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RUSSIA’S EXPANSION IN THE CAUCASUS AND GEORGIA

Anti-Russian Demonstrations in Georgia

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ANTI-RUSSIAN DEMONSTRATIONS IN GEORGIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE XIX CENTURY

At the beginning of the XIX century, with the abolition of the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti, Russia’s expansion into the South Caucasus entered an active phase. This stage turned out to be quite long and full of contradictions. By annexing the kingdoms of Kartl-Kakheti and Imereti, Russia created an important stronghold for strengthening its influence in the Caucasus and expanding its borders. Naturally, the Russian authorities realized that these events would lead to a new armed confrontation with the peoples of the Caucasus. The conflict, known in history as the Caucasian Wars, took place right after the Georgian kingdoms were conquered.

The seemingly peaceful annexation of Kartl-Kakheti and the capture of the Kingdom of Imereti by military force with the manifesto of the Russian Emperor Alexander I was immediately followed by anti-Russian demonstrations and uprisings. It was a struggle for the restoration of Georgian statehood against the military-occupation system of the Russian rule and the unrestrained behavior of the Russian officials, becoming quite severe in the first half of the XIX century.

It is noteworthy that the Georgian National Liberation Movement united with the anti-Russian movements of the Caucasian Khanates as Muslim Khanates and Christian countries often used to become allies against the common invader. In addition, the Georgian leaders of the National Liberation Movement called upon the Persians and Ottomans for help. They considered the Caucasus as part of their sphere of influence and were involved in the war against Russia which aspired to dominate the region. The weakened Persians and Ottomans, if victorious, settled on a symbolic vassalage from the Georgians and demanded only a formal recognition of their rule. Thus, in the first half of the XIX century, the events of the struggle for the restoration of Georgian statehood were more or less connected to the Caucasus and Eastern wars and the main actor in the anti-Russian demonstrations was the peasantry along with the Georgian political elite.

ANTI-RUSSIAN DEMONSTRATIONS IN EASTERN GEORGIA

POLITICAL DEMONSTRATION OF 1802

The beginning of the national movement and anti-Russian demonstrations in modern Georgian historiography is considered to be April 12, 1802 - the events that unfolded during the proclamation of the manifesto of Alexander I in the Sioni Church in Tbilisi. In a besieged cathedral, a significant part of the Kakhetian nobility protested against the manifesto on abolition.
of the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti and its annexation to Russia and did not take the oath of allegiance to the Russian emperor.

In July 1802, a gathering of several thousand people in Kiziki, near Kelmencur, at the initiative of the Kakhetian nobility, escalated into a political demonstration against Russia. Among its leaders were: Oman Jandieri, Svimon and David Kobulashvili, Ivane Andronikashvili, Ioseb and Ivane Chavchavadze and others. The Russian authorities sent a military unit to disperse the gathering of Kelmencur but the rebels were able to repel their first attack.

The participants of the political demonstration sent a letter to the Russian Emperor, Generals Lazarev and Gulyakov, and Garsevan Chavchavadze, who at that time was in Russia. They protested the manifesto of September 12, 1801, demanding the restoration of the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti, the coronation of Julon Erekle’s son as the King and the fulfillment of the terms of the Treaty of Georgievsk of 1783.

On July 24, 1802, the Kizik princes gathered at the River Lakbe and invited Metropolitan Ioane of Bodbe and took the oath of allegiance first to the Russian emperor and then to Julon, the son of Erekle. They informed Julon Batonishvili* of this event and called upon the entire nobility and peasantry of Kakheti in writing to take the same oath.

In a petition addressed to Emperor Alexander I (signed by 69 nobles), Kakhetian dukes expressed dissatisfaction with the abolition of the monarchy in Kartl-Kakheti. The demands of the people envisaged the existence of the sovereign state of Kartl-Kakheti under the subordination of the Russian Empire and the approval of Erekle’s son Julon as a king. The aims of the participants of the Kelmencur meeting did not, in essence, go beyond the terms of the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk; however, this was completely unacceptable to the Russian imperial court.

The members of the royal family understood the situation, forgot about the quarrel over the throne and united against the Russian rule to restore the representative of the Bagrationi dynasty on the throne of Kartl-Kakheti. In the case of victory, Erekle’s son Julon would have been announced as the King of Kartl-Kakheti.

Erekle’s son Vakhtang was planning a highlanders’ revolt and blocking the Dariali road. Giorgi’s son Teimuraz was mobilizing troops in his kingdom to support those gathered in Kelmencur. Julon and Parnaz Batonishvili, situated in the Kingdom of Imereti and with the support of Solomon II and the Pasha of Akhaltsikhe, were planning to join forces against the Russians and cross the Kartli border with the army of Imeret. Alexander Batonishvili, who had taken refuge in Persia, was looking for anti-Russian forces among the rulers of the Islamic Khanate of the Middle East and was planning to guide his troops through Djaro-Belokani to assist the Kakhetian dukes. Giorgi’s son David Batonishvili, who took refuge in Borchalo, also reconciled with the supporters of Erekle’s son Julon and was acting in coordination with them to help Julon Batonishvili in the fight for the throne. Anton Catholicos also sympathized with the political demonstration.

