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THE PERCEPTION OF KING HERACLIUS II OF KARTLI-KAKHETI AMONG THE LEADERS OF THE ARMENIAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY (JOSEPH EMIN, MOVSES SARAFOV, HOVSEP ARGHUTIAN, AND SHAHAMIR SHAHAMIRIAN)*

Abstract

This article examines the role of King Heraclius II of Kartli-Kakheti in the Armenian liberation movement during the second half of the 18th century and aims to analyze this topic within the broader historical and geopolitical dynamics of the South Caucasus. Employing source-based and comparative methodologies, it explores the relations between Armenian and Georgian individuals, as well as their cooperative responses to shared external threats.

The research highlights how, during a period of rising Armenian liberation aspirations and the geopolitical rivalry of great powers, Armenian leaders such as Joseph Emin, Movses Sarafov, Hovsep Arghutian, and Shahamir Shahamirian perceived Heraclius II as pivotal in their efforts to restore Armenian statehood. Special attention is given to Heraclius II's political capabilities, the challenges posed by Ottoman and Iranian dominance and Russian imperial ambitions, all of which shaped the nature of Armenian-Georgian collaboration.

Through a chronological analysis, this article examines the nature, objectives, and specific circumstances of the relations between Heraclius II and the leaders of the Armenian liberation movement. It aims to contribute to the study of Armenian-Georgian political history and serve as a resource for scholars interested in this field.

Keywords: *Heraclius II, Joseph Emin, Movses Sarafov, Hovsep Argutian, Shahamir Shahamirian, Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, Armenian-Georgian relations.*

Introduction

The Armenians and Georgians occupy a distinctive place within the mosaic of peoples of the South Caucasus. Historically, the formation of their respective identities was profoundly shaped by persistent external threats, which frequently compelled them to engage in prolonged defensive struggles. Despite centuries marked by resistance and efforts to safeguard their autonomy, both peoples succeeded in cultivating and preserving their unique cultural heritages. Over time, relations between these two Christian peoples steadily deepened, giving rise to close social, economic, cultural, religious, and political ties.

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To some extent, an examination of the social and political dynamics in the South Caucasus suggests that Georgians and Armenians recognized the necessity of mutual cooperation at nearly every critical moment. This need became especially critical during pivotal moments in their struggles for freedom. In this context, the second half of the 18th century stands out as a particularly significant period.

It is noteworthy that, at a time when several major powers were actively dividing spheres of influence across the world, the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti (Eastern Georgia) was gradually strengthening its position in the South Caucasus. Simultaneously, the Armenian liberation movement, which had been waning for many years, experienced a significant resurgence. The majority of its leaders (including Joseph Emin, Movses Sarafov, Hovsep Arghutian, Shahamir Shahamirian) attributed decisive importance to Heraclius II in the effort to restore Armenian statehood.

The aim of this article is to analyze the role of Heraclius II, king of Kartli-Kakheti, in the Armenian liberation movement of that era, drawing on a variety of primary and secondary sources. These include academic works on Armenian-Georgian relations in the second half of the 18th century, specialized studies, historical documents, and publications by various authors. Additionally, by employing source-based and comparative analysis methodologies, the article will examine, in chronological order, the nature of the relations between Armenian leaders and the Georgian monarch during this period, their objectives, and the specific circumstances that shaped these ties. This approach will facilitate a discussion of the research question within both a regional and global context.

Georgia and Armenia in the Second Half of the 18th Century: A General Historical Context

The South Caucasus's position on the global stage in the 18th century was largely shaped by the terms of the Peace Treaty of Amasya, concluded in 1555 between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran. According to the provisions of this treaty, signed by these two long-standing rivals, Western Georgia - including the Kingdom of Imereti and the principalities of Abkhazia, Guria, Samegrelo, as well as a substantial part of Samtskhe - fell within the Ottoman sphere of influence. In contrast, the eastern Georgian kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti, along with the eastern part of Samtskhe, were placed under Iranian domination.¹ This treaty also addressed the territorial division of Armenia, assigning its western regions to the Ottoman Empire, while its eastern territories were ceded to Iran.²

Although the Peace Treaty of Amasya did not secure lasting peace between the parties, it nonetheless played a decisive role in shaping the regional political landscape and firmly determining the fate of the existing political entities and peoples of the South Caucasus until the second half of the 18th century. In the case of the Georgian kingdoms, this arrangement, while hindering the attainment of full autonomy, also effectively

¹ George Sanikidze, "The Evolution of Safavid Policy towards Eastern Georgia", *Safavid Persia in the Age of Empires: The Idea of Iran*, Volume X, ed. Charles Melville (London: I.B. TAURIS, 2021), 379.

² George A. Bournoutian, *A Concise History of the Armenian People: From Ancient Times to the Present* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2006, 209.

precluded any possibility of restoring a unified Georgia.³ Similarly, in the case of Armenia, it curtailed the prospects for the restoration of a statehood that had long since disappeared.⁴

Naturally, the dominance of two powerful Muslim states effectively isolated the region, significantly hindering the search for allies by the Armenians and Georgians, as well as their efforts to establish close political relations with other states. At the same time, it prevented the emergence of a third major power in the region, which, to some extent, influenced the attitudes of the major European powers toward the South Caucasus of the 18th century. It is noteworthy that, within the framework of a multipolar international system,⁵ wherein powerful European states were actively extending their influence in various regions of the world, these powers remained largely passive in their efforts to establish a foothold in the South Caucasus. This reality suggests that the principal international actors of the period recognized the prevailing dominance of the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran in the region and, accordingly, either directly or indirectly acknowledged the geopolitical order established by the Peace Treaty of Amasya.⁶

However, from a formal perspective, it may be argued that the Peace Treaty of Amasya, which secured the balance of power in the South Caucasus, remained nominally in effect until 1783, when the Treaty of Georgievsk was concluded between the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. This assertion is further reinforced by the Russian-Georgian Protectorate Treaty of 24 July 1783, through which the Russian Empire not only established a legal basis for its presence in the region but also significantly weakened the positions of both the Ottoman Empire and Iran.⁷ Moreover, in the following decades, Russia's strategic interest in the South Caucasus further intensified, and through

³ The Kingdom of Georgia, weakened economically, politically, and socially as a result of successive invasions by the Mongols and later Turkoman tribes, disintegrated into separate kingdoms and principalities by the end of the 15th century. Nodar Asatiani, *History of Georgia: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (Tbilisi: Publishing House Petite, 2009), 121-123.

⁴ The Seljuk invasions caused significant economic, political, and social disruptions on the Armenian Kingdom. Subsequently, in the second half of the 11th century, Bagratid Armenia was annexed by the Byzantine Empire. Bournoutian, *A Concise History of the Armenian People: From Ancient Times to the Present*, 87-88.

⁵ From a geopolitical perspective, the 18th century was characterized by a multipolar international system that, while maintaining the principle of the balance of power, naturally precluded the complete dominance of any one state. Korneli Kakachia, *International Politics from Westphalia to the End of the Bipolar System [საერთაშორისო პოლიტიკა ვესტფალიიდან ბიპოლარული სისტემის დასასრულამდე]* (Tbilisi: Universali, 2014), 21-23.

⁶ Dimitri Shvelidze, *Protection and conquest of Georgia by Russia [საქართველოს მფარველობა და დაპყრობა რუსეთის მიერ]* (Tbilisi: Ed. Meridiani, 2014), 9-10. Also of interest in this regard is the involvement of French diplomats in the peace negotiations of Amasya. In this instance, they undertook considerable efforts to facilitate the conclusion of a peace agreement between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran. This diplomatic initiative sought to enable the Ottoman Empire to redirect its attention toward European affairs, particularly against the Habsburgs, on the basis of the Ottoman-French alliance formalized by the Treaty of 1553. Mikheil Svanidze, *The History of the Ottoman Empire: XIV-XVI centuries [ოსმალეთის ისტორია: XIV-XVI სს.]*, Vol. I (Tbilisi: Chronograph, 1999), 148-151.

⁷ Shvelidze, *Protection and conquest of Georgia by Russia*, 47-48.

its victories in the Russo-Iranian and Russo-Ottoman wars during the first third of the 19th century, the Russian Empire effectively annexed the region, thereby eliminating its principal rivals.⁸ Nevertheless, a closer examination of the political developments in the South Caucasus throughout the 18th century reveals that the Treaty of Amasya had already suffered significant erosion during the campaign of Peter I,⁹ which marked Russia's first major intervention in the region. This military campaign not only signaled Russia's growing ambitions in the South Caucasus but also directly challenged the position of Safavid Iran.

