

History

Georgia as a Transit Territory Linking Persia to Europe (the 16th-17th centuries)

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From ancient times Georgia represented the shortest way to link the Black and Caspian Seas and countries of the East and West. Apart from the Italian city-states, Georgians also had relations with other countries of Europe. It is thought that Poland must have been among the countries Georgia had contact with. From the mid-15th century, Georgia as well as Poland became actively involved in efforts to establish anti-Ottoman coalitions. The paper presents the relationship between Poland, Georgia and the Ottoman Empire, the mutual influence of those countries, their trade and political involvement.

In the struggle between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia, Western countries, as a rule, took sides against the Ottoman Empire and considered Persia an ally from which various sorts of goods, mainly silk, was exported to the Western countries and which served as a connecting channel with India. Besides commercial interests, this was also justified from a political perspective: the powerful Ottoman Empire was a permanent threat for Europe in the period when Persia was a comparatively weaker state and posed less of a threat, however was attractive for the west in terms of commercial interests. This position was as strong and sustainable as Georgia's wish to have relations with Europe, for which in many cases Georgia had to compromise its direct interests. Even if Persia in some cases was more dangerous for Georgia, it joined anti-Ottoman coalitions in order to be closer to Europe.

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The mutual sympathy of the Polish and Georgian people is based on a long and solid historical background. Frequently during their existence, the aim of both nations had been to gain independence or restore territorial integrity. Despite the geographic distance, common political objectives, economic interests and general orientation sometimes placed these two nations on the same political team, thus leading them towards indirect or direct relations.

Georgia has been the shortest route connecting the Black and the Caspian Seas since ancient times. Even though this route had often been unsafe, it was used more or less actively almost always and Georgia often connected the West and Asia for various purposes – conquest, trade, travel, pilgrimage, cultural or diplomatic relations.

The trade routes through Georgia played an important part in those relations and accordingly drew the attention of western as well as eastern countries. The famous Italian scholar Giuseppe Canale paid attention to the ancient trade route, which crossed Georgia and helped facilitate free and easy trade with Persia (Mamistvalishvili, 1981, p. 11). That route played an essential role in the growth and enrichment of the Italian city-republics – Venice, Genoa and Pisa. It is noteworthy that the route preserved its significance until the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope and the American continent.

After taking Constantinople (1453), the Turks controlled the straits of Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, which damaged the trade for Venice and Genoa. As a result in the 1470s the majority of diplomats travelled to Persia via Georgia.

According to the book of the famous Venetian merchant and traveller Marco Polo, in the last quarter of the 13th century Venetians knew the Black Sea coast very well, including the Georgian coast. But as Venetian diplomat Josafat Barbaro writes in his work “Travels to Tana and Persia”, the Venetians did not visit the Georgian coast as frequently as the merchants from Genoa.. This was due to their defeat in the Koji war (1378).

Apart from the Italian city-states, Georgians also had relations with other countries of Europe. It is thought that Poland must have been among the countries Georgia had contact with. After the union of Poland and Lithuania in 1386, the newly formed state sent its fleet through the Black Sea. This voyage was attempted from time to time. It is certain that the Polish-Lithuanian state came into contact with Georgia as well as other Eastern countries through the Genoese colonies located on the Crimean Peninsula, and the product it imported via Kaffa and Sebastopol was salt (Kveliashvili, 2005, pp. 82-83). Georgia and Poland represented the center of the route connecting the West and the East whose importance only increased when navigation was closed from time to time in the Black Sea for whatever reason. Such a situation occurred from the mid-15th century due to strengthening of the Ottoman state. Good relations were necessary between Poland and Georgia, because the Ottoman Empire posed a threat to these two states, as well as to others.

During the 15th-17th centuries, the Georgians and the Poles often participated in attempts to form anti-Ottoman coalitions, with the Cossacks also joining these coalitions. At the same time, trade and diplomatic relations were established between the two countries.

After the collapse of Constantinople, the Pope, with the support of Western countries, launched an anti-Ottoman campaign. On September 30, 1453, Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455) proclaimed a crusade against the Turks. Funds were raised and forces were mobilized.

Through a papal order, Nicholas V, as well as his successor, Pope Callixtus III (1455-1458), requested a tenth of the income from European sovereigns. Due to the inertness of Western Europe, which underestimated the importance of this confrontation, this initiative was carried out on a small scale. Nevertheless, Christian forces were able to achieve several victories.

The active involvement of the Pope did not end there, and Georgia remained among the allies, with the envoy of Pope Ludovicus of Bologna arriving in 1456 (Tamarishvili, 1902, p. 56; Paichadze, 1989, p. 81). This was only natural because the strengthening of the Ottoman Empire first of all posed a threat to Georgia, which once had been a powerful state but in the second half of the 15th century was divided into three kingdoms and several principalities. Ottoman attacks on Georgian lands began in the mid-15th century and became more frequent after the fall of the Empire of Trebizond. During this period Georgians actively participated in the anti-Ottoman coalitions launched on the initiative of the Pope. Georgians saw their salvation in rapprochement with Europe and were even willing to convert to Catholicism and unite again for this purpose.