Despite the scale of this political demonstration, the Russian authorities were able to neutralize and suppress it. In order to prevent the return of Julon and Parnaz Batonishvili from Imereti to Kartl-Kakheti, the roads leading from Imereti to eastern Georgia were reinforced, the defense of Tbilisi was strengthened and additional military forces were sent to Kakheti. The rebellious nobility of Kakheti was unable to resist and decided to disperse the people. Julon and Parnaz Batonishvili could not join the Kakhetians and Alexander Batonishvili, fortified in Djaro-Belokani, also reconsidered the invasion of Kakheti. Some of the leaders of the political demonstration in Kakheti were captured by the Russian authorities while some fled and later joined Alexander Batonishvili. Soon, the captured dukes were forgiven for their crimes and swore allegiance to the Russian emperor. The authorities clearly saw that the process of deporting members of the Bagrationi royal family from Georgia to Russia had to begin immediately.

Despite the failure of the 1802 political demonstration, it became obvious that the Georgian people would not conform with the loss of their statehood and sought to fight for independence.

* Batonishvili in Georgia refers to the member of a Royal family. Thus a son or a daughter of a king is called Batonishvili.
1804 Highland Rebellion

In 1804, an uprising broke out in the highlands of Kartli. After the establishment of Russian rule, the increase of movement through the Dariiali Valley and the construction of the Georgian military road, which connected the Russian Empire with the South Caucasus, acquired great strategic importance. The surrounding valleys and the population found themselves in a peculiar situation.

In 1803, the district (uyezd) center was moved from Dusheti to Ananuri and the Highland Peoples’ Division was set up as a separate administrative unit which united the mountain gorges of Kartli: Truso, Khevi, Mituleti, Gudamakari, Khando and Chartali. Russian taxes, the so-called “saruso,” the endless and hardest tax of the Georgian military road, became a heavy burden for them. Even a minor protest was punished by a military expedition. The sources describe the dishonoring, demeaning treatment, physical abuse, impunity and murder committed by the Russian military and officials. The Russian birch rod and whip were especially unbearable for the people accustomed to a free life.

The dissolution of the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti and the establishment of Russian governance proved unacceptable for the population of the Kartli Highlands. The protection of the Caucasus crossings and the northern borders of the Georgian kingdoms from external enemies has historically, in almost every period, designated an important role to the population of these gorges. They considered themselves directly subordinate to the Georgian kings, obeyed them and served with a distinct devotion.

The population of the highlands was the stronghold of the Georgian kings, everyone was mobilized on their orders and not appearing in battle was considered a disgrace. Members of the Bagrationi royal family, princes and the Batoniashvilis had a great influence on them. Thus, even an unforeseen reason was enough to start a revolt against the Russian regime.

In 1804, by the order of the Caucasus Governor General Pavel Tsitsianov, the mobilization of forces to invade the Yerevan Khanate also affected the highland population. Mituletians gathered in the Aragvi gorge and protested against joining the Russian army. The uprising began with an attack on the Kaishauri checkpoint in May 1804, followed by the siege of Ananuri and Dusheti as well as the capture of the Stephansminda and Lars checkpoints.

The uprising encompassed the entire Shida Kartli highlands. The Mituletians were first supported by the Mokhevians and then by the inhabitants of the Gudamakari, Khando and Chartli gorges as well as the Tushetians, Pshav-Khevsurians and Ossetians of the Truso gorge. There were 4,000 of them. The insurgents closed the Dariiali gorge and destroyed bridges and crossings from Kaishauri to Ananuri and a significant section of the Georgian military road came under their control.

The aim of the uprising of the highlanders was to defeat the Russian occupation regime and restore the Bagrationi royal government. They established ties with Alexander, Julon and Parnaoz Batonishvili who led the uprising conceptually. Julon called upon the aristocrats of Kartl-Kakheti to get involved in the uprising of the highlanders. The prince tried to give the uprising a joint Caucasian character and after negotiations with the Circassians received their promise for support.

Pavel Tsitsianov, who was marching on Yerevan, ordered General Volkonisky to suppress the uprising. In addition to the Russian army, the government also relied on the forces of the Georgian dukes in the service of the Empire and those made loyal by various rewards, decorations and military ranks. Among them were the Eristavis of Ksani, to whom the government returned the serfs and lands seized during the reign of Erekle II, thus antagonizing them with the Bagrationi royal family. They mobilized about 1,500 men although some shifted to the side of the rebels. The authorities tried to persuade and bribe the rebel leaders to quarrel with each other and break the trust among the fighters. Dukes Makashvili and Kobulashvili were helping Russia to calm down the Pshav-Khevsurians.
Some of the Georgian dukes who sympathized with the insurgents took a passive position and waited for the events to unfold and some others, especially the Kakhetian nobles, became actively involved in the struggle.

In early July 1804, Parnaoz and Julon Batonishvili stormed into Kartli from Imereti with a small unit to join the rebels but the government forces blocked their way and this attempt was unsuccessful. The Batonishvilis returning to Imereti were attacked by the Russian unit of Surami. They captured Julon Batonishvili while Parnaoz and Julon’s son Levan escaped captivity.

To continue the uprising and the mobilization of forces Parnaoz Batonishvili assumed the leadership. He moved to Bambak via Akhaltsikhe to meet with Alexander Batonishvili from whom he received a promise of assistance from the Persian army. From there he entered Kakheti to get the support of the Kakhetian dukes. Parnaoz also tried to persuade the Eristavis of Ksani but to no avail. Many Kakhetian aristocrats, including son of Garsevan Chavchavadze, Alexander and several dukes in the service of Russia, responded to Parnaoz’s call.

