

CRISTOFORO CASTELLI

ELENE ATABEG,-THE "QUEEN" OF PERSIA AND THE NUN CHRISTINE

კრისტოფორო კასტელი -

სპარსეთის „დედოფალი“ ელენე ათაბაგი და მონაზონი კრისტინე

ELDAR MAMISTVALISHVILI

Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor of Gori State University,

Chavchavadze st., No. 53, Gori, 1400, Georgia, +995577251204,

eldarmamistvalishvili@rambler.ru

<https://orchid.org/0000-0002-5978-7624>

Abstract

Don Cristoforo De Castelli, a member of the Theatine order, served in Georgia for 22 years (1632-1654). He left behind remarkably valuable written accounts, as well as a rich collection of artistic, graphic drawings and sketches, which continue to hold exceptional significance for the study of Georgian history and culture in the early 17th century.

Cristoforo Castelli was profoundly moved by the challenging economic and social circumstances in Georgia, including the conversion of a significant portion of the Christian feudal aristocracy, under the pressure of the Muslim empires, to Islam—even if only formally. The forced conversion of captured or sold sons and daughters, along with other adverse events, left a deep impact on him. Catholic missionaries like Castelli saw it as their duty to save the souls of the population by converting Orthodox Georgians and Gregorian Armenians to Catholicism, and also to offer physical healing for various ailments. The letters and drawings of Cristoforo Castelli, published by Patricia Anna Licini, contain numerous examples of these efforts. Introducing to these letters, I infer that Castelli likely intended to use them as literary passages for a memoir or novel upon his return to Italy. However, due to illness, he could not fulfill this idea and passed away soon afterward.

In his letters, he already identified three main characters of his work: Cristoforo Castelli himself, a devoted clergyman deeply in love with Georgia, for whom the salvation of Christianity in Georgia was of paramount importance.

To convey the complex struggle between Christianity and Islam, Castelli created two contrasting female characters, drawing from real-life figures that he, as a keen observer, would have encountered in Georgia. One was Elene, the daughter of the Atabeg of Southern Georgia (Samtskhe), celebrated for her beauty. Originally converted to Catholicism by missionaries, Elene later embraced Islam when she rose to become the queen of Persia. Castelli juxtaposed her with the devout nun Christine, who embodies intense religious devotion and clearly mirrors Castelli's own fervor. In a pivotal moment, as the fictional Christine parts ways with the fictional Elene, Castelli steps out from behind Christine's figure, revealing that “Christine is the creation of Brother Cristoforo.” („Suor Christina l’anima di fra Cristoforo“).

Symbolically, the confrontation between Christine/Castelli and Elene was, for Cristoforo Castelli, a confrontation of the broad lower strata of the Georgian population against the renegade—against the betrayal of Christianity or the nation.

Key words: Cristoforo Castelli; Elene Atabeg; nun Christine; Persia; Levan II Dadiani.

ელდარი მამისთვალისვილი

ისტორიის მეცნიერებათა დოქტორი,
გორის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის პროფესორი,
საქართველო, ქ. გორი, ჭავჭავაძის ქ., N53,1400, +9955 99117703,
eldarmamistvalishvili@rambler.ru,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5978-7624>

აბსტრაქტი: თეატინელმა დონ კრისტოფორო დე კასტელმა 22 წელი (1632-1654) იმსახურა საქართველოში. მან დაგვიტოვა უაღრესად საინტერესო წერილობითი ცნობები და მრავალფეროვანი მხატვრული, გრაფიკული ნახატები და ესკიზები, რომლებსაც განსაკუთრებული მნიშვნელობა დღემდე აქვთ შენარჩუნებული XVII საუკუნის პირველი ნახევრის საქართველოს ისტორიისა და კულტურის შესწავლისათვის.

კრისტოფორო კასტელი დიდად განიცდიდა საქართველოში არსებულ მძიმე ეკონომიკურ და სოციალურ მდგომარეობას, მუსლიმანური იმპერიებისადმი ვასალურ მდგომარეობაში მყოფი ქრისტიანი მოსახლეობის ფეოდალური არისტოკრატის მნიშვნელოვანი ნაწილის, თუნდაც ფორმალურად, ისლამზე გადასვლას, ტყვედ წაყვანილი თუ გაყიდული ვაჟებისა და გოგონების გამუსლიმანებას და სხვა უარყოფით მოვლენებს. კათოლიკე მისიონერებს თავიანთ მოვალეობად მიაჩნდათ მოსახლეობის სულელების, მათი გაგებით, ბედნული მათლმადიდებელი ქართველების და გრიგორიანი სომხების სხვადასხვა რელიგიური ცდომილებისგან ხსნა მათი კათოლიციზმზე მოქცევით, ხოლო ხორციელად კი სხვადასხვა დაავადებებისგან განკურნება. პატრიცია ანა ლიჩინის მიერ გამოქვეყნებული ქრისტოფორე კასტელის წერილები და ნახატები მრავალ ამგვარ მაგალითებს შეიცავენ. წერილების გაცნობამ იმ დასკვნამდე მიმიყვანა, რომ ისინი კასტელს უნდა გამოეყენებინა ლიტერატურულ პასაჟებად თავის მემორიალურ რომანში, რომლის დაწერას, სავარაუდოა, აპირებდა იტალიაში დბრუნების შემდეგ, მაგრამ ავადმყოფობის გამო ჩანაფიქრის განხორციელება ვერ შეძლო, მალე გარდაიცვალა კიდევ.

