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Between the Achaemenid era and the beginning of the 19th century, Persia played a significant and at times decisive role in the history of the Georgian people. The Persian presence helped to shape political institutions, modified social structure and land holding, and enriched literature and culture. Persians also acted as a counterweight to other powerful forces in the region, notably the Romans (and Byzantines), the Ottoman Turks, and the Russians. (See map, BAGRATIDS), from his base in southwestern Georgia, took advantage of the weakness of the Byzantine emperor and the Arab caliph to establish himself as hereditary prince of Iberia. A successor, Bagrat III (1008-14), brought the various principalities together to form a united Georgian state, and David II “the Builder” (1089-1125), laid the foundations for Georgia’s golden age during the reign of Queen Tamara (1184-1213). Georgia’s decline began with the Mongol invasions of the 1220s, and, despite brief revivals, it proved inexorable. The rise of the Ottoman Turks and their capture of Constantinople in 1453 raised up a powerful new military threat to Georgia at a time when, at the end of the 15th century, the country had been

fragmented into three kingdoms (Kartli, Kakheti, and Imereti) and the duchy of Samtskhe-Saatbago.

At the beginning of the 16th century Georgia once again lay in the precarious middle ground between two powerful enemies, the Ottoman Turks to the west and the Persian Safavids to the east. The two powers were themselves constantly at war (1514-55, 1578-90, 1602-18, 1623-39), with control of Georgia one of their objectives. Mainly under the leadership of the kings of Kartli the Georgians carried on a valiant, but unequal struggle to maintain their independence (for an overview of Georgia's economic and political situation between Persia and the Ottoman Empire in the 16th–17th centuries, see Dumbadze, ed., pp. 85-186).

At first, the initiative lay with the Safavids. Shah Esmāʿīl I (907-30/1501-24), the founder of the dynasty, sent raiding expeditions into Georgia, notably in 1518, but he was too preoccupied with consolidating his hold on power at home to pursue more ambitious undertakings in the Caucasus (Možṭar, ed., pp. 109, 542-45, 555, 557; Ḥasan Rūmlū, ed. Navāʾī, pp. 218-19, 225; Brosset, II/1, p. 446). Shah Ṭahmāsb I (930-84/1524-76), who launched four campaigns against Georgia between 1540 and 1554, inaugurated the systematic extension of his dynasty's control over Georgia. All four expeditions were costly for the Georgians. In the first, 947/1540-41, Persians captured Tbilisi and plundered it and the surrounding region. They repeated these practices during subsequent expeditions in 953/1546-47, 958/1551, and 961/1553-54. Much booty was taken, especially from Georgian churches, and Ṭahmāsb claimed as his rightful share the wives, daughters, and sons of the nobility, instead of the usual one-fifth of the treasure (Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 84-90, tr. Savory, I, pp. 140-44, 146; Ḥasan Rūmlū. ed. Navāʾī, pp. 383-85; Brosset, II/1, pp. 445-53, based on Eskandar Beg's account with notes and commentary; on the importance of Eskandar Beg's work for the history of Georgia, see Puturidze). The death, probably in 1558, of King Luarsab I (1534-57; Lovārṣāb in Eskandar Beg) brought a temporary end to the hostilities.

During these campaigns Ṭahmāsb brought to Persia large numbers of Georgians, whose subsequent role in the army and civil administration led to significant changes in the character of Safavid society. The new ethnic element became a "third force" which interposed itself between the two "founding elements," the Persians and the Turkmen. Indeed, by the end of the 16th century the Georgians were threatening to replace the latter, the *qezelbāš*, as the military aristocracy of the realm.

The competition between the Ottomans and the Safavids for control of the Caucasus was temporarily interrupted by the Treaty of Amasya (962/1555, q.v.). In Georgia it established a rough balance between the two rivals, as Kartli, Kakheti, and eastern Samtskhe (Masq) fell into the Persian sphere of influence, and Imereti and western Samtskhe into the Ottoman.