In August 1804, the uprising reached its culmination. After the victory at Lomisi, it also spread over the Ksani gorge. The highlanders raided the lands of Ksani Eristavi who was loyal to Russia. Accompanied by armed groups of Kakhetian dukes, Parnaoz joined the rebels in September. The uprising continued and became dangerous for the Russian reign.

General Volkonsky asked the emperor for additional army units. Additional Russian military forces entered eastern Georgia: a military unit with 30 cannons was deployed from Crimea via Samegrelo and the “Caucasus Line” to the Dariali Valley under the leadership of General Nesvetaev. Meanwhile, Pavel Tsitsianov lifted the siege of Yerevan after a failed campaign and turned his full attention to suppressing the uprising. The insurgents were attacked from three directions - Tsitsianov from Ananuri, Nesvetaev from Kavkavi and the Ksani Eristavis from the Liakhvi gorge. The decisive battle took place on October 13, 1804 at Sioni. The rebels were defeated and Parnaoz Batonishvili was captured. The authorities resorted to repressions: more than 300 men were arrested and exiled, several villages were burned and the captured Parnaoz and Julon Batonishvili were exiled to Russia in April 1805.

After the suppression of the uprising in the highlands, the Russian authorities considered some concessions: Pavel Tsitsianov tried to redefine the rights and responsibilities of the people living along the military road, tariffs for cargo transportation and road maintenance enforced under Erekle II were restored and the violence on the part of Russian officials was curtailed.

The 1804 Highland Uprising against the Russian regime in eastern Georgia was the first large-scale armed uprising aimed at restoring Georgian statehood. It started in the highlands of Kartli, went beyond the local geographical area and acquired a large scale. The uprising spread to eastern Georgia: the Kartli highlands, parts of the Shida Kartli valley and Kakheti. It involved various strata of the population: members of the Bagrationi royal family, nobles and the peasantry. Despite the defeat, the Highland Uprising made it clear that the Georgian people had a strong sense of sovereign statehood and a desire to restore it.

In 1804, the rebels of Mtiuleti, who had been informed of the capture of Parnaoz and were advised to lay down their arms, wrote: “The whole gorge has an oath of allegiance to the Bagrationis, you should know that we are not afraid of the Russian army ... Capturing Parnaoz is a great misfortune for us but we thank God that Alexander, Teimuraz, and Levan are free and we will continue to fight under their command.” These words of the highlanders expressed their loyalty to Georgian statehood and their readiness to restore it and continue the fight against the Russian rule. The historical sources testify that the strict retribution of the authorities did not lead to the complete obedience and tranquility of the population. Separate sporadic protests against the government continued in Kvemo Kartli and Mtianeli.

In the first half of the XIX century, the Russian government had to fight in the South Caucasus, on the one hand, against the Ottoman-Persians for the conquest of new territories and, on the other hand, against the anti-regime national movement to consolidate power.
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KAKHETI UPRISING OF 1812-1813

The Russian governance was in particular danger in 1812 when the whole Kakheti mobilized against it. The struggle for the restoration of Georgian statehood in Kakheti became highly organized, well-thought out and planned in accordance with the domestic and foreign situation. It went beyond the scope of an ordinary rebellion or revolt against the Russian rule. It was a joint armed demonstration of the Bagrationi royal family, the Georgian aristocracy and the common people. It was in effect a war to restore the country’s independence and the royal dynasty.

The Kakheti uprising of 1812 was triggered with a specific event. In particular, the population of eastern Georgia, especially Kakheti, was made responsible for almost all logistics for the Russian army involved in the wars against the Ottomans and Iran. The army’s food supply and transport tax were added to their obligations. For troops and expeditions, the Russian government demanded large quantities of manpower and livestock from the population. The government bought food and bread from the peasants at a price much lower than market value. The Russian officials and soldiers often arbitrarily misappropriated a portion of the already scarce funds allocated for bread and resources (ox-buffalo). The population no longer had a supply of bread and manpower and this was exacerbated by the Black Plague epidemic, crop failure and hunger.

By January 1812, the Russian army in Georgia had no more than a month of supply of bread left and the population refused to sell the bread at low prices. The Governor General Paulucci (1811-1812) deployed punitive military units in the villages which resulted in violence by Russian soldiers as well as their insults against the population, the looting of their houses and mutilations and casualties.

The people decided to take up arms against the government. The uprising began on January 31, 1812 in Akhmeta and soon spread to Matani and Tianeti and then throughout Kakheti. The uprising entered an active phase. The population of all ranks and social strata took part in it but the nobility held the leading position. Simon and Adam Beburishvili, Ninia Andronikashvili, Otar Kobulashvili, Ioseb Sidamonishvili and others led the armed forces.

The insurgents attacked critical locations in Kakheti. On February 2, 1812, under the command of Dukes Beburishvili and Makashvili, a large army of thousands occupied Telavi. The Russian garrison was fortified in Telavi castle and continued to fight from there. On February 5, Kiziki’s army

Castle of Manavi
captured Sighnaghi. The Russian troops were expelled from Bodbiskhevi and Anaga. Rebellion hotspots arose in Manavi, Kakabeti, Martkopi and Sagarejo. Roads leading from Telavi and Sighnaghi to Tbilisi were closed and the head of the Kakheti military district, Portnyagin, who was defeated in Sagarejo, took refuge in the capital.

The main goal of the insurgents was to restore the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti under the rule of the Bagrationi dynasty. At the beginning of the revolt, the Kakhetians sent a delegation to Alexander Batonishvili (1770-1844), the son of King Erekle II to Yerevan and invited him as their commander and king but in anticipation of Persian military aid, Prince Alexander was delayed in Armenia.

