

From the History of Georgian-German Cultural and Political Relationship: Prince Erekle in Berlin*

Giorgi Kavtaradze

Ilia State University, Georgian-European Higher Education Institution, Tbilisi, Georgia

Georgian kings and princes were trying to establish ties and to develop relationships with European monarchies. In times of cultural, religious, demographic crisis, the Catholic missions sent by the Pope, and Russian ambassadors hold out hope to the Bagratons. In such circumstances, Georgians became closer to Europeans. The Capuchins, the Theatines, Jesuit monks were honored guests and members of the royal retinue in the Georgian Kingdoms-Principedoms. Thanks to them, in XVII-XVIII centuries, were brought up such Georgians thinkers as: Vakhushti Batonishvili, Beri Egnatashvili, Sulokhan-Saba Orbeliani, Vakhtang VI, Teimuraz II, daughter of Vakhtang VI, Tamar (mother of King Erekle II), etc. In addition, at the royal courts of Russia and Persia, it became fashionable to send their Princes to Europe, in order to get an education. The best example of this is Peter the Great and Nader Shah's son—known as Baron Semlin. From XVIII century, in the history of Georgian-German relations, there are authentic sources about Georgians' stay in Germany. Among the sources, if taking them chronologically, the oldest is about military education of Prince Erekle. The following sources are about visits of other Georgian Princes to Germany. The next sources tell about the military campaign of Georgian Hussars regiment, in whose ranks poet Davit Guramishvili was fighting. Among the above-mentioned sources, in the Georgian historiography, the issue of Davit Guramishvili has been well researched, but the same cannot be said of King Erekle II.

Keywords: biography, historiography, international relations, the history of Europe

Introduction

Information about activities of Georgians in Germany until the XVIII century is veiled in mystery. Georgian culture and civilization suffered stagnation in parallel with the development of European Renaissance in the Early Modern period. After the collapse of unified Georgian kingdom, small kingdoms—principalities soon became targets for expansions of southern aggressor countries in Caucasus region. Domination of Islamic empires brought despair to Caucasian Christians. Georgian kings—rulers spared no effort to establish relations with European monarchs. In time of cultural, religious and demographic crisis Bagrationi pinned their faith on Catholics missions sent by the Pope and ambassadors of Russia. In such conditions Georgians got closer to Europeans. Capuchin, Theatin, Jesuits monks became honorary guests of the royal palace of Georgian kings and became members of the retinue. Thanks to them, in XVII-XVIII following Georgian thinkers were brought up: Vakhushti Batonishvili, Beri Egnatashvili, Sulokhan-Saba Orbeliani, Vakhtang VI, Teimurazi II, daughter of Vakhtani—Tamar (Erekle II's mother) and others. Many individuals with European level of education were

* This work was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (SRNSF) [grant number HE 15-021].

Giorgi Kavtaradze, Dr., Invited Researcher, Ilia State University; Associate Professor, Georgian-European Higher Education Institution, Tbilisi, Georgia.

brought together at the royal court of Vakhtang VI. Geographical horizons of Georgians in the Kingdom of Kartli has been widening gradually, they had more knowledge of Europe and European countries. In this regard, diplomatic missions sent to France in 1713 under Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani following orders of the King of Kartli, Vakhtang VI, have a special place in Georgian travel literature. Georgian fabulist, diplomat, lexicologist and clergyman had thoroughly described adventures of the journey from Tbilisi to Paris.¹

Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani went through the Black and Mediterranean seas and travelled all over the Ottoman Empire, Italy and France. He has visited Rome, Istanbul, Marseille, Paris and other cities. However, the route of Georgian traveler was not the territory of modern Germany. When, in 1716 Sulkhan-Saba returned to his homeland, he had brought even more information about European civilization. In addition, it became popular for royal courts of Russia and Persia to send their princes to Europe in order for them to get education. The best examples are: Peter the Great, and the son of Nader Shah, known as Joseph von Semlin.

From the XVIII century in the history of German-Georgian relations, we already have authentic sources about Georgians being in Germany. Among them, the oldest chronologically, is that associated with king Erekle's military education. Subsequently visits of other Georgian princes. Later, the campaign of Georgian hussar regiment in the ranks of which fought poet David Guramishvili. From this list, activities of Davit Guramishvili are well studied² in Georgian historiography, which we can not say about Erekle II. So, at this stage, our attention is concentrated on studying the work and activities of the later in Germany.

