UNKNOWN ANATOMY OF GEORGIAN DIPLOMATIC ASSASSINATIONS

Abstract. Current research is dedicated to the unstudied event of the Georgian diplomacy in the 80-ies of the XVIII century – unknown death of Capuchin ambassadors Domenico and Mauro Veronelli sent to Europe by Erekle II, the king of Kartli-Kakheti. Instruction (dated: 1782) of Catharine II confirms that Imperial Court of St. Petersburg was the initiator and interested force to disrupt the Ambassade sent to the Emperor of Austria by Erekle II. Based on the analysis of the primary sources preserved in the archives of Austria and Italy and the background political events, the current article reviews the preconditions and arguments unequivocally proving the assassinations of Erekle’s ambassadors and indicating that referred assassinations were ordered by the Imperial Court of Russia.

Keywords: Erekle the Second, the Empire of Austria, the Russian Empire; the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti; Vienna, Maurus a Verona; Padre Domenico.

Introduction

80-ies of the XVIII century turned out to be rather busy in the history of Georgian diplomacy. During 1781-1782 Erekle sends Capuchin missionaries to Europe with special task twice. The first Ambassade in 1781 had a tragic end. Domenico passed away in Constantinople [Tabaghua 1979:90-105]. The referred event preconditioned the urgency of sending another Ambassade with the same purpose [Tamarashvili 1902:402]. A year later, Mauro Veronelli, travelling through Russia died in Bedrichevo/Poland in unknown circumstances [Shvelidze 2014:33-38].

The most important point is that despite the death of Mauro Veronelli, the letters sent to Europe in Georgian language (without translation) were still delivered to their place of destination. Erekle’s letters were being translated with great enthusiasm at the Imperial Court of Vienna for a year and the referred process was
led by the diplomat Wenzel Kaunitz, known and recognized throughout the world [Tabaghua 1979:110-121].

**Purpose of the Study**

Purpose of the current study is to find out the actual history hidden behind these bare facts. Whether it is coincidental that none of the ambassadors sent by Erekle reached their destination and whether the ambassadors were assassinated or died natural death? This issue has not been studied in historiography.

In order to make certain conclusions in regard of the referred issue we should find out the official version of the two Ambassadors sent by Erekle and whether the real purpose towards the Imperial Court of Vienna was camouflaged by the official version. The question, whether there was a political force opposing Georgian-Austrian diplomatic union, shall be answered specifically as well.

**Novelty of the Study**

The cause of death of the Ambassadors sent by Erekle to Europe has not been studied. The current study is the first attempt to clarify the referred issue.

**Research methods**

We rely on the methodological principles of objectivity, historicism, determinism, alternativeness, reconstruction, developed in the theoretical studies by the following scientists: Charles-Victor Langlois, Charles Seignobos; Robin George Collingwood [Collingwood 1993]; Marc Léopold Benjamin Bloch [Bloch 1952]; Peter Lambert and Phillipp Schofield [Lambert, Schofield 2004]; Abrams Lynn [Abrams Lynn 2010]; Brundage Anthony [Brundage 2017]; Gregory Ian, Ell Paul [Gregory Ian, Ell Paul 2008]; Hughes-Warrington [Hughes-Warrington 2007]; Iggers George, Wang Qiang Edward [Iggers, Wang 2013]; Akira Iriye [Iriye 2012]; Kaldellis Anthony [Kaldellis Anthony 2014]; Koselleck Reinhart [Koselleck 2004; Koselleck 2002]; Lukacs John [Lukacs John 2000]; Munro Doug, Reid John [Munro Doug, Reid John 2017]; Quigley Carroll [Quigley Carroll 1979]; Raaflaub Kurt [Raaflaub Kurt 2010].

**Sources**

In order to clarify the referred problem, the state official or unofficial documents of the respective period, collected and published in three volumes by
Alexander Tsagareli in 1891-1902 are of inestimable importance [Tsagareli 1891; Tsagareli 1898; Tsagareli 1902].

Italian translation of Erekle II letters, addressed to the European Monarchs of his time, preserved in the archives of several European countries, is the most important source to study the issue. The most important part of this source is preserved in the State Archive of Austria (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-Hof- und Staatsarchiv, 1010 Wien, I, Minoritenplatz I). Two letters were published by Mikheil Tamarashvili [Tamarashvili 1902:402-404], afterwards invaluable epistolary material was found in the archives of the Vatican, Vienna, Venice by Ilia Tabaghua, who attached these documents to a monograph published in 1979 [Tabaghua 1979].