Shah Ṭahmāsb used the opportunity to tighten Persian predominance in eastern Georgia by imposing Persian social and political institutions and by placing converts to Islam on the thrones of Kartli and Kakheti. One of these was David/Dāwūd Khan II (1569-78), whose reign marked the beginning of almost two and a half centuries of Persian political dominance over eastern Georgia, with only occasional interruptions, until the advent of the Russians at the end of the 18th century. To hasten the integration of eastern Georgia into his realm Ṭahmāsb used bilingual Georgian-Persian firmans to make Persian the official administrative language of the country (Tabatadze, pp. 262-63).

The Ottomans, eager to extend their control over Kartli and Kakheti, attacked Persian positions in eastern Georgia in 1578. Despite spirited resistance led by King Simon of Kartli (1557-69, 1578-99; Brosset, II/1, pp. 36-42), the Ottomans prevailed, and in 1590 the Persians recognized all of Georgia as an Ottoman possession (Uzunçarşili, pp. 57-63).

Shah ʿAbbās I (996-1038/1587-1629) was determined to restore Persian predominance in the Caucasus. Although he inflicted enormous devastation on the Georgian kingdoms and appointed and dismissed their rulers almost at will, he never succeeded fully in stamping out resistance to his rule. When he resumed war with the Ottoman Empire in 1602 he forced Giorgi X of Kartli (1599-1605) and Aleksandre II of Kakheti (1574-1605) to join the campaign. But resistance to ʿAbbās was fierce among the nobles. In 1605 they revolted and placed Teimuraz/Ṭahmūraṯ I (1605-63) on the throne, who for sixty years served as a rallying point for opposition to the Safavids. ʿAbbās acquiesced and confirmed Teimuraz as king in 1606. He also recognized Luarsab II (1605-14) as King of Kartli, but when Luarsab refused to become a Muslim and encouraged the nobles to reject a Muslim replacement for him, ʿAbbās exiled him to Isfahan and in 1622 had him strangled (Dumbadze, IV, p. 276).

ʿAbbās undertook another campaign in 1614 against Kartli and Kakheti, replacing their kings with Muslims. When nobles of Kakheti rose in revolt in 1615, his troops ravaged the country, a punishment from which it never fully recovered (Eskandar Beg, pp. 896-901, tr. Savory, II, pp. 1081-83; Brosset, II/1,

pp. 484-87). Perhaps as many as 70,000 people were killed and over 100,00 deported to Persia. ʿAbbās appointed a loyalist, Simon II/Semāyūn Khan (1619-29), as *wālī*, or viceroy, but he kept a tight grip on Kakheti, administering it through an appointed governor (on the functions of the *wālī* and the role of other Persian officials appointed to supervise Georgian affairs in the 17th century, see Gabashvili, pp. 366-411). ʿAbbās regarded these arrangements as temporary and apparently planned to deal a drastic blow to the rebellious Georgians: the Kakhetians were to be wiped out or deported and their country settled by *qezelbāš* and other Turkmen tribes, while the nobles of Kartli were to be resettled in Persia (Berdzenishvili et al., I, p. 358).

In subduing the two Georgian kingdoms, ʿAbbās had counted on a leading noble, Giorgi Saakadze (known to the Persians as Mūrāv Beg). A Muslim, he was admired in Persia for his military exploits and was regularly consulted on Georgian affairs (Eskandar Beg, pp. 1020-21, tr. Savory, pp. 1242-43). ʿAbbās had appointed him advisor to Simon II of Kartli and in 1620 entrusted both with the suppression of anti-Persian opposition. For reasons that are unclear Saakadze turned against ʿAbbās and led a rebellion of nobles in 1623. He invited the exiled Teimuraz/Ṭahmūraṯ to return home and proclaimed him king of Kartli and Kakheti. But in 1624, ʿAbbās won a decisive victory against the rebels on Marabda Field near Tbilisi (Eskandar Beg, pp. 1024-28, tr. Savory, pp. 1245-49; Dumbadze, IV, pp. 255-87). He also used the rivalry between Saakadze and Teimuraz to divide the Georgians and drive the former into exile in Istanbul, where in 1629 he was executed (Dumbadze, IV, pp. 1284-85).