Instead, 23-year-old Grigol Bagrationi, (1789-1830) great grandson of King Erekle II (through the line of George XII), was actually involved in the popular uprising from the outset. The dukes of Kakheti proclaimed Grigol Batonishvili, who miraculously escaped exile in Russia, as king on February 20, 1812. Grigol became the leader of the rebellious Kakhetians.

Together with the allied Kartli nobility, Grigol tried to spread the uprising in Kartli. On February 9, an uprising broke out in the Shida Kartli highlands. The army of Mtiulians and Pshav-Khevsurians, led by Ioseb Sidamonishvili, established control over the checkpoints of Dusheti and Pasanauri, besieged Ananuri and blocked the Georgian military road which posed a great danger to the Russians located in Georgia.

Grigol’s companions-in-arms called upon the Mokhevians, Gudamakrelians, Tagaurelians and others to revolt. The insurgents became so strong that they entered in the vicinity of Avchala and put the Russian administration in Tbilisi in real danger.

Returning from the front-line, Governor General Paulucci himself took the lead in the fight against the uprising. On February 22, he informed the emperor of the situation in the country and called for additional forces.

The authorities took extraordinary measures to fortify the capital, suppress the uprising in Kartli and clear the Georgian military road. The troops were recalled from Imereti, Shida Kartli, the Russian-Persian front-line and the North Caucasus. With the help of the local dukes, the authorities managed to prevent the spreading of the protest within Kartli. After strengthening the positions in Kartli, it became possible to attack the rebellious highlanders fortified in the Aragvi gorge. With the support of Gabriel Kazbegi, Konstantine Mukhran-Batoni and other Kartlian dukes, Colonel Ushakov’s units expelled the rebels from Ananuri and Dusheti, the captives were severely punished and the villages of the highlanders were burned down.

Accompanied by troops and artillery, Paulucci invaded Kakheti. Near the village of Khashmi, he addressed the population with proclamations: he accused the rebels of breaking their oaths and committing treason against the king and called for their obedience. At the same time, the Governor General promised the people that he would stop the impunity and injustice of the officials.

The Kakhetians refused to surrender after which the Russian garrison launched an attack. It became difficult to withstand the Russian regular army, reinforced with artillery, and the People's Army was forced to retreat deep into Kakheti. Paulucci did not immediately pursue them. He first cleared Khashmi, Manavi, Kakabeti and Sagarejo from the insurgency and severely punished many people - hanged or arrested them. He then went forcibly through Kiziki and moved towards Telavi.

On March 1-2, 1812, in a decisive battle near the village of Chumlaki, the Russian army was confronted by a major rebel force led by Grigol. The Russians won at a great loss. The Commander of the Russian Battalion, Colonel Yakhtang Orbeliani, was killed in the battle and Alexander Chavchavadze, an adjutant of Paulucci, this time fighting on the Russian side, was wounded. Grigol took refuge in Dagestan but he was captured and deported to Russia on April 6, 1812. The rebels, left without a commander, surrendered Telavi without a fight but they put up fierce resistance to the numerous Russian troops near Tianeti. The victory was also left to the authorities this time, forcing the rebels to temporarily stop fighting.

Governor General Paulucci informed the Russian emperor that the governance and administration were restored and the entire Kartl-Kakheti was calm. The authorities punished the rebels; however, they were compelled to make some concessions. Paulucci abolished the position of Captain-Ispravniks. He also restored “Mouravoba," increased the rights of the leader of the nobility, set up temporary courts where
Georgian law became the basis for civil proceedings, banned military patrolling and set up a commission to investigate the causes of the uprising which acknowledged the shortcomings of the Russian governance.

Soon Paulucci was recalled. He was replaced by a new Governor General, Nikolay Rtishchev. He saw that the fire of the uprising in Kakheti would ignite again and started registering active participants. The leaders of the uprising, who had previously escaped arrest, fled into the forests. The unrest in Kakheti started again. In April, a new wave of uprisings swept through Eniseli, Shilda, Sabue, Gremi and other villages. The unrest spread over Kiziki as well. The Kakhetians called upon Alexander Batonishvili, who was in Persia, to join them and lead their movement. Authorities sent military units under the command of Generals Stali and Dimitri Orbeliani to keep Kakheti calm. The government promised the insurgents amnesty and called on them to disband. With the help of negotiations, promises, the use of military force and the lack of hope for foreign aid which weakened the resilience of the rebels, the armed units disbanded and Kakheti appeared to have calmed down.

In May 1812, a Russo-Ottoman truce was signed and the hostilities between the parties ended. However, peace talks with Persia were delayed since it sought to restore influence in the South Caucasus. In the summer of 1812, the army of Napoleon, the ruler of France, invaded Russia and took Moscow. Russia was in danger of being destroyed and defeated. There was a feeling that Russia, which was defending its territories, would weaken its grip over the South Caucasus. Russia’s Caucasus policy depended on the outcome of this war. Given the external situation, Alexander Batonishvili, located in Iran, started to take active actions in Kartli-Kakheti.

In September 1812, he managed to arrive in his homeland from Persia with a small army and fortified himself in Tieneti. Kakheti and Pshav-Khevsureti revolted upon his call and Kartli was engulfed in unrest. A total of 1,200 Dagestani fighters arrived from Dagestan to help Alexander Batonishvili.