The bishop of Siena, Enea Silvio de Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II) informed his friend, the Hungarian humanist, chancellor and bishop Giovanni Vitèz, that time had come for the world to unite in struggle against the Ottomans and for that he relied on "the Pope, the Emperor of Venice, Genoa, Trebizond and the Georgian King... together with Hungary, Russia, Germany" (Ninidze, 2003, p. 366). In his opinion, the initial axis of the Vatican and Burgundy had to be strengthened by the Eastern Christians (Georgia, Trabzond), Venice, Hungary and Poland (Kveliashvili, 2005, p. 77). These assumptions were made despite the fact

that during that time Poland was involved in the Thirteen Years' War with the Teutonic Order (1454-1466). During that War, the Pope called on the Poles to end the war (their hostilities) against the Order and resume their struggle against the infidel Ottomans. From the actions of the state, it is clear that these calls were not ignored, and Poland actually considered involvement in an anti-Ottoman movement.

Pope Callixtus III died two years later and was succeeded by the poet, humanist and scientist from Siena, Enea Silvio Bartolommeo De Piccolomini, or Pius II (1458-1464), "the most willing among the crusader Popes" (*Histoire des Papes*, 1842, p. 265).

Giorgi VIII was the first Georgian King who sent envoys to Europe for organizing an anti-Ottoman coalition (1458-1459). However, the European countries preferred an agreement with the Ottoman Empire. Although the envoys sent by the Georgian King – Nikoloz Tbileli, the envoy of Samtskhe Atabeg, Qvarqvare II – Parsadanand others, in 1460, were late for the Congress of Mantua of 1459, the readiness of Georgian rulers to get involved in the struggle against the Ottoman Empire is well documented in the sources (Tamarashvili, 1902, pp. 56-60). According to Layosh Tardy, when the representatives of Hungary were informed in Mantua that the Georgians had planned to participate in the Crusade by supplying a large number of troops, the Hungarian king, in admiration, pledged to commit 10,000 warriors (Tardy, 1980, p. 21).

Despite his best effort, Pius II was unsuccessful in assembling anti-Turkish forces. It appeared to be even more difficult during the reign of his successor, Paul II (1464-1471). The Ottoman Empire represented a rather powerful state by that time and Europe was even more divided. As the Pope and the German Emperor supported the Teutonic Order in the Thirteen Years' War against Poland (1454-1466), this aggravated their relations with this country (Malgozhata, 1995, pp. 74-75). Due to the understandable controversy with the Pope, the anti-Ottoman union was concluded between the King of Poland, Casimir Jagiellon and the King of Bohemia, George of Podebrad (Jerzy z Podiebradu) (1420 - 1471) in May of 1462, which, although unsuccessful, was directed against the initiative of the Pope (Kveliashvili, 2005, pp. 42-44). The King of Bohemia tried to maintain good relations with Catholics and the Pope, but the Catholics rebelled against him and were supported by the

Hungarian King, Matthias Corvinus. However, they could not gain the support of the Polish King (Picheta, 1947, p. 92).

Anti-Ottoman activities were constantly on the agenda in Poland and were carried out together with various allies, Georgia often among them. The significance of Georgia particularly increased after the collapse of Trebizond (1461), which connected Europe to Persia. In terms of the Polish-Georgian relations, the second attempt to form an anti-Ottoman coalition during the Ottoman-Venetian War in 1463-79 was more successful.

On April 12, 1471 the Polish envoy in Venice notified Hungarian King Matthias: "The envoy of the Georgian King, Constantine, arrived and declared that after the governor of their country reached an agreement with Uzun Hassan, he decided to place 30,000 horsemen under the command of the anti-Turkish camp. At the same time, Uzun Hassan also had a large number of troops." According to historian T. Tivadze, Uzun Hassan was the architect of the inclusion of Georgia in the anti-Ottoman coalition. The envoys sent to Venice by the King of Kartli Constantine II in 1471 first arrived from Trebizond to Manzikert and after that was admitted to the palace of the King of Poland, Casimir IV. Casimir Jagiellon sent his envoys with this mission (Ninidze, 2003, p. 377). That same year Nikoloz Tbileli, the envoy of the Kakhetian King George, arrived at Venice and met with the Pope and the King of Naples to form a coalition against the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. From this period onwards, cooperation between the Georgians and the Poles became more active. "From the letter sent to the envoys staying at the Palace of the Sicilian King by the Signoria of Venice dated April 22, 1471, we learn that a new delegation had arrived in Venice composed of Polish and Georgian envoys and the envoys of Uzun Hassan" (Tardy, 1980, p. 22). We know from Italian sources that there were four envoys: Azimamet, Morat, Nikolo and Kefarsa, serious and authoritative persons (Mamistvalishvili, 1981, p. 21). The envoy of Venice, Caterino Zeno easily managed to convince the Iranian ruler to take the White Sheep Turkomen's weapon against the Ottomans. The ensuing military campaign did not bring the desired result to the allies, as the Persians were forced to repel a large army at the Euphrates River. The tension in the relations with the Ottomans resulted in ending of Zeno back to Europe at that time as an envoy of the

Persian monarch with the hope of getting assistance from Hungary and Poland. It is true that Zeno's mission was unsuccessful both in Eastern and Western Europe, since neither Poland nor Hungary were ready to fight against Turkey at the time.