It should be emphasized that Peter I's military campaign in the South Caucasus in 1722 prompted a notable increase in activity of the Georgian and Armenian political elites. A significant part of these groups, led by Vakhtang VI, king of Kartli, openly supported Russia's advance into the region and even considered providing military assistance. Although, following Peter I's withdrawal, Armenian and Georgian opposition groups faced severe repression from both the Ottoman Empire and Iran,¹⁰ the situation became increasingly precarious for these major Muslim powers by the 1750s. On the one hand, the persistent efforts of the kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti to assert greater autonomy, and on the other hand, the growing mobilization of Armenian groups, whose primary objective remained the liberation of Armenia from foreign domination and the restoration of statehood, can be interpreted as signs of the gradual erosion of Ottoman and Iranian dominance in the South Caucasus.

The Perception of King Heraclius II of Kartli-Kakheti Among the Leaders of the Armenian Liberation Movement in the Second Half of the 18th Century

The first half of the 18th century was undoubtedly a particularly challenging period for the Armenian and Georgian people. Despite their continuous resistance, they were unable to free themselves from Ottoman and Iranian domination. However, a gradual improvement in their situation began in the 1750s, largely due to the reigns of Teimuraz II and Heraclius II in the kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti. In the early years of their rule, they succeeded in fortifying the borders of Eastern Georgia and, following the assassination of the Iranian ruler Nader Shah Afshar¹¹ In 1747, the Iranian influence over the Georgian kingdoms significantly diminished. Later, in 1762, following the death of Teimuraz II, Heraclius II united the kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti under a single crown, effectively ending Iranian rule in Eastern Georgia. Although during the 1750s and 1760s the primary challenge for Eastern Georgia remained the frequent raids by the Lezgin tribes, Heraclius II, in a manner similar to his father, pursued an active military policy. As a result, he managed not only to improve the internal political and economic conditions of the kingdom but also to extend

⁸ Vartan Gregorian, "The Impact of Russia on the Armenians and Armenia", *Russia and Asia: Essays on the influence of Russia on the Asian Peoples*, ed. Wayne S. Vucinich (Stanford, California: Stanford University 1972), 178.

⁹ Monarch of Russia from 1682 until 1725. George A. Bournoutian, *Armenians and Russia (1626-1796): A Documentary Record* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2001), 470-471.

¹⁰ Asatiani, *History of Georgia: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*, 163-164.

¹¹ Shah of Iran from 1736 to 1747. Alexander Mikaberidze, *Historical Dictionary of Georgia* (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2007), 472.

his authority over the neighbouring khanates of Ganja, Erivan, and Nakhichevan.¹² During this period, one of the prominent leaders of the Armenian liberation movement, Joseph Emin (1726-1809),¹³ emerged in the South Caucasus. Despite numerous obstacles, Emin succeeded in entering the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti and establishing direct relations with Heraclius II.¹⁴

Joseph Emin was born in 1726 in Hamadan, in western Iran. His family later relocated to Calcutta, India, while Emin himself travelled to England, where he succeeded in establishing connections within influential circles. With the patronage of the Duke of Northumberland, he was admitted to the Woolwich Military Academy to pursue military studies.¹⁵ It is noteworthy that Emin sought to initiate correspondence with Heraclius II even prior to his arrival in Georgia. In this context, particular attention should be given to a lengthy letter addressed to the Georgian monarch, in which Emin refers to Heraclius II as the king and protector of both the Armenian and Georgian people. In the same letter, Emin underscores the plight of the Armenian nation, deprived of statehood, and offers his services to the Georgian monarch. In his view, only Heraclius II was capable of aiding those Armenians who remained beyond his authority from continued suffering and of ensuring their proper protection.¹⁶

It should be noted that Emin's commitment for the restoration of Armenian statehood became increasingly evident not only in his extensive letter addressed to Heraclius II but also during his time at the royal court of Kartli-Kakheti (c. 1763-1765 and 1767-1768), where he consistently sought to draw the king's attention to this cause, emphasizing the pivotal role that Heraclius II's direct involvement would play in its realization.¹⁷ In pursuit of this objective, Emin established a close relationship with Bishop Hovnan of the St. Karapet Monastery in Mush, located in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire. Bishop Hovnan, who had long been preparing a plan for a mass uprising against Ottoman rule, similarly viewed the participation of Heraclius II as integral. He therefore requested that the monarch dispatch a small number of warriors to the Armenian-populated regions of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁸

Given the limited number of primary sources and academic works, it is challenging to determine with certainty what strategic calculations Bishop Hovnan and Joseph Emin

¹² Asatiani, *History of Georgia: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*, 166-169.

¹³ Abgar Ioannisyanyan, *Joseph Emin [Иосиф Эмин]* (Yerevan: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, 1989), 10-13.

¹⁴ Valuable personal and political information regarding Joseph Emin is compiled in his autobiographical work "The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin." This text constitutes an indispensable source for the study of Georgian-Armenian relations in the 18th century, as well as the broader social, economic, and political conditions of the diverse peoples inhabiting the Caucasus. It may also be regarded, in a certain context, as a comprehensive political manifesto that played a pivotal role in shaping the early stages of the Armenian liberation movement. Joseph Emin, *Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin* (Calcutta: Baptist mission press, 1918).

¹⁵ Ioannisyanyan, *Joseph Emin*, 33.

¹⁶ Emin, *Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin*, 108-113.

¹⁷ Grigol Pheradze, "Heraclius II's Caucasian Policy in the 1760s (according to the autobiographical memoir of Joseph [Hovsep] Emin)", *Kadmos*, No. 15 (2013): 135.

¹⁸ Emin, *Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin*, 217.

had, or how they envisioned the initiation of a mass uprising through the deployment of a relatively small number of Georgian troops into the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, considering that Bishop Hovnan had been diligently preparing for such an uprising over an extended period,¹⁹ it is plausible to assume that his request was neither unconsidered nor superficial. In this context, a letter from Catholicos Simeon I of Etchmiadzin²⁰ to Heraclius II is of particular interest, as it reflects the Catholicos' strongly negative attitude toward the actions undertaken by Bishop Hovnan and Joseph Emin:

“I wish to inform Your Highness that such stupid individuals should not use your name and seal. They cause more harm than good. I write because I love and respect Your Highness. Who is Hovnan that you should write to him, and why use a stupid messenger, who shows the letter to everyone? Please review the situation and inform Emin that he should keep his men at his side. He has to realize that our land is in the hands of the infidels and such behavior will bring great grief for our nation.”²¹

In addition to clearly reflecting the negative stance of Catholicos Simeon I, this document also allows, to some extent, the inference that the communication between Joseph Emin and Bishop Hovnan probably took place under the supervision of Heraclius II - otherwise, Emin would not have been capable to independently send documents bearing the royal seal to the bishop. Furthermore, an analysis of Joseph Emin's autobiographical work suggests that, despite Heraclius II's cautious stance toward a mass Armenian uprising, he initially demonstrated an apparent interest in strengthening his cooperation with Emin. This is primary evidenced by Emin's extended presence at the royal court of Kartli-Kakheti, his close relationship with the Georgian monarch, and the military assignments entrusted to him by the king. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that Heraclius II ultimately refrained from taking any concrete action in support of Emin and Hovnan's plan, which can be explained by two main reasons:

- 1) The dispatch of Georgian warriors by Heraclius II to initiate a mass uprising in the Armenian-populated regions of the Ottoman Empire would have meant an open declaration of war against the Ottomans that, in the absence of a powerful ally, would have been doomed to fail from the outset.
- 2) Heraclius II also took into account the antagonistic attitude of the Armenian Catholicos, Simeon I, who, in the absence of Armenian statehood, acted not only as the spiritual leader of the Armenian nation but also as its symbolic unifier and national representative.²² Although Heraclius II's regional policy was neither dictated by nor subordinate to the views of Catholicos Simeon I, the latter's uncompromising opposition to Joseph Emin's actions nevertheless indicated that Emin lacked broad

¹⁹ Ioannisyan, *Joseph Emin*, 128-129.

²⁰ Catholicos of Etchmiadzin from 1763 to 1780. Bournoutian, *Armenians and Russia (1626-1796): A Documentary Record*, 476.

²¹ *Ibid*, Document No. 279, 237.

²² Sebouh Aslanian, *Dispersion History and the Polycentric Nation: The Role of Simeon Yerevantsi's "Girk or Koci Partavcar" in the 18th Century National Revival* (Venice: S. Lazarus, 2004), 36-37.

support within the Armenian community, which further complicated the prospects of realizing his objectives.

