



Interdisciplinary Conference of Young Scholars in Social Sciences

Captive Trade in Georgia

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Annotation: There were numerous glorious moments throughout centuries-old history of Georgia, though we would like to talk today about that terrible and shameful social fact, which is known in history as “Captive Trade”. It brought the biggest damage to Georgian community and to the moral past of our people. Not any war or any foreign conqueror brought so much damage with swords to Georgia than this “peaceful” captive trade – fairly denoted academician Niko Berdzenishvili. This was total, century old demolishing. Captive trade was the result of heavy social-political and economic situation of feudal Georgia. Trade with people caused big damage to the development of Georgian nation and its independence. Georgian population and the power of the country was in danger as the best part of Georgians, its brave young people constantly immigrated abroad and were forever lost for the motherland. This was the result of the conflict between king and the officials and it is one of the cases that left heavy effects on the history and the development of the country.

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The women and men, little babies and old ones, nobles and poor ones were kidnapped. Young people who were beautiful, brave and wise had the most expensive price. Kidnapped and sold Georgian lady should become precious jewelry for the seraglios and harems of sultans. She should be the bedmate of Muslim ruler and in case of success she could become his spouse. Georgian women had to give birth to Turkish children and bring them up as the enemies of Georgia. Kidnapped and sold Georgian boys became brave and denoted knights of Islam: In Turkey they became janissars, in Egypt-Mamelukes. People were kidnapped everywhere-on the road, in the cornfields, while shepherding, at the spring water, at the mill and in the church, at their homes. Kidnappers were Ottoman, Lezghins and Georgians itself.

After defeating Soviet Regime, idealization of feudal Georgia became very popular though not everything was beautiful as Georgian nobles often treated major part of its population very cruelly and much more, Georgian nobles were main motivators for captive trade.

This terrible fact-trade with people comprised the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. Captive trade was very active in Georgia during XVI-XIX centuries by Ottoman Turkey and Iran and with the help of Georgian nobles. During three centuries (XVI-XIX) Georgia was disputable place for two great conquerors Ottoman Turkey and Iran and they used various forms of violence to conquer and subordinate it: fight, exile of local population, captive trade, inculcation of “Ottoman rule” and “kizilbash rule”. For people’s trade there were special markets organized in Istanbul, Akhaltsikhe, Trabzon, etc. Lezghians rule greatly damaged Georgia in XVII-XIX centuries. Dagestan feudals and tribe leaders specially disturbed Kakhetians. They sold kidnapped Georgians in the Crimea, Ottoman Turkey and Persian markets.

According to the observations of European missionaries and investigations of Georgian historians, captive trade was quite an ordinary fact for the noblemen in Feudal Georgia. They had

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immeasurable rights-they treated their servants and serfs as they wanted, they sold them as ordinary things. Each costed 25 or 30 Roman squads. The captive belonged to him who paid more –Ottoman, Greek, European, etc. The letter which was written by Italian missionary Guiseppe Judiche and sent to Rome on September 20, 1640 had the following content: "this month Turkish ships loaded with the local cargo is taking off from Mingrelia to Constantinople, the ships are full of Christian boys sold to Turkmen in Mingrelia, Imereti and Kartli. Every year the number of sold out people reaches not less than two thousand."

In the XVII-XVIII centuries, together with the tribute and presents for Shah and Sultan , captives were also implied. In the XVII century, the king of Imereti sent Sultan 80 boys and girls, Dadiani 40 and Guerieli 46 ones. The king of Kartli Simon I sent Shah non Georgian captives which he bought deliberately. King Rostom stated the rule to send Georgian captives to Persia. King Vakhtang VI also sent non Georgian captives. Later, the kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti sent 9 captives to Shah once in two years. Sending captives was one of the main signs of subordination and its refusal already meant rebellion.

With the captive trade and taking the best part of population out of the country, military, political, economic and cultural future of Georgian kingdoms was damaged, Georgia was losing main producing and fighting force. That's why, In order to suppress this terrible "illness", first of all, principal activities from the kingdom were necessary. In this regard we should denote the merit of Solomon I, Erekle ii and Solomon II. According to historical sources and Georgian folk-lore, the most unmerciful fighter against captive trade was the king of Imereti Solomon I (1752-1784). He started his political work with the fight against captive trade. King Solomon prohibited all his subordinates to sell captives to Turkmen and stated severe fine and even death penalty-it is recorded in one of the notes of Russian ministry of external affairs collegium (1761). King of Kartli-Kakheti Erekle II also struggled against captive trade (1762-1798). Among the important measures implemented by Erekle II we should denote prohibition of selling boys and captive trade during Ottoman rule and Khizilbash rule. (1772). King directly addressed fellow-countryman to destruct everyone who desired to captivate their wives and children. He received effective measures to return back those captives in Georgia who were sold abroad or were captivated during wars. He saved about ten thousand captives that cost him 400 000 roubles. Erekle II leded to suppress numerous attacks by Lezghians King of Imereti Solomon II also fought suppress captive trade (1789-1810), but captive trade was so profitable for traitor nobles that king's threat couldn't make them refuse this habit. Ottomen and Persians wanted to take captives first of all to destroy Christianity and Georgian sole.

That's why that saint church started to panic for eradicating this terrible sin from the very start. In the middle of the XVI century (1543-1549), church meeting was held which especially discussed captive trade and according to religious law passes the following verdict:

"1. whatever a person sells out, or nobles or their subordinates, or peasants must be cursed and cast out" (Georgian law monuments, I, 1963, p 393)

Because of the increased frequency of captive trade in the West Georgia, on 4-5 December, 1759, under King Solomon I initiative, West Gorgian church meeting was held which anathematized captive salesmen. For buying back the captives, even Georgian church paid quite considerable cots. As a result of the church effort captive trade quite decreased, though so deeply spread this "terrible illness" couldn't be completely suppressed. Based on historical sources and scientific literature we can say that this shameful and destroying fact, nobles obstinacy, supremacy of Ottomen and Iranians was finally ended up by Russian government. For handling this century old problem, Russian had to implement quite wide scale and principle measures.

With the effort of Russian Imperial kingdom, mainly with the help of Emperor Aleksandre I, in 1801 Georgian captives from Turkey were released and taken back to Georgia. On 16 June, 1804,



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Russian representative in Mingrelia Litvinov published order and appeal against people's kidnapping and captive trade. With this order, Litvinov declared that the captive salesmen would be punished under Russian law which implied death penalty to all family members.

In 1847 special action was implemented in Samurzakhano for liquidation captive salesmen. Similar actions were implemented in different parts of Georgia. At the end of 1850, Lezghian rule was finally eradicated in Georgia. After overflow the serfdom (1864), especially after Russia's victory in Russian-Ottoman war in 1877-1878, at the end of 1870 captive trade actually ended in Georgia.