During the Ottoman-Venetian War (1463-1479), the Sultan knew about the contacts between Poland and Uzun Hassan. Negotiations were held between Uzun Hassan and Casimir Jagiellon prior to the defeat of Uzun Hassan by Mehmed II in 1473, and the creation of an anti-Ottoman coalition, as well as support for a Polish-Czech-Hungarian Union were considered along with giving control of the entire Black Sea coast, Greece, and Constantinople to Poland (Kveliashvili, 2005, p. 52). The Georgians had a political as well as a familial relationship with Uzun Hassan. It is known that the spouse of Uzun Hassan, Theodora or Katharina, was the daughter of the Emperor of Trebizond, whose mother was Georgian.

Goods imported from the eastern kingdoms via the Black Sea crossed Moldova, arriving in Lvov, which belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian state, and then, via Poland, they were sent to Eastern European countries. Since 1387, Moldova had formally been a feudal possession of the Kingdom of Poland; however, Hungary also laid claim to it. Moldova maintained its independence as much as possible, using this rivalry to its advantage (In September of the same year Stephen III became a vassal of the King of Poland). In 1475, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire conquered Kaffa, which was followed by the seizure of Taman, Kerch, Azov, Anapa, Kuban, Kopa, Balaklava, and Sudak. In 1475, the Crimean Khan Mengli Giray mentioned in a letter sent to Mehmed Giray that he would be an enemy to any enemy of the Sultan, and a friend to his friend. A difficult period began for foreigners residing in Kaffa. Valachians, Polish, Russians, Georgians, and Circassians were the first to learn their fate: they were to be deprived of their property and sold as slaves or imprisoned (Gade, n.d., pg. 180).

The anti-Ottoman union was established in Eastern Europe in the 1480s, composed of the Grand Duchy of Moscow, Hungary and Moldova. The Crimean Khan resumed attacks on the southern territories of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Simultaneously, Ottoman operations were underway in the northern Black Sea region, resulting in the loss of the Black Sea ports

of Kiliya and Ackerman, located on the territory of the Principality of Moldova in 1484, which was a major blow for Poland. Navigation on the Black Sea stopped. Poland was prohibited from interfering in the affairs of the Black Sea region and the Crimean Tatars were instructed to attack the southern possessions of the Polish-Lithuanian state.

Ten years later the Turks attacked the capital of Moldova – Suceava, and afterward the ruler of the city, Stephen the Great, pledged an oath of loyalty to be placed under the permanent protection of the King of Poland, Casimir and his descendants (Malgozhata, 1995, p. 76). However, a year later, when the King of Poland appeared in Moldova with the intent to crown his brother Sigmund, Stephen III declared himself a vassal of the Turks.

After the (maritime) routes were transferred to the Turkish control, Kaffa was connected by sea (and later by land routes) to Poland to Germany. During all this time the slave trade was thriving. There is evidence of merchants trying to obtain permission from the Pope to take captives out of Kaffa in 1465 through "St. George's Bank". At the same time the Genoese obtained a similar permission from the German Emperor for taking captives out of the Black Sea region (Heyd, 1923, pg. 61; Beradze, 1980, pg 122). Captives were taken out of Georgia to Genoa via Lvov. This route gained particular significance after the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed II, occupied Karaman Beylerbeylik which connected the Mediterranean Sea coast and Iran (1468) (Inalcik, 1973, p. 28). It is known that the lines of communication between Venice and the Persian governor Uzun Hassan was via German cities, Poland, Kaffa and Georgia. This is the route that was taken by the envoy Caterino Zeno, and he returned to his country by the same route in 1470s. From the writings of the Polish Chancellor, Italian philosopher and historian, Filippo Buonaccorsi we learn that when he arrived in Poland, Zeno travelled to Kaffa accompanied by an army of guards of the King of Poland, boarded a vessel there and headed to Sebastopol (Sukhumi). Calimah, the chancellor of Jan Olbracht, the King of Poland, described the journey of Zeno. According to him, the kings of Poland and Georgia ensured safe passage for Zeno to the court of the Shah of Persia. Zeno moved from the following state to Europe via, accompanied by the envoys of Hungary and Poland. Upon reaching Poland in 1474, he met the envoy of Venice,

Paolo Ognibene, who was travelling to Georgia and Persia. Zeno gave the letters addressed to Uzun Hassan, Qvarqvar Atabeg and the Prince of Megrelia to Ognibene describing the results of his negotiations with the King of Poland (Tardy, 1980, pp. 23-25).

