



GORGIN KHAN

GORGIN KHAN (also known as Giorgio XI and Šāhnavāz Khan II), Georgian prince (d. 1709), who was alternately ruler of Georgia and holder of high positions in the Safavid administration and military.

Gorgin Khan was the son of Šāhnavāz Khan I (Wakhtang V), the Safavid viceroy (*wāli*) of Kartli (Kārtl), the eastern half of Georgia. Gorgin Khan first gained prominence at the Persian court under Shah Solaymān, at a time when tensions between the Georgian royal family and the Safavid ruling elite were running high. The principal cause for this is said to have been the intrigues of the grand vizier, Shaikh 'Ali Khan, who apparently harbored a grudge against Šāhnavāz Khan I for refusing the shah his daughter in marriage. He took revenge and turned Shah Solaymān against the Georgians by calling their loyalty to the Persian crown into question. Plotting to sow discord among the Georgians by inciting a civil war in Georgia and to use this as an excuse to invade the territory, Shaikh 'Ali Khan in 1675 invited Prince Erekle of Kakheti (Kāket), a rival claimant to the throne of Georgia who had fled to Moscow, to return from exile. It was with the same intent that the grand vizier persuaded the Ottomans to invite Archil (Šāh-nazar Khan), a brother of Gorgin Khan and Erekle's archrival, to claim the throne of western Georgia (Chardin, ed. Langlès, IX, pp. 370-71; de Peyssonnel, pp. 45-46; Brosset, 1854-57, II/2, p. 9; Lang, 1957, pp. 89, 96).

In 1676 Šāhnavāz Khan I was summoned to Isfahan to account for what was considered to be Archil's defection to the Ottomans. When he died on the way, Shah Solaymān first approached Gorgin Khan, who had been left in Tiflis as



his father's regent, but soon changed his mind, presumably at the instigation of Shaikh 'Ali Khan, and began to favor Prince Erekle. Although Erekle was promised all of Georgia if he would renounce his faith, he refused to apostatize and for the time being his role therefore remained limited (Brosset, 1854-57, II/1, pp. 79-81, 552; Gorgidzhanidze, pp. 134-35; Lang, 1957, p. 96). Sometime during the next two years, Shah Solaymān summoned Gorgin Khan to his court. After a five-month stay in Isfahan, during which period he converted to Islam, Gorgin Khan was confirmed as *wāli* of Kartli (Brosset, 1854-57, II/1, pp. 79-83, 553-54; Lang, 1957, pp. 89-90).

Gorgin Khan's first reign as viceroy of Kartli lasted ten years and was marked by continuing tensions with Shaikh 'Ali Khan. In 1688 Shah Solaymān deposed Gorgin Khan for having aided rebel forces against the Safavid governor of Kakheti (Kākhet), and sent Prince Erekle, who by then had converted to Islam and had been named Naẓar-'Ali Khan, to Tiflis to replace him. Gorgin Khan fled and took refuge in Ottoman-controlled western Georgia, forming an alliance with his brother Archil with the aim of fomenting rebellion in the Safavid territory (Brosset, 1854-57, II/1, pp. 86-87, 178, 572; Lang, 1957, pp. 96-97). Ottoman support in 1691 gained Gorgin Khan and his brother control over Guria, Mingrelia, and Imereti (Bachi-acuk), all in western Georgia (Sanson, in Kroell, pp. 45, 48). A campaign into Kartli brought Gorgin Khan before the walls of Tiflis, but he was unable to oust his rival. In the following years Gorgin Khan's position remained embroiled in the mounting tensions between the Safavids and the Ottomans, and in 1694 some of the shah's advisors recommended that he be reappointed as *wāli* of Kartli, with the understanding that this would enable him to move into Mingrelia and harass the Ottomans in the region east of the Black Sea (Sanson, in Kroell, p. 61). Many Georgian notables are said to have supported Gorgin Khan in his renewed claim to the governorship of Kartli (Brosset, 1854-57, II/1, pp. 569-70; Sanson, in Kroell, p. 66).

Gorgin Khan and the Safavid crown continued to be at loggerheads for a while longer, though reports about the course of events in this period just preceding the death of Shah Solaymān are contradictory. There is no disagreement that the shah sent an army led by Kalb-'Ali Khan, the governor of Ganja, to subdue Gorgin Khan, but sources sympathetic to the Safavids claimed that Gorgin Khan had suffered a crushing defeat, while sources favorable to the Georgian cause asserted that he had bested the Persians by dressing up his soldiers as women (Sanson, in Kroell, pp. 75-76). Intrigues of an unclear nature made



Gorgin Khan lose his throne again in 1695 (*Nouveaux mémoires* III, p. 262; Lockhart, p. 45). The Armenian historian, Zakaria the Deacon, claims that Gorgin Khan had mounted a revolt against the shah by refusing to send him his favorite concubine, after which the shah had sought his head. Gorgin Khan had the person charged with the order killed and continued his rebellion until promises from Isfahan made him submit to the Safavid crown. Having been given assurances for his safety, he returned to Isfahan to ask the shah, by now Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn, for forgiveness (Zakaria, in Brosset, 1874-76, pp. 122-23; Brosset, 1854-57, II/2, p. 15). The Portuguese envoy Gregorio Pereira Fidalgo witnessed how in March 1697 Gorgin Khan made his appearance at the royal court accompanied by fifty soldiers (Aubin, pp. 73-75).