In addition, when examining the relationship between Heraclius II and Joseph Emin, it is essential to highlight Emin's proposal for the establishment of a unified Georgian-Armenian state, which he envisioned as the foundation for a respectable and enduring union between the two people.²³ Once again, due to the limited availability of relevant sources, it is difficult to determine with precision how Emin envisioned the practical implementation of this idea or what institutional form such a state might have assumed. Nevertheless, considering the broader directions of Emin's intellectual and political activities, it is plausible to suggest that his vision, initially shaped in the early 1760s by Western European political ideals and grounded in the conviction that Heraclius II would serve as the central figure in its realization, gradually evolved. By the 1780s and 1790s, in response to shifting regional dynamics and broader geopolitical developments, Emin's orientation had largely moved away from his earlier position, moving instead toward the Russian Empire, which he came to regard as the most capable power to assume responsibility for protecting the Armenian and Georgian peoples following their unification.²⁴

In the 1760s, Joseph Emin's efforts to restore Armenian statehood ultimately failed. From a geopolitical standpoint, it can largely be attributed to the dominant positions held by the Ottoman Empire and Iran in the South Caucasus. In the regional context, his plans were obstructed by two principal factors: the limited military and political capacities of Heraclius II, and the insufficient support from the Armenian community itself. The latter was perhaps most clearly illustrated by the stance of Catholicos Simeon I, who, according to Emin's own work, urged Heraclius II to sever all ties with him and expel Emin from the kingdom.²⁵ Consequently, in accordance with Heraclius II's directive, Joseph Emin left the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in 1767/1768.

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The relationship between Heraclius II and Joseph Emin represents a complex issue. A close examination of Emin's activities reveals that he was among the most prominent figures in the centuries-long Armenian liberation movement. Although he did not succeed in achieving his principal objective during his time in the South Caucasus, his efforts nonetheless contributed significantly to the revitalization of the Armenian liberation movement. Paradoxically, it was only after his departure from the South Caucasus and his

²³ It is noteworthy that the idea of Armenian-Georgian unity was actively discussed as early as the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly during the reigns of Teimuraz I and Vakhtang VI. In this context, the following works are of particular interest: Guram Maisuradze, *Relations between the Georgian and Armenian Peoples in the 13th-18th Centuries* [ქართველი და სომეხი ხალხების ურთიერთობა XIII-XVIII საუკუნეებში] (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1982) and Eldar Mamistvalashvili, *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy of Georgia: The 1st Half of the XVII Century - The Era of Teimuraz 1st* [საქართველოს საგარეო პოლიტიკა და დიპლომატია: XVII ს. პირველი ნახევარი - თეიმურაზ I-ის ეპოქა] (Tbilisi: Universali, 2011).

²⁴ Emin, *Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin*, 211.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

journey to India that a markedly new political context emerged in the region, namely the outbreak of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774.

It is noteworthy that diplomatic relations between the two parties had been gradually deteriorating. From the 1760s onward, the Ottoman Empire had actively sought ways to oppose Russia's political and economic interests in southern Ukraine and the western Black Sea region, which naturally led to a conflict of interests between the two powers. While neither side was prepared to initiate a large-scale conflict by 1768, the intensifying disagreements on key issues made war inevitable, and in the fall of the same year, war was officially declared between them.²⁶ It is also important to note that the strained relations were significantly influenced by the anti-Russian sentiments prevalent in European states. These sentiments were, in turn, a consequence of the Russian Empire's considerable military and political achievements on the global stage. The rise of the Russian Empire, in particular, alarmed French diplomats, who, after ceding Canada and India to Britain, turned their attention to Eastern Europe, particularly the Ottoman Empire, which, despite its internal challenges, was still regarded as a major power capable of resisting Russian expansion.²⁷

It is also noteworthy that during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774, in addition to other strategic objectives, the Russian Empire's attitude toward the Christian peoples under Ottoman influence became increasingly evident. Empress Catherine II, who saw herself as the sole "protector" of Eastern Christians, actively sought to involve various Christian peoples in the ongoing conflict.²⁸ This situation, along with the involvement of Balkan peoples, created new opportunities not only for the Armenians, Georgians, Kurds, and other communities residing in the Ottoman Empire's eastern provinces, but also for the Georgian kingdoms. As soon as hostilities broke out, these kingdoms began to put forward proposals aimed at securing support from the Russian Empire.

Thus, it is natural that during the war, the kingdoms of Imereti and Kartli-Kakheti were effectively considered reliable allies of the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus region. In the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774, King Solomon I of Imereti sought to expel Ottoman garrisons from the kingdom and liberate his realm from Ottoman domination, while one of the primary objectives of Kartli-Kakheti was to reclaim the historical lands that had once been part of a united Georgia, particularly the Akhaltsikhe region (historical Samtskhe). In addition to viewing this region as an integral part of Georgia,²⁹ Heraclius II recognized the strategic importance of reclaiming Samtskhe. Notably, by the 1760s-1770s, a significant part of the population of Akhaltsikhe was Georgian, who, despite Ottoman

²⁶ Mikheil Svanidze, *The History of the Ottoman Empire: 1600-1923 [ოსმალეთის ისტორია: 1600-1923]*, Vol. II (Tbilisi: Chronograph, 2002), 99-100.

²⁷ Oleg Jibashvili, *Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774 and South Georgia [რუსეთ-ოსმალეთის 1768-1774 წლების ომი და სამხრეთ საქართველო]* (Batumi: Shota Rustaveli State University, 2010), 24-26.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 26-27.

²⁹ Valerian Matcharadze, *Materials for the History of Georgian-Russian Relations in the Second Half of the XVIII Century. Part III, Vol I: Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774 and Georgia [მასალები XVIII საუკუნის მეორე ნახევრის რუსეთ-საქართველოს ურთიერთობის ისტორიისათვის: რუსეთ-თურქეთის ომი 1768-1774 წლებში და საქართველო]* (Tbilisi: Publishing House of the Tbilisi State University, 1988), Document No. 123, 357-362.

policies, had succeeded in preserving both their Christian faith and Georgian identity to a considerable extent.³⁰ Moreover, Heraclius II maintained considerable authority over the Armenian, Kurdish, and Assyrian populations residing in the Ottoman Empire, which significantly bolstered his prospects of success in the event of involvement in the conflict.³¹

It should be noted that Heraclius II, similarly to the Armenian groups, placed significant importance on strengthening ties with the Kurdish and Assyrian populations of the Ottoman Empire, as evidenced by the active correspondence he maintained with Kurdish chieftains.³² Simultaneously, the issue of engaging the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus increasingly became a focal point of the political agenda for the king of Kartli-Kakheti. Heraclius II's interest in deepening cooperation with the Russian Empire was perhaps most clearly reflected in his correspondence with Russian officials, in which the Georgian monarch consistently emphasized the necessity of activating Russian military forces in the region. Should it be possible to assemble an adequate number of Russian troops, he envisioned conducting military operations directly on Ottoman territory through the unification of the peoples subjugated by the Ottomans.³³ In this context, the extensive report submitted on 24 July 1769 by Grigol Khvabulov, the Russian diplomat sent to Georgia, is particularly noteworthy. In his report, Khvabulov addressed several key issues,

³⁰ Roman Gogolauri, *Russo-Turkish Wars and Issue of South Georgia [რუსეთ-თურქეთის ომები და სამხრეთ საქართველოს საკითხი]* (Tbilisi: Universali, 2016), 9-18.

³¹ Perhaps, from this perspective, the observations of historian Bey-Mamikonian, from his study of Georgian-Armenian relations in the 1760s, are particularly noteworthy: "...Across the entire Western Asia, from the southern borders of Eastern Anatolia and Iranian Kurdistan to the most desolate valleys of the Caucasus Mountains, people of all nationalities and beliefs were readily inclined to blindly believe in the feasibility of any perilous endeavor if they were promised with Heraclius' assistance. Conversely, without anticipating his support, they refrained from daring to undertake any action." G. Bey-Mamikonian, "The half-forgotten memoirist of the XVIII century reflected on Heraclius II and the Georgians of his time" [XVIII ს. ნახევრად დავიწყებული მემუარისტი ერეკლე მეორეზე და მისდროინდელ ქართველებზე], *The Messenger of Academy of Sciences of Georgian SSR*, Vol. V, No. 2 (1944): 199-200.

³² A significant part of the documents related to this issue has been published by 20th-century Georgian historian Valerian Matcharadze: *Georgian documents on the history of Georgian-Kurdish-Assyrian-Russian relations: 60-70s of the 18th century [Грузинские документы по истории грузино-курдско-ассирийско-русских взаимоотношений: 60-70-е гг. XVIII века.]* (Tbilisi: Soviet Georgia, 1989).