Nino Doborjginidze published quite actual articles based on the Georgian materials recorded in the historical archive of Propaganda Fide in Vatican, general archive of Capuchins in Rome and archive of Theatines [Doborjginidze 2013:235-244; Doborjginidze 2019:197-211]. Maia Damenia, who studies the History of Catholic Missions in Georgia, published the description of the first volume of Georgian Materials recorded in the archive of Propaganda Fide [Damenia 2017].

**Literature Review**

Based on Erekle’s letters, the official goal of the Ambassade is to raise funds in Europe in order to train two regiments in an European manner [Tabaghua 1979:90], however, it is also indicated that the Ambassador should have personally conveyed some «Secret Thoughts» to the Emperor of Austria [Tabaghua 1979:90-100].

This means that besides the official version – borrowing money to train 2 regiments, there was a specific task that was not written in the letters and Erekle’s ambassadors had to convey it to the Emperor of Austria personally.

It is noteworthy that the opinions available in historiography regarding Erekle’s European ambassadors is limited to the topic of money loans.

We think that reason for sending ambassadors to Western Europe only for the sake of money loans should be totally ruled out. Extremely important event such as sending ambassadors to Europe could be planned by Erekle for solving systemic problem rather than using it for pragmatic purposes.
According to Mikheil Samsonadze, the aim of Erekle’s European Ambassade is to «Awaken» Russia. The researcher focuses on one of the letters, in which Erekle exaggerates the role of Russia and concludes that «the rulers of Kartli-Kakheti intended these letters to be heard (read) by the Russian authorities. This means that introducing their content to the Russian ruling circles was within the interests of the addressees (senders of the letter) themselves» [Samsonadze 1988:230].

We totally disagree with the referred version due to following reasons: We do not agree with the opinion «that Erekle deems Russia as an only ally» (moreover after the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74). It is categorically ruled out by the materials preserved in European Archives. Nor do we consider it right to assume that the purpose of the European Ambassade sent by Erekle is to indirectly make Russia understand the opinions of Erekle regarding the latter.

Erekle’s ruling style suggest that such simple and mere blackmail is not characteristic of the latter. It is impossible for Erekle to waste the most important resources for such a pragmatic purpose.

If the Ambassades had such pragmatic purpose what was the need of sending Ambassades through two different way? Erekle sends the first Ambassade, in particular Domenico, through the approved way of Constantinople. However, he changes the route of the second Ambassade and chooses a rather difficult way to Vienna through Russia.

The question is if the first Ambassade had been successful and Domenico had arrived in Vienna Would it have been necessary to send the second Ambassade for the same purpose?

It is obvious that Erekle has a fairly accurate considerations with this Ambassade. We think it cannot be categorically linked to making Russia understand Erekle’s thoughts towards the latter. On the contrary, Erekle does not want to make Russia understand his real attitudes, as his official position, his benevolence towards Russia, is radically different from the real, negative attitude of the King of Kartli-Kakheti (formed during the Russo-Turkish war 1768-74) towards this northern coreligionist.
The king of Kartli-Kakheti was well aware that on the one hand the planned adventure of Totleben, aimed at the death of Erekle, and on the other hand the attempt of Captain Lvov to remove the Georgian king from the throne was not a private initiative of these two persons and all this was done by Russian officials at the behest of the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg [Guruli 2015:34-37].

Furthermore, we cannot agree with Vakhtang Peradze, who develops the opinion of M. Samsonadze and believes that Erekle’s European Ambassade was aimed to «Awaken Russia and turn to Georgia diplomatically.»

V. Peradze writes: «Attempts of Erekle II to establish a political alliance with Western European countries, particularly Austria, was aimed to make influence over the Russian royal court. The referred Ambassade was being prepared for a long time and Erekle II did not keep it secret. On the contrary, the Ambassade was sent through Russia and by informing the Russian Court about the start of diplomatic relations with the Austria in order to obtain a loan Erekle, was striving to arise envy and interest in Georgia, since Kartli-Kakheti rulers were well aware that such relations would not be pleasant for Russia. It was a kind of a diplomatic strategy of Erekle II pointing Russia that Georgia could find an acceptable ally in Europe. Erekle’s assumption proved true: Russian Court expressed dissatisfaction and was made to change its attitude towards Erekle at least in the public perception: Russian diplomacy turned to Erekle [Peradze 2006:89-90].

