

## PLANS OF EREKLE II, KING OF KARTLI-KAKHETI AS REGARDS THE CAMPAIGN OF RUSSIAN TROOPS IN DAGESTAN IN 1775\*

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### **Abstract**

In the spring of 1775, in order to punish the Kaitag Utsmi Amir-Hamza, a military expedition of Russian troops under the command of General Medem was sent to Dagestan, after which, at the invitation of Fatali Khan of Derbent, these troops entered the city of Derbent. King Erekle II of Kartli-Kakheti soon responded to this campaign and tried to interest the Russian authorities in a long stay of Russian troops in the city of Derbent, and also suggested that they continue the campaign of troops in the South Caucasus.

In a letter to General Medem dated May 6, 1775, Erekle II suggested that he move to the South Caucasus with his army. Promising General Medem all-encompassing support on behalf of all the Christians of Transcaucasia, King Erekle emphasized the ease and further unhindered march of Russian troops. On May 29, King Erekle sent a letter to the head of foreign policy of the Russian Empire, Nikita Panin, in which, reproaching the imperial court for neglecting the interests of the Georgian Kingdom and all Transcaucasian Christians in the last Russian-Turkish war (1768-1774), he asked to order General Medem to continue the campaign in the South Caucasus. According to the King, in this case, given the situation, all the inhabitants of the Transcaucasian khanates, both Christians and Muslims, would declare obedience to Russia. In the words of King Erekle, such an action by the Russian army would be a great consolation for all Christians living between Derbent and his kingdom.

As a result of the analysis of the content of the above-mentioned letters, it can be concluded that the "minimum plan" of Erekle II regarding the campaign of Medem to the North-Eastern Caspian was to maximize the stay of Medem's troops in Derbent, and the "maximum plan" was the advancement of these troops to Shirvan and their approach to the borders of the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom.

Naturally, in this case the King of Kartli-Kakheti was guided by the interests of his kingdom. Probably, on the one hand, Erekle II wanted to use Medem's troops, if they entered Shirvan, to spread and strengthen his power over some of the khanates of the South Caucasus. And if Petersburg had not agreed to advance the army in Transcaucasia and would have left them in Derbent, this circumstance would have made it easier for King Erekle to fight against the predatory raids of the Dagestanis, and might have made it possible to try to annex the East Kakhetian region - Char-Belakani, appropriated by the Dagestanis, to his kingdom.

The aforementioned initiative of Erekle II was unsuccessful: Medem was ordered to refrain from answering the King's letter. Soon Medem was recalled from Derbent, and then part of the Russian troops stationed there left this strategic point. Such decisions of the Russian Imperial Court largely determined the subsequent foreign policy steps of the Georgian King, in particular his political rapprochement with the Ottoman Empire.

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In July 1774, the united army of Dagestani chiefs under the command of Amir-Hamza, the Utsmi of the Kaitag, severely defeated Fatali-Khan of Quba and Derbent in Gavdushan Valley. The winners started dividing Fatali's territories [6:151-153; 3:18-19]. Amir-Hamza besieged Derbent. Fatali Khan turned to Russia for help and expressed his readiness to accept the subordination to Empress Catherine II. The Russian government was already going to punish Amir-Hamza for capturing acad. Samuel Gottlieb Gmelin, head of the Russian Naturalistic Expedition in the Caspian lands, which was followed by the death of the latter in captivity. At the same time, Fatali Khan was considered to be an ally of Russia in this region.

In the beginning of March 1775, in accordance with the order received from the Imperial Court, General-poruchik of Russian army *Johann Friedrich* Medem moved from Kizlyar to Derbent with about 2,800 soldiers [3:20]. Soon he was joined by the Shamkhal of Tark and the chief of Buinak with their troops. Amir-Hamza was forced to lift the siege from Derbent and attack Medem. On March 28, not far from today's village of Mamedkala 20 km from Derbent, the fire from canons forced the Kaitag horsemen to retreat due to heavy losses<sup>1</sup>.

Freed from the enemy's siege, Fatali Khan welcomed General Medem and offered to send an army to Derbent [3:20-21; 8:208]. Fatali-Khan sent to Catherine II the key to Derbent together with a letter. In the letter, Fatali asserted his loyalty to the Russian Empress, expressed gratitude for sending the army and asked for help to liberate Shirvan. In return, he promised that all his descendants would be grateful and glorify the queen [6:156-158]. The Shamkhal of Tarki also wanted to enjoy the protection of Russia [3:20].