³³ One of the letters sent by Heraclius II on 4 September 1769 to Count Nikita Panin, advisor to Empress Catherine II and member of the Russian Empire's Collegium of Foreign Affairs (1763-1781), is particularly noteworthy. In this letter, Heraclius II, among other significant issues, emphasizes the importance of accelerating military operations: "...Kindly dispatch five out of the fifteen regiments before the onset of winter. While it is true that His Excellency the Count has pledged to send us 1,500 soldiers without prior agreement with the Imperial Court, this falls short of our requirements. We urgently need these five regiments before winter arrives, as Ottoman forces have not yet reached our borders. With the assistance of this army, we can gather the enslaved Christian population [Georgians, Armenians, Assyrians, and Kurds] residing around Mount Ararat, Akhaltsikhe, Kars and along our Black Sea shores. By the grace of God, we can then mobilize and put an end to them [Ottoman troops]." Matcharadze, *Materials for the History of Georgian-Russian Relations in the Second Half of the XVIII Century. Part III, Vol I: Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774 and Georgia*, Document No. 160, 413-416.

including Heraclius II's potential alliance with the Russian Empire and the prospects for joint military efforts against the Ottoman Empire:

“While in Tbilisi, following your [General Potapov’s] oral directive, I submitted to King Heraclius a suggestion urging him to motivate the Ararat Armenians to participate in the overall opposition against the Turks. King Heraclius, in turn, assured me that he could readily stir them to action, given that some of the Armenians were under his rule and were already regarded as his allies in this cause. Nevertheless, he conveyed his optimism about receiving assistance and expressed his intent to mobilize the Armenians of Ararat for war, initiating an assault on Turkish cities.”³⁴

Interestingly, in the same report, Khvabulov emphasized the stance of the king of Kartli-Kakheti: Provided that he received adequate military support from the Russian Empire, Heraclius II was prepared to unite with the peoples subjugated by the Ottomans and, if necessary, to advance with combined forces even as far as Constantinople.

It is notable that, similarly to the peoples residing in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, the increasing engagement of the Georgian kingdoms on the global stage also attracted the attention of influential Armenian circles operating within the Russian Empire. In this context, particular attention should be given to the ambitious project devised by the Armenian merchant Movses Sarafov (also known as Movses Buniatov) from Astrakhan, which was also endorsed by numerous other prominent Armenians. Dated 8 June 1769, the fourteen-article proposal, in addition to addressing various logistical matters, primarily emphasized the necessity of liberating Armenian territories and outlined concrete steps to achieve that objective.³⁵ In the opening article of the proposal, Sarafov stressed that, in order to bolster morale among the Armenian population, it would be advisable to deploy Russian troops to the South Caucasus via two main routes: along the western coast of the Caspian Sea and directly through Georgia.³⁶ Furthermore, in the sixth article, he underscored the strategic importance of the Yerevan fortress, urging Heraclius II to strengthen his position within the Erivan Khanate as much as possible. According to Sarafov, Heraclius II’s control of the Khanate would significantly contribute to the planning and implementation of effective military operations against the Ottoman Empire.³⁷ In this regard, perhaps the most interesting element of the project appears in the seventh article, where Sarafov advocates for the formation of a coalition army:

“After solidifying their positions in the Yerevan fortress, Georgian Kings Heraclius and Solomon, in collaboration with Armenians, allied forces and the troops stationed in Erivan, are set to collectively initiate assaults on Turkish fortresses and borders from their individual positions. More specifically, King Heraclius will launch attacks on the neighbouring cities of

³⁴ Ibid, Document No. 143, 386-392.

³⁵ Mekertich Nersisyan, *Armenian-Russian Relations in the XVIII Century: 1760-1800 [Армяно-Русские Отношения в XVIII веке: 1760-1800 гг.]*, Vol. IV. (Yerevan: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, 1990), Document No. 45, 86-93.

³⁶ Ibid, Document No. 45, 86.

³⁷ Ibid, Document No. 45, 89.

Akhaltsikhe and Kars from his borders. Simultaneously, an offensive from Erivan will begin on Turkish fortresses, including Bayazit and Van. Following this, if it aligns with divine will, they will proceed to advance further based on their capabilities.”³⁸

Movses Sarafov’s project suggests that the idea of forming a coalition army was not solely supported by Heraclius II, but was also shared by influential Armenian circles within the Russian Empire. Moreover, the project clearly reflects the combat readiness of the Armenian population and highlights the trust that these groups placed in Heraclius II, along with their growing interest in cooperating with him. It stands to reason that, had Heraclius II been perceived as incompetent or weak, he would not have received support either from Armenian circles within the Russian Empire or from the various peoples living under the Ottoman yoke. However, an observation on the course of the war suggests that, despite both Heraclius II’s repeated appeals and various proposals submitted by Armenian, Kurdish, and Assyrian communities, the Russian Empire failed to undertake decisive, result-oriented actions on the South Caucasus front. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the limited number of Russian troops deployed in the region. In contrast to the main Russo-Ottoman front, encompassing southern Ukraine and the northern Black Sea territories, where tens of thousands of troops were mobilized for large-scale operations,³⁹ the deployment of merely 3,000 to 4,000 soldiers in the South Caucasus⁴⁰ made any substantial military initiative against the Ottomans highly improbable.

In this context, it is perhaps also important to consider the ambiguous actions of the generals and officers sent from Russia to the South Caucasus, which not only hindered any significant strategic progress but also caused confusion among the Georgian warriors and commanders. A notable example of this is the unsuccessful attacks led by General Gottlob Tottleben on Ottoman positions in Western Georgia, the passive stance of Russian forces during the Battle of Aspindza, the actions taken against Heraclius II in the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, and, finally, the failed assault on the Poti fortress by General Sukhotin. These events ultimately rendered it impossible for the Russian Empire to continue its military operations in the South Caucasus, forcing the Imperial Court to decide on the withdrawal of Russian expeditionary forces by the end of 1771.⁴¹

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³⁸ Ibid, Document No. 45, 89-90.

³⁹ For comparison, the Ottoman Empire alone was capable of mobilizing approximately 150,000 to 200,000 soldiers on the main front to carry out combat operations. Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870 : An Empire Besieged* (London: Pearson Education, 2007), 140-142.

⁴⁰ By a decree issued on 22 October 1769, Empress Catherine II increased the total number of Russian expeditionary forces sent to Georgia to 3,767 soldiers. Matcharadze, *Materials for the History of Georgian-Russian Relations in the Second Half of the XVIII Century. Part III, Vol I: Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774 and Georgia*, Document No. 178, 438-439.

⁴¹ The issues surrounding Georgian-Russian relations during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774 have been extensively studied by historian Valerian Matcharadze: *The Battle of Aspindza* [სსპიბძის ბრძოლა] (Tbilisi: Sakhelgami, 1957).

The Russo-Ottoman War concluded in 1774 with the signing of the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji. Although Article 23 of the treaty prohibited the Ottoman Empire from engaging in the slave trade within the Kingdom of Imereti, the Russian Empire nevertheless continued to recognize Western Georgia as part of the Ottoman sphere of influence.⁴² The Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, however, was notably absent from the treaty's provisions. Moreover, during the 1768-1774 conflict, Heraclius II failed to achieve his principal military objectives. This outcome not only indefinitely postponed any prospects for the restoration of Armenian statehood but also significantly weakened the positions of Kartli-Kakheti in the region. In this context, the growing unease among the South Caucasian khanates regarding the Kartli-Kakheti's rapprochement with the Russian Empire is particularly noteworthy. Furthermore, following the withdrawal of Russian expeditionary forces from the South Caucasus, Lezgin raiding campaigns against Eastern Georgia resumed with regularity, inflicting economic, political, and social damage on the kingdom.⁴³

In response to these challenges, Heraclius II adopted a more active stance on the global stage, seeking support not only from the Russian Empire but also from various European powers. This diplomatic approach continued until the conclusion of the Russian-Georgian Treaty of 24 July 1783, by which the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti was officially placed under the protection of the Russian Empire.⁴⁴ From both legal and strategic perspectives, the Treaty of Georgievsk was unprecedented: on the one hand, it recognized the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti as the first Caucasian state to come under Russian protection without relinquishing its status as a subject of international law; on the other hand, it provided a formal legal basis for the Russian Empire's presence in the region. And, from a geopolitical standpoint, this new arrangement rendered the Treaty of Amasya (1555) nominally obsolete and significantly curtailed any prospects for its future implementation.⁴⁵

Although the issue of Armenia was not explicitly addressed in the official text of the Treaty of 24 July 1783, it is natural that the Russian Empire's ambition to establish a foothold in the South Caucasus opened new prospects for various Armenian groups. It is therefore not surprising that, during this period, efforts to formulate Russian-Armenian projects were actively pursued in parallel with the negotiation of the Russian-Georgian agreement.