Peradze’s opinion is invalidated by the fact that before this second Ambassade he refers to, Erekle sent the first Ambassade exactly with the same purpose. Mikheil Tamarashvili writes about Erekle’s Ambassade: «The king (Erekle – M.N.) who was looking forward to the outcomes of Patri Domenico’s trip, was very saddened by his death. Since the case was urgent, Erekle assigned the same mission to Patri Maurio Veronelli» [Tamarashvili 1995:698].

Domenico’s letters did not reach us. According to V. Peradze it is obvious that Russia was eager to grab Erekle’s letters. These letters were carried by Domenico. Domenico’s death and failure to perform his duty was at least a desirable scenario for Russia even if it was not ordered by the latter. So Domenico’s letters must have
been kept by the imperial court of St. Petersburg and Erekle’s official attitude towards Russia would be clear to Russia as well.

If the function of these letters was only to awaken Russia and make it turn to Georgia, as V. Peradze considers, the question is, what was the necessity of sending a second Ambassade to Europe. Why the letters of the same content of the first Ambassade was not enough for Russia to «turn and awake»? What was the need of repeating the performance created for «turning and awakening»?

We agree with V. Peradze that Erekle was ready for the scenario that the Russian agency would be interested and follow the ambassadors sent by him. However, we believe it is obvious that Russia should have done this not for the harmless purpose of understanding the content of the letters sent by Erekle to the European monarchs, but rather, to disrupt the Ambassade. Disruption of Ambassade without making influence over Domenico was unreal. Therefore, one way for hampering the capuchin Ambassador was his liquidation.

It is also noteworthy that V. Peradze constructs his reasoning based on a factual mistake stating that Erekle had been preparing this Ambassade for a long time. A documentary study of the issue makes it clear that the second Ambassade is an organic part and continuation of the previous Ambassade and Erekle is in a hurry.

Primary source confirming the latter is preserved in Volume III of Georgian materials recorded in the historical archive of Propaganda Fide. Page 44, keeps an interesting document. On March 16, 1781 Capuchin Mauro Veronelli makes an insertion into the letter dated 14.03.1781: «This morning, March 16, King Erekle ordered me to ask Your Excellency to send Padre Domenico, who brought this letter, to Vienna as soon as possible, since he has many important things to do.» [Doborjginidze 2019:184]

**Research result**

We think borrowing money is a topic Erekle needs to inspire the real purpose of the Ambassade. Before we find out the true purpose of the Ambassades we have to analyze first the strange and fatal background of both Ambassades.

Erekle sends two Ambassades to Europe – Missioner Domenico in 1781, then Patri Mauro Veronelli in 1782. The first Ambassade was sent in summer 1781.
Domenico took the letters, however the addressees of the referred letters are unknown. The missioner died on July 3 in Constantinople.

No one is insured against death. Certainly, the missioner Domenico could not have been an exception and he could have really died a natural death! However, the fact that a year later, in October 1782 Erekle sends an ambassador, Patri Marco Veronelli to Vienna again, through a completely different way, via Moscow, creates a rather doubtful situation [Tabaghua 1979:62].

It is evident that the Ambassade failed. However, it is necessary to achieve the most important goal - to send letters to Vienna and notify Erekle’s position to the Emperor of Austria. It is also clear and possible that the Ambassador could have really died a natural death on the way, but it should not turn into an obstacle to achieve the already set goal. Taking into account the background situation, changing the route of the ambassador and demonstratively sending a missioner to Europe through Russia instead of using the old, proven and closest way - through Constantinople - is rather dubious. Marco Veronelli has to arrive in Moscow first and then travel to Vienna [Tabaghua 1979:62].

We consider it is rather important to find out the reason Erekle had to change the route, taking into account that travelling to Austria through Moscow/Russia is quite unfavorable compared to travelling through Constantinople. On the other hand, it is an important detail that the route through Constantinople is quite adapted for Georgia. The mediators here are German Dr. Jacob Reineggs and Hungarian Count Janos Kohar, who had been at the Royal Court of Erekle since 1779.

As Ilia Tabaghua writes: «Documentary evidence confirms that Dr. Rinex and Count Kohar had a close connection ... with the Royal Court of Austria. Count Ianos Kohar was in contact with Baron Herbert, the Austrian representative in Constantinople, and Reinex might also have contacts with him. Thus, contacts between Tbilisi and Vienna were established and implemented through Constantinople» [Tabaghua1979:61].

