



Additional information № 6

Division of the Unified Georgian Kingdom in the XVth Century

It is paradoxical that the positive phenomenon of the unification of the royal blood lines of Davit Ulu and Davit Narini in King Giorgi VIII was unfortunately followed by the process of the division of Georgia into kingdoms and principalities. A number of factors led to this event.

In the mid-XVth century substantial changes occurred in the international arena, making Georgia's position in the world even more complicated. On 29 May 1453, the Turks under Sultan Mohammad II (1451-1481) brought to an end the Byzantine Empire and seized its capital, Constantinople.

The seizure of Constantinople by the Turks contradicted the interests of the European states. They decided to join forces and oppose the Turks. This anti-Ottoman coalition was initiated by Pope Pius II (1458-1464), who urged the Eastern Christian states to participate in this joint Western European military campaign.

In 1459 the Pope delegated Ludovicus Bolognius to Tbilisi to deliver a plan of Constantinople's liberation. The vassals of King Giorgi VIII accepted the king's appeal to participate in this military campaign. They even joined King Giorgi VIII in discussing the military operation plan. King Giorgi VIII urged the Emperor of Trabzon and the Ruler of Minor Armenia to join their ranks in this military campaign. The Georgians were willing to contribute to this campaign and provide joint troops numbering some 120,000 soldiers. Uzun Hassan (1453-1478), Sultan of the Aq Qoyunlu dynasty, or White Sheep Turkmen, also expressed his willingness to participate in the campaign. He was hoping that he would appropriate certain territories in Asia Minor. In coordination with his allies, King Giorgi VIII decided to delegate envoys to Rome to specify a date for the launch of the military operations. In 1460, the envoys and the Pope's representative Ludovicus Bolognius travelled through Hungary and Germany and arrived in Rome. Besides representatives of the Emperor of Trabzon, the Samtskhe Principality, the Ruler of Minor Armenia, and Uzun Hassan, Bishop of Tbilisi Nicholas, a representative of the Georgian King also participated in this delegation. They were given a warm welcome in Rome. Due to disagreement with the Western allies, however, Pope Pius II failed to establish a particular date. Instead, he advised the delegation to turn to European rulers to allow them to participate in this military campaign. That same year the envoys travelled to France and initiated talks with King Charles VII (1422-1461). However, the king passed away shortly thereafter. The envoys attended the coronation of his heir, Louis XI (1461-1483), though negotiations with the newly enthroned king proved to be futile (*D. Paitchadze, The Anti-Ottoman Coalition of the European Countries and Georgia in the Sixties of the XVth century. Tbilisi, 1989*).

By that time, separatism had gained a foothold in the western Georgian provinces, such as Guria, Sabediano (Samegrelo), and Abkhazia. The princes of these provinces remained technically and legally subordinated to King Giorgi VIII. Their power within respective principalities, however, had grown unlimited. The reasons behind this phenomenon must be sought in the reforms carried out by Alexander I (Alexander the Great) with a view to



Giorgi VIII
King of Unified Georgia

strengthening the central government in Georgia. He replaced local princes with members of the Royal House of Bagrationi, his brothers and children. It was a mistake of historic importance, which eventually became evident during the reign of his son, King Giorgi VIII. The princes of various provinces – his close relatives, members of the Bagrationi Dynasty – rebelled against King Giorgi. The representatives of the other princely families, on the other hand, would never dare rebelling against their king.

The division of the unified Georgian Kingdom was a slow and gradual process, representing a result of stagnation in the country's social and economic development. Since society no longer developed in the right direction, Georgian kings granted ownership over provinces to their children and close relatives, members of the Bagrationi Dynasty, attempting this way to consolidate various parts of the country and ensure a centralized government. However, this attempt failed. Unfavorable circumstances developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries both at home and abroad. These circumstances were interconnected and adversely affected Georgia, altering the nature of the reforms described above and in some cases even entailing the opposite effect of the results expected by the throne. While separatism was spreading and growing, it was only natural for the issue of royal lineage to become increasingly relevant and acquire a new meaning. Provinces, previously granted to princes or representatives of various branches of the House of Bagrationi, eventually turned into domains where the yet-to-be-crowned Bagrationis presented themselves as kings. Their existence, along with other known reasons, contributed to the separation of individual provinces from the centre and to the dissolution and isolation of these provinces, also causing the Bagrationi throne to lose vassals as its firm social foundation and making this way central government unattractive. All this intensified the process of division of the unified Georgian monarchy.