The King of Kartli-Kakheti, Erekle II, is known in the German literature as "Prince Heraclius", which is associated with the name of a God-like hero in the Greek mythology. During the life of his father, the king of Kartli, Teimuraz II, Erekle got known as a commander fighting for Christianity in the Caucasus. His battles had great resonance in the press and literature at that time. Later, after the death of Teimuraz, when Erekle united Kartli-Kakheti into one kingdom, his name "Prince Herakle" [Prince Erekle] was mentioned even more frequently in English, French, and German-language newspaper articles and literature. Among heroic notices about Erekle, there is one interesting fact that we do not have any mentions about in Georgian historical sources—it is about Erekle's journey to Europe and his activities at that time.

In German press and literature it was reported that Prince Erekle got educated in Berlin in his youth. In Georgian historiography we first encounter this report in Mamia Dumbadze's work³. However, the author only names the fact and indicates Armenian historian A. Ioanisian as a source of this information.

German philosopher Steffi Chotiwari-Jünger begins her popular work "Georgians in Berlin", with Erekle II, in the newspaper published in Berlin in 1767, where she writes about a popular rumour story of Georgian king's incognito visits to Europe. The German scientist's article had a following tagline: "The visit of the first Georgian (unverified) to Berlin".⁴

Georgian philologist Elene Gogiashvili studied the work "Kurze Geschichte des Prinzen Heraclius Und des gegenwärtigen Zustandes von Georgien"⁵ and pointed out: "I think the reference to Erekle II's stay in

¹ Orbeliani 1940: Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, Travel to Europe, Solomon Iordanashvili's first edition, Tbilisi, 1940.

² Asatiani 1949: Levan Asatiani, David Guramishvili—Participants of War with Prussians, Georgian Writing, Tbilisi, 1949, pp. 285-293.; Kubaneishvili 1955: S. Kubaneishvili, David Guramishvili in Georgian Hussar Regiment, Tbilisi, 1955.

³ Dumbadze 1973: Mamia Dumbadze, Kartli-Kakheti's foreign and domestic situation in the 60's of XVIII c., the essays on Georgian history, Volume 4, Tbilisi, 1973, p. 633.

⁴ Chotiwari-Jünger 2001: Steffi Chotiwari-Jünger, Georgians in Berlin, Tbilisi, 2001, p. 5.

⁵ Henrichs 1793: Herman Henrichs, Kurze Geschichte des Prinzen Heraclius Und des gegenwärtigen Zustandes von Georgien, Flensburg und Leipzig in der Kortenschen Buchhandlung, 1793.

Europe, no matter how imprecise it is, is still important in researching the history of public opinion in the 18th century. The German author's emphasis on European education of Erekle II has been used to showcase his superiority, in contrast to the other Eastern rulers."⁶ Why does the author of the thesis consider the original German source to be inaccurate? The article does not explain that. Also, in the original German source there is no mention of Erekle II's confrontation with any of eastern rulers. Consequently, the conclusion is unclear as well.

It is interesting that all three researchers: Mamia Dumbadze, Steffi Chotiwari-Jünger and Elene Gogiashvili interpret Erekle II's presence in Germany with different historical information. The first author, who was a historian, did not have access to German sources and, consequently, used the fact that was widespread in Armenian historiography without any criticism. Modern female researchers are philologists by profession and have not studied the issue using historical, research methodology. Ms. Steffi does not use Hermann Heinrich's work, and Ms. Elene doesn't add any other German or Georgian historical sources.

Hermann Heinrichs is considered to be the publisher of the "Prince Hercules and brief history of contemporary state of Georgia"—a German-language historical work, written at Erekle II's time. However, the identity of this person is not clear neither in German nor in Georgian historiography. In the introduction to the thesis, the publisher notes that the author of the work on Erekle II is Count Jeka, known under a publishing name of Elias Habesk. Under the latter pseudonym, he is considered by both German⁷ and Georgian⁸ historiography as "Jacob Reineggs"⁹. He, who has, for some time, served on high positions at Erekle II's Royal Court. Hence, this statement about Erekle II's stay in Germany is authentic. In addition, as mentioned in the work, prince Erekle got military education in Europe, specifically in Germany. To reinforce this view, two more main arguments can be stated: (1) During his reign, Erekle had carried out a number of European reforms; (2) In the daily life of the ruling circles of Kartl-Kakheti and Caucasus region in general, receiving education in Europe became popular, especially starting from Russian Emperor Peter the Great, and the son of Teimuraz II could not have been left behind that trend.