Alexander, who had moved to Kakheti, led the rebels. One part of them was tasked with controlling the roads from Tbilisi to Kakheti and another part - with activities along the Georgian military road. The main force, led by Alexander Batonishvili, was to attack Russian military units in Kakheti.

Alexander’s attack was to begin on the night of Alaverdoba. This celebration day was also to be his coronation as the King of Georgia. The authorities opposed the protest with significant forces - reinforced strategic points in Kakheti, requested the deployment of additional troops from the North Caucasus and set a reward for the killing of Alexander Batonishvili.

Russian troops from the North Caucasus were able to clear the military road occupied by the Pshav-Khevsurians. Under the leadership of General Dimitri Orbeliani, units of the regular army operated against the insurgents in Kakheti and they were reinforced by the divisions of the army which were recalled as a consequence of the Russian-Persian armistice negotiations as well as by the military forces stationed in Imereti. The authorities made every effort to prevent the coronation of Alexander Batonishvili.

Alexander Batonishvili chose guerrilla warfare tactics. His cavalry, divided into small units, attacked the Russian army and inflicted heavy damage. However, Alexander was forced to face the Russian regular army in a decisive battle near the village of Shilda. The battle of October 10, 1812 lasted six hours. The rebels retreated and the authorities won.

The peace negotiations between Russia and Persia failed and hostilities resumed. The Persian army, under the command of Abbas Mirza, begun the movement towards Georgia. Alexander Batonishvili was following the current international events and, along with the success of Napoleon in Russia, was hopeful for Abbas Mirza’s expedition to Georgia. With the Persian army entering the country, Batonishvili would gain a serious military force against Russia. It should be noted that Alexander’s position also contained a threat because the anti-Persian sentiments in the population of Georgia, especially in Kakheti, was quite strong and it may have caused the anti-Persian counter-movement. Alexander Batonishvili tried to persuade the insurgents to perceive Persia, in this case, not as a conqueror but as an ally in the fight against the Russians.

With the aim to join Alexander Batonishvili to help the rebels and to capture Tbilisi, the Persian army, led by Abbas-Mirza, marched to Kakheti through the Shak road. The Russians, however, forestalled and on defeated the Persians in a battle
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at Aslanduz on October 19-20. Alexander Batonishvili’s expectations for outside help were dashed.

On November 26, 1812, during a battle at Manav, Dagestani units bribed by the Russians betrayed Alexander Batonishvili and left the battle. Alexander was defeated. Batonishvili took refuge in Shatili. The rebellious population of Kakheti was subjected to severe repressions and punitive measures.

The correspondence between Alexander Batonishvili, based in Shatili, and Governor General Rtishchev showed Batonishvili’s high diplomatic culture. In terms of relations with Russia, he defended the principles of the Treaty of 1783, considered the struggle for the restoration of Georgia’s independence as just and refused to surrender.

The defeat did not break Alexander Batonishvili’s spirit. He continued to appeal to the Caucasus highlanders even from Khevsureti and offered them specific plans to fight against Russia. Batonishvili also tried to establish a connection with Abbas-Mirza, advising him to resume the fighting. Through a network of spies, the authorities monitored the prince and tried to capture him by bribing Khevsurians but this was in vain. Alexander Batonishvili was a living symbol of dignity and freedom for the highlanders and they were particularly loyal to him until the end.

The international political situation turned in Russia’s favor. After the defeat of France, Persia and the Ottomans it also strengthened its position in the Caucasus. The battle of Alexander Batonishvili become hopeless. Governor General Rtishchev decided to capture Batonishvili and, under the command of General Stali, deployed 800 Russian troops to Khevsureti. Armed Khevsurians and Kists fought heroically, defending the idea of dignity and freedom took the life of about 700 fighters. The Russians razed more than 20 Khevsurian and about ten Kist villages to the ground and turned Shatili into ashes. Prince Alexander, thanks to the dedication of the Khevsurians, escaped the enemy and took refuge in the Northern Caucasus. Encamped in the village of Untsukuli in Dagestan, Alexander began to assemble the combat units of the highlanders. Soon 6,000 fighters were united under his banner. In 1813, he entered Kakheti via Shilda and fought with the Russian army near Sabue but was defeated and returned to Dagestan with his army. Alexander Batonishvili remained in Dagestan until 1818, hoping that the international situation would turn in favor of the Persians. Russia did not officially allow him to cross the border into Persia and there were fruitless attempts to win him over. Finally, secretly from the Russian border guards, Alexander still managed to move to Akhaltsikhe and from there to Persia where he remained for the rest of his life. However, before that, his name was once again mentioned in the circle of conspirators of 1832 while selecting the desired candidates for the royal throne of independent Georgia.

Participants in the uprising were severely punished: many were arrested, sentenced to death and deported. Reparations were imposed on the population in the form of bread and cash, lineages hostile to Russia were raided and pro-government dukes and officials were rewarded.

After the defeat of the people’s demonstration of Kakheti, the authorities made some changes in the governance. The Captain-Ispavnik institute never resumed operation, the "Mouravoba" restored by Paulucci was abolished again and supervisors from the Georgian nobility (the so-called "Smotritels") were appointed in the villages. The number of Georgians in the Russian governance increased.

The Kakheti uprising of 1812-1813 lasted for 15 months. It was a joint armed demonstration of all ranks and social strata and a selfless public
struggle to restore an independent Georgian state. To protect national dignity, the blood of thousands of people was shed and lives were lost. The public demonstration of Kakheti is an exemplary page in the history of the Georgian people's struggle for freedom.