The second envoy, Ambrogio Contarini, arrived in Persia using the same route in 1474 but encountered obstacles on his way back in 1475 (Georgia-Black Sea-Danube route) (Tsintsadze, 1966, p. 28). After it was learned that the Turks had seized Kaffa, some of the envoys, who were in Poti, a coastal city on the Black Sea in Western Georgia, decided to return through Shemakha-Baku-Derbent, by way of Astrakhan and Volga and Moscow, while still others – via Circassia. As was mentioned above, the envoys of the King of Kakheti, George VIII, also arrived in Venice in 1474 and then travelled to Rome and Naples. However, attempts by the Georgian envoys to establish contacts with European countries were futile (Tardy, 1980, pp. 25-26).

During that period Poland had to play a double game. The decision made at the Petrkovski Seimin April of 1477 was not followed by military operations against Porte, despite the fact that attacks on its southern borders continued. In the 1480s the Holy Roman Empire, Venice and the Pope, Innocent VIII (1484-1492) launched an initiative to create a coalition. The King of Poland, Casimir Jagiellon, decided to join the anti-Ottoman coalition. In 1485, he tried to regain Kiliya and Ackerman and negotiated with the rulers of the Volga Horde (sons of Ahmed Khan) to oppose the Crimea. Despite the fact that this initiative appeared to be successful and both the Poles and the Lithuanians achieved victory, Poland chose to have peaceful relations with the Ottoman Empire. Negotiations with the Ottoman Empire were held through the mediation of Venice. Despite the fluid situation marked by attacks of the Crimean Tatars on the southern territories of Poland in 1487 and counter-attacks by the Poles against Crimea, negotiations continued and peace was concluded between the two countries on March 23, 1489 (Kveliashvili, 2005, pp. 59-67). It is easy to discern the consequences of this decision from the events that followed. At the same time, the general situation remained unchanged: attacks of the Crimean Tatars continued, including on Kiev and Ljubljana, and the Jagiellons maintained their claims in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, as well as their desire to

participate in an anti-Ottoman coalition. Navigation in the Black Sea was also on the agenda.

Despite the closure of access to the Black Sea, a route connecting Europe and Asia through Georgia was actively used: this was from the Black Sea coast of Georgia to the Dnieper Estuary, then to Kiev and on to West European states via Lithuanian-Polish territory. This route was used by Georgian envoys going to Lithuania in the late 15th century, on their way to deliver a special message to the Queen of Spain.

The anti-Ottoman union was formed between Georgia and Egypt by sending Nilo, the spiritual adviser of Constantine II, to the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt, with a special mission in 1493-94. On his way home, while in Jerusalem, Nilo learned from Spanish envoys about the termination of the Reconquista in Spain and invited them to Georgia where they arrived in autumn of 1494 (Tsintsadze, 1966, p. 17). The King of Kartli sent a letter dated March 10, 1495 with Nilo, the envoy Zakaria and these Spanish envoys (Tsintsadze, 1966, p. 16). This letter has drawn the attention of researchers a number of times (Ninidze, 2003, p.386). It was discovered in Poland and logically led I. Tsintsadze to assume that the Georgian and Spanish envoys arrived in Spain via the Lithuanian-Polish state (Tsintsadze, 1966, pp. 31-34). This opinion is shared by other researchers as well. The historical record a number of times emphasizes the significance of the letter, as evident by its inclusion in the parish register of Lithuania, which happened only in rare cases. Under the conditions of on-going anti-Ottoman preparations, the Georgian envoys travelling to Spain arrived to Vilno. Constantine II was trying to get in touch with the Poles (whose disposition was in accordance with the plans of the Georgian King) through his envoys (Ninidze, 2003, pp. 82-83).

According to Bohdan Baranowski, it is possible that the representative of the King of Kartli was taking a letter to the King of Poland (Tabutsadze, 1991, pg. 148). This assumption is totally –justified considering the precedent of 1471.

The Georgian envoys brought to Europe an action plan regarding a two-front assault on the Turks: by the Spanish fleet (in the Mediterranean), and by the much safer land route passing through the Lithuanian-Polish

state, which would be carried out by the King Constantine and the Sultan of Egypt.

During the 16th-17th centuries, Europe tried hard to find a way to connect to oriental markets. However, these attempts were hindered by the resurgent Ottoman Empire. Particular attention was paid to Persia and the export of silk from there (Zevakin & Polievktov, 1933, p. 1). For this purpose, safe routes were constantly sought. Attempts to put together anti-Ottoman coalitions continued throughout the 16th century and Europeans relied on the assistance of the Persians and Georgians. As soon as the Battle of Chaldiran (1514) ended, Shah Ismail sent envoys to the Sultan of Egypt to create an anti-Ottoman coalition together with the Georgian and Hungarian Kings.

