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Persian Historical Documents of Georgia (Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries): Aspects of Linguistic Analysis

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Abstract

Iranian-Georgian interrelation in the 16th to 18th centuries is reflected in the rich collections of Persian historical documents preserved in Georgian depositories. Their language, lexis, semantics, style, and phraseology clearly reveal the literary language's development in the common cultural area. This article examines a document issued by Shah 'Abbās II in 1658 concerning a *toyul* for Papuna Tsitsishvili, a representative of the famous Kartli princely house.

Keywords

Persian historical documents, Georgia, Safavid Persia, linguistic interference, *toyul*, *aznaur*

True to its geographic position, Georgia has been an arena of confrontation between the great states of the East and West for centuries. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the wake of the downfall of Constantinople and the fundamental reconstruction of relations between Asia and Europe, Georgia had fallen completely under the Islamic influence of the Persian and Ottoman Empires. In this historically complex epoch, both Iran and Georgia met with new statehood and political realities. The powerful state of the *kizilbash* was founded under the Safavids on the ruins of the Turkmen state, and on the present territory of Georgia emerged several independent principalities: Kartli and Kakheti in eastern Georgia, the kingdom of Imereti in western Georgia, and the principality of Samtskhe-Sātabago in the south. On the basis of the Amasya peace treaty of 1555, the east of the country and the eastern part of Samtskhe were given to Iran, and the west and the southern lands of Samtskhe to the Ottomans.

Perso-Georgian relations of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries are reflected in the Persian and Persian-Georgian sources of the period. The National Center of Manuscripts of Georgia and the National Archive of the Ministry of Justice preserve rich collections of documents which distinctly reflect the political, social, economic, and cultural state of East Georgia, including the

efforts of Georgians to protect their own identity and system of landownership. At the same time, these documents reveal aspects of Georgian-Persian cultural and linguistic relations.

These collections are preserved at the National Centre of Manuscripts (511 items), the National Archive of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia (1,237 items) and Sh. Amiranashvili Museum of Art of Georgia (four items). These collections were acquired through archival funds of administrative establishments of the Caucasus and private purchases. The collection of the National Centre of Manuscripts mostly comprises the documents acquired by of the Museum of History and Ethnography.

The collections join Persian *farmāns* (deeds), *hokms* (verdicts), books of grants and purchases, and letters of appeal (petitions) to Persian kings and the Georgian governors who had converted to Islam, with their decisions. The deeds of trade transactions, contracts, trade and taxation receipts, and wedding contracts are in abundance. They refer to both Georgia and other parts of the Caucasus, and are addressed to Georgian landowners, catholicoses, Armenian meliks, and rulers of Dagestan, among others. These documents present a rich source for study of the historical, economic, social, and cultural relations of the late feudal Georgia and Safavid Iran. At the same time, the documents that are illuminated are of great importance from the viewpoint of the history of art. Their refined drawings are illustrative of the art used in the manuscripts of the period.

An extensive literature has been devoted to the Persian historical documents kept in the Georgian depositories. A great part of the Persian *farmāns* and *hokms* of the National Center of Manuscripts and the National Archives of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia were edited by M. Khubua, V. Puturidze, M. Todua, and N. Dundua, although a considerable number—more than eighty documents—still remain unpublished. While certain issues have been studied, in-depth, interdisciplinary research has still to be undertaken to enable us to discuss issues from a wider perspective, and to highlight important aspects of the Perso-Georgia relations.

We would like to tackle the unstudied linguistic-structural aspects of the documents, which have hitherto been mined only for research on administrative and landownership issues by the Georgian scholars M. Khubua, V. Puturidze, I. Dolidze, N. Berdzenishvili, A. Vacheishvili, V. Gabashvili, D. Katsitadze, K. Kutsia, M. Todua, and T. Abashidze, among others. On the whole, these documents require special analysis, and we shall endeavor future systematic research of this subject. For the present, we analyze a seventeenth-century document connected with the names of Shah ‘Abbās II (1642-66) and Vakhtang V, known also as Shahnavāz (1658-1676), the heir to the governor of Kartli, Rostom (Rostam) Khan.

The period is one of the most interesting and complicated in the political and cultural life of Georgia. The era of “Georgian revival” following Mongol rule began in the sixteenth century, with the main motive of this cultural movement in the literature and historiography being national-patriotic. Despite their anti-Georgian political valence, the Persian and Georgian-Persian documents of the period can be considered an integral part of the revival: they represent the struggle of Georgian ruling authorities to preserve Georgian landownership and some degree of independence.

The Persian document Pd 7 (see the picture below), preserved at the National Center of Manuscripts, was issued by Shah ‘Abbās II in 1658. It concerns confirmation of *toyul* (fief) to Papuna Tsitsishvili, a representative of the famous Kartli princely house.¹ In 1632 Shah Safi confirmed this *toyul* to Keykhosrow, Papuna’s brother, and Shah Abbas II in 1658 ordered Shahnavāz to reconfirm the estate to the family. The Persian seal of Shahnavāz is added at the end of the document for reconfirmation of this *toyul*. The document is authorized by the vizier E’temād al-Dowla and there are two registration seals on the other page.

