

INDIA AND GEORGIA

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

India-Georgian relations might have been established with the operation of the Silk Route trade from Europe – via Caspian to Central Asia and then onwards to India. The early sources reflecting upon India-Georgian connections are Georgian chronicles, which establish Iranian campaigns to India in which Georgian soldiers formed an auxiliary unit. The chroniclers seem to have drawn from oral narratives and passing references with regard to Indian treasures as trophies of war and some legends. The Iranian military campaigns are substantiated by the Greek and Arab sources, besides 12th Century Georgian historian of Queen Zamar, who testifies to this campaign and booty acquired there from. In the following centuries the evidence of interaction are drawn from Georgian philology, in poetry and translations. From 15th Century onwards there are plenty of travelogues by travelers, traders and adventures, where facts about India are mixed with legends and mysteries. However, the intensive trade and cultural relations were established in 18th – 19th centuries advanced through ambassadorial missions by Erable the Zend. The merchant accounts of Khurtsidze, Stephen Zubalashvili, Catholic priest Anton Khulsishvili and diplomate Rafiel Danibegashvili testify to the activities of Georgian interests and involvement with India. The relations during Soviet rule were governed by Moscow, which are marked by mutual visits and bi-lateral trade agreements after independence.

Keywords:

India, Georgia, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Silk Route, Persian army.

Introduction:

The links between Georgia and India¹ supposedly should have established immediately after the commencement of the Silk Route, connecting Europe and Asia, intermittently for more than two centuries. The way from India to Georgia should have crossed the river Amudaria and through the Caspian Sea stretching the ancient cities of Iberia and Kolkhida: Mtskheta, Fazis coming to the Black Sea coast². According to the Georgian sources, the renowned king of Georgia, Vakhtang Gorgasali, invaded India in the 60s of the 5th century BC. His campaign was determined by the order of the Shah of Iran, to whom the King Vakhtang served as a vassal at that time.

The notes about his campaign to Iran bear some legendary characters, although we could claim that the campaign took place indeed. According to the Georgian chronicler, the Persian army, in which the

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¹ The historical territory of India is meant here.

² Lortkipanidze, O.Antic, *World and the Kingdom of Khartli*, Tbilisi, 1968, p. 119, (In Georgian).

Georgian military unit was also included, first came to Gurgan (“Jorjan”), and later on marching to India. It seems the chronicler did not have any concrete notes on the campaign at hand, thus he only mentions some Eastern treasure, in the form of trophy of war. The list of articles of the treasure includes musk ambergris, as well as ruby (sapphire) and emerald, gold and silver. It should be mentioned that “*India*,” the one mentioned in the Georgian source, should be the land around the Ganga basin and the Northern India.

The Georgian chronicler writes, the Persian and Georgian army entered “Sind.” It is hard to denote the area that the chronicler implied, but the contemporary central India should be mentioned along with the southern areas of the river Sind and part of Pakistan. As for the mentioned cities: “Sindia”, (Sindila), “Tophor”, “Kimrai”, it is also hard to identify them as well. The cities are not mentioned by the famous astronomer and geographer of the Middle Ages, Ulugbek in his Geographic Table. Only one city is mentioned by Ulugbek under the title of “Sindi” – “Mansura” (Mathura).³

It is evident that the Georgian chronicler had only the oral notes with regard to the above-mentioned military campaign, as he narrates the Eastern parable on the hawk and raven instead of the description of the real battle scenes. The chronicle informs that the King of “Sind” made his fortress as a stronghold, telling a parable to the King Vakhtang Gorgasali; according to the story, the raven that brought up the hawk became the victim of the hawk itself.⁴ Telling the parable the King of Sind allegorically warned the King Vakhtang over the deadly consequences of his service to Persians. In his turn, King Vakhtang somewhat vaguely responds to the King of Sind, mentioning that he accompanied to Persians, but not in sake of their service, but according to the will of God and for the glory of God.⁵ Finally, King Vakhtang defeated King of Sind, but petitioned him for the Shah of Persia to set the wounded king free in return of a ransom.⁶

Still, there is a real relationship between Georgia and India behind this legendary story. The Georgian source tells us that Persians and Georgians came to Gurgan and “Abash Land” except India-Sind. In the Georgian sources, Abyssinia (Ethiopia) is meant under the ethnic word “*Abash*”, although it is obvious that it is not the one that of Africa. As

³ S. Gorlenko, *Ulugbek and his Geographical Table*, Works of the A.Navoy State University of Uzbekistan, New Series, #74, Samarkand, 1957, p. 68 (In Russian).

⁴ Juansheri, *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (“The Life of Kartli”), Vol. II, Tbilisi, 1959, pp. 193-195 (In Georgian).