Fatali-Khan tried to take advantage of the Russian army's presence there and take revenge on his enemies. From May 10, General Medem, Fatali-Khan and Shamkhal Murtuzali attacked Amir-Hamza and his allies in the mountain gorges. They raided and looted the auls of the Dagestanis. However, eventually they were defeated in one of the gorges and retreated [3:21; 10:65].<sup>2</sup>

General Medem's military actions allowed Fatali-Khan to easily reclaim most of his possessions; he then worried about the urgent solution of the Shemakhi issue. Amir-Hamza was forced to "repent" his behavior and send hostages to Medem [3:22].

Medem's campaign and the capture of Derbent by the Russian troops drew the attention of King Erekle II of Kartl-Kakheti. On May 6, Erekle sent a letter to Medem, where he offered the general to come with his army to New Shemakhi. After that, in King's words, "the entire Daghistan would be subject to him." In ad-

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<sup>1</sup> General Medem himself indicated the date of the battle in his letter to the queen Catherine II, see [4:59]. On the role of artillery in this battle, see [2:162; 7:212].

<sup>2</sup> For details of General Medem's campaign in South Dagestan, see also [10:36-47].

dition, on behalf of his country and “all the local Christians,” Erekle promised to help Medem as much as possible. The King indicated another route to the General-poruchik: from Salyan the road along the Mtkvari (Kura) river was completely flat on both sides of the river and it was easy to reach Tbilisi and Kakheti. The King also noted that in this direction it was possible to approach Kakheti by boats up to a hundred versts or closer. Erekle undoubtedly wanted Medem and his army to come to the borders of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti as close as possible and even cross the borders of the kingdom if there was a corresponding will from St. Petersburg.

Erekle II emphasized that “loyalty to Christianity” forced him to give such “advice” (he refrained from naming “many other reasons”). In King’s words, the “Christians on this side” (Christians of the South Caucasus) were vigilantly watching the approach of the general and his army. It is especially noteworthy that this did not concern the “Sultan’s serfs” (Ottoman Christians), who wished for the entry of the Russian army, but since at that time there was a “reconciliation” between Russia and the Ottomans, this matter had to be postponed for the future. Erekle indicated that his advice referred to the “countries that no longer have a protector.” Finally, the King asked Medem to write a reply letter.<sup>3</sup>

It is significant that King Erekle sent the letter addressed to Medem along with the oral commission with a certain Efrem, who turned out to have been sent by Medem “for this case”. It is unknown with what thought and purpose Medem could have sent the messenger to Erekle. He must have also brought the general’s letter to the King. Through the messenger the King sent another letter to the general, a petition to Catherine and a letter to count Nikita Panin, head of Russian foreign policy. Medem should have certainly forwarded the King’s letters to Catherine and Panin to the imperial court in St. Petersburg. Unfortunately, we did not find either Erekle’s second letter to the general, or the appeal to the Queen of Russia. Meanwhile, Erekle’s letter to Count Nikita Panin was published and we can familiarize ourselves with it [12:178-180].<sup>4</sup>

In the letter to N. Panin dated May 29 Erekle II expressed diplomatic gratitude that in the “reconciliation with the Ottomans”, that is, according to the Kaynarca truce, he was ensured against the threat of revenge from the Ottoman side for participating in the war on the Russian side. There, the King openly reprimanded the Russian authorities for dragging him and his kingdom into the war against the Ottomans at their instigation (according to the will of the Emperor and the letters written by Panin), which the King could not do with his own forces, and the Ottomans did not give him a reason to do it. Although the King and his subjects en-

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<sup>3</sup> The original version of the mentioned letter was published by A. Tsagareli, although the title mistakenly states that this is Erekle’s letter to General-poruchik P. Potemkin. Also, unintentionally, by mistake, 1875 is indicated as the year of writing the letter [12:177-178]. For the Russian translation of the letter to be submitted to the addressee, see [3:266-267]. The above-mentioned errors have already been corrected by the editor here.

<sup>4</sup> For the Russian translation of the letter to be submitted to the addressee, see [13:267-269].

gaged in the war with great enthusiasm, they did not spare themselves, and Erekle incurred great costs, did not receive any benefits, but rather accrued new problems.

In this context, mentioning N. Panin's letters to Erekle II urging him to join the war, Erekle clearly indicated his personal responsibility before the King. Supposedly, in addition, Erekle wanted to remind N. Panin of his responsibility, as he needed to share his proposed plan for the Russian army stationed in Derbent in order to somewhat improve the situation. It is also noteworthy that Erekle directly told Panin that during the Russo-Ottoman war, Russia once already disappointed the Christians there and at that time his government had an opportunity to win the hearts of Christians.