These substantial circumstances require clarification of numerous issues. We suppose that changing the route is not an accidental event, as going to Vienna from
Georgia via Moscow instead of using an approved and shorter way, is quite far from the optimal choice.

Obviously, Erekle had to choose the worse option due to certain circumstances. The reason for considering the ambassador’s trip to Vienna via a longer way shall be clarified as well.

While searching the referred factors, another and quite important question arises – whether the change of a route was connected to the death of Domenico. If yes, whether the missioner Ambassador of Erekle was assassinated for disrupting the diplomatic mission of the latter.

Naturally, it is difficult to confirm exactly who killed Domenico due to the lack of respective documents. Nevertheless, we believe it is possible to find out whether anyone was interested in Domenico’s death and the disruption of the ambassade through the analysis of existing situation and a combination of sources.

In Rome, an interesting primary source is preserved in the third volume of Propaganda Fide Historical Archives (Sheet No. 45), proving that an unknown person (identity is not indicated) attempted to obtain the letters kept by Domenico.

Padre Fortunat de Trento wrote to Cardinal: «After the death of former prefect Padre Domenico Triestino, I informed this to a person in order to attend the funeral. Herein, I also talked to him about the letters the prefect had with him. Two or three days later the above-mentioned person sent me two letters one after another and ordered me not to send the above-mentioned letters until I received the reply from King Erekle. I replied that the king’s reply was not necessary at all and I was obliged to send this letter to Your Excellency» [Doborjginidze 2019:184-185].

It is evident from the above letter that the person interested in obtaining the letters could have been related with both Domenico and the Royal Court of Kartli-Kakheti. Obviously, this incognito is well acquainted with Erekle and the situation around him and is also interested in obtaining Erekle’s letters. Undoubtedly, he acts not only because of his personal curiosity.

Consequently, the combination of the mentioned facts and circumstances prove that quite important forces acted against Erekle’s European mission.
Following issues need to be clarified as well - who might have been interested in disrupting the ambassade and seizing the letters; whether it was a precondition for Erekle to consider the route via Constantinople and the environment existing there dangerous. It is also interesting to what extent was the threat associated with Domenico’s death.

We think that if Domenico died a natural death, the Royal Court of Kartli-Kakheti would have no need to change the route. In our opinion, the referred decision adopted by Erekle is a lustration that Domenico was assassinated.

Furthermore, in order to find out political force interested in Domenico’s assassination, we need to look for the environment having a strongly anti-Georgian position and willing Erekle’s diplomatic mission not to arrive in Vienna.

We can cite a number of facts of Russian-Georgian relations, clearly confirming the anti-Georgian sentiments of the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg within the chronological framework of our research topic. In particular: Revolt of Paata Batonishvili inspired by Russia [Tukhashvili 1983a:45-56]; Attempt of Joseb Emin to make Erekle involved into the war against Turkey [Markova 1966:134; Maisuradze 1982:260]; Anti-Georgian actions of Russia during the Russo-Turkish war, in particular, Totleben’s attempt to assassinate Erekle and Captain Lvov’s attempt to oust Erekle from the throne [De Gray De Foie 1985:35-59]; Ambassade of Levan Batonishvili and Catholicos Anton I to Russia and their humiliation by St. Petersburg [Buleishvili 1987:60-63]; Publication of «Georgian History» of Alexander Amilakhvar in 1779, an attempt from the side of Russia to discredit the Bagrationis [Natsvaladze 2017:35-36]; Assassination of Prince Levan in 1781, the Catholicos of Armenia is especially interested in spreading the wrong version (Levan’s death caused the failure of the project to create an army, leaving Russia as a winner) [Tukhashvili 1983b:8; Jambakur-Orbeliani 1914:14-18; Berdzenishvili 1973:255-262; Aleksishvili 1956:111-121]. The list of these facts can be endless...

The above-mentioned anti-Georgian sentiments of the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg can undoubtedly serve as indirect proof that the assassination of Patrice Domenico, sent to Vienna by Erekle, was also a Russian order. However, as the
orderer of the assassination can be easily identified not through logical reasoning but based on the documentary evidence, it is no longer necessary to bring the above-mentioned anti-Georgian sentiments as indirect evidence.

However, there is a direct, unequivocal documentary, written evidence from the Russian Imperial Court that Georgian-Austrian relations contradicted the Russian interests.