მას თავის წერილებში უკვე გამოკვეთილი ჰყავს ჩაფიქრებული თხზულების სამი მთავარი გმირი: თვითონ ქრისტოფორო კასტელი, საქართველოზე შეყვარებული სასულიერო პირი, რომლისთვისაც ყველაფერზე წინ იდგა ქრისტიანობის გადარჩენა საქართველოში.

ქრისტიანობის ისლამთან ბრძოლის გადმოსაცემად, კრისტოფორემ შექმნა ორი ქალის სახე, რომელთა პროტოტიპების მოძებნა მაშინდელ საქართველოში ძნელი არ იქნებოდა ისეთი დაკვირვებული ადამიანისათვის, როგორც კრისტოფორო იყო. სამხრეთ საქართველოს (სამცხის) ათბაგის ქალიშვილს, სილამაზით განთქმული ელენე ათბაგს, მისიონერებმა კათოლიკობა მიაღებინეს, მაგრამ როდესაც ის სპარსეთის დედოფლი გახდა,

სარწმუნოება შეიცვალა, გამუსლიმანდა. კასტელმა მას დაუპირისპირა უაღესად მორწმუნე, მებრძოლი მონაზონი კრისტინე, რომელშიც, სრულიად გარკვევით ამოვიცნობთ თვით კრისტოფორო კასტელს. ისიც უნდა ითქვას, რომ როდესაც წარმოსახვითი კრისტინე ამთავრებს ურთიერთობას წარმოსახვით ელენესთან, კრისტოფორო გამოდის ქრისტინეს ჩრდილიდან და ფარდას ახდის საიდუმლოს: `კრისტინე მორჩილი ძმის კრისტოფოროს არსებაა~` (` Suor Christina l'anima di fra Christoforo`).

სიმბოლურად კრისტინე/კასტელის დაპირისპირება ელენესთან კრისტოფორო კასტელისთვის იყო დაპირისპირება საქართველოს მოსახლეობის ფართო დაბალი ფენების პროტესტი რენეგატისადმი - ქრისტიანობის ანუ ერის მოღალატისადმი.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: კრისტოფორო კასტელი; ელენე ათაბგი; მონაზონი კრისტინე; სპარსეთი; ლევან II დადიანი.

Introduction. In the presented article, based on the letters and drawings of the Italian Theatine missionary Cristoforo Castelli, the historical significance of the issues faced by the two characters created by the missionary—Elene Atabeg and nun Christine—is examined in a completely new light. Through these two surreal figures, Cristoforo aimed to depict the condition of Christianity in Georgia in the early 17th century. Elene Atabeg represents a social stratum willing to compromise and turn renegade for personal benefit, while nun Christine, created by Cristoforo Castelli, stands as her antipode..

Methods. The methods utilized in the presented work include empirical analysis, the comparative-historical method, cause-and-effect analysis, synthesis, abstraction, content analysis, systematic analysis.

Results and discussion:

1. Don Cristoforo de Castelli (1597-1659), originally from Genoa, was raised in Palermo, Sicily, where he received an education and training in painting and medicine, preparing him for missionary work in the East. When Father Pietro Avitabile, Prefect of the Gori mission, submitted a request to Rome from Teimuraz I, the King of Kartli-Kakheti, and Catholicos-Patriarch Zakaria to send a healer and an artist to Georgia, Cristoforo was selected as the ideal candidate. Arriving as a missionary, he spent two years (1632-1634) in Gori, five years in Guria, and fifteen years in Samegrelo. His arrival in Georgia could be seen as divine providence. Castelli's work was extensive: he painted numerous subjects, depicting Georgian secular and religious figures, noble and common women, and views of towns and villages. He also decorated church walls and healed the sick. His letters to cardinals, relatives, and friends in various Italian cities contained detailed accounts of nearly every facet of Georgian life, providing a wealth of information that remains invaluable for the study of Georgia's history and culture centuries later.