Then Erekle II formulated his own proposal. The King wrote that at that time the Russian army was in the Derbent area, it had defeated the "Lezgins" and destroyed some of their villages. Because of this, the Lezgins were so scared that they could no longer continue fighting and "all Christians or Muslims between Derbent and us" would become full subjects of the Russian Empress. According to Erekle II, the presence of Russian troops in Derbent was a great consolation for Christians and if the army did not move forward, or did not stay there, it would be very sadening and disturbing for the Christians of this region (South Caucasus).

Therefore, in contrast to the letter to Medem, Erekle did not offer N. Panin the routes for moving the army, nor did he write anything about their arrival in the kingdom or directly to its borders. In this regard, his proposal was more modest and was expressed only in the offer to leave the army in Derbent or to "move forward" to some extent.

Analyzing the content of the above letters, one could conclude that the "minimum plan" of Erekle's plan regarding Medem's campaign to the North-Eastern Caspian region was to extend the stay of Medem's army in Derbent as much as possible. The "maximum plan" was to move the army to Shirvan and approach the borders of Kartli-Kakheti kingdom, and in the best case, enter the kingdom directly.

Another question is what Erekle's goal was. It is clear that the Ottoman territory was not the subject of the King's interest: The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca had been recently concluded between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, and neither side was going to violate it at that stage. Erekle II understood this well, and so he pointed out that he did not consider the Sultan's subjects among the Christians who were ready to serve the Russian Empire and to General Medem he only pointed only "unprotected" countries, where the activity of his army had to be extended. Such countries implied the Muslim khanates located between the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti and the Caspian Sea formally considered as subordinate parties of Iran, i.e. territories under the protection of Iran. In Russia too, they were also regarded as "countries of Persia", i.e. territories under the patronage of Iran. However, after the death of Nadir-Shah, due to civil wars and unrest in Iran, these khanates actually became independent political entities and the power of any large state (Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Iran) did not extend to them, i.e. they remained "without protection". From the 1760s, the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti became one of the strongest

political forces in Eastern Transcaucasia, and its interest for the neighboring khanates gradually increased. In the first place, this concerned the Ganja, Yerivan and Nakhichevan khanates; however, in the case of a favorable situation, naturally Erekle's political vision would quickly spread to other khanates as well.

That is why, during the movement of Medem's army on the territory of South Caucasian Khanates, Erekle II pointed out to the Russian Court that Iran was not in a position to harm them in the provinces of Iran on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea: "The majority of Persian Muslims in Gilan, who are discontent with each other, will gladly welcome you and obey your orders." The region of Gilan was not mentioned accidentally - it was the area directly bordering with an independent khanate, to which the power of Kerim-Khan extended.

Erekle's strategy was to present his kingdom to the Russian Imperial Court as its main stronghold in the South Caucasus. Accordingly, with its strengthening and expansion, Russia's influence in the region would also increase. Thus, Erekle wanted to use Medem's army to subjugate individual khanates of the South Caucasus to his power.

On the other hand, if it was not possible to persuade the Russian government to make general Medem "move forward", that is, to enter the above-mentioned Khanates, then why did Erekle try to keep the Russian army in Derbent for as long as possible? The answer lies in that Medem's military expedition was directed against the Dagestani leaders. The continuation of this expedition would lead to the weakening of Dagestani forces. That is why, in his letter to Medem, Erekle II mentioned with satisfaction the victories won over them by the General-poruchik. Even if active hostilities were stopped, the presence of Russian troops in Derbent, even of a small part, would definitely remain in the center of attention of the Dagestanis. And in such a situation, the probability of aggressive actions on their part against eastern Georgia would be significantly weakened, if not completely stopped.

This situation would make it easier for Erekle II to fight against Dagestani raids. It is true that after the treaty of Kaynarca, the extent of Dagestani raids was much reduced, but Erekle probably pursued even more far-reaching goals. He was long worried about the issue of Eastern Kakheti, aka Char-Belakani, conquered by the Dagestanis. Most likely, he wanted to take advantage of the presence of Russian troops in Derbent to hinder the actions of the Dagestanis towards Kakheti, and to solve the Char-Belakani problem once and for all. If possible, the King probably hoped for coordinated military operations with Medem on the two opposite sides of Dagestan.