ANTI-RUSSIAN DEMONSTRATIONS IN WESTERN GEORGIA

THE PEOPLE’S STRUGGLE OF 1810 IN THE KINGDOM OF IMERETI

The people’s struggle of 1810 in the Kingdom of Imereti. The anti-Russian demonstration in western Georgia began right after the abolition of the Kingdom of Imereti.

In 1810, Alexander Tormasov, the Governor General of Georgia, according to the instructions received from St. Petersburg, proclaimed King Solomon II of Imereti as deposed. He abolished the kingdom and began a large-scale battle against him. Fighting continued for a month near Vartsikhe where the king of Imereti was staying with his supporters. Finally, Solomon II was captured by deceit and taken to Tbilisi. However, he managed to escape from captivity and moved to Akhaltsikhe.

From Akhaltsikhe, Solomon II called on the population of Imereti to fight against the Russian invaders. Following the call of the king, the population of Imereti confronted the government which eventually turned into a popular uprising. The anti-Russian demonstration took on a large-scale. Solomon II returned to Imereti and spearheaded the uprising. Shida Kartli also became involved in the uprising where Alexander Batonishvili sent his nephew, Julon’s 19-year-old son Levan. Tormasov set a hefty monetary reward for killing Solomon II and Julon’s son Levan but to no avail. The government was even surprised because no one turned out in Imereti to provide this service for the Russian government.

In September 1810, Solomon moved to the Khanistskali gorge. He was pursued by the Russian army but they were not able to capture the king. The temporary Governor of Imereti, Teodore Simonovich, asked the Governor General for permission to take hostages from the families of the nobles in order to prevent their participation in the Imereti uprising.

Many people were killed in Imereti during the Russian occupation. Despite their courage, the people turned out to be powerless against the Russian military. Solomon II was forced to return to Akhaltsikhe. The king, hoping to find an ally, tried to establish diplomatic relations with Russian opposition forces - he sent ambassadors to the Ottoman Sultan and the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte but to no avail. Through ambassadors, Governor General Tormasov offered him to leave Akhaltsikhe and move to Tbilisi where he would receive amnesty and due respect from the Russian emperor. The king did not accept the offer. Eventually, he was forced to flee to the Ottoman Empire. Solomon II settled in Trabzon and died there in 1815. In 1991, King Solomon II of Imereti was relocated to Georgia and reburied in Gelati.
After the defeat of the uprising of 1810, Russian rule was established in Imereti. Russian authorities rewarded loyal supporters with decorations and high positions. However, until the 1840s, it was quite difficult for the authorities to firmly establish Russian governance in Imereti.

**1819-1820 Uprising in Western Georgia**

After the abolition of the Georgian kingdoms, the most painful issue was the abolition of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church in 1811 and its reformation in the Russian manner. Despite the introduction of the Exarch institute and the Georgian-Imereti Dicastery (1814), the Church maintained its independence in western Georgia. After Maxime, the last Catholicos of Abkhazia, the Church of Western Georgia was headed by Dositheos Kutateli with the status of an incumbent bishop for the Catholicos.

The experience of public demonstrations and uprisings in the Kingdom of Imereti forced the government to be careful not to set Russian rules at once and maintain the traditional forms of government.

Attempts to carry out ecclesiastical reform in western Georgia between 1819 and 1820 caused great unrest which turned into a popular uprising against the Russian regime.

Ecclesiastical reform implied the organization of the Georgian Church according to the Russian custom, the reduction of the number of Eparchies, the amendment of Church taxes and the transfer of land and serfs in possession of the Church to the State Treasury which would have significantly increased the state’s revenues.

In order to accelerate the ecclesiastical reforms, Exarch Varlam Eristavi was replaced by Theophylact Rusanov in 1818. He actively engaged in the implementation of the government’s plan.

Ecclesiastical reform initiated in eastern Georgia was met negatively by the Church and the population of western Georgia. Blatant interference in traditional forms of ecclesiastical management led to dissatisfaction in Imereti, Racha and Guria in 1819, eventually transforming into a liberation struggle.

In July, Racha joined the unrest that started in Imereti in June 1819. Despite the expulsion of Theophylact Rusanov from Imereti and the promise to stop the reform, the unrest did not subside. It was particularly exacerbated when the government demanded that people “repent of their sins” and swear allegiance to the emperor. The insurgents blocked the access roads to Kutaisi and decided to attack the city. Authorities reinforced the outskirts of the city.

The core of the uprising was revealed: Dositheos Kutateli, Ekvtime Genateli, the grandson of the King Solomon I of Bagrati Cathedral, Imereti
Imereti, Ivane Abashidze, and dukes from Racha and Imereti - Bezhan Tsereteli, Merab Iashvili, Sekhnia Tsulukidze and others.

The leaders tried to organize the uprising and united the people around the idea of liberating the homeland and restoring the Kingdom of Imereti. At first, the rebels offered the king's crown to Erekle's son Alexander Batonishvili but because his coronation became impossible, Ivane Abashidze was proclaimed as king.

In early 1820, the authorities ordered the new ruler of Imereti, Colonel Puzirevsky, to take decisive action against the rebels. In March, the rebel leaders Ivane Abashidze, Dositheos Kutateli and Ekvtime Genateli were captured. Ivane Abashidze managed to escape and took refuge in Guria. The arrested archbishops were treated dishonorably, they put sacks on them and moved them out from Imereti. At Surami, the tortured Metropolitan Dositheos died. His body was carried to Ananuri in a sack. Ekvtime was exiled to Russia where he died soon after.