Fidalgo's predictions that Gorgin Khan would find a miserable end did not come to pass, at least not yet. His energy and courage, which are said to have verged on impetuosity and recklessness, made him stand out amid an administration in which at that time few were inclined to military service (Lockhart, p. 46). These character traits in addition to a certain Persian openness to talent regardless of past behavior, and the desire to have Gorgin Khan serve far away from his native land, no doubt played a role in Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn's decision in 1699 to appoint him *beglerbeg* of Kermān with the task of putting an end to the recurrent Baluchi incursions that ravaged the country as far as Yazd. He also received the name Šāhnavāz Khan (II) on this occasion (Naṣiri, p. 277; Brosset, 1854-57, II/2, p. 16; Krusinski, I, pp. 150-51; Tardy, p. 321). He first dispatched his brother Levan (Leon), also known as Šāhḳoli Khan, who meanwhile had been appointed *divānbeḡi* (q.v.), with a contingent of troops to the region, and shortly thereafter went to Ker-mān himself, where he routed the numerically stronger Baluchis in several confrontations (Brosset, 1854-57, II/2, pp. 16-20; Lockhart, p. 46).

Four years later the need to repel invading Afghans prompted the shah to appoint Gorgin Khan *sepahsālār*, commander-in-chief, governor (*beglerbeg*) of Qandahār, and, nominally, *wāli* of Kartli (Ḳātunābādi, p. 552). Since Gorgin Khan had no offspring of his own (his only son had died prematurely; Peyssonnel, p. 53), his nephew Kaiḳosrow (Ḳosrow Khan) succeeded him as the actual governor of Kartli.

After assuming power in Qandahār, Gorgin Khan found a rival in the person of Mir Ways, the Afghan *kalāntar* of the city. Mir Ways at first cooperated with Gorgin Khan. Most sources claim that Gorgin Khan's rule in Qandahār quickly turned oppressive, however. His soldiers misbehaved toward the local



population, he sequestered goods, commandeered Afghan girls and women, and raised taxes. The resentful Afghans sent complaints to Isfahan, but they were intercepted by Gorgin Khan's men at the royal court and never reached the shah. In the end, Gorgin Khan's heavy-handed treatment of the Afghan population prompted the Afghan leader to lead a rebellion against the new Georgian overlords. This gave Gorgin Khan an excuse to arrest Mir Ways and to send him to Isfahan, urging the shah to get rid of him, or at least never to allow him to return to Qandahār (Krusinski, I, pp. 151-54; Brosset, 1854-57, II/2, p. 26; Lockhart, pp. 84-85).

During his stay in Isfahan, Mir Ways, through skillful flattery and substantial bribes, managed to rehabilitate himself and to persuade the shah that Gorgin Khan was untrustworthy and intended to turn Qandahār into an autonomous region ruled by himself, and that Persia was threatened by an impending coalition between the Russians and the Georgians (Krusinski, I, pp. 179-81; Tardy, pp. 323-33, Lockhart, pp. 86-87). Sent back to Qandahār to serve as a shadow administrator, Mir Ways rallied his people against the Georgians. Matters came to a head when Gorgin Khan demanded Mir Ways's own daughter. Gorgin's death at the hands of the Afghans in 1709 is told in different versions. Depending on the source, he was either surprised and killed in his tent or at the entrance to his harem, after which the Afghans took Qandahār and massacred the city's Georgian garrison, or he was hacked down after the Afghans invited him and his entourage to a banquet ("Traduction d'un mémoire," fols. 254-57; Soimonov, p. 299; Tardy, pp. 325; Picault, pp. 151-53; Lang, 1957, pp. 99-101; the different versions are summed up in Lockhart, pp. 87-88). Upon the news of Gorgin Khan's death, Kaiḳosrow (Ḳosrow Khan), who at that time was serving as *divānbeḡi* and *dāruḡa* of Isfahan, was appointed *sepahsālār* and *wālī* of Georgia, and sent to Qandahār to avenge his uncle. In the ensuing battle, which was lost by the Persian army, Kaiḳosrow was killed (ARA, VOC 1753, 23 June 1709, fol. 293v; Mostawfi, pp. 116, 168; Lockhart, pp. 89-91).



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