2. The first half of the 17th century in Western Georgia can be perceived as the sphere of influence of Levan II Dadiani (1611-1657), the duke of Odishi (Samegrelo). His presence was felt even in Eastern Georgia, particularly after he arranged the marriage of his sister Mariam to Rostom, the

Muslim king of Kartli, thus aligning himself with Safi, the Safavid shah of Persia. Levan pursued a foreign policy that was independent of the Ottoman sultan, his suzerain, and paid only a symbolic tribute rather than the full amount expected. Against this backdrop, the Italian Catholic missionary Don Cristoforo de Castelli from the Theatine order introduced the fictional character of Elene Atabeg, claiming her to be the daughter of the real Atabeg Manuchar III Jaqeli (1614-1625). In his narrative, Castelli highlighted this as a significant demonstration of Levan Dadiani's actions to attract the interest of the Ottoman Sultan and to counter his requests. He sent Elene, renowned for her beauty throughout the East, to the Shah of Iran in defiance of the Sultan's wishes, presenting her as a tragic victim of grand political machinations, representative of the plight of many Georgian women. Through Elene, Castelli aimed to create a multifaceted portrayal of the profound tragedy experienced by Georgia.¹

3. Manuchar III fought valiantly to defend his principality, sometimes against the Persians and other times against the Ottomans. He joined forces with the Kartli-Kakhetians in the Battle of Marabda (1625) against the Persians. However, faced with the insurmountable challenges posed by both the Persian and Ottoman pressures on Samtskhe (Saatabago), Manuchar saw no other recourse and traveled to Istanbul to seek the Sultan's mercy in order to preserve his rule. The Sultan granted his request, and as Vakhushti Batonishvili recounts, he *"permitted him to remain Atabeg while retaining his Christian faith"*. As Manuchar III was returning to his homeland, he encountered his uncle Beka (later known as Sapar-Pasha). Beka extended an invitation to his nephew to visit him, but in an act of treachery, he had Manuchar poisoned and killed. Beka traveled to Istanbul alone. *„ He converted to islam, was given (by Sultan - E.M) the title of Atabeg and the territories of Samtskhe Saatabago and was named Sapar-Pasha... then he was sent back and he came to Samtskhe in 1626“* (Vakhusthi, 1973: 724-725).

4. The presented article is primarily grounded in Cristoforo Castelli's reports and their detailed analysis.

Crisforo Castelli, who was actively observing the situation in Georgia during the 20's and 40's of the 17th century and who, according to himself was the firsthand witness to how Gurili and Dadiani transformed the orphaned Atabeg daughter into means to achieve their political goals, created interesting reports regarding the initial period of Elene's life ("before becoming the queen?").

Cristoforo recorded that the young Elene Atabeg met Malakia II Gurieli, duke of Guria (1625-1639), in his palace, where a warm, almost father-daughter bond developed between them. Cristoforo took it upon himself to instruct and fortify her faith, urging her to resist temptations and reject marriage proposals from the Shah of Persia or the Ottoman Sultan, who persistently desired to bring Elene to their courts. Elene herself strongly opposed marriage to a non-Christian, but her destiny was ultimately determined by others.

¹ I published for the first time about the relationship between Cristoforo Castelli and Queen Elene in my book: (Mamistvalishvili E, 2019: 71-90). Now what is published is radically different from the aforementioned article. It should be noted that the presented article was written primarily based on Castelli's letters published by Patrizia Anna Licini (Licini P. A., 1980) and the paintings of Cristoforo Castelli published by the Georgian Bezhan Giorgadze (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976)

Driven by his economic and political interests, the duke of Odishi favored Shah Safi in the ongoing conflict between the two Muslim empires and sent Elene to Persia. According to Castelli's account, Elene was thereby destined to become queen of Persia.

5. Before I continue the story of Elene, I should briefly mention Shah Safi: born in 1611 and originally named Sam Mirza (1611 - May 12, 1642), he was the son of Shah Abbas I's eldest son, Mohammad Baqer Mirza, and the Georgian concubine-mother Dilaram Khanum. (Susan Babaie..., 2003: 104). In 1615, Shah Abbas I killed Safi's father and either killed or blinded his other sons. Safi Mirza thus became the heir to the throne. Daruga and Ispahsalar of Isfahan, Kaikhosro, the illegitimate son of King David XI of Kartli who was raised in Persia, played a significant role in Safi's ascension and was appointed by him as the wali of Kartli in 1633. (Rostom, King of Kartli. see: Mamistvalishvili E. 2022: 488-519; addiotinally: 2020: 9-153) Safi proved to be a weak ruler, his authority undermined by the misconduct of his officials and constant rebellions. He imposed severe repressions, nearly wiping out the notable family of the Georgian origin Imamkuli-Khan Undiladze, to whom, as with his father, Alaverdi-Khan Undiladze, the grateful Persians had built monuments.

