



Additional information №7

Offshoot Branches of the Bagrationi Royal House in the 16th-18th centuries

From the second half of the 15th century onwards Georgia witnessed various dynastic confrontations and internal political battles. While the Royal throne became weaker, the struggle between the Georgian princes to inherit their respective domains became even stronger. The dissolution of the kingdom and the subsequent separation of estates led to the formation of offshoot branches within the Royal House of the Bagrationis.

This political instability eventually led to the emergence of the Kartli, the Kakheti and the Imereti Bagrationi Royal dynasties. The negative economic and social situation which prevailed in the kingdoms of Kartli, Kakheti and Imereti, led to the establishment of several offshoot royal branches. Unfortunately, “provincial kings” played a regressive role which, apart from other reasons, facilitated the dissolution of the united Kingdom of Georgia. (*Provincial Kings in XIV-XV Century Georgia* by D. Ninidze, Tbilisi, 1995).

After the collapse of the united Kingdom of Georgia various representatives of the Batonishvili from the Bagrationi family, who were present in independent kingdoms, started struggling for their rights. The main reason for this tense situation in the Royal House was complicated. Close and distant relatives of the Royal family, particularly the offshoot branches of the Bagrationis, made claim for their respective rights and legal status. Although the rules of succession to the Royal throne were frequently violated, their representatives succeeded to obtain certain legitimate rights. This resulted in the emergence of a new branch, besides numerous others of the Bagrationis. They made their political and economic claims, while the conditions for obtaining their relevant statuses no longer existed. Despite being related to the Bagrationis, these were no longer respected and referred to as “princes”.

Throughout the 14th and 15th centuries all the offshoot branches of the Bagrationis remained loyal to the real Bagration Royal House, but from the 16th century onwards some of them failed to retain their Royal name (Bagrationi). In turn, this resulted in the emergence of the Natomi Mepeni (relatives of the King). This gave rise to the formation of different offshoot branches which had a princely status. Therefore, the princely offshoot branches of the Bagration-Mukhranski, Bagration-Davitishvili, Bagration-Ramazishvili, Bagration-Gochashvili, Bagration-Babadishvili all belonged to the above mentioned Natomi Mepeni (*The Scientific and Cultural Heritage of the Bagrationis*, edited by Roin Metreveli, Rafael Chikovani and Ramaz Shengelia; *Offshoots of the Bagrationi Royal House in the 16th-18th Centuries* by David Ninidze, Tbilisi, 2003, p. 51-52).

For instance, since the beginning of the 16th century (1512) the Mukhranbatonis (Bagration-Moukhransky) became an offshoot branch of the Kartli kingdom. This was confirmed and expressed by Prince Ioane of Georgia, when he states: “[They are] **second degree Bagrationi and first degree princes**”. (*Prince Ioane of Georgia, a brief description of the nobility of Georgia*, n.p. “Iveria” V-VI, 1884). Moreover, the upper part of the banner which was granted to Prince Konstantine Mukhranbatoni by King Teimuraz II in 1745 contains the words Natomi Mepeni, which emphasize the origin of this offshoot branch. (*The Scientific and Cultural Heritage of the Bagrationis*”, edited by Roin Metreveli, Rafael Chikovani, Ramaz Shengelia; *Offshoots of the Bagrationi Royal House in the 16th-18th centuries* by David Ninidze, Tbilisi, 2003, p. 37-50).

According to a law enacted by King Vakhtang VI (1703-1724) of Kartli, the princes of Georgia had to be divided into three ranks: high, middle, and low. That the Mukhranbatonis had a princely origin is also evident from a list compiled by Vakhtang VI before his re-settlement in Russia in 1724. This list of royal retinue (amounting to approximately 2,000 people) included all the members of the royal



The upper part of the banner of Prince Konstantine Mukhranbatoni

family, the nobility, and servants. Every person was listed according to rank and status. This important historical document reveals once again that the Mukhrani line was part of the nobility, but not part of the Royal House. (*David Guramishvili within the Georgian Hussar's Regiment by S. Kubaneishvili, Tbilisi, 1955, p.122*). Therefore, the princes of the Mukhranbatoni offshoot branch belonged to first degree of princes. The other Georgian princes, for example the Eristavi of Aragvi, the Eristavi of Ksani, the Orbeliani, the Tsitsishvili and the Amilakhvari belonged to the same rank and were all loyal servants to the King.