In 1461, the Turks took over the Trabzon Empire, blocking Georgia's contact with Western Europe even further. As soon as the news about the fruitless negotiations reached Georgia, the previously existing agreement between the king and his vassals came to an end. Internal struggles resumed with renewed vigor. In addition, Uzun Hassan, the Ruler of Persia, reached Georgia's southern borders, these territories having previously allied themselves to the Georgian king. In 1462, Atabagi (Prince) Kvarqvare II, supported by Uzun Hassan, declared war on King Giorgi VIII and even defeated him. Other feudal subordinates of



King Giorgi VIII took advantage of these developments and rebelled against him. Bagrat, Prince of the Kutaisi Province (Imereti) and cousin of King Giorgi VIII (a son of Prince Giorgi, the younger brother of King Alexander I), was the most active among them. In 1463, Bagrat was victorious in a battle near the town of Chikhuri, Imereti, subsequently declaring himself King of Imereti. However, he failed to seize Kutaisi which remained under the control of King of Georgia.

Seeking help, King Giorgi VIII returned to the Kartli region. This time, however, the Atabagi of Samtskhe rebelled against his sovereign. In 1465, King Giorgi VIII was forced to resume fight against Kvarkvare II Jakeli. Deploying treachery, Prince Kvarkvare succeeded in capturing Giorgi VIII near the Paravani Lake. The king's ally and relative Constantine, the son of Demetre, left the battlefield together with the remaining detachments, moved to Kutaisi, and strengthened his position there.

In 1466, Bagrat the son of Prince Giorgi – this time referred to as King of Imereti – entered the territory of Kartli. Constantine the son of Demetre and some of the influential noblemen supported his coronation in Imereti and Kartli where he eventually declared himself king. Noblemen in Kakheti, however, would not submit to him, anticipating the return of Giorgi VIII, the legitimate king of unified Georgia. In the meantime, Kvarkvare Jakeli concluded a pact with Giorgi VIII and even freed him. Although Giorgi VIII succeeded to return Imereti and Kartli, he failed to retain these territories since after his year-long imprisonment he found his allies, noblemen in Imereti and Kartli, annihilated. In 1466 he was forced to settle and strengthen his position in Kakheti, establishing the Kingdom of Kakheti. This is how two kingdoms were established at the beginning of the separation process of Georgia, the Kingdom of Imereti and Kartli under Bagrat V (1466-1478) and the Kingdom of Kakheti under Giorgi VIII (1466-1476).

Bagrat IV died in 1478 which opened up prospects for Constantine the son of Prince Demetre. In 1478-1484 Constantine reigned as Ruler of Kartli and Imereti. King Constantine II took certain steps with a view to strengthening the royal throne in Kartli and Imereti. Alexander, son of Bagrat V, however, would not submit to him and attempted to be crowned king in Likht-Imereti (part of Imereti region). By 1484, he had managed to spread his influence only in Racha-Argveti where he was referred to as “king”.

In the situation when the division of the unified Kingdom of Georgia was inevitable, Alexander the son of Bagrat was dissatisfied with the status he had achieved and fought to take over the Kingdom of Imereti. Despite resistance from Constantine II, Alexander succeeded in actually coming into power in 1489, legalizing the independent Kingdom of Imereti. Thus, Alexander II was the first king of the independent Kingdom of Imereti.

Although due to historic tumult King Giorgi VIII was forced to settle and strengthen his position in Kakheti, he never gave up fighting for the restoration of the unified Kingdom of Georgia. This battle was continued by his direct descendants. At first, the anointed King Teimuraz I united Kartli and Kakheti (1625-1633); then Erekle I (1688-1703), Alexander III (1735-1737), and Teimuraz II (1744-1762) ascended the throne of Kartli. In 1762, as the rightful heir of King Giorgi VIII, King Erekle II legitimately reclaimed Kartli and united Kartli and Kakheti forever. After this event of historic importance, Kartli as an independent kingdom ceased to exist which in itself was a progressive step forward for Georgia's unification.

In the light of this progressive political step, it is simply indecent to discuss today the issue of the Kingdom of Kartli as an independent political entity and its nonexistent heir.

Had not the unified kingdom been divided into three kingdoms, the superior Royal Family line of succession would have continued in unified Georgia with the direct descendants of Giorgi VIII, Crown Prince Nugzar being a legitimate representative of this line today.