⁵ *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 194.

⁶ *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 195.

Georgian scholars presume this is the state of the “Small Khushan”, created on the territory of Sistan⁷, or the harbor of Gurgan on the Caspian Sea – Abeskun, near Astrabad.⁸

The Greek and Arabic authors also mention the military campaigns of the Persian Shahs against Khushans, Huns and Ephtalits.⁹ Although some notes on the military campaign of the Georgian King in India is preserved only by the Georgian sources, but the fact is determined by some objective circumstances as well. Obviously, the military campaign of the then Georgian King and his army would have had a little significance for the World History. On the other hand, the fact that such military campaigns indeed took place is testified by the Georgian historian of the famous Queen Tamar, 12th century. The so called “first historian” of Queen Tamar writes that “the flag of Gorgasali was a bit faded after the military campaign of Sind”.¹⁰ Thus, the official historiography of the 12th century considered it to be trustworthy that the King Vakhtang Gorgasali participated in the campaigns to India and Sind.

There could not be found much information on the Georgian-Indian relations in the following centuries. Although it should be mentioned that in the classical poems of the Georgian poetry: “A Panther in the Knight’s Skin” by Shota Rustaveli, “Abdulmesia” by Ioan Shavteli and “Tamariani” by Chakhrukhadze, India and even Sind are mentioned here and there. In the poem “The Wisdom of Bahlavar” the events take place in India. Some social scientists consider that the Georgian translation of the poem is an intermediate version of the texts between the Eastern (Sanskrit, Farsi, and Arabic) and the European (The poem “Iodasaf and Bahlavar”) versions. (Accordingly Iodasaf, the son of the King of India, Abenes, was Christianized by the anchorite Bahlavar).¹¹ According to the fragmented sources, several Christians were tortured in the city of Thanā, India, among them “layman, Dimitri from Tbilisi of Georgian nationality, with a good knowledge of the Eastern languages”.¹²

⁷ V. Goiladze, *Vakhtang Gorgasali and His Historian*, Tbilisi, 1991, p. 180 (In Georgian).

⁸ S. Kakabadze, *Vakhtang Gorgasali and his Era*, Tbilisi, 1994, pp. 259-260 (In Georgian).

⁹ *Vakhtang Gorgasali and his Era*.

¹⁰ *The First Historian of Queen Tamar. Kartlis Tskhovreba (Life of Kartli)*, Vol. II, Tbilisi, 1959, p. 73 (In Georgian).

¹¹ I. Abuladze, *Sibrdzne Balavarisi (“The Wisdom of Balahvar”)*, Tbilisi, 1957 (In Georgian).

¹² I. Tabagua, *Georgia in the European Archives and Libraries (XIII-XVI)*, Tbilisi, 1984, pp. 93-94 (In Georgian).

In the beginning of the 15th century, one Georgian happened to be in India, called Efrem, whose history was recorded by George Sphrandzes, ambassador of the Emperor of Constantinople, Constantin XI (1449-1453). According to his story, Efrem, was already 100 years old at the time when he met Sphrandzes. He found himself in India in his early childhood as Persians had kidnapped and sold him to a merchant. During one of the expeditions of the merchant to India, Efrem escaped. He lived in India for a long time and learned the local language as well. Finally, he reached to Portugal and Spain by ship and then returned to Georgia.¹³ Although some fantastic aspects could be found in the narrative regarding India, but the main part of the story seems authentic.

The Shah of Persia, Nadir Avshar (1736-1747) waged the military campaign to India in 1738-1739. He brought a young Georgian Prince Erekle (later the King of the Eastern Georgia – 1744-1798) with him in the military campaign. Unfortunately, the Georgian historian, Oman Kherkheulidze, who wrote the story, traditionally provides the Eastern parable, rather than describing some details of the battle and the real picture of India. More precisely, he tells that there was a huge rock on the border of India and Sind, with the curse on it for those who cross the border. According to historian, King Erekle suggested King Nadir Shah to load an elephant with the rock, leading the army of Nadir Shah. Thus, they would be protected from the curse¹⁴. Some real details are also provided along with this legend. Namely, “Amad Shah” is named as the King of India, which could be “Mahmmad (Mohammed) Shah,” the real head of great Moghal State. Besides, the source mentions that before his campaign to India, Nadir Shah captured Qandahar, which is testified otherwise as well.¹⁵

According to the historical sources, Georgian merchants had intensive trade relations with India in the 18th-19th centuries. The first serious activities in this direction were taken in 1770, when the King of Kakheti and Kartli, Erekle the 2nd, first time becoming acquainted with India in his early childhood, sent an ambassadorial mission, comprised of merchants and an ambassador, to India, with an aim to launch serious relations with the country.¹⁶ A rich Armenian merchant, Jacob Shakhmirian, who was an owner of trading centers in Madras and

¹³ George Sphrandzes, *Ambassadorial Mission to Trapesund and Iberia, “Georgica” (The Byzantine Writers about Georgia)*, Vol., 8, Tbilisi, 1970, pp. 50-53 (In Greek and in Georgian).