The direct descendant of the last King of Georgia Giorgi VIII, the anointed King of united Kartli-Kakheti, Teimuraz I (1625-1633), was expelled from Kartli by Iran to be succeeded by the illegitimate son of King David XI, the self-styled King Rostom-Khan. While Rostom attempted to strike a balance between the beliefs and customs of the Persian Shah and the Georgian people, his reign brought about the deterioration of the moral life of the country and its people. Human vices became common. Anti-national sentiment led the Patriarch of all Georgia, Evdemos (1630-1642), to preach throughout the country about this sorrowful situation that prevailed in Georgia. He also developed and implemented a plan to bring back King Teimuraz. In 1642 Catholicos Evdemos was arrested by King Rostom-Khan. Catholicos Evdemos criticized the king even more harshly and called on the people to rise up against him. Finally Rostom ordered that Catholicos Evdemos be strangled to death in his own prison cell.

Having no children of his own, King Rostom-Khan adopted the 30-year old Prince Bakhuta from an offshoot branch of the Mukhranbatoni, who later became King Vakhtang V of Kartli. This action delayed the unification of the Kartli and Kakheti kingdoms by at least another fifty years.

This historical fact may give some people a wrong perception, particularly those who are not quite familiar with dynastic law. Some think that with King Rostom-Khan's adoption of Prince Bakhuta, the princely offshoot branch of Mukhrani received a royal dignity. This is completely wrong, because according to past and present legislation an adopted person loses one's own origin (that is, his/her hereditary surname) and becomes an integral part of his/her adoptive parents (thus, a heir of their estate). Following his adoption, Prince Bakhuta became the successor of King Rostom-Khan, and thus established the continuation of the Royal House of Kartli until it became extinct in 1919. Parallel to this, the princely offshoot branch of Mukhranbatoni continued to exist till the present day and had nothing to do with the Royal House of Kartli. One should also mention that none of the seven kings of Kartli, including King Vakhtang V, were ever anointed according to the established rules. On the other hand, it is interesting to observe that all the direct ancestors of Crown Prince Nugzar, from King Ashot I the Great (780-826) down to last the King of Georgia, Giorgi XII (1798-1800), were all anointed according to the established rules and procedures, except for King Erekle I (1688-1709).

On 23rd July 1783, in a written authorization, King Erekle II refers to Princes Garsevan Chavchavadze and Ioan Bagration-Mukhranbatoni as **“Our faithful servants”** (*The Treaty of Georgievsk by Giorgi Paichadze, Tbilisi, 1983, p. 26*). By signing the Treaty of Georgievsk as a legate of the King, Prince Ioane Mukhranbatoni had confirmed the sovereign rights of King Erekle II and his direct descendants over all the other branches of the Bagrationi. (*The Treaty of Georgievsk by Giorgi Paichadze, Tbilisi, 1983, p. 36, 39*). Iran, the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire always considered the Kings of Kartli-Kakheti as Kings of Georgia (*Letters and Other Historical Documents of the XVIII century relating to Georgia. Vol. I (1768-1774.), edited by A.A.Tsagareli, 1891; Georgia in the Archives of Europe, Vol. II by I. Tabaghua, Tbilisi, 1986*).

The superiority of the Royal House of King Erekle II over all the others branches is confirmed by the fact that the highest echelons of the Imeretian Kingdom (both secular and religious) had requested King Erekle II to put the Imeretian kingdom under his Crown. At that time this kingdom was still characterized by the presence of various representatives of the Imeretian Royal House, in particular the illegitimate son of King Solomon I; the brother of Solomon I (Prince Bagrat) and his two sons (the legitimate David and the illegitimate Simon); and the former King (David II) and his sons (the future King Solomon II and his illegitimate half-brother Prince Archil).

In 1789 King Erekle II elected his grandson, Prince David, to succeed him as king. The latter took the name of



King Teimuraz I of Georgia
(1625-1632)

Solomon II and ruled over the Imereti kingdom between 1789 and 1810. This political act confirms the superiority of the Kartli-Kakhetian Royal House. It was also an act intended to speed up the unification of Georgia, which was supported by the Imereti people. In the same year, approximately after six months since the enthronement of Solomon II, an important document was signed. This was known as the Treaty of the Iberians (Georgians), which once again emphasizes the precedence of the Royal House of Kartli-Kakheti over all the other offshoot branches (*Georgia and Russia by G. Veshapeli, Tbilisi, 1918*).