Instruction of Catharine II, received by Gregory Potemkin in 1782 through the Count Bezborodko, Cancellor of the Empire, gives an absolutely unambiguous response to our question.

This document is preserved in Moscow, in the Fund for Russian-Georgian relations between 1774-1804 of the Russian Foreign Policy Archive. Description 110/2; Case 18, pp. 66-67. The document was fully published by Al. Tsagareli [Tsagareli 1902: 30-31], then fragments were published by Valerian Macharadze [Macharadze 1998: 254-255].

The instruction consists of 6 paragraphs. The first and fourth paragraphs are the most important. The fourth paragraph of the instruction without any ambiguity and directly indicates that Erekle’s relations with the Emperor of Austria was not desirable and that Erekle should stop correspondence. [Macharadze 1998: 254; Tsagareli 1902: 30-31]. Catherine gives following recommendation to Potemkin: «The Georgians should renounce their relations with the Holy Roman Emperor and other Christian powers, saying that they have a promise that no one will interfere in the affairs of our Asian neighbors and therefore not send letters to the emperor.» [Tsagareli 1902: 30]

When we read the instruction of Catherine II, who deems Erekle’s relationship with the Austrian emperor absolutely unacceptable, one gets the impression that Russia is radically opposed to the Austrian Empire and taking into account the given reality, it is obvious that the friendship of the allied state -Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti with the enemy of potential ally could not be justified.

Nevertheless, the fact itself is rather odious for any diplomatic etiquette or principi, as well as humiliating and offensive. The Russian Imperial Court claims to
impose a standard on an independent kingdom as well as to decide and instruct it should or should not have relations with.

Such an attitude and claim is absolutely unacceptable and offensive to Kartli-Kakheti sovereign state, regardless the attitude of Russia towards the Austrian Empire.

However, Russian odious attitudes have no end. If we study Russian-Austrian relations in the XVIII century, we will definitely notice that since the 70-ies Russia prefers to have contacts with its traditional ally, the Kingdom of Prussia, without the Austrian Empire.

The Russian Empress Catherine II and the Austrian Emperor Joseph II have a fairly warm relationship. They have intense correspondence to each other and discuss number of mutually desirable issues. Their conformity of ideas towards numerous many political issues is obvious, conceptually they have the same opinions within the process of creating a «Greek Project», therefore, they plan the issue for the redistribution of Europe together [Ivonin 2013:99; Ivonin 2011:32-33]. Secret meeting of two emperors in Mogiliov is especially important [Ivonin 2013:99; Ivonin 2011:32-33]. Despite the confidentiality, the results of the latter were reflected in the ideological policy of the Russian Imperial Court itself, that served to prepare the society for a new and great redistribution of Europe [Zorin 2001: 58-88].

One more important detail is that Russia acquires a special status on the Diplomatic filed as a defender of Austria. In 1779, Russia sided Austria in the Teshin negotiations held between Austria and Prussia and attempted to reconcile these two opposing and constant enemies [Nersesov 1988:131-145]. This is a completely different height for Russia itself - the rank of the main guarantor of the Westphalian truce is a completely different, superior function in the rankings of European diplomacy – granting the function of Justice of Peace [Duhhard 2011:526-528].

Russia experienced such a high diplomatic rank for the first time as the defender of Austrian interests and from this point of view, it could clearly see that the imperial ambitions could set completely different perspectives for the latter.
We believe this unprecedented diplomatic status for Russia, was the reason for having sharper imperial ambitions towards the kingdoms and other political entities in the Caucasus.

However, political independence of Georgian kingdoms is yet a topic not causing any doubts to any parties within the diplomatic relations despite Russia’s wills. Consequently, even if we evaluate the topic of Erekle’s European ambassadors from the Russian viewpoint, defining the area of relations by a northern coreligionist is only an odious perception of reality.

To this extent, it should be established - whether Erekle’s attempt to contact the Austrian emperor twice was an anti-Russian act. If so, then another specific answer is needed – what is the harm caused by Erekle’s diplomatic relationship with Austria as a ruler of an independent state.

The question is why the relationship between Erekle and Joseph II should be unacceptable for St. Petersburg if Russia has good relations with Austria and if St. Petersburg seeks civil relations and alliances with the Georgian kingdoms. What is the threat to Russia caused by the rapprochement of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti with the Austrian Empire? What threatens Russia from the referred union that it diligently tried to assassinate both ambassadors sent to Vienna by Erekle.