ʿAbbās's measures in Kartli and Kakheti represented a continuation of his predecessors' efforts to integrate eastern Georgia fully into the Safavid empire. Besides war, he institutionalized the practice begun by Ṭahmāsb of employing Georgians as *qūllar* or *ḡolāmān-e ḵāṣṣa-ye šarīfa* in the Persian army and civil administration. They were obliged to become Muslims, but the majority of such conversions were entered into without conviction. After a period of training they were assigned either to the special regiments of the army or to a branch of the royal household administration. Estimates vary as to the size of the military forces composed of Georgian "slaves." One source indicates that in 1588 ʿAbbās had formed his bodyguard from 12,000 of them taken into his service. Another source in 1608 puts the number of Georgian cavalry guards at 25,000 (Lang, 1952, p. 525). In any case, the Georgians were renowned throughout Persia as fierce warriors. Both Ṭahmāsb and ʿAbbās were pursuing a policy to strengthen the "third force" in Safavid society and thus diminish

the power of the *qezelbāš*, whose loyalty had become suspect.

The contributions which the *ḡolāms*made to the Safavids were substantial. Many of ʿAbbās's *ḡolām*s were the descendants of those Georgians who had been brought to Persia by Ṭahmāsb. Still other Georgians, nobles and princes among them, entered Persian service voluntarily, and a significant number achieved high office. Two outstanding examples were Allāhverdī Khan (d. 1022/1613), who rose to be governor of Fārs province and commander-in-chief of all Persian forces (*sepahsālār-e Īrān*), and his son, Emāmqolī Khan (qq.v.). Other Georgians became prefects (*dārūḡa*) of Isfahan. But the majority of the Georgians were settled in widely scattered parts of Persia and became cultivators of the soil. The most important of these Georgian colonies was in Farīdan (q.v.) in Isfahan province, where their descendants still speak Georgian and retain their Christian faith (Oberling, pp. 128-33; Sharashenidze).

During the remaining century of Safavid predominance in Georgia after the death of ʿAbbās in 1629 Persian influence was unprecedented. The kingdom of Kartli was transformed into a province of Persia and regularly paid tribute and sent gifts (*pīškeš*) to the shah in the form of boys and girls, horses, and wines (Berdzenishvili, ed., 1973, pp. 252-54). The Georgian economy was also closely linked to that of Persia, and Georgian literature was enriched by translations of Persian classics and adaptations of Persian genres.

Nonetheless, in contrast to the calamities of Shah ʿAbbās's reign, eastern Georgia experienced a period of relative peace and prosperity under an enlightened and able viceroy, Ḵosrow Mīrzā, the son of Dāwūd Khan and a Muslim. As a reward for aiding Sām Mīrzā gain the throne as Shah Ṣafī (1038-52/1629-42) the shah granted him the title Rostam Khan and in 1632 appointed him *wālī* of Kartli, a post he held until 1658 (Bagrationi, pp. 63-68). His willingness to cooperate with his suzerains won for Kartli a large measure of autonomy, but Kakheti, the center of unyielding resistance to the Safavids, was brought directly under Persian rule.

Kakheti knew little of peace and prosperity during this period, as nobles and the populace rallied around the exiled Teimuraz in the hope of ending their subjection to Muslims. Teimuraz himself was intent upon uniting all of eastern Georgia under his rule and sought help from the Ottomans and the Russians. But when he contested Rostam Khan's administration in Kartli in 1634, neither of his presumed allies moved to support him. At the behest of Shah ʿAbbās II (1642-66) Rostam invaded Kakheti in 1648 and, driving Teimuraz into exile

again, was named ruler of Kakheti (1648-56; Berdzenishvili et al., I,pp. 368-69). In order to end resistance in Kakheti once and for all, the shah revived ʿAbbās I's plan to populate the country with Turkmen nomads, a measure that incited a general uprising of nobles in 1659. Although they halted the settlement of Turkmens, they failed to shake Persian control of their country (Berdzenishvili et al., I, pp. 369-72).