Puzirevsky invaded Guria with an army and demanded the handing over of Ivane Abashidze. The appearance of the punitive military expedition made the population of Guria revolt. Puzirevsky was killed by Bolkvadze, a nobleman, because of a personal insult. An armed unit near Chokhatauri besieged and destroyed a Russian military unit. The Gurians crossed Rioni, occupied Chaladidi and revolted in Samegrelo as well. The Megrelians were commanded by the prince's brother, Grigol Dadiani. The prince of Samegrelo, Levan Dadiani, loyal to Russia, saw the danger to his principedom in Grigol's uprising, defeated his brother, captured and handed him over to the Russians.

Ivane Abashidze, who relocated to Racha, expanded the uprising. He destroyed a Cossack checkpoint near the Cholabur River which disrupted the capacity of the Russian army to connect with eastern Georgia. Afterwards, he fortified himself in the Khanistskali River gorge.

A new expedition sent to suppress the uprising, led by General Velyaminov, accompanied by the Governor of Imereti, Gorchakov, was able to penetrate western Georgia with a large army. Rebels put up great resistance in the Kvara castle against the 2,000-man military unit which arrived in Racha under the leadership of Gorchakov. However, they eventually retreated. In the battle at Khanistskali, the Russians tried to capture Ivane Abashidze, the declared King of Imereti. After several clashes, Ivane Abashidze retreated and managed to move to Akhaltsikhe. An assassin, sent there for him, took his life.

Velyaminov attacked the Gurian units fortified in the Shemokmedi castle with 3,200 soldiers. Georgians were defeated in an unequal battle. By the time the Russian army entered the castle, only five Georgian soldiers remained alive and they were also impaled.

It turned out that the leaders of the uprising had developed a charter indicating the high organizational character of this struggle. The charter contained a plan for the uprising which clearly showed the purpose of the uprising - the expulsion of the Russian authorities from Georgia. The charter was signed by the commanders which made it easier for the authorities to identify them. Part of the leaders of the uprising served in the Russian army and the authorities resorted to this cunning method to detain them: ten men named in the charter were called up for military operation, they were besieged as soon as they arrived and the authorities prepared to capture them. The Imeretian dukes immediately understood the situation and mounted resistance. Levan Tsulukidze and his two comrades were killed on the spot and the wounded were captured.

The uprising was defeated. The Russian army severely punished the population: they destroyed the castles, ransacked and set villages on fire, cut down vineyards and arrested and punished many people. The leaders and participants of the uprising were exiled. Most of them were not able to return to their homeland.

The governor of Imereti, Gorchakov, issued a proclamation on March 12, 1821 about the Imeretian dukes as “traitors of the homeland.” It was accompanied by a list of people to be expelled from the empire which included members of the Imereti royal family and nobility. It comprised a total of 27 men. The government offered compensation to those who would hand them over dead or alive.

The 1819-1820 uprising of western Georgia, which Russian officials called an “ecclesiastical riot” in order to reduce its scale and significance, was, in fact, an excellent manifestation of the Georgian people’s national liberation struggle. The revolt which began against the unwelcomed ecclesiastical reform acquired a popular character. It was marked by the restoration of the Kingdom of Imereti and the liberation of the country from the Russian occupation regime. This was an important event for the national movement which, like the armed uprising in Kakheti in 1812, is an example of the selfless struggle for the liberation of the homeland and the restoration of the state.
CONSPIRACY OF 1832

The defeat of the anti-Russian uprisings in the first twenty years of the XIX century and the results of the national struggle showed Georgian society the need to change the forms and tactics of the fight. It became clear that it was not enough to set up spontaneous, local and regional uprisings against the Russian regime but, rather, a joint Georgian-wide struggle based on a program and pre-planned action.

After the abolition of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, the Russian government deported representatives of the Bagrationi royal family to Russia, mainly to St. Petersburg and Moscow. Those who remained in Georgia, gathered at the court of the Kingdom of Imereti from 1801 and made plans to restore and strengthen the Georgian state.

The abolition of the Kingdom of Imereti after the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, the failure of the uprisings of the first twenty years of the XIX century and the endless repressions put a certain mark on society. During this time, a generation emerged that grew up under Russian rule. The government allowed young people to receive a European education and advance in the military or civilian hierarchy. By relying on them, the government intended to suppress anti-Russian sentiment in society and create a loyal attitude towards Russia.

Under these conditions, the consolidation and revival of the national movement takes place around the representatives of the Bagrationi royal family exiled in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Their families became a gathering place for distinguished members of Georgian society where the future of the homeland and the ways to save it were being discussed.

In 1825-1826, secret circles were formed in St. Petersburg and Moscow. In St. Petersburg, a secret society was led by Julon’s son Dimitri Bagrationi and in Moscow by George’s son Okropir Bagrationi. Parnaoz Batonishvili, Dimitri and Vakhtang Orbeliani, Giorgi, Dimitri and Elizbar Eristavi, Alexander Cholokashvili, Solomon Razmadze and others gathered in St. Petersburg. Giorgi Eristavi, David Orbeliani, Solomon Dodashvili and others joined the Moscow circle.

In 1827-1829, the conspirators relocated their center to Tbilisi. It was headed by Alexander Orbeliani, Elizbar Eristavi and Solomon Dodashvili. The work spread to almost all parts of Georgia and the circle of conspirators was growing. Alexander Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, Dimitri Kipiani, Tekla and Tamar Batonishvili and others also joined it. The heirs of the Princes of Abkhazia and Samegrelo, Konstantin Shervashidze and David Dadiani, also sympathized with the conspirators.