It is noteworthy that Russia does not have relations with Erekle and his predecessors, as one ruler of an independent state should have with another one. St. Petersburg considers the Caucasus as an area that should become part of it sooner or later.

There is an official document clearly indicating that in the 70-ies of XVIII century conquering Georgia was not within the interests of Russia only because they had no common border and it was practically impossible to implement. However, when the common borders appeared, then the time and opportunity to conquer Georgia would be set in the agenda. This is what Empress Catherine II wrote to Sukhotin before the Russo-Turkish War in 1768: «We do not intend to annex the territory of Georgia, it is not adjacent and it is far away ...» [Tsagareli 1898: 471]. This means that as soon as Georgia becomes a neighboring country to Russia, the
«annexation» of this territory will automatically be inserted into the agenda of the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg.

Theoretically, Russia faces a choice - it must either take advantage of the benevolence of its ally, that is one of the main guarantees of its success, or think about its own imperial future and maintain the conglomerate, being an excellent opportunity for the future annexation of the Caucasus. Russia chooses this second option, the conquest of the Caucasus, and attempts to gradually prepare the political processes related to its plans without any difficulties.

Thus, Russia makes the choice to fulfill future imperial ambitions. Instead of guaranteed reality and success ensured by the unequivocal benevolence of the Georgian political space, Russia chose the future uncertain grand prospects but without Georgia.

The afore mentioned relation is a clear proof that the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg claims to restrict the international independence of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti even before signing the Treaty of Georgievsk.

It should be particularly noted that this instruction was written before signing the Treaty of Georgievsk. According to Iase Tsintsadze the referred instruction was created in February-March 1783 [Tsintsadze 1960:99]; however, Tsagareli states it was created in December 1782 [Tsagareli 1902:30-31]. This is the period when Domenico, one of the two missioner ambassadors sent by Erekle, is no longer alive.

It is important that demand of Catharine II to restrict the relationship with Austria is confirmed in the same document. Furthermore, in the first paragraph of the instruction created for the Russian Officials, Catharine II clearly indicates that the Georgians shall be referred as allies and not subordinates [Tsagareli 1902:30]. Obviously, this instruction is aimed more at the international community rather than at the Russian bureaucracy.

The Imperial Court of St. Petersburg needs multi-faceted calculations in diplomatic field. One of these calculations refers to the indication that the treaty must be concluded with an allied and not subordinate state, therefore the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti should also be referred to as an ally and not a subordinate.
However, it is incompatible to consider the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti as an ally on the one hand and on the other hand, to prohibit the referred independent state from having relations with a country it has longstanding, friendly diplomatic relations.

Valerian Matcharadze explains the fourth paragraph of the above-mentioned document as follows: «Erekle learned of the Russian-Austrian rapprochement before receiving the news from Russia, therefore the king addressed to the Emperor of Austria, but the Russian Royal Court knew based on the experience of 1768-74 that the Austrian government could interfere despite the «friendship» [Matcharadze 1998:254].

We cannot agree with our teacher, Professor Valerian Matcharadze, as the documentary materials clearly indicate that we should categorically rule out the idea that Erekle considered Russia to be the only possible savior of the country. Moreover, it is confirmed by the latest research written based on the materials preserved in the archives of Vienna and the Vatican [Doborjginidze 2013; Doborjginidze 2019; Natsvaladze 2020a; Natsvaladze 2020b; Natsvaladze 2020c; Natsvaladze 2020d; Natsvaladze 2020f].

These studies confirm that Erekle, as the king of Kartli-Kakheti, thinks about the political future of the whole Caucasus, and within this context he has his own interests though not entirely acceptable to Russia because of the imperial, aggressive policy of the latter [Natsvaladze 2020c:38-41; Natsvaladze 2020d: 41-43].

Thus, the instruction created by Catharine in 1782 confirms that the attempt of Erekle to contact the Emperor of Austria as a ruler of the sovereign state was in contradiction with the plans of official St. Petersburg towards the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. Hence, this is the evidence and a document explicitly indicating that Russia was the one interested in hampering the European Ambassade of Erekle II.

