1744—1762; king of Kartli-Kakheti — 1762—1798) and Giorgi XII (king of Kartli-Kakheti — 1798—1800). Gun barrels, both “ornamental” and “plain”, were mentioned among the tariffs imposed on goods imported into Tbilisi (Qoiava 1963: 190). It is also worth noting that various goods, which were not massively imported, were not mentioned in the customs tax tariffs. For example, some goods are mentioned as “various small things”. In other words, guns in Tbilisi were mainly produced from imported gun barrels. In my mind, this was not caused by the lack of technological progress because much more difficult fire arms such as “European caliber” cannons were produced in Tbilisi in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. The only explanation is the availability and low prices of the imported goods. Another reason was the high price of iron in Georgia. Local iron did not meet the existing demands and that caused the increase of import, which in turn resulted in higher prices for iron. It seems that in the 18<sup>th</sup> c., as a result of mass import from the traditional places of gunmaking, the local production of gun barrels was not needed. It should be also mentioned that the imported barrels were long-lasting and guns produced from them were subsequently used by several generations.

There are no details provided in the Georgian customs tax tariffs as regards to where from the gun barrels were imported to Tbilisi and other regions of Georgia. Academician Iv. Javakhishvili, who briefly touches upon the issues of gun barrel, and guns in general, import in Georgia, mentioned that “the best barrels were imported from abroad... Guns from the West Europe were finding their way into Georgia with big difficulty as the Ottoman Empire was blocking a direct way.

The weapons probably found their way to Georgia through Crimea, the fact reflected in the folklore. In Khevsuretian-Pshavian poetry a generic term for a gun was Kirimi (Khirimi) (Crimea — *A. T.*) or Kirimuli” (Crimean — *A. T.*) (Javakhishvili 1962: 281). Indeed in the Georgian speech the most commonly used term for a gun was Kirimi (Khirimi). In the folklore a gun was generally mentioned as “Khirimi” (Georgian Folklore 1974: 209, 210, 476; Makalatia 1934: 155).

In that regard quite interesting is a gun which is preserved (under the inventory number of 21—25/1) at the Ethnology and Modern History Guns Fund of the Georgian National Museum (Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia). The gun, as is seen from its inscriptions, initially belonged to the king of Kartli Bakar (1716—1719), which passed the gun as a present to the king of Kartli Konstantine (1722—1732). The gun’s length is 178 centimeters, barrel’s length — 141 centimeters. The barrel’s inner diameter is 18 millimeters. The gun barrel near the flintlock mechanism and the muzzle is decorated with golden geometrical ornaments and Georgian royal crown (Kapianidze 2010: 343—345) (fig. 1). Near the flintlock mechanism, on octahedral gun barrel, which is smooth inside, gunsmith’s pentagonal label is given which points to the gun’s Crimean provenance. On the label, which is gilded with gold, an Arabic inscription is visible: صالح على (“Salih Ali”). On the label’s side edges there are Georgian inscriptions: „თოფო ყირიმო მეფისა ბაქარისაჲო“ (“Oh, gun Kirimi of king Bakar”) and „თოფო იხილე მირთმეუა მეფის კონსტანტინესაჲ“ (“Oh, gun see being presented to king Konstantine”) (fig. 2). Except for the gun barrel, all the other features of the gun point to local Georgian production (Cholokashvili 1953: 200). It is worth noting that the royal gun which was produced in Georgia was called “Kirim” because of the imported gun barrel.

The Crimean gun barrel is also spotted on Giorgi XII’s (1798—1800) (fig. 3) and Solomon II’s (1789-1810) guns (inventory numbers: 43—26/2 and 3240) in the Ethnology and Modern History Guns Fund of the Georgian National Museum (Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia). Giorgi XII’s gun barrel bears a Persian inscription: “Kirim Girei Khan, son of Devlat Girei Khan” (Kapianidze 2010: 348—350). Kirim Girei Khan, son of Devlat II (1699—1702; 1709—1713) ruled over Crimea in 1758—1764 and 1768—1769. Therefore the inscription on the gun’s barrel should have been made in that period. It is difficult to say how Kirim Girei’s gun barrel found a way into Georgia.

Apart from the royal guns, the Ethnology and Modern History Guns Fund of the Georgian National Museum (Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia) also hosts hundreds of guns with imported Crimean gun barrels produced in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. Tbilisi. General typology of the Crimean gun barrels was studied by E. Astvatsaturian. The description of the gun barrel is as follows: some gun barrels are mainly octahedral in form, while others have smooth surface. The guns are decorated with plants and geometric ornaments. Most of the Crimean barrels have pentagonal gunsmith labels. Sometimes the gun barrels have round labels and various Arabic inscriptions (Astvatsaturian 1995: 38-39). Most of the guns preserved at the Georgian National Museum have similar inscriptions. For instance, the gun barrel (fig. 4) with the inventory number 12—26/3 has pentagonal label with inscription عمل (“made by”) and the initials of the gunsmith (fig. 5).