In the late 15th century, Cossacks had been attacking from the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. One letter written in Hungarian in 1555 states: "The Great Duke of Moscow and the Cossack leaders, who are neighbors and relatives of each other, commanded their troops against the Tatars. The Megrelians, bordering the Russians and the Cossacks, became involved in the campaign earlier. Their number reached more than 200,000. Their commanders are Megrelians and Circassians who are sure of the seizure of Turkey ... When they defeat the Tatars there, they can go to Moldova and then to Turkey via the Danube" (Tardy, 1980, p. 63). The 16th century Ottoman author, Mustafa Ali, in his world history – "The essence of events" -begins the story of the Ottoman campaign to Astrakhan in 1569 and the attempt to build the Volga-Don channel by relating the Ottoman campaign to western Georgia and the expulsion of the Qizilbash from there, followed by their first campaign to the north (Ali Mustafa Ben Ahmet, n.d., pg. 565). This means that despite the Peace of Amasya signed between Persia and the Ottoman Empire in 1555, according to which western Georgia fell under the control of the Ottoman Empire, western Georgia was also in contact with Persia. This situation was repeated later as well, for example in the 1630-1640's. The European missionary has no doubts that "Levan II Dadiani wanted to be a friend of Persia more than of the Ottoman Empire" (Tamarashvili, 1902, p. 162).

The Jagiellon Dynasty ceased to exist in 1572. Other rulers came to govern Poland, but relations with Georgia continued in various forms. There is information that in the 1580's the King of Poland, Stephen

Báthory, intended to take advantage of the difficult situation in Russia, seize Moscow, give a hand to the Georgians, Circassians, and Persians and place the Turks in an iron siege. The source of this information is Gregoryde Volan, whose information is derived from P. Pierling. Representatives of the Polish King conducted negotiations on the formation of an anti-Ottoman coalition in Venice, Vienna, Spain and Persia (Tsintsadze, 1966, pp. 39-41), which actively continued until the death of Stephen Báthory in 1586. Information on these attempts was provided to Alexander II, the King of Kakhs as well (Tsintsadze, 1966, p. 40). In 1578, Simon I, released from captivity in Persia, started fighting against the Ottomans, and was soon joined by the Atabeg of Samtskhe, Manuchar, and the Kakhetian King, Alexander II. Sashamkhlo, Sharvan, Dagestan and Georgia joined the anti-Ottoman coalition. The Treaty of Istanbul (1590) was followed by one more attempt to create an anti-Ottoman coalition and this attempt was undertaken by the Pope of Rome, Clement VIII (1592-1605) and the German Emperor, Rudolf II (1576-1608).

In one of the documents published by Gulbenkian covering the events of the early 17th century, a secret envoy of the Polish King is mentioned who was sent to the Shah to form an alliance against Turkey (Tabghua, 1987, pp. 127). The letter delivered by the envoy of the Polish King to the Shah addressed the joint actions of Poland and Persia against Turkey (Tabutsadze, 1991, p. 148).

Cossack assaults started in the 1580's. European travelers provide us with information about them. According to Pietro Della Valle (1627), the dukes of Guria and Megrelia established relations with the Cossacks. "They protected their freedom to such an extent that they accept with love the Polish Cossacks who live on the Dnieper Estuary on the Black Sea as Christians in their countries, though they are great enemies of the Turks and caused them great damage then and as well as now" (Material for the history of Georgia, 1899, p. 57). He has saved information on the attempts of the Cossacks to establish a military alliance with Persia with their help via Imereti, which was unsuccessful because the Turks took the most of the envoys captive. "As it is said, the King of Poland maintains a friendship and correspondence with these Dukes. Ships often move from one country to another, which may be rather significant for

Georgians, as Cossacks are the owners of the Black Sea and are much stronger currently; the King of Polsha can help the Georgians in hardship caused them by the Persians or the Turks by the same route, which is too short. On the other hand, Georgians can largely help the Cossacks in their affairs with their ports and safe havens which they have on their shore. Thus Georgians will be helpful for our people too, if we take any great initiative anytime, by sea or by land, against the Ottoman Empire, particularly Constantinople" (Material for the history of Georgia, 1988, p. 57; Beradze, 1989, pp. 129-131).

Jacques François Gamba, who travelled to the South Caucasus in 1820-1830s mentions that the Zaporozhian Cossacks did not let their neighbors – the Russians, Poles, Moldovians, Tatars and Turks – rest for a long time, they were not under the patronage of either of these states, and they put fear into the Ottomans, and because of that "the first paragraph of all agreements concluded between the Ottoman Empire and the Poles provided for a prohibition of navigation on Boristen (Dnieper) and Pontus Euxinus (Black Sea) for Cossacks" (Gamba, 1982, pg.66). Attempts of the Polesto subdue the restiveness of the Cossacks in the 1630s, since it complicated their relations with Ottomans, were unsuccessful (Tymovskij, 2004, pp. 223-226).