The conspirators failed to complete the program but their papers and interrogation protocols allow us to reconstruct the program’s requirements.

It should be noted that there were differing opinions among the conspirators on the ways to liberate the country: Ivane Abkhazi saw Georgia’s secession from Russia in the distant future and considered it inadmissible to liberate it earlier than 100 years or otherwise the country would fall under Persian-Ottoman influence. Grigol Orbeliani believed that the country was ready to revolt against Russia, regain independence and defend itself from external enemies. Alexander Orbeliani considered it necessary to peacefully convince the Russian emperor to create an autonomous Kingdom of Georgia within Russia.
In the case of the restoration of independence, there were differing opinions about the state structure of Georgia: 1. Proponents of the monarchy sought to restore the traditional Bagrationi dynasty. This was supported by Batonishvilis and part of the aristocracy (princes). 2. Proponents of the idea of a constitutional (limited) monarchy thought of creating a bicameral parliament. The upper house would be occupied by the king and the ministers and the lower house by deputies selected through representation. The king’s powers would be hereditary and 3. A republican governance was supported by the smallest part. At the head of this group was Solomon Dodashvili. Despite such differing views, all were in favor of the restoration of a united Georgian state.

Most of the conspirators came to share the idea of creating a constitutional monarchy. This was an indicator of the development of political thought which meant the renewal of the traditional form of monarchical rule and its adaptation to the requirements of the new time. They planned to invite Alexander Batonishvili as king. Ministers were also selected of whom only Alexander Chavchavadze was a member of the secret organization.

The conspirators considered Poland and Chechnya-Dagestan, where the fight against the Russian regime had been active at that time, to be their allies. In Europe, they hoped for the help of France and England. A connection was established with Alexander Batonishvili who again tried to form an anti-Russian coalition with the help of the Shah of Persia and the Sultan of Egypt, Mohammed Ali. However, due to the wars lost to Russia, the conspirators had little hope for an alliance with Persia and the Ottomans.

The Society of Georgian Conspirators was especially active during the Polish uprising of 1830-1831. After the capture of Warsaw by the Poles, the conspirators decided to take action against the Russian authorities. Almost all of the conspirators supported the armed uprising. Solomon Dodashvili drafted a proclamation to the Georgian people. The defeat of the Polish uprising and the repression carried out by Russia temporarily suppressed the enthusiasm of the Georgians but the fighting spirit was soon restored. The sending of Governor General Baron Georg Rosen (1831-1837) against Qazi Mullah in the North Caucasus, in Chechnya and in Dagestan, was considered by the conspirators as a favorable moment.

The date of the uprising was set for November 20, 1832 but it was changed several times and finally set for December 20. The conspirators drafted an action plan entitled the “First Night Ordinance” which included the preparation of armed units, the capture of castles and the disarmament of Russian troops stationed in Tbilisi and its vicinity as well as the capture of strategic checkpoints and food depots and the incorporation of volunteers and artisans into the uprising. On the day of the uprising, there were plans to arrest high-ranking military and civilian officials invited to a ball at Luarsab Orbeliani’s palace which would make it easier for the conspirators to disarm the troops and launch the “First Night Ordinance.”

On December 9, Iase Palavandishvili suddenly betrayed the conspiracy. He informed his brother, Tbilisi Civil Governor Nikoloz Palavandishvili, of the plan of the secret society to recruit on the conspirators’ side. The governor insisted on informing the authorities.

Based on the information of Iase Palavandishvili, the government arrested the conspirators. In 1834, a military court sentenced 13 of them to death. Among them were: Elizbar Eristavi, Alexander Orbeliani, Solomon Dodashvili, Dimitri Eristavi, Luarsab and Vakhtang Orbeliani, Zakaria Cholokashvili and others. However, the Russian emperor Nicholas I (1825-1855) avoided the execution of conspirators. He chose to win the hearts of the Georgian public and establish a loyal attitude
towards Russia and replaced the death sentence with exile to remote regions of the empire.

The conspiracy of 1832 was defeated but it left an indelible mark on the socio-political life of Georgia and the national consciousness of generations. This event elevated Georgian political thinking to a new level and created a qualitatively new era in the struggle for statehood.

In the first 30 years of the XIX century, anti-Russian riots and uprisings prompted the Russian authorities to think about the reorganization of its system of governance in the Caucasus. For this purpose, several projects were developed in the 1930s on the governance and management of Georgia and the Caucasus among which the project of Senator Pavel Hahn was favored. Based on this project, Emperor Nicholas I introduced a system of civil government in the Caucasus instead of a public-military system which meant the enforcement of solely Russian legislation in the South Caucasus. The reform was completely inconsistent with the traditions and justice system of the local population and caused widespread discontent: one of the reasons for the Guria uprising of 1841 was the vicious side of this reform. Unrest began in the Ossetian communities of Shida Kartli, in Djaro-Belokani, in the Armenian provinces, and especially in the Muslim-populated areas.

The appearance of Shamil in the North Caucasus in the 1830s and 1840s, the rise of Mouridism and intensification of the “Holy War” showed Russia that it needed to gain the support of the local population in order to strengthen its position in the South Caucasus. Therefore, at the end of the first half of the XIX century, the ruling elite of the empire considered it expedient to change the political course: to replace military-bureaucratic expansion and violence in the Caucasus with a policy of cultural modernization and cultural-economic expansion.

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