⁴² Mikheil Rekhviashvili, *Imereti in the XVIII Century [იმერეთი XVIII საუკუნეში]* (Tbilisi: Publishing House of the Tbilisi State University, 1982), 139-141.

⁴³ Luigi Magarotto, *The annexation of Georgia by Russia: 1783-1801 [საქართველოს ანექსია რუსეთის მიერ: 1783-1801]* (Tbilisi: Mtsignobari, 2008), 31.

⁴⁴ Shvelidze, *Protection and conquest of Georgia by Russia*, 33-39.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 39-49.

In the early 1780s, following the failure of the Russian-Armenian project⁴⁶ initiated by Ivan Lazarev,⁴⁷ Hovsep Arghutian⁴⁸ undertook a new initiative and, in 1783, in active collaboration with Russian officials and the Armenian Meliks of Karabakh, submitted a revised draft of a Russian-Armenian treaty to the Russian Imperial Court.⁴⁹ At the same time, the wealthy Armenian merchant Shahamir Shahamirian (1723-1797), became increasingly active. As early as the 1770s, he and his associates had already begun to establish a new center of the Armenian liberation movement in Madras, India.⁵⁰

It is noteworthy that Shahamir Shahamirian soon succeeded in establishing close ties with Heraclius II, the Armenian patriarchs, Archbishop Hovsep Arghutian, the Armenian Meliks of Karabakh, and other influential figures. Similarly to many other Armenian leaders of his time, his primary objective was the liberation of Armenian territories from Muslim domination and the restoration of Armenian statehood. In the 1780s, while working on a draft of a new Russo-Armenian project, Shahamirian, akin to Arghutian, placed considerable hope in the strategic plans of the Russian military elite. In the aftermath of the power vacuum created in the region by the death of the ruler of Iran, Karim Khan Zand,⁵¹ in 1779, these circles began to plan a military campaign against Iran.⁵² Among their broader objectives, the reconfiguration of spheres of influence between Russia and Iran was seen as a necessary precondition for the reestablishment of an Armenian state. In this context, it is probably not a coincidence that the Armenian Meliks of Karabakh also intensified their activities during the 1780s, maintaining regular contact with both Russian

⁴⁶ Abgar Ioannisyán, *Russia and the Armenian Liberation Movement in the 1780s [Россия и армянское освободительное движение в 80-х годах XVIII столетия]* (Yerevan: Publishing House of the State University, 1947), 15-23.

⁴⁷ Count Ivan Lazarev (1735-1801) was one of the prominent figures of the Armenian liberation movement in the 18th century. He actively sought the support of the Russian Empire in addressing the Armenian question, working in coordination with various groups and influential individuals. Bournoutian, *Armenians and Russia (1626-1796): A Documentary Record*, 463.

⁴⁸ Hovsep Arghutian (1743-1801) was one of the prominent leaders of the 18th-century Armenian liberation movement. Over several decades, he maintained close ties with representatives of the Russian Imperial Court, high-ranking officials, the royal court of Kartli-Kakheti, as well as various influential individuals and groups. In addition to his ecclesiastical duties, Archbishop Arghutian actively engaged in efforts to restore Armenian statehood, working in coordination with the Russian officials. *Ibid.*, 446.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Document No 357, 299-303.

⁵⁰ Satenig Batwagan Toufanian, *Le Piège de l'Orgueil: Un projet Républicain en Orient au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Presses de l'Inalco, 2018), 47-54.

⁵¹ Ruler of Iran from 1750 to 1779. John H. Lorentz, *Historical Dictionary of Iran* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2007), 156.

⁵² Although, after the death of Karim Khan, Iran was again ruled by representatives of the Zand dynasty for several years, internal conflicts within their ranks, coupled with the persistent hostility of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar towards the Zand dynasty, prevented the country from being united under the control of a single ruler. It should be noted that, amidst the ongoing crisis, Ali-Morad Khan Zand sought assistance from the Russian Empire and, in return, aimed to cede Iran's spheres of influence in the Caucasus to Russia Zurab Sharashenidze, *Iran in the Second half of the XVIII Century [ირანი XVIII საუკუნის მეორე ნახევარში]* (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1970), 89-119.

officials and other Armenian leaders, which evidently conflicted with the interests of their ruler,⁵³ Ibrahim Khalil Khan.⁵⁴

At the beginning of 1786, Shahamir Shahamirian presented a new draft of the Armenian-Russian treaty, which differed significantly from the version previously devised by Hovsep Arghutian. While Arghutian's draft envisioned a restored Armenian kingdom as an entity largely dependent on the Russian Empire, Shahamirian proposed a markedly different vision. The Armenian state, once liberated by the Russian army, was to be established not as a monarchy but as a republic, with political power concentrated in the "Armenian Chamber," and the country's official representative in international affairs elected by this political body. Regarding its international legal status, the newly established Armenian state was to stand on equal footing with the Russian Empire. The latter, under specific conditions, would act as a reliable ally and assume responsibility for protecting Armenia from external threats.⁵⁵ However, despite the considerable efforts of both Arghutian and Shahamirian, at the final stage, the highest political circles in Russia deemed it unfeasible to act upon or implement the proposed plans. This was largely due to the repeated postponement of the planned military intervention - delays which were primarily attributed to the shifting political landscape in Iran.⁵⁶ In this context, a letter sent by Hovsep Arghutian to Shahamir Shahamirian on 3 January 1787 is particularly revealing, as it suggests that the primary reason for the Russian refusal was the absence of an officially recognized Armenian representative:⁵⁷

"I sent them a translation of the proposed treaty between Russia and Armenia. They have responded that treaties are signed between kings. Who is your king? They also added that our Catholicos is keeping away from the Russians. The khan of Shushi has taken the son of Melik Hovsep to his fort and has imprisoned him. He has also frightened Catholicos Hovhannes. The Armenians of Karabakh are now silent and are not writing anymore."⁵⁸

It is probable that the attitude of the Russian Imperial Court was largely formal in nature, as the existence of a legitimate secular representative of Armenia would have rendered the initiatives of both Arghutian and Shahamirian to develop new proposals for the restoration of Armenian statehood unnecessary. Indeed, it is conceivable that the Imperial Court's position was shaped not so much by the content of these proposals or the absence of an official Armenian representative, but rather by the evolving geopolitical context. On the one hand, this shifting environment significantly diminished the prospects

⁵³ Ioannisyan, *Russia and the Armenian Liberation Movement in the 1780s*, 129-139.

⁵⁴ Ruler of the Karabakh Khanate from the 1760s to 1806. Bournoutian, *Armenians and Russia (1626-1796): A Documentary Record*, 452-453.

⁵⁵ Ioannisyan, *Russia and the Armenian Liberation Movement in the 1780s*, 153-161.

⁵⁶ By 1785-1787, the influence of the Zand dynasty in Iran had significantly weakened. By 1793-1794, Agha Mohammad Khan had effectively dismantled the Zand dynasty, marking the beginning of Qajar rule in Iran. Sharashenidze, *Iran in the Second half of the XVIII Century*, 119-149.

⁵⁷ Evidently, this would apply to a leader who, from a legal standpoint, could appear on equal footing with the Russian monarch in official documents.

⁵⁸ Bournoutian, *Armenians and Russia (1626-1796): A Documentary Record*, Document No. 386, 323-324.

for restoring Armenian statehood; on the other hand, despite the conclusion of the Treaty of Georgievsk with the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, it left the latter vulnerable to external threats.

Furthermore, the complexity of the political situation contributed to a profound sense of disillusionment among regional actors. By 1786-1787, even the Armenian Meliks of Karabakh, who had for decades awaited meaningful Russian intervention in the South Caucasus, had lost hope of receiving assistance. During this same period, repressive measures initiated by Ibrahim Khalil Khan against the Armenian Meliks endangered the security of hundreds of families, prompting a significant part of the Armenian population to flee the Khanate.⁵⁹

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By the late 1780s and early 1790s, the South Caucasus was significantly influenced by the Russo-Ottoman War of 1787-1792. Although no direct military operations took place in the region during the conflict, its repercussions were clearly reflected in the political strategies of both Heraclius II and the leaders of the Armenian liberation movement active in India and the Russian Empire. Notably, the largely passive stance of the Russian Imperial Court toward Russo-Armenian initiatives compelled several Armenian leaders to reevaluate their political visions. Accordingly, from the late 1780s onward, figures such as Hovsep Arghutian and Shahamir Shahamirian increasingly focused their efforts on Heraclius II, seeking to strengthen ties with him.⁶⁰ This growing interest in Armenian-Georgian cooperation was not one-sided; Heraclius II himself nurtured and counted on such a rapprochement, which probably had elevated Armenian-Georgian relations to an entirely new level of political significance.