Georgian nobles now grudgingly recognized the need for an accommodation with the Persians. Even Teimuraz concluded that the prospects for Georgian independence were nil and submitted to Persia. But when his grandson Erekle/Ereglī Khan rejected Teimuraz's understanding with the shah, both men were imprisoned. Teimuraz died in captivity in 1663.

The Persian-appointed kings of Kartli never completely abandoned the idea of independence. Vakhtang V (1659-75), Šāhnavāz II to the Persians, tried to reestablish a united kingdom in eastern Georgia by placing his son, Archil II, on the throne of Kakheti (Brosset, II/1, pp. 74-78; Asatiani, pp. 115-26). Although Archil converted to Islam and assumed the title Šāhnaẓar Khan (1664-75), factions at the Persian court thwarted Vakhtang's master plan (Bagrationi, p. 159).

Giorgi XI (1678-88) tried to achieve the unity his father, Vakhtang, had sought, but the shah discovered his plans and forced him into exile (for Georgian-Iranian relations between 1675 and 1725, see Tabagua, pp. 12-41). But Giorgi/Gorgīn Khan, too, eventually reconciled himself to Persian suzerainty and in 1696 agreed to terms with the new shah, Solṭān Ḥosayn (1105-35/1694-1722). It was the beginning of an illustrious but, ultimately, tragic career in the service of the Safavids. The shah entrusted him with restoring order along the eastern frontiers of the empire. As *beglarbegī* of Kermān, Giorgi, aided by his brother Levan, by 1700 had reestablished the shah's fiat in the region. As a reward the shah made Levan *dīvānbegī* (q.v.) of Persia and his son, Kaikhosro/Ḵosrow Khan, *dārūḡa* (see CITIES iii) of Isfahan. The shah appointed Giorgi commander-in-chief (*sepahsālār*) of his armies and dispatched him to the east once again, this time to relieve the garrison at Qandahār, which was under siege by Afghan rebels. The shah also designated him *wālī* of Kartli, but, while he was in the field, he entrusted the administration of the country to a nephew, the future Vakhtang VI. Giorgi was victorious at Qandahār in 1704, but the leaders of the anti-Georgian faction at the shah's court had him assassinated in 1709. A punitive expedition to the Afghan border led by Kaikhosro in 1711 ended disastrously with his death and

the destruction of nearly his entire force of 30,000 (Lang, 1952, pp. 530-34; for a contemporary account of the Georgian-led campaigns between 1700 and 1711, see the chronicle of Sekhnia Chkheidze in Brosset, II/2, pp. 16-31).

For much of the 18th century Persia generally maintained its position in Georgian affairs, but the viceroys asserted their independence whenever the opportunity arose. They looked for support to Russia, which now supplanted the Ottomans as Persia's chief rival in the Caucasus.

Vakhtang VI, *wālī* of Kartli (1711-14, 1719-23), at first opposed Persian predominance and was forced to give up his throne. But in 1716, convinced that no foreign aid would be forthcoming, he accepted Islam. After serving the shah as *sepahsālār* of Persia and *beglarbegī* of Azarbaijan, he became *wālī* of Kartli again in 1719. But his true allegiance was to Georgia, and he made no secret of his pro-Russian and pro-Christian sentiments to Russian envoys in Persia (Butkov, pp. 16, 51). When Persia was attacked by the Afghans in 1722 and the Ottomans in 1723, he sided with the Russians (Paichadze, 1970, pp. 35-59). He hoped that Peter the Great would not only seek gains for Russia, but would also protect Georgia from both Persians and Turks (Paichadze, 1965, pp. 26-35). But the tsar cut short his Caucasus campaign, and Vakhtang had to flee to Russia, where he died in 1737.