The document is masterfully adorned with gold-leaf ornamentation. The text is written in gold gilding in black and red ink. The seal with the names of Shah ‘Abbās II and the Twelve Imams is placed into the rosette, made with refined gold gilding and black accents.

The document, as the charter granting the estate, confirms a three-stage suzerain-vassal relation in its presentation of the hierarchic distribution of rights: the shah (suzerain) orders the *vali* of Kartli (vassal and executor), and the latter gives the *toyul* to the noblemen. The text, like medieval diplomatic/functional texts in general, is structured in invariable textual elements, divided into specific topics.

As stated above, the document concerns confirmation of the official granting of the feudal property (*mamuli*). In the Persian documents, the Georgian patrimony *mamuli* is alternated with the Turko-Persian *toyul*. This is a form of Iranian landownership which was bestowed by the shah or local governors to tax peasants in return for the services of military or civil personnel. This form did not mean hereditary ownership, unlike Georgian patrimonial *mamuli*, which was the predominant Georgian landownership. In the Georgian setting, *toyul* acquired just the meaning of estate, *mamul-i*. This demonstrates the adaptation of *kizilbash* institutions to Georgian feudal organization, the adaptation being conditioned by the social-economic order of the Georgian state (Gabashvili, 71; Puturidze, I, 89).

¹ For the Persian text and translation, see Puturidze, I, 73-75; Khubua, 12.

A linguistic study of the Persian historical documents is of special interest in terms of the phenomenon of lexical interference in social terminology. This phenomenon was brought about by geographic closeness and political-cultural interrelation.

We would like to examine in detail an example of such linguistic influence in the document under discussion: the term *aznāvar*, corresponding to the Georgian *aznauri* (nobleman), borrowed into Persian from Georgian with the meaning of *shojāʿ*, *palavān* “brave, hero” (Anvari, I, 348). However, the word *aznāvar* evidently bears social significance in the text quoted from Eskandar Bek Monshi’s (1560-1633) writings (ibid.): *ozamāʿ o aznāvarān dar qalʿahā motahassen shoda budand* “the grandees and noblemen were fortified in the castles.”

Georgian *aznaur-i* is attested in early Georgian sources. It is first met in the fifth century hagiographic work of the priest Jacob Tsurtaveli, *The Martyrdom of Saint Shushanik*. According to him, at the end of the fifth century Kartli was governed by Varsken Pitiaxsh, who was married to Shushanik, the daughter of the chief commander of Armenians, Vardan Mamikonian. Due to political concerns Varsken adopted Zoroastrianism, but his wife opposed him and fell victim as a consequence. In this work we find much interesting information concerning the real situation in Kartli, along with an array of social terms (cf. *azat*, *zēpur*), among them *aznaur-i* (nobleman). In the Georgian text *aznaur-i* means “free,” representative of high social status (cf. Middle Persian *āzāt[āk]*).

The Georgian text provides evidence of division already in this epoch of the *aznaurs* (noblemen): among them was distinguished the privileged stratum, “great *aznaurs*.”² Let us examine this term in the following passages: “and as he was approaching the borders of Georgia, the land Hereti, it occurred to him to have the *noblemen* (*aznaurni*) and his sons”; “there came the grandees and noble ladies, the gentry and common folk” (*msgavsad misve saxisa aznaurni did-didni da zēpurni dedani, aznaurni da uaznoni softisa Kartlisani movides*) (Tsurtaveli, 1938, 5, 42, tr. Lang, 46, 56).

Later attested in some old Georgian religious as well as historical literature, *aznaur-i* was borrowed into Georgian under the Sasanians from Zoroastrian Middle Persian *ʾznʾwl / āznāwarl* “noble” (Mackenzie, 16).

Georgian scholars considered *aznaur* and its corresponding Armenian form *azniu* “noble, honorable” (cf. also Armenian *azn* “kin, tribe, generation”) as coming from Iranian **ā-znā-*, where *ā-* is a preverb, and *znā-* “to know”

² Cf. *u-az-no* “non-nobleman,” i.e. not free, a representative of low social status.

(Andronikashvili, I, 218-11; Chkheidze, 3-4, 168).³ The meaning of **āznā*, in their opinion, should have been “famous, fine, and noble,” cf. Russian *znatnyi*, *znatʹ* (Fasmer, II, 100).