Medem demanded to increase the army to 10 thousand men. Fatali-Khan also expressed his desire to restore the previous control over his possessions and himself to enter the protection of Russia. General Medem informed the Imperial Court about this in his report of May 24 [1:787-788]. General-poruchik also indicated that his military measures were sufficient to punish Utsmia [1:782].

The above-mentioned report was discussed at the Imperial Council of State on June 22, and it was decided that Medem had to refrain from military action with

Fatali-Khan; Fatali's representatives had to be received in St. Petersburg and duly assured of patronage [1:788]. On July 2, they discussed the rescript for Medem, where he was ordered not to interfere in the "disputes of the highlanders", i.e. in the confrontation between the Caucasian rulers [1:782].

The proposals of Erekle II were to be discussed in July. There is no direct reference to this in the published reports of the State Council. However, this is evidenced by the fact that on July 28, in the letter sent on behalf of Catherine II, Medem was told, that King Erekle's request made it absolutely clear that the King continued to seek help from Russia to satisfy his "own lust for power", just as it was "when our troops were there" (implying the period during the Russo-Ottoman war) and therefore he no longer deserved any attention. Therefore, Medem was instructed to reject Erekle's offer with silence. And if the King contacted him again, he had to inform him that it was impossible to do so and if the King wished, he himself could make "new conquests and [territorial] acquisitions" [3:25-26].

It is quite natural that the King of Kartli-Kakheta was concerned about strengthening his Kingdom and expanding his power, and for this he tried to use various factors. To this end, he was not to be denigrated, especially by the Russian Empress, whose court resorted to any method to further increase the vast empire and subjugate the neighboring peoples.

As for Fatali-Khan, he was denied the request to come under the protection of Russia; however, at the same time, he was encouraged not to turn his back on Russia and to depend on the expectation of allowance from the Empress. On September 10, the State Council approved the reply to be sent to Khan, explaining to him that "due to the treaties concluded with neighboring states" it was not possible to help him. And advised him to seek help from Persia, on which he was politically dependent, to return the lands confiscated by the neighboring rulers. On the advice of knyaz Volkonsky, it was decided in the answer "to somewhat mitigate the issue of advice asking for help from Persia", in order to avoid Fatali-khan being completely offended by the refusal from St. Petersburg [1:788-789]. Panin sent the reply letter together with the returned Derbent key to Fatali Khan on October 7 [3:26].

It was well known in St. Petersburg that after the death of Nadir Shah, Iran had no power over the khanates of the South Caucasus. Kerim-Khan had neither the opportunity nor the desire to help Fatali-Khan in strengthening his power, who did not think of declaring obedience to Kerim-Khan and sought to dominate other neighboring khanates. It should also be considered that at that time Iran was engaged in the war with the Ottomans, which completely excluded its interference in the affairs of North-Eastern Caspian Khanates inaccessible for it.

Thus, how to explain on the one hand the cold-hearted attitude of the Russian government to Erekle II (they were not even going to give a decent answer to the King), and, on the other hand, the message of the diplomatic rejection to Fatali-Khan's request? It was unacceptable for the Russian authorities to strengthen the political units of the Caucasus "more than it should be." After all, they were considered as potential bites for the empire. Their strengthened rulers would no longer

turn to the Imperial Court for “help” and “protection”; this would prevent Russia from expanding its political influence on them in the future. The most ambitious rulers in Transcaucasia at that time were Erekle II and Fatali-Khan (this was the reason for the open hostility-rivalry between these two monarchs).

In this case, the matter was further complicated by the concern of the Ottomans due to the appearance of the Russian army in Derbent simultaneously with the start of hostilities against the Ottomans by Kerim Khan. In St. Petersburg the possibility of a sharp reaction from large southern neighbors caused by sending a military detachment to Dagestan was sensed in advance. On April 26, Catherine II urged Medem to refrain from military measures with “a tinge of war” against Amir-Hamza “on the borders of Persia” and to force him to return the belongings of Gmelin’s expedition in some easier way [6:155].

Nonetheless, the conduct of military measures and the entry of the army in Derbent were already inevitable. The Ottomans did not know anything about the number of Medem’s army or about its goals. Therefore, they were afraid that the army would invade South Caucasus from Derbent towards the Ottoman borders. Istanbul persistently demanded the answer from St. Petersburg, for which purpose the Russian army was in Dagestan [9:156-157]. Russia had recently concluded the favorable Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca with the Ottomans and was not going to make it questionable. Agreeing to Erekle’s proposal would increase the suspicions of the Sultan’s court and pose a great threat to the peace established between Russia and the Ottomans. This was not in Russia’s interests at that stage. Moreover, in response to the Ottoman request, Medem was forbidden to “intervene in the affairs of the highlanders” [9:157; 1:788].