Under the vigorous Nāder Shah Afšār (1148-60/1736-47), Persia reasserted itself in the Caucasus. In 1734 and 1735 he drove the Ottomans out of eastern Georgia, confirmed Teimuraz II (1729-44) as *wālī* of Kakheti, and appointed a Persian as governor of Kartli. His forces pillaged the country and deported thousands of villagers to Persia (Brossert, II/2, pp. 49-50). When the Georgian nobles revolted, Teimuraz and his son Erekle, who had fought with Nāder Shah's armies in India in 1737-40, aided the Persians in defeating the rebels. For services rendered, Nāder Shah awarded Kartli to Teimuraz (1744-62) and Kakheti to his son, Erekle II (1744-62; Bagrationi, pp. 177-82). Yet, Nāder Shah continued his despotic ways, relentlessly draining both countries of their resources (Brosset, II/2, pp. 114-19).

Nāder Shah's assassination in 1747 promised a measure of relief. The new ruler, ʿĀdel Shah (1160-61 /1747-48, q.v.), who had married one of Teimuraz's daughters, sought Georgian help in consolidating his rule over all of Persia (Brosset, pp. 118-25). Both Teimuraz and Erekle used the opportunity to assert their independence. When Teimuraz died in 1762 Erekle succeeded him, thus uniting eastern Georgia as a single state for the first time in nearly three

centuries.

Under Erekle II (1762-98) the independence of Kartli-Kakheti remained precarious, and he reluctantly decided to seek Russian protection. His policy coincided with Catherine II's renewed interest in Georgia, and in 1783 the two monarchs signed the Treaty of Georgievsk, which made Kartli-Kakheti a Russian protectorate (Tsagareli, pp. iii-x, 32-36; Paichadze, 1983, pp. 91-137). It also marked the beginning of the end of Persia's pretensions to political dominance over Georgia.

The founder of the Qajar dynasty, Āḡā Moḥammad Khan (1193-1212/1779-97, q.v.) was determined to recover those provinces that had once formed part of the Safavid empire. Georgia was the special object of his ambitions. Erekle (Ereglī Khan) refused to become a mere *wālī* of Kartli-Kakheti and reaffirmed his attachment to Russia. Āḡā Moḥammad responded by attacking the country, capturing Tbilisi in September 1795 and deporting some 15,000 of its inhabitants to Persia as slaves (Hedāyat, *Rawżat al-ṣafā* IX, pp. 269-71; Tsagareli, II/2, pp. 107-24; Hambly, pp. 126-30). His assassination in 1797 ended plans for a second expedition into Georgia.

Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah (1212-50/1797-1834), Āḡā Muḥammad's successor, pursued a similar policy toward Georgia. In 1798 he demanded the unconditional submission of Erekle's son and successor, Giorgi XII (1798-1800; Tsagareli, II/2, pp. 181-82). Giorgi refused, and Russia's firm support caused Persian armies to remain in place (Dubrovina, pp. 116-21).

The end of Georgian independence, nonetheless, was at hand. When Giorgi died in December 1800, Tsar Paul took advantage of the interregnum to proclaim the incorporation of Kartli and Kakheti into the Russian Empire in January 1801. War with Persia, which broke out in 1804, ended in 1813 with the Treaty of Golestān. Under its terms Persia gave up all claims to Kartli and Kakheti in favor of Russia, thereby effectively ending her centuries-long involvement in Georgian political affairs.

Although Russia and Persia were at peace, Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah had not given up hope of reclaiming Georgia. War between the two countries broke out again in 1826, and Russia's success on the battlefield and the Treaty of Torkamānčāy in 1828 confirmed her control of Georgia (Shengelia, pp. 55-72). The treaty also set the tone of Russo-Iranian relations down to World War I and made manifest Persia's inability to challenge Russia's supremacy in Georgia and the

Caucasus.

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