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**CHANGING THE IMPERIAL PATTERN:  
LIFE IN THE SOUTH-WEST GEORGIA UNDER THE OT-  
TOMANS AND THE RUSSIANS  
(1870-1914)\***

The following common features can be traced for the Ottoman and the Russian Empires starting from the 70-s of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. onwards:

- 1) Byzantinism – both Empires saw themselves as heir of “Kingdom of the Romans”, i.e. East European hegemonic power, former rapidly regressing, from this point of view, latter yet being desirable protector;
- 2) Continental imperialism; these multinational Empires comprised both, Europe and Asia. European and Asian provinces had different statuses, Asians being beyond the favour as usually;
- 3) Both metropolises (Eastern Thrace and Anatolia, for the Ottoman Empire, and Russia itself, for the Russian Empire) still possessed prominent agricultural sections;
- 4) At a certain degree, both metropolises used the state socialistic way to run the economics (state property was especially prominent in the Russian industry);
- 5) Moderate rates of modernization.

And the differences are as follows:

- 1) Nonhereditary autocracy of the Ottomans, and hereditary monarchy in Russia;
- 2) Absence of the estates (i.e. privileged restricted group) in the Ottoman

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Empire; and, on the contrary, existence of the estates everywhere through the Russian Empire;

- 3) The Ottomans had reputation for cosmopolitanism while selecting the bureaucracy in the centre, and some respect for national feelings in the provinces. And the Russian Imperial structures were served by the Russian aristocracy;
- 4) Russian aristocracy, holding the Imperial offices, was Orthodox Christian totally, and Islam was prerequisite to have a job in the Ottoman structure.

Very prominent Georgian-Turkish commercial relations pass through the small towns like Ardahan and Artvin, Oltu and Yusufeli, and the outskirts, with the local folk being thoroughly engaged in this service. Many of them, the Turkish citizens, speak also the Georgian language, as a family one. And Georgian historical monuments, scattered everywhere, are under special care of the Turkish government. Knowledge of history of this interaction is a way to build the most rational network.

Georgian principality of Samtskhe-Saatabago was incorporated by the Ottomans in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. as they wished to secure their Anatolian domains while confronting the Safavis. Georgian feudals lost their lands just to receive them back as the state property now in their use instead of military service rendered to sultan. As zaims and timariots, the Georgians also packed the local administration, i.e. of Gurgistan (Childir) Vilayet, maintaining the Georgian language due to the permanent economic links with the rest of Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

These bilingual warriors resisted the Russian army bravely, while assault of Akhaltsikhe on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1828.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, they cared much for their social privileges. Reunification with the rest of Georgia was a great idea, even under Russian hegemony, but there was no need for the timariots in the Christian Em-

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<sup>1</sup> T. Dundua, A. Tabuashvili. Emancipation of the Serfs in the Southern and South-Western Georgia (Childir Vilayet) (in Georg. with Engl. summary). To the Splendid Hermitage Places of Klarjeti. Special Issue. Proceedings. Institute of Georgian History. Faculty of Humanities. Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. Tbilisi, 2012, pp. 134-141.

<sup>2</sup> Military reports show heavy fightings while the sieges of small Georgian towns like Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe and Atskuri (to outline their strength, the defenders of Akhalkalaki used to say – “guy from Kars is better than three from Yerevan, and two guys from Kars are no match for one from Akhalkalaki”; defenders of Akhaltsikhe used to say – “it is easier to hunt down the moon from the sky, than moon from Akhaltsikhe mosque”). The garrisons of these fortresses refused to surrender and they fought severely. In: Утверждение русского владычества на Кавказе. Т. 4. Ч. 2. Под ред. генерал-майора В. Потто. Время Паскевича. Турецкая война. 1828-1829 годы. Тиф. 1908, pp. 59, 86.

pire. They never knew what could be the next step – the lands in their use, were they to be delivered to them in hereditary possession, or – just taken away forever. There was only one thing they were quite sure about – namely, no administrative positions for them in the Russian Empire, these positions were all reserved for the Orthodox Russians.

Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829 gave to Russia control over two Georgian-speaking provinces of Childir Vilayet – Samtskhe (with Akhaltsikhe as principle town) and Javakheti (with Akhalkalaki as principle town). Some of the timariots received land in possession thus obtaining the same rights as the rest of the Georgian aristocracy – only few auxiliary provincial administrative positions were reserved for them. Those working on the state lands preserved the same status.<sup>3</sup> And local commercial classes were too tiny either to protest, or not the changing of constitution. Perhaps, there was enough reason for many Muslim Georgians to leave the Christian Empire. Still, economic reintegration of Georgia to its logical and historical boundaries was in action, progressive from every point of view.

Capture of Artaani/Ardahan fortress while Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 again shows Georgians fighting against the Russians.<sup>4</sup> No other signs of local activities are traced. Why? What made Muslim Georgians so indifferent? What happened in the Ottoman Empire towards the midst of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.?

Even up to 1878 the commodity turnover between Muslim Georgia and Georgia proper was prominent. It is well recorded that South-West Georgia produced definitely more food than needed just to be sold Northwards, and this was happening while the Ottoman rule.<sup>5</sup> By 1877 even the Chans from Rize district, speaking the Mingrelian/West Georgian language, and having sultan as supreme ruler, “. . . move intensively to Adjara, Guria, Kartli (provinces of

<sup>3</sup> T. Dundua, A. Tabuashvili. Emancipation of the Serfs in the Southern and South-Western Georgia (Childir Vilayet) (in Georg. with Engl. summary). To the Splendid Hermitage Places of Klarjeti. Special Issue. Proceedings. Institute of Georgian History. Faculty of Humanities. Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, pp. 139-140.