Consequently, Instruction of Catharine II, unequivocally confirms that mission of Georgian Ambassade is unfavorable for Russia. Therefore, we think that the assassination of Capuchin ambassadors of Erekle, firstly Domenico and then Mauro Verronelli could have been ordered by the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg as only the Russian party could have been interested in disrupting the referred ambassade.
We believe that necessity of changing the approved route during the preparation of the second Ambassade was preconditioned by the assassination of Domenico. Selection of a more difficult route through Russia was a kind of prevention that the second phase of the Ambassade would not end with similar lethal outcome as it happened in Domenico’s case.

We think such a decision of the Bagrationi Royal Court definitely excludes the possibility of considering Domenico’s death as «a natural death» rather than assassination.

Erekle is quite open and at the same time deliberate politician towards Russia. If he needs diplomatic manipulations in regard of Russia, it is only because the imperial door of St. Petersburg actually pursues an anti-Georgian policy camouflaged as a coreligionist. Accordingly, Erekle is trying to take a rational step for the favour of Georgian nation and therefore he has to endure a lot of insults from Russia. The interest of the nation and the state is supreme for Erekle. Hence, the reality shall be explained through considering these circumstances and Erekle’s orderly, conceptual attitude towards the referred issues. Moreover, no document can be found confirming Erekle’s anti-Russian sentiments.

Therefore, the question is whether Erekle tries to demonstrate that he makes no intrigues behind the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg by sending Mauro Veroneli to Vienna through Russia. Moreover, when it refers to Austria, which has a fairly harmonious relationship with Russia.

That is why we think that the change of route is a premeditated prevention in order to ensure the ambassador’s arrival to his place of destination, in Vienna alive and fulfil his mission. Unfortunately, such prevention turned out to be ineffective.

The second Ambassade leaves even more questions than the first. The strangest thing is that the correspondence of paramount importance is carried by the ambassador without translation - in Georgian, but the fact is that Erekle asked the Capuchin monks to translate the letters. It is evident that Erekle realizes not only the importance of translating these letters, but also the necessity, though, his order is not fulfilled. The question arises - whether Erekle is aware that the missionary ambassador takes the correspondence in Georgian without any translation.
Needless to say, Erekle is well aware of the difficulties that correspondence in the Georgian language might cause for Europeans. Therefore, logical conclusion can be made- if Erekle had known about it, he would have made the ambassador wait until the translation of letters. However, based on the developed events, this elementary logic remains logical and has no effect on political reality.

We must take into account the limited communication opportunities characteristic of that period - Georgian is quite rare in Europe and the only option is again in Rome, the Congregation of Propaganda Fide that can translate Erekle’s letters. However, no one can guarantee that the letters will be translated as quickly as possible. This is what happened - the translation of the letters, led by Wenzel Kaunitz, an Austrian official and world-class diplomat, took more than a year.

The actual circumstances prove and confirm that the situation is unusual at the moment of sending the second Ambassade. The departure of the ambassador is urgent and Erekle is in a hurry with Mauro Veronelli as well. This is clearly indicated in several sources.

Mikheil Tamarashvili, regarding the ambassadors sent by Erekle: «The King (Erekle - M.N.) who was looking forward to the outcomes of Patri Domenico’s journey, was deeply saddened by his death. Erekle assigned the same mission to Patri Mauro Veronelli as the case was urgent» [Tamarashvili 1995:698]. According to Tamarashvili’s assessment it is obvious that the outcomes of the Ambassade should not be procrastinated in time: «the case was urgent «.

Erekle has to make a choice – either delay the ambassador until translating the letters, or transmit correspondence to Mauro Veronelli without translation. The king chooses the second choice. Herein, there is a rather interesting detail - information in the letters is a kind of mask to camouflage real goals of the Ambassade. Mauro Veronelli has to personally report to the Emperor of Austria the secret thoughts and commissions of Erekle. This is the main and most important circumstance, making the Ambassadors Domenico and Mauro Veronelli the targets of the Russian Imperial Court. Their liquidation is the best and easiest way to disrupt Erekle’s Ambassade to Europe.
It is rather significant that the purpose of the Ambassade is secret. Erekle confirms it in the letter himself. Hence, the reason for the secrecy shall be specified. If the main reason for the Ambassade is to obtain money from Europe and the equipment for two regiments, and this is evident in the letter, how can it be a stated goal (at least easily understood by those who received these letters) and a secret at the same time?

We think it is impossible to be compatible on the one hand, the notion of mystery and on the other hand, the facts clearly confirmed in the letter. It is an approved diplomatic practice that the Ambassadors convey the secret tasks to the addressees orally. Despite the official texts, which could be found by undesirable persons. Therefore, it was thus possible to hide the real purpose and transmit the secret orally.