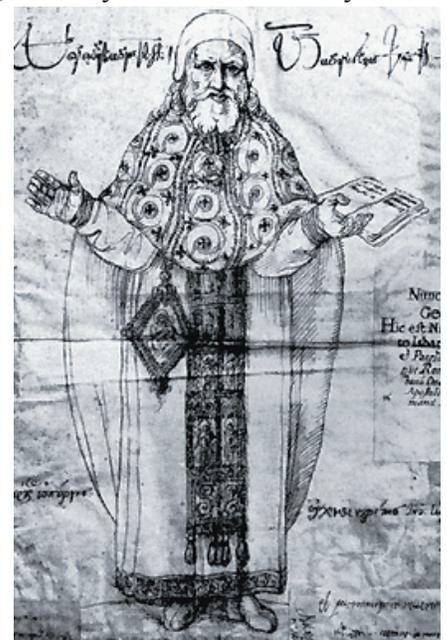
The precedence of this royal house is also confirmed by various historical facts which occurred during the first half of the 19th century. In all the uprisings that took place at that time, the rebellious people of Georgia demanded from Russia the restoration of the Georgian throne, headed by the representatives of the Kartli-Kakheti Royal House. In particular, they demanded that the elder son of the late King Giorgi XII, Crown Prince David (XII), to become king of the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom, while his younger brother, Bagrat, to become king of the Imereti kingdom.

Today, the royal branch of Imereti includes descendants of the illegitimate son of Prince Bagrat (1740-1800), Simon (1771-?). According to Georgian dynastic law, the representatives of this family are not considered as royals, because this line stems from an illegitimate prince, which therefore puts them in a lesser position than the legitimate counterparts. In 1831 the wife of King Solomon II, Queen Mariam, states that Simon (the son of Bagrat), his son Rostom as well as his grandsons wore “**princely**” titles but were not royals (*Central State Historical Archive of Georgia, Fund 2, Census I, Case № 2232, p.6*). One should also observe that even after the annexation of Georgia, the representatives of the Royal House of Kartli-Kakheti, in particular the sons of King Giorgi XII, his grandsons, granddaughters, great grandsons and great grand-daughters retained their royal titles of Princes and Princesses of Georgia. (*Russian State Historical Archive, Department of General Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Fund № 1284, Inventory 235: Inventory Affairs of the Chief Inspector in Terms of the Former Royal Houses of the Caucasus, 1804-1861, Letters of the Princes and Princesses of Georgia and their Children: Case № 44 (1807), Case № 58 (1815), Case № 60 (1811), Case № 251 (1861)*). From the second half of the 19th century onwards the Russian Empire distinguished the representatives of the former Royal House of Georgia from all the other branches of Bagrationis by granting them the title of Serene Highnesses.

The argument that in the Imereti Kingdom several illegitimate sons became kings does not justify the real situation. The throne of Imereti was often occupied by persons who did not carry the Bagrationi surname. Examples of these include Gurieli-Demetre (1663/1668-1669), Giorgi IV (1681-1683), Mamia III (1701-1702, 1711-1712, 1713-1714), Giorgi V (1716), and Giorgi (Malakia) Abashidze (1701-1707).

Let us refer once again to the historical fact, when King Teimuraz I was replaced by Rostom-Khan. This act was downright illegal, because Teimuraz was recognized as King of Georgia, not only in his own country but also internationally. This is clearly manifested in his diplomatic relations which he established with various other countries. In the diplomatic correspondence with certain European countries one can read: “**Niciphores Irbachi was conferred the title of Ambassador by the King of Iberia (Georgia) Teimuraz...**”; “**...the Duke of Alba! Praise be to the Lord! The Georgian King’s envoy Niciphores Irbachi trusts in thy protection**”; and “**The Georgian King’s envoy who is returning to his homeland...**” Moreover, in a letter sent to Pope Urban VIII King Teimuraz I puts his seal which states: “**Praise be to God, from the seed of David and praiseful to the Holy Trinity, the King of entire Georgia, Teimuraz**” (*Georgia in the Archives of Europe, Vol. II by I. Tabaghua, Tbilisi, 1986*).

Following, the issue of legitimate heirs was strictly observed in the Kingdom of Kartli. Despite the fact that the illegitimate son of King Vakhtang VI, Prince Vakhushiti, was older than his brother Prince Bakar, the latter was still considered as the future heir-to-the-throne of Kartli. One should also note, here, that in the case of the direct descendants of King Teimuraz I, down to Crown Prince Nugzar, no such violations ever took place (please refer to the detailed genealogical chart of the Bagrationi dynasty).



Ambassador Niciphores Irbachi
(1585-1657)