Although Safi continued the successful campaign against the Ottoman Empire initiated by Abbas I, it ultimately ended in a humiliating defeat for Persia and the Treaty of Zuhab, which ceded much of Iranian territory in Mesopotamia back to the Ottomans (Roemer, H.R.. 1986: 285).

Let's hear from Cristoforo Castelli himself: *"We have already mentioned Elene, the daughter of Atabeg, one of the rulers in Georgia... Atabeg was defeated by the Turks and forced to renounce Christianity in order not to be expelled from his principality. Despite the violence, he was a true Christian and protested alongside up. He had a daughter with rare beauty, whom he loved greatly and guarded carefully, fearing the Turks would take her. Taking advantage of an opportunity, Atabeg sent Elene to the Duke of Guria, Malakia, where I was serving the said duke as a physician... The Duke of Guria then sent an ambassador to the Shah of Persia. At that time, Abbas was the Shah of Persia, known for his admiration of women. He asked the ambassador: 'Are there beautiful women in your land?' The ambassador responded: 'As the sun shines among the stars... Elene Atabeg shines among beautiful women... the daughter of the dukes of Artaani, Samtsakhe, and others.' Upon hearing this, the Shah decided that she would be fitting for his grandson, Shah Safi"* (Licini P. A. 2009: 53-54).

Cristoforo Castelli misrepresents the conversion to Islam of the fictional Elene's father, Manuchar III Atabeg (1591-1625). As we previously mentioned, Manuchar died a Christian, having been poisoned by his uncle, Beka, who converted to Islam and received favor from the Sultan. Therefore, the Atabeg who converted to Islam was only Beka III, also known as Safar Pasha, at that time. It seems likely that M. Tamarashvili relied on Castelli's report, which led him to also believe that Elene's father was Manuchar Atabeg of Samtskhe, who had converted to Islam. (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 85, picture 41). In picture 41, we observe *"Mahmad Atabeg"*, an elderly, armed horseman dressed in Turkish attire, whose ill sister was cared for by the missionaries. Cristoforo Castelli added a note to this painting, identifying the figure as Safar Pasha, the killer of Elene's father. However, both the portrait and its annotation do not align with the historical Sefer Pasha. (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 85, picture. 41: Mamistvalishvili E. 2024. b: 245-252). Following this, we might surmise why Cristoforo referred to Elene's father as Mahmud; perhaps he noted a resemblance between the names Manuchar and Mahmud. The inscription reads: *"Atabeg Mahmud of Meskheti, father of Queen Elene of Persia"*—depicting a young, armed rider clad in Georgian attire (Mamistvalishvili, E. 2024. b: 245-252).

We have one very interesting letter from Cristoforo, whose addressee was a talented and educated Roman aristocrat Don Pietro della Valle (he was a traveler, writer, historian, diplomat, poet, maker of musical instruments) who was very interested in the past and present of Georgia. His interest in Georgia was due not only to the ancient Christian country of the East, but also to the fact that he was the son-in-law of Georgians; his wife was Maria (Mariucha) Tinatin di Ziba Pietro della Valle from Kakheti (that's how this lady was called in Italy). (For more information about Pietro Della Valle, see Mamistvalshvili E. 2022: 14-489). In a letter sent from Samegrelo to Della Valle (March 15, 1642) (Andreu C.R. 1951: 134-136), Castelli, based on a certain objective announced at the end of the letter, mainly recounts the adventures of Elene, the daughter of Atabag, from the time when Cristoforo met her in Guria, and the feelings Elene endured before being sent to Persia by Levan II Dadiani as the bride of Shah Sefi. Castelli speaks at great length about his promise to Elene that he would never abandon the daughter of Atabeg wherever she might be. However, as he repeatedly pointed out, Castelli was not permitted to fulfill this promise by the mission leadership of Rome and Samegrelo. At the letter's close, the purpose behind Castelli's writing to Pietro della Valle, a Roman aristocrat and influential figure at the papal court, becomes clear: he asked Della Valle to petition the Theatine clergy (Andreu C.R. 1951: 136) to permit him to travel to Persia as Queen Elene's protector and, with the support of Della Valle's wife and the Shah, to establish a mission of the Theatines in Persia, which Castelli himself would lead.

At the beginning of the letter, Castelli explains to the addressee the reasons for his decision to join the mission of the Theatines in Georgia. He highlights some of the positive contributions he made during his time there, notably the conversion of Elene, the daughter of the duke of Meskheti, to Catholicism.

Castelli opens the letter by apologizing for sending Pietro della Valle numerous paintings that he felt were unworthy of His Majesty. He pleads, "don't exclude me from the ranks of your servants," indicating his desire to remain in the good graces of the esteemed Roman aristocrat. Among these paintings must have been a joint portrait of the well-known King Teimuraz and his wife, Queen Khoreshan. The suggestion that this beautiful work did not meet Pietro della Valle's standards is likely a reflection of Castelli's humility toward a member of one of Rome's most illustrious families.