¹⁴ Oman Kherkheulidze, *The Reign of King Irakli II*, Tbilisi, 1989, p. 41 (In Georgian).

¹⁵ See: *History of Iran*, Edition of the Moscow State University, Moscow, 1977, pp. 204-205 (In Russian).

¹⁶ Z. Chichinadze, *Trade and Crafts of Georgia in Old Times: Grigol Khursidze and Stefane Zubalashvili in India*, Tiflis, 1905, pp. 6-7 (In Georgian).

Calcutta, served as a mediator in the negotiations. According to some information, Erekle asked Shakhmirian to arrange the transfer of 10 thousand Indians to Georgia in order to make them teach the processing of sugar-cane to Georgians and assist in foundation of the loom factory.¹⁷ In the last years of the reign of the King Erekle the 2nd, the two Georgian merchants, Luka Khurtsidze and Stephan Zubalashvili travelled to India. The deed and activities of Luka Khurtsidze were kept by his son Grigol; he settled in India and was married to an Indian women. It seems he died on the island of Palang, in 1829¹⁸. Various goods were taken from India to Georgia: sugar, tea, coffee, alum, pepper, cinnamon, needles, embroidery, weapons (gunpowder), wool, cotton, paper, leather, umbrellas, vessels, glass ware, etc.

It is also a well-known fact that the Georgian Catholic priest, Anton Khutsishvili, moved to India in the beginning of the 19th century and stayed there for a while. He even studied the Indian language (probably “Hindi”) in India as well.¹⁹ His grave stone could be found in the city of Varanasi until recently, with an inscription that the Georgian trader Tamaz Khuduashvili was buried here. Originally he was from the villiage of Kojori (near Tbilisi)²⁰.

The travelling of a diplomat Rafiel Danibegashvili, sent with an ambassadorial mission to India by the King Erekle the 2nd, deserves special mention. He travelled to India for five times, but he left only the notes of his 3rd travel (1799-1813). After the death of the king Erekle the 2nd, Rafiel entered in the service of the Russian Emperor. He died in Russia, in 1827. It would be interesting to provide the details of the route and travelling of Rafiel to India. After the long journey and adventures, he happened to be in Calcutta, in the beginning of the 19th century.²¹ Later on he travelled to the central India across the river Ganges. Rafiel provides the brief description of Calcutta and mentions that Armenians, Englishman, Frenchman, Danes and Portuguese were residing in the city apart from Indians. He says that Europeans were mainly living in the tower, located nearby sea. Rafiel mentions that the company of West-

¹⁷ *Trade and Crafts of Georgia in Old Times: Grigol Khursidze and Stefane Zubalashvili in India.*

¹⁸ *Trade and Crafts of Georgia in Old Times: Grigol Khursidze and Stefane Zubalashvili in India*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁹ *Trade and Crafts of Georgia in Old Times: Grigol Khursidze and Stefane Zubalashvili in India*, pp. 34-35.

²⁰ L. Maruashvili, *The Life of Rafail Danibegashvili*, in: *The Travels of R. Danibegashvili in India, Burma and other Asian Countries, 1795-1827*, Moscow, Publishing House “Progress,” 1969, p. 181 (In Russian, English and Hindi).

²¹ *The Travells of R. Danibegashvili in India, Burma and other Asian Countries, 1795-1827*, p. 27 (Russian Text).

India is located in Calcutta, governed by an English lord.²² According to his information, the Company had a huge annual income (approximately 500 million rupee), although a great amount of money was spent on the maintenance of the English-Indian army. According to the traveler, the rain-water was used for drinking by the inhabitants of Calcutta. As Rafiel says, “Bangla” (Bengali) language was spoken in Calcutta.²³ On his way to the central India, Rafiel crossed the main trading centers: “Sirampoor” (Serampore) and “Chichra” (Chinsura), located northward to Calcutta. Afterwards, Rafiel describes the city of Machsusabad (Murshidabad) – the abode of the ruler of Bengal (Navab), controlled by Englishmen. Then he crossed Azimabad (Phatona), modern-day Patna. The Georgian traveler mentions a barbarian tradition of drowning of old men and old women in river (filling the mouth of a person with the water), was followed in the city. Those who survived were taken to the so called “Village of Dead”.²⁴