Around 1623, the Sacred Congregation De Propaganda Fide sent 4 novitiates of the Dominican Order to the East and among them were Giovanni Guliano Da Luca who left records from which we learn about the Cossack raids against the Ottomans and Tatars. The Cossacks moved by the Danube and the Dnieper on boats and upon returning to Georgia with plunder, they prayed in the church and left money there. Despite the fact that the Cossacks did not have ideal relations with the Georgians and often posed a threat to the Georgian population, and since Western Georgia was formally under the control of the Ottoman Empire according to the Persian-Ottoman Peace Treaty, as well as the treaty concluded between the Prince of Odishiand the Ottoman Empire, and the Prince of Guria and the Ottoman Empire, according to which the Georgians were obliged to hand over the Cossacks from their territory to the Ottoman Empire, they did so only in some cases. There is a legend that the Prince of Odishi, Levan II, paid a ransom to the Cossacks and they helped him to fight against the Turkish fleet (Beradze, 1989, p. 131).

Trade routes led from the Caspian Sea West Coast and Iran to Tbilisi, then to Akhaltsikhe or Kutaisi. From 1612, when the border between Turkey and Persia was closed, the need for finding a safe trade route was put on the agenda again. In 1621, the Dominican leader Paolo Maria Cittadini da Faenza, who was in Georgia in 1616, informs us that two routes (the subsequent quotation describes three routes) led to Georgia from Persia. "The second road leads to Persia, Gilan, from Gilan to Shirvan, from Shirvan to Shemakh, from Shemakh to Demirkap. There is a peaceful route from here to Georgia; the third – from Tabriz to Yerevan, then to Tbilisi via Ganja, from Tbilisi to Zagem; *the fourth from Poland to Kiev, from Kiev to the Black sea, from there you enter Megrelia or Guria by Cossack vessel by the Black Sea*" (Tamarshvili, 1902, p. 84; Tabaghua, 1986, p. 60).

In about the same period, in 1627, in the report submitted to the head of the Catholic Church, Pietro Della Valle addresses the issue of trade routes and mentions that "our people can come to Georgia by three routes. One route, the shorter one, is via Constantinople ... the second route is via Persia, where there are missionaries, Barefoot Carmelites and Augustines who have churches in Persia. *The third and the final route is the route of Polsha (Poland). From the places of this State, which are at the Black Sea coast, it is possible to go to Georgia easily and quickly. It is possible to easily reach this sea from the center of Polsha by the river Dnieper, which flows along Kiev... there are enough monks from Polsha to do this ... the King of Polsha will also provide assistance; he will zealously try to facilitate this movement. There will be many Cossack vessels for this, by which our people will be able to arrive to Georgia ...Polsha Ruten Catholics can provide assistance, who have the Greek church rules yet and will have a great influence among Georgians because of that*"(Report of the traveller, n.d., p. 63; Tabaghua, 1986, p. 210). The same author advises the Theatinian missionary – Don Giuseppe Judici: "You, Holy Fathers, are obliged to use all efforts to persuade the King (Teimuraz – I.T.) to open the route and establish trade relations from the Georgian ports of the Black Sea with Poland which also has ports on the Black Sea coast, including at the Dnieper Estuary, on the embankments of which the Cossacks, vassals of the Polish King, live" (Tabaghua, 1987, 125; Tabutsadze, 1991, p. 150); "At the same time, in his opinion, it would be better if wide trade relations were established between Poland and

Georgia and a strong alliance was formed between these two countries this way. In this case, there would be no need in Cossacks” (Tabaghua, 1987, 126). During those years, it was thought that the Turkish threat was eliminated and it was possible to transport Persian silk via Georgia, through the Black Sea and Poland. However, as already mentioned, the fact that the shortest route between Warsaw and Persia passed through Georgia had been known earlier.