H.W. Bailey considered Georgian and Armenian forms as originating from Iranian **āznābara* “bearer of nobility,” where the root reflects Iranian *zan-*: *zn-* “be born” (cf. Khotanese *āysna-* “born into the great house, noble,” cf. Avestan *āsna*). According to him, “*āznāvar* became an important word in Georgian for the *aznaur* class. The Georgian word came into Ossetic, into Svanetic (*aznavir*), and into Armenian *aznavor*” (Bailey, 17). Compare this to the masculine proper name Aznag, attested in Svanian, coming from Scythian *aznāka* “strange, foreign” < *znā-*, Ossetic *æznag* “an enemy, stranger, a guest” (Abaev, I, 227; Andronikashvili, 1980, 37). In New Persian this term is no longer used, and in certain cases appears as the word borrowed from Georgian.

In modern Persian we find *rāʿiyat* “peasant” and *vāli* “governor.” In seventeenth-century Persia there were four *vālis*: of Arabestān, Lorestān, Gorjestān, and Kordestān. The regions of East Georgia—Kartli, Kakheti, and Tbilisi—constituted a *velāyat* that was subject to Iran. *Vāli* with the same meaning is used in the Georgian and Georgian-Persian documents. In the Georgian texts we generally come across other terms signifying social-administrative units: *batil-i* (<Perso-Arabic *bātel*) “annulled,” *bara* (< Pers. *bahra*) “kind of tax,” *gorzakaḳal-i* (< Armenian *gorcakal-*) “official, agent,” *damgha* (< Turkish *tamghā*, *tamqā-*) “seal, tax for commercial goods.” It is interesting that examples of lexical interference of this type are attested in the Persian texts as well: *māmāsākhli* < Georg. *mamasaxlis-i* “family head” (Puturidze, 252, 443); *tāvād* < Georgian *tavad-i* “nobleman” (Puturidze, 147, 463); *mowrāv*, *māvrvāv* < Georgian *mourav-i* “governor” (Puturidze, 83, 52).

The cited Persian document corresponds in style, special terminology and phraseology to the legitimated Persian *farmāns*. It consists of an invocation, mention of the ancestors’ name and introductory formula “the most brilliant order was issued. . .” Then, in elevated but businesslike style there are mentioned “cover of the greatness” Papuna Tsitsishvili and his ancestors, to whom this *toyul* belonged.

In the text, Rostom-Khan and Safi-Khan are decorated with the epithets established in Persian diplomacy, and in the end there is an appeal to Shahnāvaz, who according to the shah’s order should confirm ownership of the patrimonial *toyul* to Papuna Tsitsishvili. Vakhtang V Shahavāz, “supporter of noble

³ Cf. *āznā* < Ir. *zana* “kin, tribe, generation” (Javakhishvili, I, 191).

khans,” “*vāli* of fortunate and happy Georgia,” “equipped with bravery and the ability to govern,” also issued *farmāns* himself.⁴

The Persian document Pd 7 is a typical example of Persian legal acts of the period in terms of its structure and linguistic viewpoint. The character of the document is determined by its purpose, the linguistic tendencies of the period, and concrete political and cultural realities.

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⁴ For example, the Persian document Pd 128 (1659), preserved at the National Center of Manuscripts, with which Shahnavāz fixes a 40 Tabriz tuman wage to Kaikhosro, father of Papuna Tsitsishvili (the document is unpublished).

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Appendix

The *farmān* of Shah ‘Abbās II

My great grandfather, may his tomb be luminous.

The majestic *farmān* was issued that his dignity and (highly) patronized Papuna Beg, the son of Keykhosrow Beg Tsitsishvili presented the excellent order dated 1 Rabi‘ I 1069 with the following brief content: five families of *aznāvans* (nobles) and five families of *ra‘iyats* (peasants, farmers) living in the district of Kartli and previously belonging to Farsadan Tsitsishvili, should be granted to Keykhosrow Beg Tsitsishvili, so that *aznāvans* and *ra‘iyats* have to consider themselves as being in the possession of the distinguished one (Keykhosrow Beg), and they would not turn away from his rightness and goodness, taking his favor and supervision as necessary. And high officials of the Georgian *velāyat* as far as they consider this as prescribed may not bring about disorder in the abovementioned community.

They requested our signature and we ascertained that the deceased Rostam Khan, the *vālī* of Georgia, might know that the order of his Honor, being in Paradise, was assigned by us from the beginning to the end. And now our signature is requested with a charge of his dignity, the present *vālī* of Georgia.

On this basis we ascertained that may the protector of royalty and magnificence, the force of splendor and courage, vigilance of majesty and justice, high in position, the descendant of glorious kings, the chief of noble khans,

courageous in reign, fortunate and happy, the *vāli* of Georgia, Shahnāvāz accept this record and recognize the abovementioned order as signed from the beginning to the end and take actions accordingly; let them know about the order and do not request each year a new one. Written on 1 Rabi' I 1069.

[Endorsement:] He [the Lord]. From protection of power and fortune, force of highness and splendor, of high rank, certainly of the devoted friend, the chief among (nobles) of the royal court, according to the letter of E'temād al-Dowla, with addition of previous *farmān*, which is with [the owner of *farmān*]. Mohamed, the messenger of God.