⁵⁹ Ioannisyan, *Russia and the Armenian Liberation Movement in the 1780s*, 177-181.

⁶⁰ It is noteworthy that from 1787-1788 onward, the views of Hovsep Arghutian and Shahamir Shahamirian began to align significantly. As an influential clergyman in the Russian Empire, Hovsep Arghutian maintained strong ties with Russian officials; at the same time, similarly to Shahamirian, he placed great importance on the involvement of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in issues related to the liberation of Armenia. In this context, among other documents, one particular letter sent by Arghutian to Platon Zubov (commander of the Russian Black Sea flotilla) in May 1793, is of particular interest. In this letter, Archbishop Arghutian once again appealed to Russia for assistance in resolving the issue of the Armenian Meliks of Karabakh: "To allocate a small Russian force to help them [the Armenian Meliks] overthrow the Khan of Shushi. To appoint Prince David, the grandson of Heraclius, as their ruler. The Russian army can move into the region from Derbent. The road to Baku is not difficult to traverse and from there one can easily enter Karabakh. A second army can move from Georgia into Karabakh." Bournoutian, *Armenians and Russia (1626-1796): A Documentary Record*, Document No. 407, 339-341. Moreover, it is important to note that Archbishop Arghutian played a pivotal role in assisting the citizens of Tbilisi following its destruction in 1795. Subsequently, after the death of Heraclius II, he was actively involved in resolving disagreements among members of the royal court. Rusudan Tchubabria, "For the Investigation of the Reasons Behind the Opposition of the Armenian Group to Heraclius II" [ერეკლე II-ის მიმართ სომხური ჯგუფის დაპირისპირების მიზეზთა გარკვევისათვის], *Works of Tbilisi State University: Oriental Studies*, No. 327 (1998): 155-168.

Indeed, the events unfolding in the last quarter of the 18th century suggest that the Treaty of 24 July 1783 ultimately proved unfavorable for the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. While it formally provided a legal framework that undermined the Amasya Peace Treaty concerning the division of the South Caucasus, in practice, it failed to guarantee the kingdom's security. After 1783, various Muslim khans and Lezgin chieftains, encouraged by the Ottoman Empire, repeatedly formed alliances against Kartli-Kakheti. In the second half of 1787, following the withdrawal of two Russian battalions initially dispatched to defend Eastern Georgia, the kingdom was effectively left defenseless in the face of a threat that could have had disastrous consequences.⁶¹ Moreover, it must be noted that, as Kartli-Kakheti was formally under the protection of the Russian Empire, this status significantly limited its ability to establish diplomatic relations with European monarchs in search of support.⁶² Within such constraints, it appears logical that Heraclius II sought to strengthen Georgian-Armenian relations, which reached their most developed stage through the establishment of ties with Shahamir Shahamirian.

It is noteworthy that relations between Heraclius II and Shahamir Shahamirian had been developing gradually since the 1780s. Particularly significant in this context is the bestowal of the title of noble upon Shahamirian by Heraclius II on 22 March 1786,⁶³ followed by the granting of administrative rights over the Lore region on 16 November 1790.⁶⁴ Clearly, this attitude of the Georgian monarch toward a merchant from India was

⁶¹ Shvelidze, *Protection and conquest of Georgia by Russia*, 49-55. In this regard, it is also worth mentioning the subversive actions of the ruler of Karabakh, Ibrahim Khalil Khan, against Heraclius II. Encouraged by the Ottoman pashas, the Khan of Karabakh sought to align himself with various Muslim khans in an effort to turn them against Heraclius II. Vakhtang Guruli, *King Heraclius II and Russia: The Relations between the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti and Russian Empire, 1783-1798* [ძევე ერეკლე და რუსეთი: ქართლ-კახეთის სამეფოს ურთიერთობა რუსეთის იმპერიასთან, 1783-1798] (Tbilisi: Publishing House "Georgian University", 2018), 167-168.

⁶² The rights of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in conducting international relations were regulated by fourth article of the Treaty. According to this article, Heraclius II was restricted in his ability to engage in diplomatic relations with other states without the consent of official representatives of the Russian Empire. Valerian Matcharadze, "Treaty of Georgievsk: Documents" [გეორგიევსკის ტრაქტატი: დოკუმენტები], *Sami Saunje* [სამი საუნჯე], No. 2-8 (2013), Document No. 5, 74.

⁶³ The text of the royal decree dated 22 March 1786, by which Heraclius II granted Shahamir Shahamirian the title of noble, was published by historian Alexander Yeritsian in the Russian newspaper *Kavkaz* in 1883. Alexander Yeritsian, "The Indian Wealth of Testaments" [Индийская Богатия Завещания], *Kavkaz*, No. 94, April 27, 1883, 3. An English translation of the aforementioned royal decree was also published by historian Mesrovb Seth in 1937. Mesrovb Jacob Seth, *Armenians in India: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New Delhi, Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1992), 590-591. Although the original royal decree is considered lost, its authenticity is acknowledged by a significant number of historians.

⁶⁴ During the research, despite numerous attempts, the royal decree of 16 November 1790 could not be located in the archives of Armenia or Georgia. However, both the date of its issue and the transfer of the Lore region to Shahamir Shahamirian by Heraclius II are confirmed in a document jointly issued by Heraclius II and Giorgi XII on 20 November 1797, which reaffirmed the content of the original 1790 decree. The Georgian original of the royal decree dated 20 November 1797 is currently preserved at the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) in Armenia: Matenadaran, New Documents, File No. 1, Document No. 12. A photocopy of this royal decree, along with its Armenian translation, has also been published by historian Pavel Chobanyan:

motivated by carefully calculated and deliberate considerations. In this regard, the reports of historian Alexander Yeritsian are of interest; he remarked that Shahamirian, along with his subjects and financial resources, intended to resettle in the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti and, in cooperation with Heraclius II, contribute to the liberation of Armenian territories.⁶⁵ Although Yeritsian's account may appear logical at first glance, it raises certain questions when examined in light of Shahamirian's political activities, as since the 1770s he had been working not necessarily on the formation of a Georgian-Armenian alliance, but rather on projects aimed at establishing an independent Armenian state.

When discussing the political views of Shahamir Shahamirian, it is essential to consider his work *Vorogayt Parats* (The Snare of Glory),⁶⁶ which he envisioned as a constitutional document for the restored Armenian state. On the one hand, the work addresses the causes of the fall of the Armenian Kingdom, as well as broader historical, social, and political issues concerning the Armenian nation.⁶⁷ On the other hand, it proposes an extensive set of laws that, in Shahamirian's view, would place all citizens, regardless of their social status or condition, on equal footing before both the government and the judiciary.⁶⁸ Regarding the political organization of the state, the author advocates a republican form of government, which fundamentally contradicts the concept of a strong monarchical institution in Armenia. Clearly, such a vision would have been incompatible with the position of Heraclius II, who, throughout the second half of the 18th century, sought to consolidate and expand his power both within his own kingdom and in the region.

Shahamir Shahamirian's work, and his relationship with Heraclius II, provide a solid foundation for appreciating the complexity of the issue. Indeed, it is perhaps not a coincidence that, in the document drafted for an independent Armenian state, the author mentioned the monarch of Kartli-Kakheti on the title page alongside the Armenian

"From the History of the Armenian Colony of India" [Հնդկահայ գաղթօջախի պատմությունից], *Historical-Philological Journal* [Պատմա-քաղաքագիտական հանդես], Vol. 1 (1988): Document No. 3, 185-187.

⁶⁵ Yeritsian, "The Indian Wealth of Testaments", No. 94, 3.

⁶⁶ The aforementioned work by Shahamir Shahamirian, with extensive research and commentary, has been published in French by the historian and philosopher Satenig Toufanian: *Le Piège de l'Orgueil: Un projet Républicain en Orient au XVIIIe siècle*.

⁶⁷ "The Armenian nation finds itself today almost entirely under foreign domination. None of us can nor should seek to claim any sort of superiority over a brother, a neighbour, or the people in general. There is no longer, among us, a sovereign reigning as a despot who should worry about renouncing his sovereignty and submitting to the yoke of the law, and who, for this reason, would ally with the Greeks or the Persians, thereby harming our country as has so often happened in the past. There are no more nobles among us, and if, by chance, one remains, he is unknown. There are no more princes endowed with their titles of nobility, nor landowners inheriting their properties. We have all, without distinction, become sharecroppers of foreign nations, subjected, in our own country, to hard labor as beasts devoid of reason." Ibid, 233-234.