It should be mentioned that there were cases when guns or gun barrels were imported from Daghestan, Constantinople, Hungary, etc. Therefore, guns produced from the the gun barrels imported from Daghestan were called “Mustafa” (based on the gunsmith’s name); guns produced in Constantinople — “gun Stamboli” ; Hungarian guns and arms produced from Hungarian gun barrels — “Mazhari” (Ethnographic dictionary 2011: 592—595; Kapianidze 2010: 343, 359). Among the above given gun names, the most widely spread was “Kirim/Khirimi”. As is seen, Georgian gunsmiths chose gun barrels produced in Crimea from Damascus metal in order to create fire arms. Even European fire arms and gun barrels entered Georgia via the Crimean peninsula.

In this period not only Georgia, but other neighbouring territories too were getting Crimean guns. This is well attested by the French consul Peysonelle visiting Crimea in the 1750s (Peysonelle 1974: 194).

As we see, the import of Crimean guns to Georgia in 17<sup>th</sup> — 18<sup>th</sup> cc. was so large that a special tax tariff was created at Tbilisi customs, while the words “Kirimi”, “Khirimi” were synonymous to gun.

The available information enables us to establish an approximate price paid for the Crimean gun barrels, although, we will touch upon the gun prices in general in Georgia at first. Prices for fire arms as well as other military equipment were different. Members of the royal family and the nobility, based on their economic potential, were armed with expensive guns and pistols or daggers, swords and sabres. Expensive weapons were either imported or of local production and they were encrusted with gold, silver, ivory or other valuables. This kind of guns were called “engraved guns”. Peasants and poor sections of the population were mainly armed with inexpensive non-engraved locally made guns.

According to the description of Erekle II’s property, which was compiled around 1797, the king’s “French gun” was sold for 10 tumani (One tumani was equal to 10 minaltuni, one minaltuni comprised of five abazi, while one abazi was equal to four shauri) (Materials for Economic History 1955: 275—276). According to one of the documents published in second half of 18<sup>th</sup> c., a gun produced in Constantinople had a price of 5—6 tumani (Georgian Law Collection 1985: 296). Bezhan Amilakhvari, Georgia noble, sold his gun imported from Russia for eight tumani. It is also known from the same document that eight tumani equaled the price of eight oxen (Materials for Economic History 1938: 81—83).

The above examples are about the highest circles of the population. In the lower strata of the population the widely spread weapons were much cheaper. Indeed, in several documents dating from the 1740s the price for a gun was two minaltuni (Materials for Economic History of Georgia 1938: 1—2, 3—4). In this period Tbilisi mint produced Iranian occupation coins which were spread in East Georgia. In the 1740s abazi usually weighed 4,6—5 grams (Dundua, Dundua 2015: 78—88). For two minaltuni, the price of the commonly used gun, one could buy a cow or 250 kg. of wheat or three inexpensive *chokhas* (Georgian national suit). Gun barrels had to cost around half of that price.

According to the Georgian customs tax tariff, which was established in the early 19<sup>th</sup> c., there are cases of importing “ornamental” and “plain” gun barrels. Both types of the gun barrels had a customs tax of 22,5 kopecks (Qoiava 1963: 190), which equals one abazi and half shauri. In this period, import dues usually were taxed by 10%. Therefore, the market price for a gun barrel was two minaltuni, one abazi and one shauri. By the end of 18<sup>th</sup> c., in comparison with the 1740s, weight of abazi had significantly reduced. The weight of abazi coined in Tbilisi mint from 1760s to the end 18<sup>th</sup> c. was 2,9 gr. (Dundua, Dundua 2015: 107—109, 115—116). Therefore, at that time, one Crimean gun barrel equaled approximately 100-140 kg. of wheat.

Thus, large quantities of gun barrels were imported from Crimea to Georgia in 17<sup>th</sup> — 18<sup>th</sup> cc. Their prices were quite adequate, which facilitated their spread and use across the country. It was because of Crimean gun barrels that the Georgian folklore preserved terms like “Kirimi”/“Khirimi”.

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**Fig. 1. Gun of the Georgian king Bakar. Guns Fund of the Georgian National Museum (Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia), inventory numbers: 21-25/1.**



**Fig. 2. Label and Georgian Inscriptions of the king Bakar's Gun Barrel. Guns Fund of the Georgian National Museum (Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia), inventory numbers: 21-25/1.**





**Fig. 3. King of Kartli-Kakheti Giorgi XII's Gun. Guns Fund of the Georgian National Museum (Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia), inventory numbers: 43-26/2.**



**Fig. 4. Gun Produced in Tbilisi with Crimean Barrel. Guns Fund of the Georgian National Museum (Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia), inventory numbers: 12-26/3.**



**Fig. 5. Label of Gun Barrel Produced in Tbilisi. Guns Fund of the Georgian National Museum (Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia), inventory numbers: 12-26/3.**