We should also take into account that during the war of 1768-1774, the interests of the Russian Court and the King of Kartli-Kakheti showed significant incompatibility, which considerably cooled the relations between them for some time. With his proposals Erekle II tried to somehow turn these relations towards a new partnership, but in vain. At Catherine’s court it was decided to withdraw the Russian army from Derbent. This was ordered to Medem in the rescript sent on July 28. In September, Catherine II called Medem’s occupation of Derbent a “careless and troublesome act” and commissioned Count Potemkin to correct it [5:401]. Of course, King Erekle knew nothing about these moods of the imperial court.

The withdrawal of Russian troops from Derbent was delayed. In the spring of 1776, after the reconciliation of Fatali-Khan and Amir-Hamza through the mediation of Russian representatives, Russian soldiers left Derbent. After that, it became clear to Erekle II that Russia was not ready to renew relations with him and demonstratively turned its back on him. Therefore, the King preferred to look to the restoration of the relations with the Ottomans, which had been seriously damaged due to the alliance with Russia during the 1768-1774 war. That same summer, Gurgina Enakolopashvili, the ambassador of the King of Kartli-Kakheti, visited Istanbul with new proposals from the King. The confidant of Erekle II was received with great honors at the Sultan’s Court and sent back with abundant gifts.

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**ՔԱՐԹԼԻ-ԿԱԽԵԹԻ ԱՐՔԱ ՀԵՐԱԿԼ II-Ի ԾՐԱԳՐԵՐԸ ԴԵՊԻ ԴԱՂՍՏԱՆ 1775  
Թ. ՌՈՒՍԱԿԱՆ ՋՈՐՔԵՐԻ ԱՐՇԱՎԱՆՔԻ ՀԵՏ ԿԱՊՎԱԾ**

*Դավիթ Մերկվիլաձե*

**Քանալի բառեր՝** Հերակլ Բ, գեներալ Մեդեմ, Ռուսական կայսրություն, Դերբենդ, Քարթլի-Կախեթ, Ֆաթալի-խան, Դաղստան, Հարավային Կովկաս, Նիկիտա Պանին

1775 թվականի գարնանը Ղայթաղի ուցմի Ամիր-Համզային պատժելու նպատակով Դաղստան ուղարկվեց ռուսական ռազմական արշավախումբ գեներալ Մեդեմի հրամանատարությամբ, որից հետո Դերբենտի Ֆաթալի խանի հրավերով զորքերը մտան քաղաք Դերբենդ: Այս արշավանքին արձագանքեց Քարթլի-Կախեթի թագավոր Հերակլ II-ը: Վերջինս փորձեց շահագրգռել ռուսական իշխանություններին, որպեսզի Դերբենդում ռուսական զորքերը մնան երկարաժամկետ, ինչպես նաև առաջարկեց նրանց շարունակել զորքերի արշավը դեպի Հարավային Կովկաս:

1775 թվականի մայիսի 6-ին գեներալ Մեդեմին ուղղված նամակում Հերակլ II-ի նամակի վերլուծության արդյունքում, հեղինակը եզրակացնում է, որ Հերակլ II-ը ունեցել է երկու ծրագիր. ա) նրա «նվազագույն ծրագիրն» կապված է եղել Մեդեմի հյուսիս-արևելյան արշավանքի հետ՝ նպատակ ունենալով հնարավորինս երկարացնել Դերբենդում Մեդեմի զորքերի գտնվելու ժամանակը, բ) իսկ «առավելագույն ծրագիրը» եղել է նպաստել և հասնել նրան, որ ապահովվի ռուսական զորքերի առաջխաղացումը դեպի Շիրվան և Քարթլի-Կախեթի սահմաններ:

Սակայն Հերակլ II-ի վերոհիշյալ նախաձեռնությունները ձախողվեցին: Շուտով Մեդեմը հետ կանչվեց Դերբենդտից, իսկ այնտեղ տեղակայված ռուսական զորքերի մի մասը հեռացավ : Ռուսական կայսերական արքունիքի նման որոշումները մեծապես որոշեցին վրաց ցարի հետագա արտաքին քաղաքական քայլերը, հատկապես՝ Օսմանյան կայսրության հետ նրա քաղաքական մերձեցման տեսանկյունից: