

GROUND FOR THE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN OF GEORGIANS TO JERUSALEM IN THE FIRST HALF OF 16TH CENTURY

Abstract

According to “Akhali Kartlis Tskhovreba” (New Life of Kartli, 1st half of 18th c.), the Ottoman Sultan assigned the envoy to King George of Kartli (1525-1527), King Bagrat of Imereti (1520-1574) and King Levan of Kakheti (1510-1527) and informed that Georgian churches of Jerusalem were taken over by an enemy. He called the kings to drive the enemy away and promised to transfer the churches to them. Georgian kings were glad to arrange the campaign to Jerusalem, and the sultan fulfilled his promise. This information was repeated by Vakhushti Bagrationi and Timote Gabashvili in various versions and with some additions.

This information has raised different opinions among researchers as early as in 19th century. Part of them (T. Bagrationi, T. Zhordania) have not questioned its validity while the others (M. Brosset, Al. Tsagareli) stated that the Georgians would never come to Jerusalem with the weapons. Discussions on this issue continued into the twentieth century. E. Metreveli and L. Menabde questioned the Georgian “campaign” in Jerusalem. Though no new historical sources dealing with the above issues were found, differences of view still persist. Most researchers (E. Mamistvalishvili, R. Pirtskhalaishvili, A. Tvaradze, S. Maskharashvili, Ts. Ghvaberidze) regard that the campaign of Georgians to Jerusalem has really taken place. Each of them justifies the cause and time of the “campaign” of Georgians to Jerusalem (1517 or 1527) in his way. G. Japaridze, relying on Arabian sources, made the conclusion that discussing the Georgian’s campaign to Jerusalem is unreal and groundless. This has never occurred. Therefore, it is even more interesting to clarify what is based on the information on the “campaign” of Georgians to Jerusalem.

The research showed that: when Sultan Suleiman I (1521-1566) arranged a campaign to Europe (1521-1532), the Franciscans driven away from Sion fought to return back or to settle in Jerusalem – they attempted to purchase or hire a Georgian monastery located in Jerusalem, named “Dair-al-Amud” (“Column”). Against the background of the events in Jerusalem, it is not excluded that the Sultan has made an appeal to the Georgians to protect Georgian churches. Supposedly, Georgian kings have really arrived in Jerusalem but not to fight, rather to claim their rights on Georgian churches and monasteries and this, due to hostile relations with the Ottoman Empire, was later rethought and regarded as the campaign.

Keywords: *Jerusalem, Campaign, Suleiman I, Franciscans, Oral Folk Heritage*

According to "*Akhali Kartlis Tskhovreba*" [New Life of Kartli, 1st half of 18th century), the Ottoman Sultan assigned the envoy to King George of Kartli, King Bagrat of Imereti and King Levan of Kakheti and informed that Georgian churches of Jerusalem were taken over by an enemy. He called the kings to drive the enemy away and promised to transfer the churches to them. Georgian kings were glad to arrange the campaign to Jerusalem, in which "*they freed Christ's grave and all holy places*". And sultan fulfilled his promise and transferred to the Georgians "*Christ's grave, Golgotha, Bethlehem, Cross Monastery and other monasteries... with the firm deed*".

This information, from "*Akhali Kartlis Tskhovreba*" in various versions and with some additions, was repeated by Vakhushti Bagrationi and Timote Gabashvili. Vakhushti Bagrationi mentions Sultan's name (Suleiman) and also explains that the Sultan summoned the Georgian kings because he himself "was fighting in the west." According to T. Gabashvili, the enemy that the Georgians had to deal with were the French "*Drive the French out of there and conquer*."

These data have caused differences in the views between the researchers as early as the 19th century. Part of them (T. Bagrationi, T. Zhordania) have not questioned their validity while the others (M. Brosset, Al. Tsagareli) state that the Georgians would never come to Jerusalem with the weapons.

Discussions on this issue continued into the twentieth century. E. Metreveli considered it necessary to find out if the reports of ancient historians are based only on oral folk heritage, or if they had sources unknown to us. L. Menabde did not rule out that oral folk heritage and source evidence were based on some specific historical facts that were subjected to processing, exaggeration, and excessive publicity.

Though no new historical sources dealing with the above issues were found, differences in views still persist. Most researchers (E. Mamistvalishvili, R. Pirtskhalaishvili, A. Tvaradze, S. Maskharashvili, Ts. Ghvaberidze) regard that campaign of Georgians to Jerusalem has really taken place. Each of them justifies the cause and time of the "campaign" of Georgians to Jerusalem (1517 or 1527) in his way. G. Japaridze, relying on the Arabian sources, made the conclusion that discussing the Georgian's campaign to Jerusalem is unreal and groundless. This has never occurred. Therefore, it is even more interesting to clarify what is based on the information on the "campaign" of Georgians to Jerusalem.

As a result of the study, the following was revealed: Emperor Charles V of Austria (1519-1556) wrote a letter to Sultan Suleiman in which he referred to himself as the "King of Jerusalem" because, at that time, Franciscan monks lived in Jerusalem on Mount Zion. They considered themselves not monks of the Holy Sepulchre but of Holy Zion, as evidenced by the inscription engraved on the seal of their leader, «*Sigilium Guardianisacri Conventis Mountis Sion.*»

Angered by the letter of Charles V, the Sultan issued a decree on March 18, 1523, according to which the Franciscans were expelled from Zion and their monastery was converted into a mosque.

Having been expelled from Zion the Franciscans made every effort to return to Zion – they asked for the intercession of European monarchs and counts. In 1528, the French Emperor Francisco I (1515-1547) took on the burden of mediation, but the Sultan

responded that there had always been a Muslim mosque on Zion and that, it would never be converted into a Christian temple.

Since it was impossible to return to Zion, the Franciscans decided to settle in Jerusalem - to buy or rent an Iberian monastery called "Deir-al-amud" (Monastery of the Pillar). However, this also turned out to be difficult. They encountered resistance from local authorities, as evidenced by the protocol of the Jerusalem Sharia's Court session of I Sha'ban 942 A.H. (January 25, 1536). By decision of this court, in 1536 the Franciscans leased the Georgian monastery of Amud, which they finally took possession of later (1561).

To fully understand the events that took place in Jerusalem, it is necessary to recall the conditions of the Orthodox monks living in Jerusalem in those years.

In the spring of 1526, before the second invasion of Hungary, Sultan Suleiman extended the "firman" issued by Selim I in 1517 to the Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem. According to which the holy sites of Jerusalem, churches and monasteries, as well as the houses, gardens and other property belonging to them were left in the possession of the Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem. This created a barrier for the Franciscans to capture any monastery. Perhaps it was then (in the spring of 1526) that the Sultan sent his representative to the Georgian kings and called on them to protect their shrines.

Two Arabic documents preserved in the library of the Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem assure us of the correctness of this point of view. According to the first document (signed by Salekh, the judge of Jerusalem, on the 14th of the month of Zī-'l-Hijjé, 929 A.H. (=October 24, 1523), Georgian hegoumenos Savula (Saba) filed a lawsuit against the Franciscan abbot Fra-Donato, because *"at that time the main owners of one part of the Holy Zion Monastery (meaning King David's Tomb - T. M.) were Georgians too... Since the Georgian hegoumenos presented old and solid documents, the court acquitted him."*

The second Arabic document (signed by Mustafa, the judge of Jerusalem, in 1005 A.H. (=1596/1597) refers to the royal decree to specify the boundaries of the Latin, Georgian, and Greek cemeteries on Mount Zion.

Briefly, as soon as the Franciscans were expelled from Zion (March 18, 1523), legal disputes between Georgians and Franciscans began, which lasted for a long time. We think it is not difficult to understand that the victory of the Georgians at the trial on October 24, 1523, was determined not only by *"old and reliable documents"*, but also by the attitude of the Ottoman authorities towards the Franciscans.

Therefore, in 1526, Sultan Suleiman, setting out on a campaign against Hungary, opened a second front of European Christians in Jerusalem, which included Greek and Georgian monks. In such a situation, if he had called on the Georgian kings to protect Georgian churches and monasteries, there is nothing incredible about it.

It would take some time for the ambassador sent by Suleiman I to arrive in Georgia, for the Georgian kings to come to an agreement with each other and to prepare for the departure to Jerusalem. Accordingly, **Georgian kings would arrive in Jerusalem in 1527.**

"Akhali Kartlis Tskhovreba" was written in the first half of the 18th century. More than two hundred years have passed since this incident. Perhaps the author of the work heard about the peaceful journey of the Georgian kings to Jerusalem in a changed form, or even changed himself. This change was caused by the fact that the Ottomans invaded Georgia twice (1543 and 1545) during the reign of Sultan Suleiman. Against the backdrop of such a

development of events, it would be difficult to imagine that earlier, Sultan Suleiman had handed over the holy relics to the Georgians without a fight. Therefore, the peaceful journey of the Georgian kings to Jerusalem in 1527 was subsequently reinterpreted as a campaign.