⁶⁸ In this regard, Article 143 of the document is of particular interest: "Every person residing on Armenian territory is under the protection of the Chamber of Armenia and may freely file a complaint against anyone: the First Magistrate, a leader, a member of the Council, a judge, a representative of the authority, or any individual. The accused must respond to the plaintiff and submit to the verdict that the court will pronounce against him according to the laws." Ibid, 364.

Catholicos,⁶⁹ while also expressing a particularly favorable attitude toward the Georgian people and emphasizing their importance to the Armenian nation.⁷⁰ In Shahamirian's view, the Georgians were the Armenian people's closest and most trustworthy allies.⁷¹ Notably, numerous passages in the work explicitly reject any theoretical possibility of Heraclius II being proclaimed king of Armenia. Nevertheless, an analysis of the various assumptions articulated in Shahamirian's work, his correspondence with prominent figures, and the broader context of his political activity suggests that, if necessary, he considered it entirely feasible to develop a new legal framework suited either to the Georgian state or to a proposed Armenian-Georgian union, based on the model devised for an independent Armenia.

It is worth considering that, from 1786 onwards, Shahamirian frequently emphasized the importance of Heraclius II in his correspondence, referring to him as the protector of both the Armenian and Georgian people. In this regard, particular attention should be paid to the letters he addressed to Heraclius II and to the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin on 15 October 1787. In the first letter, Shahamirian elaborates on the significance of Heraclius II's lineage - namely, the Bagratid dynasty - for both Armenia and Georgia.⁷² In the second one, addressed to Catholicos Ghukas Karnetsi,⁷³ he underscores the pivotal role of Heraclius II, asserting that cooperation with him is essential for concluding an agreement with the Russian Empire that, in his view, could definitively resolve the Armenian issue:

“Obviously, it is possible to have a treaty with Empress Catherine (as demonstrated by Georgia). We only need to find a civilian and military leader. Then we can also have a treaty. Heraclius is, after all, a Bagratid [of Armenian background], if he could do it why can't we? Heraclius has written to me and has asked for me to send him laws so that he can govern his country well, I

⁶⁹ Ibid, 212.

⁷⁰ “I speak first of all of the valiant Georgian nation which, from the origins until the fall of the Armenian monarchy, defended, sometimes sovereign, sometimes vassal, the small Georgian country, which [in size] represents no more than two of the fifteen provinces of Armenia. The men of this nation [Georgia] preserved the brilliance of their freedom. Despite enduring the rule of unjust tyrants, facing plundering by barbarians, and witnessing the capture of a portion of their homeland, they remained steadfast. On the contrary, surrounded by enemies and without anyone's help they became braver, and some sacrificed their lives in defense of freedom, which they have maintained to this day.” Ibid, 288.

⁷¹ In this regard, Article 510 of the document is of particular interest: “For a considerable period, Armenia faced a challenge in having its own leaders - specifically, men who are both Armenian by nationality and religion... Consequently, if the elected representatives lack a sufficient number of qualified individuals from the Armenian nation who also adhere to the rites of the Holy Church of Armenia, the Armenian community may need to delegate roles such as officer, architect, surveyor, or artillery leader to individuals from other nations: Firstly, to Georgians, secondly to Russians, and thirdly to Niemets, known as Germans.” Ibid, 444-445.

⁷² Nersisyan, *Armenian-Russian Relations in the XVIII Century: 1760-1800*, Document No. 240, 362-373.

⁷³ Catholicos at Etchmiadzin from 1780 to 1799. Bournoutian, *Armenians and Russia (1626-1796): A Documentary Record*, 456.

have sent him the book called *The Snare of Glory*. I have also sent a copy to you and one to Arghutian.”⁷⁴

Indeed, had Heraclius II succeeded in assuming the role of Armenia’s official representative and in concluding a new treaty with the Russian Empress, it would have necessitated his recognition in the document as the sovereign of the Armenian people and territories.⁷⁵ Achieving such an outcome would have required mobilizing the Armenian community and formally securing their support for Heraclius II - an objective that may, in part, explain one of the primary motivations behind the transfer of administrative authority over the Lore region to Shahamir Shahamirian. It is plausible that both figures, in line with their broader policies toward the khanates of Erivan and Karabakh, considered it strategically appropriate to concentrate Armenians from various regions in Lore, under the leadership of Shahamirian and, consequently, under the authority of Heraclius II. In this context, particular attention should be given to the royal manifesto of Heraclius II dated 4 December 1790, which was modeled on a draft composed by Shahamirian in 1787, wherein the Georgian monarch called upon Armenians living across the world to return to the South Caucasus and place themselves under his protection.⁷⁶

However, given that many historical documents remain inaccessible to the present research, it is difficult to determine the exact nature of any plans or negotiations that may have existed between Heraclius II and Shahamir Shahamirian. Nevertheless, based on the available primary sources and academic works, it can be inferred that both Heraclius II and Shahamirian remained committed to a shared political vision throughout their lifetimes, particularly the one that, at a certain stage, may have involved the formation of a unified

⁷⁴ Ibid, Document No. 390, 326.

⁷⁵ It is perhaps no coincidence that, in a document of state significance for Armenia, Shahamir Shahamirian emphasized the importance of Heraclius II not only on the title page of the work but also within the text itself: Then, the Armenian dynasty of the Arshakuni became extinct, and Ashot, the son of Smbat Bagratuni, settled with us. The Armenians welcomed Ashot Bagratuni with the same hospitality, and his dynasty ruled Armenia for about three hundred and fifty years, until the reign of Gagik II. It was with him that the Armenian Bagratuni dynasty of the House of Ararat came to an end, a dynasty that is not unknown to us today, just as the descendants of Japhet or Vagharshak are unknown to us, since currently, on the throne of Georgia, reigns a descendant of the Bagratuni house [referring to the Georgian Bagrationis]. God protect him!” Toufanian, *Le Piège de l’Orgueil: Un projet Républicain en Orient au XVIIIe siècle*, 222.

⁷⁶ It is worth noting that, through this royal manifesto, Heraclius II called upon Armenians residing in various parts of the world to return to their "homeland", that is, to the Armenian lands, and promised them his protection. According to the royal manifesto issued by Heraclius II on 4 December 1790, which is currently preserved in the National Archives of Georgia, the document was translated from Armenian into Georgian on 2 March 1879 by Dimitri Okroashvili. A note appended to the document also states that the manifesto was published in 1792 at the Armenian printing house in Madras, established by Shahamir Shahamirian and his associates, in an edition of one thousand copies. National Archives of Georgia, Catalogue No. 1449, Document No. 1300. The text of this royal manifesto was published by the historian Lovard Tukhashvili in 1972: “The Relationship of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti with the Peoples of the Caucasus and the Near East in the Second half of the 18th century” [ქართლ-კახეთის სამეფოს ურთიერთობა კავკასიისა და მახლობელი აღმოსავლეთის ხალხებთან მე-18 საუკუნის მეორე ნახევარში], *Issues of the History of the Feudal age of Georgia*, Book 2, ed. M. Dumbadze (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1972), 98-99.

Georgian-Armenian state. Notably, from 1786-1787 onward, their visions appear to have aligned more closely, a development that is, to some extent, confirmed by the aforementioned document issued by Heraclius II and his successor, Giorgi XII, on 20 November 1797. In addition, several documents issued by Giorgi XII following Heraclius II's death attest to Shahamirian's continued close relationship with the royal court of Kartli-Kakheti.⁷⁷ In this regard, Shahamirian's own position is also noteworthy: although neither he nor his descendants were able to resettle in the Kartli-Kakheti kingdom, Shahamirian remained loyal to Heraclius II and his broader political aspirations until the end of his life. This loyalty is further affirmed in a letter he addressed to Catholicos Ghukas Karnetsi on 14 May 1792, in which he emphasized the importance of supporting Heraclius II's position during the peace negotiations following the Russo-Ottoman War. In the same letter, Shahamirian discussed the need for reconciliation between the Armenian Meliks of Karabakh and Ibrahim Khalil Khan, and advocated for the cession of certain eastern provinces - including Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, and Bayazit - to Heraclius II by the Ottoman Empire, as part of a broader strategy to consolidate forces in the region.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ A prominent example of this can be found in the document issued by George XII on 14 September 1799 to the Georgian traveler and diplomat Raphael Danibegashvili, in which the king appointed him as a commander and dispatched him to India on a special mission concerning the son of Shahamir Shahamirian: "And your father, Joseph [Danibegashvili, for years, he acted as a mediator between Heraclius II and Shahamir Shahamirian], passed away in our father's [Heraclius II] (our) service... And you, Raphael, I am currently sending you to Shamir-Agha's [Shahamirian's] son in India. Your father [Joseph], in the service of our blessed father, was sent to India several times, and now you are also being dispatched to India for the same purpose." Koba Kharadze, *Thirty-two years in the Countries of Asia* [ოცდაათორმეტი წელი აზიის ქვეყნებში] (Tbilisi: Lega, 2008), 202-205. In this regard, it is also possible to cite a letter of condolence sent by George XII to Shahamir Shahamirian's son, Hovhannes Shahamirian, dated 23 October 1799. In this document, the king expresses his condolences regarding Shahamir's death and reminds his heir, Hovhannes, of his right to rule the Lore region: "The news of the death of your distinguished father and our faithful friend has reached our ears and we, in accordance with the laws of friendship, have mourned it with sorrow... The request of your late father regarding the Lore region was willingly fulfilled by our blessed father, the King. His letter was handed over to the young commander Raphael, on the occasion of his journey. After the death of my father, we are sending him to you and we hope he will reach you and that you will be informed of all this." An Armenian copy of this document is preserved at the Matenadaran: Catalogue No. 49G, File No. 156, Document No. 2452. Also, it was published by historian Pavel Chobanyan: "From the History of the Armenian Colony of India", Document No. 4, 187-189.