Pietro della Valle regarded King Teimuraz I as a prominent political and military figure, with a desire to meet him so profound that he once planned to return to his homeland via a route that would pass through Georgia. Della Valle had heard travelers describe Georgia's natural beauty and its resemblance to Lombardy, Italy, which intrigued him deeply. In a letter to Teimuraz's mother, Ketevan the Martyr, he wrote: "*As far as I heard from those who were there [in Georgia], their country is very beautiful and very similar to the most beautiful places in Lombardy.*" Alongside his admiration for Georgian landscapes, della Valle sought the opportunity to know Teimuraz personally (Pietro della Valle, 1843: 471)

It is probable that Della Valle, who was in Isfahan, requested his friend Don Pietro Avitabile (later the Prefect of the Gori Mission of Theatines), on his journey to Georgia, to commission a portrait of King Teimuraz and Queen Khoreshani from one of the mission's artists. Avitabile later informed Della Valle that this request would be fulfilled by the missionary Arcangelo Lamberti, "*who has the skill for making miniatures*" (Tabagua I., 1987: 143). It's uncertain whether Lamberti completed the commission, as he admitted that painting was not his expertise; he was only able to paint with oil

paints to the extent that he had learned some of the basics from Cristoforo Castelli. It is unclear if he actually painted King Teimuraz and Queen Khoreshani, but it is probable that this task was taken up by Don Cristoforo de Castelli. When Pietro Avitabile compared the artistic skills of Arcangelo Lamberti and Cristoforo Castelli, he remarked that Lamberti "has the skill for making miniatures," whereas Castelli is a genuine artist "*who paints so convincingly that when you look at his work, you cannot believe they are his paintings*" (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 74, pic. 1).

6. Let us return to the episode of Levan II Dadiani sending Elene to Iran. Elene was dispatched to Kartli with a large retinue and bishops. King Rostom, having been informed of the journey to Persia of the bride of Shah Safi, whom he had assisted in ascending to the throne, came to meet Elene with a grand gift, brought her to Gori amidst cannon salutes, and "accommodated her in the most beautiful tent." From there, Atabeg's daughter was taken to Tbilisi, where she was similarly honored. The journey from Tbilisi to Isfahan took three months, and along the way, they were welcomed with grand celebrations at each stop (Licini P. A., 2009: 60-61).

Elene was brought to Isfahan, though Shah Safi was away preparing for an Indian campaign. Upon hearing of Elene's arrival in the capital, he abandoned everything and hurried back, inviting the queen to the palace and celebrating for eight days. The shah "*bestowed upon Elene much joy, along with several cities, and provided a significant sum of money for her leisure and spending... The Lord willed that the ruler-husband passed peacefully not long thereafter, in the hands of his beloved queen... This is what Elene wrote to me,*" says Castelli, "*and the eunuchs who escorted Elene to the palace told me that before his death, the shah proclaimed her queen without tainting her*" (Licini P. A., 2009: 61).

Cristoforo's account of the eunuchs who supposedly accompanied Elene to the Shah's palace appears highly dubious. It is unlikely to interpret Castelli's statement as suggesting that these eunuchs traveled back to Georgia to relay details of the wedding celebration and Shah's passing to an interested missionary. Castelli seems to have misunderstood the strict regulations around eunuchs' rights and their restricted movement. His own letters confirm that he never set foot in Persia, which rules out any direct interaction between Castelli and the eunuchs guarding Elene. Given these facts, it can be asserted with confidence that Cristoforo Castelli's narrative about Elene's wedding festivities and Shah Safi's death was a fabrication.

7. Safi died on May 12, 1642, and was buried in Qom. Arcangelo Lamberti provides an intriguing account of the circumstances surrounding his death - In Samegrelo, anyone who can drink copiously without losing composure is considered a great man. In my time, there was such a man whose drinking prowess gained renown across Iran. News of his fame even reached the ruler of Iran, Shah Safi, who sent a message to Dadiani requesting this celebrated drinker be sent to Persia. The man, of the Atabeg house, was already en route to Iran. Upon their arrival, the Shah was delighted, as his young bride had also arrived for the wedding. They frequently invited Shedan Chiladze (Scedan Cilaze), as the famous drinker was called. He demonstrated his talents impressively here as well, receiving frequent rewards from the wealthy Shah: "*sometimes a gold-adorned saddle, other times a splendid coat with a collar of Siamese leather, or a gold and jewel-embellished rifle, and many other valuable gifts.*" The situation escalated to the point where the Shah insisted on drinking alongside him, and in doing so drank

himself into illness, eventually leading to his death. Enriched with gifts, Chiladze returned to his homeland (Arcangelo Lamberti. 1938: 49-50).²

It is worth noting that Cristoforo was familiar with Shedan Chiladze, who painted him and referred to him in a note as "Our benefactor Shedan Chiladze, the greatest nobleman in Georgia" (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 100, pic. 89). It is surprising that the missionary does not provide any further details about Shedan Chiladze, especially considering that he left us portraits of his wife (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 100, pic. 66: "Shedan's wife Karoshan Chiladze"; pic. 89: "Shedan Chiladze").