In 1630s the Holsteinians became interested in trade with the Persians, who planned to export Persian silk to Europe via Moscow. They sent their envoys to each other. Though these measures did not bring actual results, they caused discontent of the other European merchants who were also trading in Russia and Persia. Because they also wanted access to Persia and Shenberg, the envoy of the Polish King, was among them. *The Swedish and Polish Kings sent letters missive to the Holsteinian Duke (Herzog), proposing that he move towards Persia via the Black Sea and Georgia.* Friedrich rejected this proposal (Zavakin & Polievktov, 1993, p. 7). But the Prince of Odishi, Levan II Dadiani (1611-1657) was particularly active in trying to carry out this trade project in the first half of the 17th century (Atelava, 1990). For that reason, he became a relative of Khosro-Mirza, or Rostom Bagrationi, who was the grandson of the Kartlian King Luarsab, and was appointed as the Wali (viceroy) of Kartli by the Persian Shah. He invited European merchants to export Iranian silk and these merchants established a colony there. In this business he was supported by Nikoloz (Nikifor) Irubakidze-Cholokashvili, the envoy of the King Teimuraz to Europe, and upon his advice a mission was established in Odishi. Levan II developed trade with the European countries together with him. The route would pass through Georgia, including Odishi. Giuseppe Judice informs us, that "Prince Dadiani always wanted to bring merchants and settle them in his principality. He wanted to attract merchants and merchandise from distant states very much ..." "If it would be possible to bring some rich Venetian merchants from Constantinople, he would oblige them to sell silk apart from other goods, entirely from his principality and partially from Persia ... If somebody would start trade with silk by the Black Sea, the merchants would deliver silk for them from Persia and Armenia to Odishi more than a half price cheaper than it would cost to take to Halab. The Georgian envoy Nikifor, who was sent to Pope Urban VIII, among other things,

asks His Excellency “to grant the Father Nikifor a common passport and mediate for him before the Emperor and the Polish King, through the countries of whom he will pass when returning to Iberia” (Tamarashvili, 1995, p 559). Thus, as always, the visit of envoys to Rome and Poland was considered. It appears his request was granted. Propaganda gave a recommendation letter to Nikiphor Irbakh ... Owing to recommendations of the Pope and Propaganda, nuncios of Vienna and Warsaw accepted him with great attention and welcome, arranged his meetings with Kings, with whom they were accredited (Tamarashvili, 1995, p. 562). Jean Chardin provides information on Nikiphor. According to him, he had been in Jerusalem several times, travelled around Europe, had been in France, England, Spain, Poland and Italy (Chardin, 1975, p. 141). An opinion predominated that dominates the Georgian historiography is that this mission was intended to create an anti-Iranian coalition. Based on the documentary material discovered by Zh. Vateishvili and I. Tabaghua in the General Archive of Simancas, near the city of Valladolid, Spain (Vateishvili, 1983; Tabaghua, 1986, pp. 141-191). M. Svanidze (1990) substantiates the opinion that this mission intended to create an anti-Ottoman coalition (pp. 197-217).

Relations with Europe were considered to be rather significant, as Europe, in the opinion of many Georgians, would protect Georgia from Persia as well. According to Feiner: “That was the period when the anti-Ottoman coalition was being formed in Europe and some Asian states and Georgians took vigorous participation in it”. The European troops were divided into three groups: 1. Germany, Poland, Hungary; 2. Italy and Spain; 3. France. Iran, for its part, sent five or six missions to the Pope and the Spanish and French Kings, and notified them of the decision to attack the Ottoman Empire and promised them to return Palestine and especially, Jerusalem (Avitabile & Giorgadze, 1977, pp. 4-5). M. Svanidze considers that Teimuraz relied on the assistance of the Poles and Cossacks in this undertaking. The confrontation, which began in the Crimea during the period when the Ottoman Empire was intending to overthrow Mehmed II Khan and place Janibeg Giray on the throne, was supported by Poland and Iran. With the support of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, Mehmed defeated the Ottomans and his brother, Shahin Giray, started creating an anti-Ottoman coalition, which would include some Caucasian countries, in addition to Poland and Iran. For this purpose,

envoys of the Polish Hetman to the Crimea held negotiations with the envoys of the Georgian King who promised to provide a large number of soldiers. At the same time, the Georgian King maintained correspondence with an influential Polish magnate, Krzysztof Zbarsky (Svanidze, 1990, p. 209).

The King of Poland died in 1673. The successor king - John Sobieski started to pursue an anti-Turkish political course and became one of the active members of the anti-Turkish coalition. A similar attitude existed before him as well but John Sobieski chose his priorities according to political circumstances. As was expected relations with Georgia started to become active again. The dispatching of Rotmister of the Royal Court Bogdan Gurdziecki (Baron Buhtam-Beg according to T. Krusinski), who was born of Georgian nobility, as an ambassador to Persia had attracted attention. Despite the Polish government's preference not to assign foreigners as ambassadors (Zedginidze, 1965, pp. 166-173), Bogdan Gurdziecki's brother - Persidon (Parsadan) was also sent as an ambassador to Persia. Primarily, Bogdan was dispatched to Persia as the head of the Polish diplomatic mission by the King of Poland Jan Kazimierz (1648-1668) in 1668, who ordered the Georgian-Polish ambassador to offer Suleyman Shah an alliance against Turkey, as noted by Stanislav Zelensky in his work "Jesuits in Poland" (Zedginidze, 1965, p. 167). According to the royal chancellery instruction made on June 30, 1668 and presented in G. Zedginidze's article (1965), the ambassador had to travel through Georgia during both legs of the journey and had to "investigate and find ways for local traders to go to the Kingdom of Poland, for the purpose of exporting textiles and other goods....". This instruction was issued under the order of the king (p. 169). Presumably the ambassador had completed his task. He presented a letter from the Chancellor of Poland to King Vakhtang V "Shahnawaz".

