



EREKLE II

EREKLEII, king of Kakheti, 1744-62, and king of Kartli-Kakheti in Caucasus, 1762-98 (b. 1720, or, according to Toumanoff, 7 October 1721, d. 11 January 1798). In Persian sources Erekle is referred to as Ereklī Khan, *wālī* of Georgia, since the shahs considered him a vassal.

Erekle spent his early years in the service of Nāder Shah, who ended the temporary Ottoman hold on eastern Georgia in two campaigns in 1734 and 1735. Nāder appointed Erekle's father, Teimuraz (Ṭahmūrāt) II (1729-44), of the Bagratid dynasty, *wālī* of Kakheti and installed a Persian governor in neighboring Kartli (Marvī, pp. 411-15, 423-26). Teimuraz welcomed the Persians as liberators, but many Georgian nobles turned against the new regime as Nāder Shah's troops drained the country of its wealth and deported large numbers of people to Persia (Brosset, pp. 49-50). Nonetheless, Teimuraz and Erekle remained loyal to the shah, perhaps in order to prevent the return of the rival Mukhran dynasty, whose removal had opened the way to Teimuraz's appointment as *wālī*. In the meantime, Erekle gained a reputation as a military commander by leading Georgian forces in Nāder Shah's campaigns in India in 1737-40 (Brosset, pp. 206-7). He thus carried on a tradition of regular Georgian service in the shah's army that had begun during the reign of Ṭahmāsb I (1534-76). Erekle and Teimuraz came to the aid of Nāder Shah again in 1743 when Georgian nobles rebelled (Marvī, pp. 1042-44), and as a reward Nāder granted Kartli to Teimuraz (1744-62) and Kakheti to Erekle (1744-62) and also arranged the marriage of his nephew 'Alīqolī Khan, who eventually succeeded him as 'Ādel Shah (q.v.), to Kethewan, Teimuraz's



daughter (Marvī, pp. 652-57). Nāder, however, continued his economic exploitation of both countries until his assassination in 1747.

Erekle took advantage of political instability in Persia after Nāder's death to assert his independence. When Ebrāhīm Khan, brother of 'Ādel Shah, fomented a new revolt in eastern Georgia in 1748 by supporters of the Mukhran dynasty, Erekle counterattacked and won a decisive victory. To reinforce his position against the Persians he concluded alliances with the khans of Azarbaijan and sought Russian aid. In 1752, he and his father sent a mission to St. Petersburg to request 3,000 Russian troops or a subsidy to enable them to hire Circassian mercenaries. They also sought Russian recognition of Teimuraz's accession to the throne of Kartli and approval of Erekle's own ascension after his father's death (Paichadze, pp. 59-60). But in none of these matters did they gain satisfaction, for the Russian court was preoccupied with European affairs.

Erekle succeeded his father as King of Kartli in 1762, and thus he united eastern Georgia politically for the first time in three centuries. Because of his long association with Nāder Shah, his court affected a certain pomp, and he himself dressed in the Persian style. His method of governing resembled that of contemporary enlightened despots in Central Europe. He reserved executive, legislative, and judicial authority to himself and closely supervised the activities of government departments. His primary objective in internal policy was to reduce the powers of the aristocracy as a means of further centralizing government administration and increasing his control over it. To accomplish his ends he relied both on his own agents to replace the aristocracy in local affairs and on peasant-vassals to supply the military force necessary to overcome the aristocracy's resistance.

In devising a foreign policy, Erekle was guided by the realization that if his country was to survive, it would need a protector. He chose Russia because it was Christian, but also because it would serve as a link to Europe, which he thought essential for Georgia's development as a modern nation. It had been his wish from the beginning of his reign to restore Georgia's ancient links with the West by bringing scholars and scientists in every field to his country. Despite the receptivity of his own intellectual elite to "Europeanization," (Lashkaradze, pp. 70-95) he failed because Georgia remained physically isolated from Europe and had to expend available resources on defending its independence.



Erekle's initial attempts at cooperation with Russia also proved disappointing. He was anxious to use Russian influence and military power to prevent the Persian ruler, Karīm Khan Zand, who, he was certain, would never renounce suzerainty over Kartli and Kakheti, from reestablishing Persian control in eastern Georgia. Yet Erekle's participation in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74 suggested that his reliance on Russia had been ill-placed, for Empress Catherine II had treated the Caucasus front as merely a secondary theater of military operations (Dumbadze, pp. 648-63). Erekle continued to seek Russia's goodwill for want of an acceptable alternative. His immediate motivation was Karīm Khan's efforts to reassert Persian authority over Azarbaijan and Šīrvān and his use of the Mukhran pretender to the throne of Kartli as a means of reincorporating eastern Georgia into Persia. Karīm Khan's death in 1779 temporarily relived Erekle of these dangers, as Persia fell prey to a new period of instability.

Erekle finally obtained the guarantees he had sought from Russia when he and Catherine II concluded the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783 (Tsagareli, II/2, pp. iii-x, 32-36; Paichadze, pp. 91-137). Reflecting Russia's growing interest in the region, it transformed eastern Georgia into a Russian protectorate, as Erekle formally repudiated all legal ties to Persia. But even now Russia failed to live up to its responsibilities. During a new Russo-Turkish War in 1787-92 Russian troops evacuated Kartli-Kakheti, leaving Erekle to face new dangers from Persia alone.

Āgā Moḥammad Khan Qājār, who had become master of the central Iranian plateau by 1794, was determined to recover provinces in the north that had once belonged to the Safavid empire. In 1795, he demanded that Erekle acknowledge Persian suzerainty, promising in return to confirm him as *wālī* (Hambly, pp. 127-28) When Erekle refused, Āgā Moḥammad launched an invasion of Kartli-Kakheti, which resulted in the capture of the capital, Tbilisi, on 26 Rabī' I 1210/11 September 1795 and the subsequent devastation of much of the country (Hedāyat, *Rawżat al-ṣafā* IX, pp. 269-73; Tsagareli, II/2, pp. 107-24). Those events stirred Catherine II to action, and in 1796 Russian forces took Baku and Ganja and entered eastern Georgia. But her death that year brought an abrupt change of policy in the Caucasus, as her successor Paul I withdrew all Russian troops. The assassination of Āgā Moḥammad in 1797 spared Kartli-Kakheti more devastation.

Erekle died in 1798 convinced that only Russian protection could ensure the continued existence of his country. But three years later, in 1801, Tsar Paul



went beyond the Treaty of Georgievsk by proclaiming the incorporation of Kartli-Kakheti into the Russian empire. His action ended both Georgia's independence and Persia's long political involvement in Georgian affairs.

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