Continuing his travel, Rafiel visited the city of Banaras (modern day Varanasi). According to his information, the city was considered to be the holy place and everyone tried to spend his last days there. The description of the following cities is provided by Rafiel: Lakhnawore (modern-day Lucknow), Camber (Cawnpore or Kanpur), Mered (Mirud or Meerut). Much more time is devoted to the description of the city of Delhi. Rafiel wrote that Delhi was called “Shahchinabad” (Shahjanabad) as well, after its founder Shah-Jehan. Besides, describing the city of Delhi, he wrote: “The Royal Palace is gilded from top to the bottom. One of the mosques is called Chuma-Machet, which is covered with pure gold and is so tall that it might be seen twelve versts away from the town.” The nearby, small, beautiful, fort also comes in his description, which is “built of the purple stone. In the middle of the fort the royal palace is located, built of pure marble... in front of the palace the small, but lovely garden could be found, filled with fragrant trees such as clove, pomegranate and so forth”.²⁵ It seems Rafiel stayed for a long time in Delhi, as according to his notes he was assigned the task of collecting taxes. He was paid 200 rupee per month for it.²⁶

²² *The Travells of R. Danibegashvili in India, Burma and other Asian Countries, 1795-1827*, p.28.

²³ *The Travells of R. Danibegashvili in India, Burma and other Asian Countries, 1795-1827*, p.26.

²⁴ *The Travells of R. Danibegashvili in India, Burma and other Asian Countries, 1795-1827*, p. 27.

²⁵ *The Travells of R. Danibegashvili in India, Burma and other Asian Countries, 1795-1827*, p.29 (159-160).

²⁶ *The Travells of R. Danibegashvili in India, Burma and other Asian Countries, 1795-1827*, p.29.

Afterwards, Rafiel crossed several cities northward of Delhi, among them Lahore and Norpore (Far), at the foot of Himalayas. Rafiel mentions that the ritual of “Sati” (burning wives of the dead men) existed there. He provides the description of a small volcano that evaporates the constant fire. According to the traveler, Indians considered it to be a holy fire and worshiped it.

Rafiel Danibegashvili visited the city of Kashmir (Srinagar), the capital of Kashmir. He erroneously said that the city is located on the river of Radawa (Ravi) while the fact is that it is on the river Jhelum. The traveler mentions that “this is the only town in India where it snows, but the snow does not cause any harm. Besides, there are many small rivers on which the people sail on boats. From here come the shawls known to all nations. There are some twenty-four thousand looms in and around the city, on which shawls are woven”.²⁷ Rafiel informs us that the main dishes of the city includes boiled millet, butter and cabbage, whereas tea, “Chuckhon Butter” (melted butter – “ghee”) and milk could be found in the daily ration of the rich people. The traveler further tells that there are numerous canals in the town, whereas in the middle is the lake which is nineteen versts in circumference.²⁸ From Kashmir Rafiel, crossing Tibet moved to the Central Asia first and later on came to Moscow.

In the 50s of the 20th century, in September, 1954, the new stage in the Georgian-Indian relations started. In that year, the famous film maker and representative from the cultural sector of India, Raj Kapoor, visited Georgia, besides the other parts of the USSR. This was the first foreign delegation that visited Georgia and the population was allowed to publicly meet them. The relations were kept at an official level, when on June 13, 1955, PM of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, with his daughter Indira Gandhi, visited Tbilisi. They paid visit to the city of Gori and city of Rustavi as well and attended the concert at the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theater.²⁹

India was one of the first countries, establishing an official diplomatic relations with Georgia after the country gained its independence (September 22, 1992). Georgia joined the programmes of Indian Technical-Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Irakli Menagarishvili paid an official visit to India in 2000. Later on, in December, 2004, the deputy

²⁷ *The Travells of R. Danibegashvili in India, Burma and other Asian Countries, 1795-1827*, p. 32 (In Russian).

²⁸ *The Travells of R. Danibegashvili in India, Burma and other Asian Countries, 1795-1827*, p. 33.

²⁹ Newspaper “*Komunisti*”, 1955, June 14, p.1 (In Georgian).

India and Georgia

Minister of Foreign Affairs of India, Rajiv Dogra, paid a counter-visit to Georgia. In 2005 delegation exchange took place between the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and the Indian Chamber of Commerce. The memorandum regarding their collaboration followed shortly.³⁰ Thus, Georgia goes on its ancient traditions and is eager to collaborate in the spheres of culture, economy and security with the India in future.

³⁰ Web-Page – www.indoeti.blogspot.com