On the way back the ambassador once more met with Vakhtang V (Shahnawaz) who responded to the letter of the King of Poland. The King of Kartli sent a message to the King of Poland describing the visit of Bogdan Gurdziecki to Georgia as a representative "of your majesty to restore peace and strengthen favorable and friendly ties with Sultan Suleyman" (here Shah Sultan is implied, 1666-1704). The Shah of Persia is presented in the letter as a "superior governor, the greatest, peerless,

the most powerful leader whom even the most threatening enemies worship, who gives the whole world greater wealth compared to wealth taken from the seas and who is to be worshipped more by humans than he actually is." I. Tsintsadze refers to John Kazimir as an addressee by mistake. By the time of writing his reply to Shahnawaz's letter, Michal Korybut Wisniowiecki (1669-1673) was the King of Poland. Bogdan Gurdziecki was the head of the Polish diplomatic mission in Persia later during the period of John Sobieski (1674-1696). According to Chardin and Jan Strase, Wali (viceroy) of Kartli Shahnawaz had a surgeon from Poland, named Adam, who had been sent to him by Bogdan and who lived in Tbilisi for a long time. According to the source, this surgeon married a Georgian woman who lived in Tbilisi. And it is also known that during the period in question many Europeans lived in Georgia (Chardin, 1975, p.74-75, 350, 352; Struys, 1935, pp. 254-255, 260-261). It is assumed by I. Tsintsadze that Vakhtang V's servant was also sent to serve the King of Poland, accompanying Bogdan Gurdziecki who had already been there. My assumption is that the Georgian King in this context refers to the same Bogdan by "servant", who had earlier served Vakhtang V. "Your Majesty, based on benevolent and friendly relations between us we kindly ask you to accept my kind servant as a desired guest to your Highness, as he was for his predecessor" (Tsintsadze, 1966, 352). Presumably, Joan Kazimir is meant by "predecessor," and as for the addressee of the letter, it is King Michal as it has already been noted above. According to Jean Chardin "the Governor had long been talking about his greatest wish to see Europeans settled in his country" in conversation with Padres. The Governor told Padres that "in case representatives of other countries wished to come to, he would grant them liberty and privileges. And for Europeans wishing to go to India, the way through Georgia would be the best alternative for them". Joan Sobieski's victory near Vienna in 1683 and his becoming a member of the anti-Turkish alliance in which 30,000 troops were involved received great admiration in Persia. This information is also supported by a letter sent by Bogdan from Schemacha in 1685.

Along with written sources, trade relations between Georgia and Europe, and particularly with Poland, are evidenced by coins discovered on the territory of Georgia.

Thus, the sources discussed above give us grounds to conclude that:

From ancient times Georgia represented the shortest way to link the Black and Caspian Seas and countries of the East and West;

Poland was one of the most important countries on this route, with which Georgia started to have relations from 1386 (i.e., after the Polish-Lithuanian Union);

From the mid-15th century Georgia as well as Poland became actively involved in efforts to establish anti-Ottoman coalitions;

One of the factors strengthening Georgian-Polish ties were the establishment of Catholic missions in western as well as eastern Georgia. Along with representatives of other countries, Polish missionaries were involved in Catholic missions that collected and distributed information on Georgia and the Georgians.

In the struggle between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid Persia, European countries, as a rule, took sides against the Ottomans and considered Persia an ally from which various sorts of goods, mainly silk, was exported to the Western countries and which served as a connecting channel with India. Besides the commercial interests, this was also justified from a political perspective: the powerful Ottoman Empire was a permanent threat for Europe in the period when Persia was a comparatively weaker state and posed less of a threat to the West. This position was as strong and sustainable as Georgia's wish to have relations with Europe, for which in many cases Georgia had to compromise its direct interests. Even if in some cases Persia was more dangerous for Georgia, it joined anti-Ottoman coalitions to be closer to Europe.

Starting from the 16th century the West, as well as Persia, had been constantly in search of secure trade routes. Despite the fact that the territory of Georgia was frequently unattainable, it still functioned as a transit route; the Kings of Poland and Georgia were involved in these activities; the practice of exchanging heads of diplomatic missions between Poland and Georgia was very common and it served two main purposes: first, the creation of an anti-Ottoman coalition and second, the

export of silk from Persia to Europe, for which Georgia was considered the most secure way in most cases.

In particularly difficult times, the Cossacks were employed for this purpose. As a rule Cossacks were under the control of the King of Poland and followed his instructions. Due to developed relations between Poland and Georgia, these two countries were well informed about one another and their common interests led to the development of mutually supportive relations between the two countries.

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