<sup>4</sup> Russian officer reports about enemy forces of some 5000 moving through Shavsheti region after they had left Ardahan. Then they quarrelled with pasha being left with only 700 men, the rest went home, i.e. that was local militia. In: Материалы для описания русско-турецкой войны 1877-1878 гг. на Кавказско-Малоазиатском театре. Т. 1. СПб. 1904, p. 337. Next report contains note about militia gathering in Artanuji/Ardanuç. In: Материалы для описания русско-турецкой войны 1877-1878 гг. на Кавказско-Малоазиатском театре. Т. 1, p. 360.

<sup>5</sup> С. С. Эсадзе. Историческая записка об управлении Кавказом. Т. 2. Тиф. 1907, p. 260.

Georgia) and Tiflis itself”.<sup>6</sup> There could be only one way – that is economic reintegration of Georgia. That is also why the Muslim Georgians were so indifferent towards the Ottomans.

Due to the Russian advance, the sites of Batumi, Artvini and Artaani<sup>7</sup> were left by many Turks from former provincial administration.<sup>8</sup> So, the Turks and not bilingual Muslim Georgians formed the local administration by that time. That is also why the Muslim Georgians were so indifferent towards the Ottomans.

System of the timars was abolished in the 30s of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Former timariots were offered pension instead of land. Still, there was a possibility for them to buy former timar as mulk, i.e. in hereditary possession, from which they would pay taxes to support new regular army.<sup>9</sup> Only few Georgian begs, i.e. Muslim Georgian nobles, mostly Khimshiashvilis, are mentioned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. and later, as the subjects of Tsar.<sup>10</sup> That means as follows: Georgian timariots failed to get the mulks. Later, the Russians allotted only some of them, receiving pension, with the lands.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I. Chavchavadze. Ottoman Georgia (in Georg.). “Iveria”. April 21, 1877, №8, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Places where the Georgians dwelt and captured by the Russians were divided into two newly formed provinces (область): that of Kars and Batumi. In: С. С. Эсадзе. Историческая записка об управлении Кавказом. Т. 2, pp. 256, 258, 260; Ekv. Takaishvili. Archaeological Expedition of 1907 in Kola-Oltisi and Changli (in Georg.). Paris. 1938, p. 3. Province of Kars included the following Georgian historical provinces: Tao, Kola, Artaani, Erusheti, Photskhovi (С. С. Эсадзе. Историческая записка об управлении Кавказом. Т. 2, p. 261; Ekv. Takaishvili. Archaeological Expedition of 1907 in Kola-Oltisi and Changli (in Georg.), p. 3; Ведомость о количестве коренного населения Карсской области в 1904 году. Памятная книжка и адресь-календарь Карсской области на 1906 годъ. Карсъ. 1906 г. №1). Province of Batumi included the following Georgian historical provinces: Adjara, Klarjeti, Shavsheti (С. С. Эсадзе. Историческая записка об управлении Кавказом. Т. 2, p. 260).

<sup>8</sup> We know for sure that former Turkish administration evacuated itself from the town of Kars. In: National Archive of Georgia. Central Historical Archive. F 1438. Descr. 1. From the Material Collected by B. Esadze. Case 712. Emigration and Migration in the Province of Kars (in Russ.), p. 3. This model can be used for the whole province.

<sup>9</sup> М. Svanidze. History of Turkey (1299-2000) (in Georg.). Tb. 2007, pp. 289-290, 313.

<sup>10</sup> Ekv. Takaishvili. Archaeological Expedition of 1907 in Kola-Oltisi and Changli (in Georg.), p. 17. Most of the population are Muslim Georgians, and the begs are Khimshiashvilis – that is what he tells while describing Oltisi district (окрyр) in the province of Kars.

<sup>11</sup> Ex. Only small part of land in Batumi district (окрyр) was private (13500 desetinas from total 345594). The rest is state property. In: A. Bendianishvili, M. Samsonadze, S. Kokrashvili, D. Tchumburidze, O. Janelidze. Russian Colonialism (in Georg.). Tb. 2008, p. 170.

Very feudal in essence, local Muslim élite suffered from the other changes too. Legal equality, now introduced in the Ottoman provinces, cut their privileges at provincial level. Here is the whole story narrated by “Iveria”, very popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Georgian newspaper, issued in Tbilisi/Tiflis: “. . . now sultan’s government decided to deal with the begs. In 1856 they summoned the leaders of the Georgian nobles (the begs) to Istanbul. The request was as follows: old family charters were needed to be checked and substituted by the new ones. The begs, willingly presenting all the charters, signed by the Georgian kings, sultans or the shahs, thought of sultan’s grace. As soon as the government cheated out of these charters, they locked them in archives saying the words of Tanzimat: all the subjects of the Empire are equal before the law”.<sup>12</sup> “With Tanzimat and legal equality being established by the Ottomans, the aznauris (Georgian nobles) lost their privileges. The begs started to receive the pension and aznauris became equal to the peasants”.<sup>13</sup> That is also why the Muslim Georgians were so indifferent towards the Ottomans.

The Muslim Georgians, what did they receive after being incorporated into the Russian Empire?

1. There was land reserved for some of the former begs and membership in local militia
2. Peasants remained mostly at the state lands
3. And all they joined the Christian Georgians.

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<sup>12</sup> P. Umikashili. Ottoman Georgia. Adjara (in Georg.). “Iveria”. May 26, 1877. №13, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> P. Umikashili. Ottoman Georgia. Shavsheti (in Georg.). “Iveria”. June 30, 1877. №18, p. 9.

## Maps