Now, the main issue of our research is not whether Erekle was in Europe for some time, but when did Erekle travel to Berlin to get military education? Unfortunately, the German author does not directly provide us with such information. Therefore, the question should be sought in the context of the information given in the text.

To clarify the issue German author names two important facts:

(1) Erekle had traveled to Europe in his youth, "the prince [Erekle], which has been gifted from the very birth with a great mind for big plans, restlessness caused by wisdom, agility, sharp mind and boundless curiosity, sturdy physique and good health, felt from the very young age that Georgia couldn't give enough opportunities for his talent, courage and mind. His father [Teimuraz II] was less concerned about his education and preferred spending days doing nothing. That's why he decided to travel to Europe and get all possible

⁶ Gogiashvili 2008: Elene Gogiashvili, Evaluation of the Ruler of the "Far Country" in the 18th Century German Travel Literature: Erekle II, Meskheti X, Tbilisi 2008, p. 13.

⁷ Rohrbacher 2008: Heinrich Rohrbacher Georgien: Bibliographie des deutschsprachigen Schrifttums, Wiesbaden, 2008, 519 s.

⁸ Kandelaki, Reisner 2008: Dali Kandelaki, E. Rissner, Prince Erekle's Life and a Brief History of Modern Georgia, II Scientific Conference of the Faculty of Humanities of Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University dedicated to 120th anniversary of Shalva Nutsubidze, Materials, Tbilisi, 2008, p. 187.

⁹ It should be noted that "Jacob Reineggs" is also a pseudonym of Christian Rudolf Ehlich, a secret German diplomat who worked in the XVIII century.

knowledge there. He paid special attention to the forms of governance of different nations and got to know the means to reinforce governance. After that, he devoted time to military science. Being dissatisfied, in order to get theoretical knowledge in this field, he went to Berlin incognito and became an ordinary soldier so he could get to practice all the necessary tasks as a low military rank soldier in Prussia's military school, which he thought was the best."¹⁰

(2) Prince Erekle has taken part in King of Prussia, Frederick the Great's battles against Archduchess of Austria Queen of Hungary and Croatia Maria Teresa: "His [Erekles] behavior as a garrison member, as well as in military campaigns of the King of Prussia [Frederick the Great] against Maria Teresa was so remarkable that he was given high rank and in the end, the king has appointed him as a commander of infantry. After that the prince has revealed his identity to the king, to which the king has expressed great respect and courtesy. [Erekle] shortly thereafter, decided to return to the homeland: After he has developed [Kartli-Kakheti] complete reform plan and was only waiting for favorable circumstances to carry them out."¹¹

If we analyse the above information, then it will not be difficult to determine the period of Erekle's traveling to Europe. Two long wars between Friedrich the Great and Maria Theresa to gain influence over Silesian territory are known to history. The First Silesian War were in 1740-1742. Second Silesian battles in 1745-1747. If we use method of exclusion, Erekle was in Georgia during the Second Silesian battle, and this is what Georgian historians of Erekle's time tell us about. Therefore, we can cross out this period from Erekle's journey to Europe. There is no information in Georgian sources about Erekle at the time of First Silesian War. Moreover, when Nader Shah took the Prince to India as part of military campaign, and then came back in 1739, he was still 18-19 years old. From this period until 1742 it seems that Erekle does not appear in Georgia. Consequently, we should assume that the Georgian Prince took part in the First Silesian War against Maria Theresa being part of Friedrich the Greats Army.

