

BOOK REVIEW

THE FIRST WORK ON OLIVER CROMWELL IN GEORGIA “OLIVER CROMWELL. PURITAN, CAPTAIN, STATESMEN”

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In 2022, the publishing house “Logos” published the book “Oliver Cromwell. Puritan, Captain, Statesmen” (441 pages) by Ivane Menteshashvili, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, Fellow International Napoleonic Society. Ivane Manteshashvili is a Georgian historian, senior scientist at the Georgian National Museum, associate professor at the University of Georgia, and simultaneous interpreter and poetry translator in Georgian historiography, Iv. Menteshashvili is well-known through his research and works on the history of England and France, mainly: “History of England, “Love and Power. Elizabeth I Tudor”, “Napoleon,” Cardinal Richelieu”- in Georgian, “The Falkland Islands. History of the Conflict,” “Power and Hero. Napoleon Bonapart,” “Transcaucasia in British Russian Competition in 1880-1914,” “The Contiguity of Civilization of the Western and the Eastern Civilizations During the Activity of the British East India Company in India” -in Russian, etc. By the way, Professor Ivane Menteshashvili partly dealt with Oliver Cromwell in his book “Power and the Heroes Born of Revolution” (in Russian), where he gives portraits of three historical persons: Cromwell, Napoleon, and Stalin.

Oliver Cromwell is one of the most controversial figures in British and world history. In the introduction of the book, Iv. Menteshashvili notes that many research papers and articles have been written on the man who “without the title of king, came to the throne of three kingdoms (England, Scotland, Ireland).” Yes, more than 1,000 separate researches and 160 monographs, each presenting a different view of the controversial person of Cromwell.

Some historians, such as David Sharp, consider Cromwell a regicide and dictator; he is a military dictator for Sir Winston Churchill and a hero of liberty for John Milton.

Who is Oliver Cromwell by Iv. Menteshashvili? What kind of historian person does he try to show us in his work: A dictator, a brutal tyrant? A hero? A founder of a future liberal state or champion of Nonconformity? A great revolutionary ruler? The finest type of middle-class Englishman? A “man of action”? Was it democracy, the supremacy of parliamentary principles, or autocracy?

Oliver Cromwell has been viewed in different ways in various historical periods, depending on the regime and epoch characteristics. For example, historians of the 1930s portrayed Cromwell in the mould of then-European dictators.

In 1973, Lady Antonia Margaret Caroline Fraser “Cromwell “ published the book. *Our Chief of Men.*” Lady Antonia is a British author of history, novels, biographies, and detective fiction. She is the widow of the 2005 Nobel Laureate in Literature, Harold Pinter. She took the title from a poem praising Cromwell by John Milton. Lady Antonia’s work is a revisionist biography with a fresh sense and challenge in Cromwellian studies. She tries to rehabilitate Oliver Cromwell and his reputation. She presents events and activities as the result of “providence”; his religious motivation determines Cromwell’s actions and views. For example, the decision to execute Charles I happened because it was the will of God.

Iv. Menteshashvili shows us the various sides of a very complex and enigmatic person in history, but I think he is closer to Lady Antonia’s vision: “providence,” Puritanism, and based on Puritan teaching and Puritan implacability; he tries to explain Oliver Cromwell’s personality, his actions, and decisions, even in the book title, Iv. Menteshashvili underlines it: first - Puritan, and then Captain and Statesmen.

Again, the main question is: Who is Oliver Cromwell by Iv. Menteshashvili? Oliver Cromwell lived in Puritan England. The Puritans believed the Church of England should eliminate ceremonies and practices not given in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. Puritans felt they had a direct covenant with God for such demands and actions.

Oliver Cromwell, as a radical Puritan, believed he had been charged by God for all his actions and also for depriving people of a wicked king. Iv. Menteshashvili explains the influence of Dr. Thomas Beard on Oliver Cromwell, his tutor. Dr. Thomas Beard was a Puritan minister and a famous schoolmaster of Oliver Cromwell at Huntingdon, from whom Oliver Cromwell got the first lessons on Puritanism.

Iv. Menteshashvili, throughout the book, repeatedly focuses on Cromwell’s Puritanism. For example: “the idea of unequivocal supremacy of God and his (Cromwell’s) own existence, based on this religious provision, is completely manifested in the self-awareness of matured Cromwell” (p. 34).

Or, when Iv. Menteshashvili tries to analyze Cromwell's actions:

“What is this? The ruthlessness that characterizes man, or the freedom of the soul, for which there is no limit, especially when he is convinced that he is a deadly weapon given to him by God? Moreover, it was the merciless God of the Puritans, the God of the Old Testament, who mercilessly annihilated the unbelievers and pagans. It seems that being aware of this Cromwell had that unprecedented powerful charge, thanks to which he had the strength to overcome all visible or invisible barriers that were on his way” (p. 90);

The same thought is carried when Iv. Menteshashvili speaks on King Charles's execution: “Cromwell was a deep believer who unwaveringly followed the ideals of the Old Testament... Cromwell, possessed by the Puritan idea of selection by God, without hesitation, signed the death sentence of the king and insisted others to do the same” (p. 229);

Also, at the very end of the book, it is declared by Iv. Menteshashvili: “The Puritan Cromwell was adamant in his belief that Providence created him to fulfill the great task assigned to him” (p. 436).

Who else is Cromwell by Iv. Menteshashvili? He is a pragmatic, rational person, characterized by a firmness of spirit based on faith; “Cromwell won at Bolton, Marston Moor, Naseby, Preston, Worcester, and Dunbar because he combined in his person courage, iron discipline, and rigor up to the point of cruelty, as befits a true Puritan” (p. 241).

The book consists of 17 chapters: the narrative begins in 1485 with the War of the Roses and with Cromwell's ancestors, who came from Wales. It is interesting how the author introduces Cromwell into the narrative; when does Cromwell first appear in the book? This is when King James I, traveling down from Scotland to take possession of his new kingdom, was entertained by Sir Oliver Cromwell (the uncle of Oliver Cromwell) at Hinchinbrooke (lies between Edinburgh and London) in April 1603. Oliver Cromwell was four years old at that time.

In the work, Iv. Menteshashvili introduces us to the opinions of various historians of different centuries: Edward Hyde, J. Morley, W. Harris, Samuel R. Gardiner, D. Wilson, Soviet-Russian authors M.A. Barg, S. Volsky, and many others. Iv. Menteshashvili agrees with some of them and disagrees with others—for example, Iv. Menteshashvili disagrees with Lady Antonia when she considers Cromwell's conversation with the king's children, 8-year-old Henry and 13-year-old Elizabeth, after the execution of Charles I, as “harmless banter” (p. 251). Iv. Menteshashvili presents various historical figures: Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex; Edward

Montagu, 2nd Earl of Manchester; Sir William Waller, Charles I. He often refers to and examines Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and John Milton.

The language of the book should be especially noted. It is very dynamic and artistic. This is not typical historical research: a combination of historical novel and scientific research; in his work, Iv. Menteshashvili asks many questions, allowing the reader to think with him, analyze, and come to his/her conclusions independently without jumping to conclusions.

“Oliver Cromwell. Puritan, Captain, Statesmen” by Ivane Menteshashvili is the view of a Georgian historian on a historical person who was always treated controversially and was full of contradictions. The book is intended for students and people interested in world and British history. This work is an essential acquisition of Georgian historiography.