Let us suppose that Shedan Chiladze, Castelli's reputed benefactor, indeed accompanied the object of his care, Elene Atabag, to Persia—a detail known to Arcangelo Lamberti, though apparently unknown to Castelli, which seems difficult to accept. It is equally hard to believe that Lamberti, while mentioning the famed Shedan Chiladze in Western Georgia, who was followed by Elene, celebrated as the most beautiful queen of the Shah in the entire "East," would omit naming her. This is especially so given that he painted portraits of Shedan and his wife, Karoshan.

Since Shah Safi passed away before he could consummate his marriage with Elene, if this account holds true, it would follow that she was not recognized as his wife.

8. It's intriguing to consider when the news of Shah Safi's death reached Georgia. Given that during the 1630s, under Rostom Khan's reign in Kartli, there was a strong connection between the Odishi principality and Persia, the flow of information between Persia and Georgia was likely quite active, with numerous messengers conveying news. Even if we assume that such communication channels were not as robust, the story of Shedan Chiladze, upon his return to his homeland, would have provided a comprehensive account of the circumstances surrounding the Shah's death.

Safi died on May 12, 1642, and this incompetent ruler left behind a myriad of issues for his successor, Abbas II, which have already been discussed in detail. It is worth noting that during the final decade of Safi's reign, the influence of the Qizilbashi within the Safavid bureaucracy was diminished (Roemer, H.R. 1986, 285). Instead, a coalition of concubines,³ eunuchs, and ghulams⁵ began to gain prominence (Roemer, H.R. 1986, 287).

Safi ruled Persia from 1629 to 1642. His reign was marked by a striking inconsistency with the nation's interests, leading to a period characterized by incessant rebellions, harsh repressions, and a failed war against the Ottomans. Many members of the dynasty and notable political and military figures from Shah Abbas's era faced severe consequences, with reports indicating that numerous individuals from the renowned Imamkuli-Khan Undiladze family were among his victims (E.

² Shedan Chiladze's "heroism" in Persia, according to American professor Matthee Rudolph: "this story may be considered "apocryphal." While alcohol indeed contributed to Safi's demise, it was not due to a drinking competition; rather, this illustrates how Georgian customs spread to Iran as well. (Matthee, Rudolph P. 2005: 43)

³ The English terms "concubine" and "concubinage" emerged in the 14th century, referring to "a mistress, a woman who cohabits with a man without marriage." In Roman law, it described "one who lives unmarried with a married man or woman."

⁵ Ghulam - (Arabic: "boy" or "youth") refers to the horse guards of medieval Muslim rulers, comprising enslaved individuals (synonymous with Mamluks). Those Ghulams who advanced in service often attained the highest official positions in the state and, in some cases, even ascended to the throne.

Mamistvalishvili 2022: 287-332). Compounding these issues, Safi showed little interest in governmental affairs and lacked cultural or intellectual pursuits; he struggled with literacy and preferred indulgence in wine and opium.

As noted by Safi's biographers, he had three wives:

A) Anna Khanum, a Circassian woman and the daughter of the Shah's slave Urgurlu Beg, who passed away on September 9, 1647. (Babayan, K. 1993: 119, 123).

B) From Parsafan Gorgijanidze's „*Chronicles of Georgia*“ (ფარსადან გორგიჯანიძე, 2022: 311-312) We know relatively more about Tinatini, the daughter of King Teimuraz I of Kakheti, who was born from Queen Khoreshan. Gorgijanidze from Farsa tells us about the sending of Tinatin to Persia: in 1634, the princes of Kartli, who rebelled against the Rostom king, intended to return Teimuraz to the throne. He accepted the invitation, but was defeated and was satisfied only with the throne of Kakheti. Rostom marched against Teimuraz with a large army and defeated him. Teimuraz sent messengers to Rostom and asked for reconciliation and intercession with the Shah. Teimuraz promised to Shah, in case of reconciliation, to give his daughter Tinatin. Rostom reported everything to the Shah, from whom such an order came: *"Your reconciliation is well received; you did well by sending the daughter of the nobleman, Tinatin, with great honor." King Rostom treated her as if she were his own daughter. He brought his vizier, Agha Moina, adorned with grand decorations that signified the wealth of the state, along with the affluent residents of Kakheti, to present the daughter of nobleman Tinatin to the Shah. They approached Shah Safi, who regarded her favorably and showed her great respect, bestowing upon her many pearls and jewels. urthermore, they sent nobleman Teimuraz a white robe worth a thousand coins and a thousand coins themselves, along with a commendatory letter stating: "We forgive your past transgressions; you and King Rostom have reconciled. We are pleased, and from now on, we will send many blessings your way..." The same order applied to King Rostom".* (Parsadan Gorgijanidze,2022: 311-312) Shah Safi married Tinatin (1610-1642) in 1637.