⁷⁸ "And I hope that, by the grace of God, Your Holiness will have seen before today the provisions of the Council of Iași, which will stipulate that each of the two neighbours, abandoning their rule over Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Bayazit, etc., will agree to transfer them to the august lord Heraclius II [It appears that Shahamirian had inaccurate information regarding the Treaty of Jassy, particularly since this document makes no mention whatsoever of transferring territories to Heraclius II], by the grace of God, King of Georgia [Kartli] and Kakheti, and of other [entities]." The original document is preserved in the Matenadaran of Armenia: Matenadaran, Catalogue No. 43, Document No. 8, File No. 81a. The text of this original document was published by historian S. V. Ter-Avetisyan in 1940: S. V. Ter-Avetisyan, "Materials for the History of the Armenian Colony in India" [Երևանի Հնդկաստանի հայ գաղութի պատմության համար], *Scientific Works*, Vol. XIII (Yerevan: Publishing House of the State University, 1940): 81-86.

Obviously, given that the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti did not participate in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1787-1792, it would have been difficult for the Russian Empire to incorporate Heraclius II's territorial claims, or the interests of Armenian circles active in India and Russia, into the Treaty of Jassy.⁷⁹ While Shahamirian's expectations in this regard may appear somewhat idealistic, they nonetheless reflect his enduring trust in the Russian Empire as a potential guarantor. Indeed, if any actor could have advanced the interests of Heraclius II in the peace negotiations, it would have been Russian officials - a fact that suggests Shahamirian still held out hope that, following Russia's military successes against the Ottomans, the Imperial Court would finally take concrete steps to address the Armenian issue. In reality, however, the Russian Empire provided no tangible support to the Armenian liberation movement. Even the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, despite being under formal Russian protection, received no substantial assistance from its protector.⁸⁰

Indeed, in 1795, Heraclius II, lacking allies or external support, found himself face to face with Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar. The attack on Eastern Georgia by the new Iranian ruler had devastating consequences for the kingdom: the country's economic and military systems collapsed, and thousands of Georgian and Armenian families were forced to abandon their homes and seek refuge in the mountains. At the same time, Heraclius II's position in the region was significantly weakened.⁸¹

The deteriorating condition of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, soon followed by the deaths of Heraclius II, Shahamir Shahamirian, and Hovsep Arghutian, rendered the continuation of Armenian-Georgian political cooperation impossible. Moreover, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, amid large-scale wars with the Ottoman Empire and Iran, the Russian Empire annexed the Georgian kingdoms and, ultimately, the entire South

⁷⁹ Notably, similarly to Shahamir Shahamirian, Heraclius II had, as early as 1788, addressed the Russian Imperial Court, requesting that the interests of the Georgian kingdoms be taken into consideration in the peace treaty to be concluded following the Ottoman-Russian war. In particular, Heraclius II asked that the cession of Akhaltsikhe to Kartli-Kakheti and the transfer of Adjara to the Kingdom of Imereti be included. Alexander Tsagareli, *Deeds and other historical documents of the XVIII century related to Georgia: from 1769 to 1801 [Грамоты и другие исторические документы XVIII столетия относящиеся к Грузии: с 1769 по 1801 год]*, Vol II. Issue No. II. (St. Petersburg: Publishing House of V. Kirshbaum, 1902), Document No. 46, 66.

⁸⁰ In this context, the observations of 20th-century international law specialist Otfried Nippold, made following his analysis of the Russian-Georgian Protectorate Treaty, are particularly noteworthy: "Georgia lived under the regime created by the treaty of 1783 until the beginning of the XIX century. Did it yield good results? The answer must be decidedly negative. Shortly after the conclusion of the Treaty, new invasions against Georgia took place; it was abandoned by its protector. King Heraclius waged a battle at Krtsanisi against the Persians, which turned in his favor, but it did not prevent the enemy from plundering the city of Tiflis in 1795, and destroying it by fire. Where was Russia then, and what did it do to come to the aid of the country it had pledged to protect? It soon became apparent that, far from protecting it, it was Russia itself that threatened Georgia. The following year, it was indeed the Russians themselves who invaded the country. And soon after, the kind of protection that Russia intended to provide to Georgia was revealed: with its own hands, it rendered null and void the Treaty it had signed." Otfried Nippold, *Georgia from the perspective of international law [საქართველო საერთაშორისო სამართლის თვალსაზრისით]* (Tbilisi: Ilia State University, 2024), 51-52.

⁸¹ Guruli, *King Heraclius II and Russia*, 228.

Caucasus region.⁸² Obviously, this new political reality would stand in direct opposition to the vision held by Heraclius II, Shahamir Shahamirian, Hovsep Arghutian, Joseph Emin, and other prominent figures of the period, whose primary objective was not subordination to a new empire, but rather the establishment and consolidation of an independent state.

Conclusions

This article examined the perception of the king of Kartli-Kakheti, Heraclius II, among the leaders of the Armenian liberation movement in the second half of the 18th century. In exploring the historical context of Georgia and Armenia during this period, particular attention was paid to their roles within both regional and broader geopolitical frameworks. This approach facilitated an analysis of the relationship between the Armenian leaders and the king of Kartli-Kakheti.

The research devoted significant attention to the relationship between Joseph Emin and Heraclius II. The principal objectives and orientations of Emin's activities were identified. It was concluded that Joseph Emin, during his time at the royal court of Kartli-Kakheti in the 1760s, was ultimately unable to realize his aims. This outcome was attributed, on the one hand, to the limited military and political resources of Heraclius II from a regional perspective, and on the other hand, to the insufficient support from the Armenian community itself. On a broader level, the dominant positions of the Ottoman Empire and Iran in the South Caucasus significantly hindered the implementation of Emin's plans.

The article also examined the involvement of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti and Armenian groups in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774. In this context, particular attention was given to the interests of Heraclius II and his significance for the success of the Armenian liberation movement. The interest shown by Armenian figures active in the Russian Empire - particularly Movses Sarafov - in the activities of Heraclius II was likewise emphasized. It was concluded that the realization of the objectives pursued by both the Georgian kingdoms and Armenian groups was significantly hindered by the policies and actions of the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus.

The subsequent sections of the article addressed key issues related to Russian-Georgian and Russian-Armenian political projects. In this context, particular attention was given to the Treaty of Georgievsk of 24 July 1783, as well as to the Russian-Armenian draft proposals put forward by Hovsep Arghutian and Shahamir Shahamirian. It was concluded that the political orientations of these two prominent figures were significantly influenced by the Russian Empire's planned but ultimately unexecuted military campaign against Iran and by the complex conditions prevailing in the Armenian-populated regions of the South Caucasus.

In addition, a significant part of the research focused on the relationship between Shahamir Shahamirian and Heraclius II. Since the 1770s, Shahamir Shahamirian had worked toward the creation of an independent Armenian state, and over time, the role of Heraclius II became increasingly important in his plans. It was concluded that by the late 1780s, the visions of Heraclius II and Shahamir Shahamirian had aligned considerably. Despite their

⁸² Shvelidze, *Protection and conquest of Georgia by Russia*, 89-133.

close cooperation, they were unable to achieve their primary objectives, which was probably due to the limited military and political capabilities of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti and the unfavorable global situation at the time.

Thus, it can be concluded that the leaders of the Armenian liberation movement in the second half of the 18th century placed great importance on the role of the Georgian people, specifically Heraclius II, in the realization of their programs. Although neither Georgia was able to maintain its independence nor the Armenian leaders achieved success, it can be assumed that the events that unfolded in the South Caucasus during the second half of the 18th century once again highlighted the significance of the close political, military, and social ties between the Armenian and Georgian peoples.

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