Although Georgian historical sources don't provide information about Erekle's European education, this information is not denied either. The fact that there is no mentioning of the hero king's travelling to Europe in two of the most important historical works: First—Papuna Orbeliani's "Story of Kartli"¹² and second—"The reign of Irakli II"¹³ is not surprising because Georgian prince went to Europe secretly, "incognito", and dominating political forces of the Caucasus shouldn't have known about it. It is noteworthy that before Erekle, Georgian historical sources use the term "to run away" when talking about Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's "Travel to Europe" and his diplomatic mission to French Royal Court. In the troublesome new modern time it was not easy to travel to Europe due to the influence of Muslim empires. Besides that, it was related to economic and political difficulties. Both above mentioned narratives about Erekle II belong to historiography of royal court: Papuna Orbeliani writes almost nothing about Erekle's youth.

The author's first mentioning of Erekle was in 1745, when Erekle received the reign of Kakheti from Nader Shah. He is rarely mentioned in later periods as well. Second historical source mainly describes Erekle's

¹⁰ Heinrichs 1793: Herman Heinrichs, *Kurze Geschichte des Prinzen Heraclius Und des gegenwärtigen Zustandes von Georgien*, Flensburg und Leipzig in der Kortenschen Buchhandlung, 1793. 29-30 s.

¹¹ Heinrichs 1793: Herman Heinrichs, *Kurze Geschichte des Prinzen Heraclius Und des gegenwärtigen Zustandes von Georgien*, Flensburg und Leipzig in der Kortenschen Buchhandlung, 1793. 30 s.

¹² Orbeliani 1981: Papuna Orbeliani, *Story Kartlisa*, text was formed, introduction, dictionary and search added by Tsagareishvili, Tbilisi, 1981.

¹³ Kherkheulidze 1989: Oman Kherkheulidze, *the reign of Irakli II*, the text was prepared for publication, examined, dictionary and search added by Lela Mikiashvili, Tbilisi, 1989.

military history. Both of the works contain not that much information for Erekle's biography. It should be noted here that after the death of Erekle II, his friend, diplomat and lawyer Solomon Leonidze did not mention the words of Friedrich the Great by mere accident: "It was written about Friedrich the Great: I am in Europe and in Asia there is Invincible Hercules, King of Georgian Georgia."¹⁴ Which, in itself, remarks already existing Georgian-German relations.

In conclusion, we can say that German Historical work of Erekle II's time is an authentic document that contains extremely important information about Georgian Hero King, that can't be found in Georgian sources. Thus, this statement enriches not only the identity of Erekle II but also the history study of XVIII century Georgia.

References

- Asatiani, L. (1942). *David Guramishvili—Participants of War with Prussians* (Vol. 24, pp. 285-293). Tbilisi: Georgian Writing.
- Chotiwari-Jünger, S. (2001). *Georgians in Berlin* (pp. 1-68). Tbilisi: The National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.
- Dumbadze, M. (1973). *Kartl-Kakheti's foreign and domestic situation in the 60's of XVIII c.* (Vol. 4, pp. 1-633). Tbilisi: the essays on Georgian history.
- Gogiashvili, E. (2008). *Evaluation of the ruler of the "Far Country" in the 18th century German Travel Literature: Erekle II (Meskheta X)*. Tbilisi.
- Henrichs, H. (1793). *Kurze Geschichte des Prinzen Heraclius Und des gegenwärtigen Zustandes von Georgien*. Flensburg und Leipzig in der Kortenschen Buchhandlung.
- Kandelaki, D., & Reisner, E. (2008). *Prince Erekle's life and a brief history of modern Georgia*. Tbilisi: II Scientific Conference of the Faculty of Humanities of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University dedicated to 120th anniversary of Shalva Nutsubidze, Materials.
- Kherkheulidze, O. (1989). *The reign of Irakli II* (The text was prepared for publication, examined, dictionary and search added by L. Mikiashvili (Ed.)). Tbilisi.
- Kubaneishvili, S. (1955). *David Guramishvili in Georgian Hussar Regiment* (Vol. 4, pp. 247-254). Tbilisi: Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR.
- Orbeliani, P. (1981). *Story Kartlisa*, text was formed, introduction, dictionary and search added by Tsagareishvili (Ed.), Tbilisi.
- Orbeliani, S. S. (1940). *Travel to Europe*. In S. Iordanashvili (Ed.), (XV, pp. 1-227). Tbilisi: Federation.
- Rohrbacher, H. (2008). *Georgien: Bibliographie des deutschsprachigen Schrifttums*. Wiesbaden.

¹⁴ According to the manuscript stored in the State Library of Berlin (Ms. or quart. 345).