C) Shah Safi's third wife was the daughter of Circassian Bika and the sister of Prince Musal (Babayan, K. 1993: 123). It is entirely reasonable that Elene is not mentioned among Shah Safi's wives. Setting aside other factors, it suffices to note that, according to Cristoforo, the marriage was not consummated according to established customs and protocols. As evident from Cristoforo's letters, he maintained communication with Elene even after her departure to Persia, emphasizing his desire to accompany her to Persia from a pragmatic perspective. He envisioned himself as Elene's advisor, intending to establish the Theatine mission in Isfahan, which he aspired to lead. This fantasy took shape when Pietro della Valle requested that Cristoforo intercede with individuals in Rome who could facilitate his release for the journey to Persia.

9. Pietro Della Valle was the initiator, organizer, and patron of establishing the Theatine mission in Georgia. While there is no evidence that he acted on Castelli's request (nor is it clear if Castelli made a formal request to him), P.A. Licini discovered a letter in the archives (APF, FF. 258v-259r. Licini P. A. 2009: 40) informing Cristoforo Castelli: "Your Excellency's letter concerning the request and desire of the Catholic Queen of Iran to have with her a person to guide her soul has already been referenced in the letter from her eminence to Father Clemente Galano. It has been agreed that permission may be granted before Giudice, who is still waiting to leave Constantinople, will have no letter other than that from Father Clemente, which the said Queen is eagerly awaiting to expedite your service."

The sender of the letter to the addressee is not identified, nor is it mentioned in the letters published by Castelli. It appears that the letter did not reach Castelli. As Licini notes, this was due to "the lack of a repeated request from Father Castelli" (Licini P.A., 2009: 40). Licini seems to suggest that Castelli might have received the letter and concealed it; however, she does not clarify what his motivation for hiding it would have been.

I believe that Cristoforo Castelli did not send letters to either Valle or the Holy Congregation, requesting to be sent to Persia. He aimed to establish a mission in Isfahan with Elene's support, thereby avoiding expenses from Rome. At that time, the presence of Carmelite and Augustinian missions in Persia was deemed entirely sufficient. Naturally, he could not expect a response to a request that was never sent.

Castelli and his fellow missionaries in Georgia understood that the Theatine mission was to be established solely in one location in Georgia—specifically in Gori—also at the initiative of Pietro Della Valle. The establishment of a mission in another country, such as Iran, was not contemplated. Therefore, I reiterate, Cristoforo could not have made such a request to the Pope or the Holy Congregation to permit him to travel to Persia. It is worth noting that while the residence of the Theatine mission in Georgia was located in Gori, the monks later operated in Guria, Samegrelo, and Imereti, in addition to Kartli, but they remained under the authority of the Gori mission.

10. From the letters of Cristoforo Castelli, we learn that after the death of Shah Safi, Elene became the wife of his successor, Shah Abbas II (1642-1666). As evident from the excerpt below, contact between Elene and Castelli, at least at the level of correspondence, continued.

According to Castelli, his release to Iran was encouraged by Pope Innocent X (1644-1655), who succeeded Urban VIII. Here is what Castelli writes: "*Innocent X desired to send me to Iran because the emperor and queen (Abbas II and Elene - E. M.) requested me to go there to establish a residence. I was on good terms with the crown princes, thanks to the virtue I recognized. I could secure a church, a place, and the means of life for our brotherhood, and whatever the ruler grants, his heirs sometimes confirm.*" (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 60.) Undoubtedly, the narrative in the excerpt is the construct of Cristoforo's imagination. According to him, Elene persistently urged Pope Urban VIII to grant him permission to go to Iran. Following that, Castelli, allegedly encouraged by Elene, began sending letters to his superiors in Rome to seek approval for his journey to Persia. As Cristoforo states at the end of the same letter, "he had many signs that the Lord was calling him to Persia, but in order not to be deceived, he intended to present every argument to Father Lorenzo de' Medici to determine whether he would support his desire to go to Persia." His eagerness to depart for Persia is reflected in the concluding words of the letter: "*Send me all the gifts except for money; my almighty crucifix suffices. Lastly, as I lie at your feet, I ask for you to bless me and to present me to the Lord.*" (Bib. Naz., 1642: v. pp. 32-34).

