

Speech of Alaverdi-Khan Undiladze
at the Court of Shah Abbas I

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Abstract: In the present edition of "the Kartvelologist" Alaverdi-Khan Undiladze's speech at the royal court of Shah-Abbas I, proposing the resumption of the Persian-Turkish war, delivered by him at the end of 16th century is published. This important historical source comes for the first time in the area of research of Georgian orientalists. It is preserved in the book of the English diplomat Antony Sherley on his travel to Persia (Sir Antony Sherley, *His Relation of His Travels into Persia*, London 1613). The Georgian translation is being published along with the original.

Key words: *Alaverdi-Khan Undiladze, Shah-Abbas I, Antony Sherley*

Interest in the personality of Alaverdi-Khan has gradually increased in Kartvelological literature over recent decades. Beginning with the second half of the past century this interest was mainly directed at the issue of his national affinity. Research into this topic aimed at shedding light on the family name of his ancestors, ending in the unquestionable recognition – even in all doubting circles - of his Georgian provenance and ethnicity [2]. A new sensational novelty was revealed in Kartvelology in the first decade of the current century: the story of *The Man in the Panther Skin* was known and used by a circle of England's intellectuals, namely playwrights, direct successors of Shakespeare [3]. My quest for the route by which the story of *The Man in the Panther Skin* must have entered England of Shakespeare's time led me to Alaverdi-Khan and the circle of English diplomats and travelers connected with him. A group of 26-strong English travelers that visited Shah Abbas I's court towards the end of 1599 was led by the well-known diplomat Antony Sherley. He stayed at the shah's court for six months and

then left for Europe in the rank of the shah's ambassador, where he lived until his death in 1635. He visited Russia and Central Europe, Italy and Spain, taking active part in the political relations of Europe and Persia. At present I am in possession of Antony Sherley's book published in London in 1613 on his travels to Persia [1].

Georgian scholars dealing with the activity of Alaverdi-Khan refer to this book, yet there is not much evidence of its use and quotation of facts from it in discussing Kartvelological issues.

As seen from Antony Sherley's reminiscences, the main purpose of the English expedition at the end of the 16th century was to egg Persia on to launch hostilities against Turkey. Sherley's book contains much significant evidence for Kartvelological scholarship. I shall point to his relation to Alaverdi-Khan and the question of the latter's origin.

The first audience with the shah convinced Sherley in his primary need to gain the shah's confidence. He writes (p. 73) "Therefore I took time to deeme by the proceeding of other deliberations, of the way which I should take; and to make my selfe learned in the purpose of his actions, by his nature, and inclination; besides, not only to get, first a kind of possession in his own affection, but of all his great men; especially of those whom I did imagine would bee best and strongest assisters of my purpose: which I did judge to be Oliver di-Can, his General, and Xa-Tamas Coolibegue, both which where Georgians; and though they were made Mahometans by the father of the King, to whom they were brought young, yet they had ever Christians hearts, and infinitely well-inclined to all those things which might promote the Christians enterprizes, publiquely wishing well to their proceedings, and taking all offered occasions to give them honour and reputation."

Sherley's expedition sailed from Southampton. He was funded by Robert Devereux, court of Essex. The political mission of this voyage was to urge Persia to launch major wars in the East – setting Persia with a view to protecting Europe from the Ottomans. Turkey that had expanded and strengthened her border through successful military campaigns in the 15th-16th c. in Asia Minor and the Caucasus caused the concern of almost all states of Europe, especially Hungary, the Principality of Transylvania, Portugal and Spain. Beginning with the 15th century Turkey's action was aimed at the destruction of the

united Georgian state, which by the close of the same century ended in the actual incorporation of the entire south western Georgia in the Ottoman empire. Turkish influence in other regions of Georgia continued to grow. The national interest of the Georgian's saw a way of the obtaining situation in receiving aid from Europe's Christian kings in waging coalition wars against Turkey jointly with Europe. These aims of Georgian kings are revealed in their letters sent to Spanish kings and the Pope: an embassy sent by Georgia to the Pope VIII (second half of the 15th century), Constantine II's embassy and letter to the Spanish Queen Isabella (1495), the letters of the king of Kartli Simon I (1596-98) to Philip II, king of Spain, the German emperor and to the Pope. The activity of the king of Kartli at the end of the 16th century towards launching military operations against Turkey was inspired by the attempt to form an anti-Ottoman coalition on the initiative of the German Emperor Rudolf II and Pope Clement VIII. As is seen from Simon I's letters, this initiative was supported by the King of Kakheti Aleksandre and the shah of Persia as well [4].

Thus, an anti-Ottoman mood did exist at the court of Shah-Abbas when the English delegation arrived there in 1599. On the other hand, by this time peaceful relations reigned between Persia and Turkey, following the peace concluded after decades of successful campaigns conducted by the Ottomans on Persian territory. The question of renewing hostilities against Turkey was problematic, however Sherley sensed this at the Persian court from the very first visit there, hence he looked for supporters among the shah's nobles. Alaverdi-Khan proved his major supporter. In my view, his firm stand was dictated by the interests of his ancestors Georgian land too.

Sherley's diplomatic activity proved fruitful. Shah-Abbas launched hostilities against Turkey, which resulted gradually in the retrieval of Persian regions lost decades ago and in the strengthening of the country's positions. The taking of this step by the shah was preceded by a hot debate described by Sherley in detail.

The decisive council was held at the shah's court after, as noted above, Sherley found supporters at the shah's court. The conversation between the shah and the English traveler was attended by the viziers: Haldenbeague, Bastan-Aga and Oliver-di-Can

(Alaverdi-Khan). Sherley tried to convince the shah in the necessity of an alliance with the Christian kings of Europe in organizing a military campaign jointly with them against the Turks. Haldenbeague and Bastan-Aga expressed their views: being a merchant, Sir Antony Sherley's discourse on political matters was incompetent; earlier too the Persians have had difficulties because of the union with Christian kings, and now too it is perilous to enter into alliance with them; true, neighborhood of the Turks is not easy, but recently Persia has no conflict with them; war with the Turks will be very difficult, for they have fortified their strongholds on the Persian border: Tbilisi, Van and Tabriz; it would be better to preserve peace with the Turks and to raid the territories where the followers of the religion of the Persians are harassed. After these viziers the council was addressed by Alaverdi-Khan.

His speech is presented in detail in Sherley's book. Attention has not been so far given to it by Georgian orientalists. It is advisable to pay attention to several aspects of Alaverdi-Khan's oratorical technique:

- the high oratorical skill, characteristic of an adviser's hyperbolic eulogistic address to the monarch, interspersed with wise and logical counsel. At the same time giving a definite direction to the discourse, using a light style.
- call for religious tolerance with practical and tactical aims.
- methodical and tactical counsel to take political and military action.
- appraisal of the international situation.
- assessment of the economic and geopolitical situation in his own country (Persia).
- prediction of the expected hazards.
- oriental wisdom: general wise maxims.

Below the reader is offered the translation of Alaverdi-Khan's address, with the English original. The translation belongs to Mariam Nodia.

References:

1. Sir Antony Sherley, *His Relation of His Travels into Persia*, London. Printed for Nathaniell Butter, and Ioseph Bagfet. 1613.

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3. Khintibidze, E., Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther Skin* and European Literature. Bennet and Bloom, London 2011.
4. Khintibidze, E., "Negotiations between the Georgian and Spanish Kings at the End of the Fifteenth Century", *Mediterranean Historical Review*, vol. 6, № 2, London 1991.