Erekle uses this approved and tested system when sending the Ambassade to Europe. Based on Marco Veronelli’s letter Mikheil Tamarashvili explains: «Two Polish Capuchins took all his papers to the Pope Nuncio in Vienna and told him that the late Patri Mauro had many personal instructions/tasks from the King of Georgia» [Tamarashvili 1902:402].

This means that the secret was Erekle’s instruction to Mauro Veronelli in order to transmit the Emperor of Austria, the one Patri should report Joseph II in a private conversation and not what Erekle had requested in a letter – in particular, two regimens and money. Certainly, it is interesting to know what a particular case is considered to be urgent and secret at the same time.

Based on the primary sources and existing international situation, we have come to the conclusion that Erekle’s goal is to get involved in the process of global redistribution of Europe as the king of an independent state and not just a person fulfilling the will of others needed by European states for targeted strikes against the Ottoman Empire. This is a part of a so-called «Greek Project» envisaging the neutralization of Ottoman Empire and Redistribution its area [Natsvaladze 2020i: 164-165; Natsvaladze 2020j: 84-88].

Erekle is interested in this issue, as the Ottoman Empire poses systemic threats to the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti and the entire Caucasus as well. Accordingly,
Erekle is interested in all the projects that envisage weakening of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, it is evident, he will not be indifferent to the «Greek project» aiming to neutralize the Ottoman Empire.

According to the agreement made between Joseph II and Catherine II this plan should have been kept secret, however, it leaked from the backstage and the reason for this was Catherine’s own policy itself, who built the whole empire on the template of this ideology, manifested in culture and architecture as well as in literary and social-political processes. This is how Catherine prepared the Russian Empire for the Greek project.

Erekle follows the rules of the game set by the two emperors and tries not to mention the topic in the letters until the end and transmit his ideas to Joseph II orally.

As for the urgency causing the postponement of the translation of letters, it is connected to the journey of future Emperor Paul (together with his wife) in Austria during 1781-1782. That was a unique opportunity for Erekle to hold negotiation in three-sided format. Erekle hopes for this, as Joseph the Emperor of Austria is clearly sympathetic to Erekle and perceives numerous conceptual layers to develop a common policy.

The goal of the Russian Imperial Court is not to allow Erekle take advantage of this unique chance. The shortest way to implement it is to liquidate the ambassadors.

**Conclusions**

Thus, according to the official position of the Russian Imperial Court, namely, the relation for Potemkin (dated December 1782) composed by the Russian Empress Catherine II herself, made it obvious that Erekle’s relationship with either the Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph II Emperor of Austria, or other Christian states was unacceptable.

Both Ambassades sent to Europe by Erekle served one purpose. In particular, Georgian political leader wanted to neutralize Russia’s imperial ambitions through the Emperor of Austria. The main task of his Ambassades to Austria and Europe was to make Russia recognize Kartli-Kakheti as an allied sovereign state and not as a segregated segment of a Kartli-Kakheti kingdom and multi-faceted conglomerate
of the Caucasus. However, Russia had different aspirations. Kartli-Kakheti as a strong and sovereign state was unacceptable for Russia. Therefore, Erekle’s attempt to be connected with Europe, bypassing St. Petersburg, was perceived as an act against Russia’s interests and the shortest way to prevent it was to get rid of the ambassadors. However, it is also possible that Russian authorities were incited to adopt such a radical decision as Domenico and Mauro Veronelli might have had a secret verbal commission from Erekle to forward to the Emperor of Austria. Perhaps, that is why Erekle’s ambassadors became the main targets of the Russian Empire. Ambassade of the King of Kartli-Kakheti actually lost importance after neutralizing the ambassadors.

With the implementation of the «Greek project», the Ambassade aimed to promote, a Christian global space was to emerge to the south of Georgia, which was the dream of all Georgian kings of all time. The importance of the referred Ambassade and Erekle’s messages to the Royal Court of Austria is confirmed by the fact that the letters sent by Erekle in Georgian were translated with great diligence and responsibility at the Vienna Imperial Court. Moreover, the process was led by Wenzel Kaunitz, a world-class diplomat of that time.

The Russian Empire undermined the grand plan, known as «Greek Project», by the assassination of Erekle’s ambassadors Domenico and Mauro Veronelli as well as the all-time dream of Russia to capture the Bosporus and Dardanelles Straits.

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