11. Let's determine Elene's age at the time she was to become Shah Safi's wife. Born before the death (1625) of her father, Manuchar III Atabeg (born 1591), Elene, according to Castelli's account, was probably taken to Guria at a young age, around 10 years old or more. This is what Castelli's story suggests. In two letters addressed to Father Stefano Medici and Father Francesco Bolvito on March 22, 1642, he mentioned that when he met Elene (1634), she was still underage (minoribus): "*... Therefore, I could have served her. For another six years or more, I remained in Guria while she grew up and became ready for marriage*" (Arch. Gen. Teatin, 1642. Licini P. A. 1980: 47). Castelli draws attention

to Elene's underage status in letters addressed to two recipients: one to Father Don Stefano Medici and the other to Father Francesco Bolvito (see: footnote 27). According to Georgian tradition and legislation, a girl was considered of full age at 13-14 years old (Gugushvili N., 2022: 264-267). Therefore, in 1634, when Cristoforo met Elene, she would have been around 7-8 years old, and by the time she was taken to Isfahan in 1642, she would have been 15-16 years old. Even if Cristoforo had adhered to Italian customs, the difference would have been negligible, as in Western Europe, the typical marriage age for women also began at 14.

Now, let's investigate the age relationship between Elene and Abbas II, specifically determining how old Abbas was when Shah Safi died and he married Elene.

First, we recall that Shah Safi was born in 1611. He would have been 17-18 years old at the time of Shah Abbas I's death in 1629 and his subsequent accession to the throne. Safi ruled for 13 years, dying on May 13, 1642. He was succeeded just two days later on May 15 by Shah Abbas II, who was born on December 31, 1632. This means Abbas was only about nine and a half years old when he ascended the throne.

Abbas II's reign was marked by tragedy for his four brothers, who were blinded in the same year, 1642, to prevent any claims to the throne.

Considering the significant age difference between Elene and Abbas II, it is important to note that such disparities were not uncommon in the marriages of royal dynasties and nobility during the feudal period. Often, factors like political alliances or material benefits outweighed concerns about the natural and legal age of the marriage partners. Therefore, it is not surprising that the older Elene formally entered into a marriage with the much younger Abbas II, especially if such an alliance promised to extend Persia's influence in Samtskhe and bolster anti-Ottoman power.

Shah Abbas II increasingly neglected state affairs in favor of indulgent pursuits, including sexual activities and excessive drinking, particularly during the last decade of his reign (Matthee, Rudi, 2012). Initially, his habitual laziness did not seem to significantly impact governance; however, over time, his decline became chronic. He hosted lavish parties, after which he would often retreat from public life for two to three weeks (Matthee, Rudi, 2015). Ultimately, on October 26, 1666, while residing in his winter city of Behshahr, Abbas II succumbed to a variety of ailments, including syphilis and throat cancer (Matthee, Rudi, 2015). He was interred in Qum, and the throne was subsequently taken by his eldest son, Sam Mirza, whose mother was a Georgian concubine named Nakihat Khanum (Matthee, Rudi, 2015).

12. Let's set aside the earlier considerations regarding the ages of Elene and Abbas II and shift our focus to Elene's personality and what we know about her. We will also evaluate the sources of this information and assess its historical accuracy.

The first scholar to examine the relationship between Elene and Cristoforo Castelli within Georgian historiography was M. Tamarashvili, a noted expert and collector of European sources on Georgia. Tamarashvili primarily relied on Cristoforo's narrative, aiming to demonstrate that Cristoforo successfully converted Elene to Catholicism. According to this account, she later married the shah and, despite formally embracing Islam, remained devoted to Catholicism and Cristoforo.

Cristoforo's writings indicate that the decision to marry Elene or use her as a political pawn acquired significant political implications. The competing interests of the Persian and Ottoman empires made Elene a valuable figure, with both powers vying for her favor. Given her potential as a

candidate for queenship, it is likely that chroniclers and court historians from both empires closely monitored Elene's status, particularly as she became the queen of Persia.

Notably, historical records about the mothers and wives of the Safavid shahs are often incomplete. There exists only fragmented information regarding their origins, names prior to conversion to Islam, the gender of their children, and the names of those children.

If we share the pathos of Cristoforo and consider the activities of the Persian and Ottoman ambassadors in the principality of Odishi aimed at capturing Elene (Licini P. A. 1980: 36, 40, 47-49, 52, 78), it becomes challenging to trace the disappearance of Atabeg's daughter's name—Elene—especially since she was first the bride of Shah Safi and later the wife of Shah Abbas II, thus becoming the queen of Persia. What happened to the letters with which, according to Cristoforo, Elene and Abbas invited him to Persia? These letters, which he sent to Rome, promised the establishment of a Theatine mission in Isfahan alongside personal favors. Furthermore, what became of the responses to the letters he sent to various addressees, where he also spoke of Elene Atabeg? Cristoforo noted that he was thwarted in realizing his goals by his Theatine superiors, both in the Principality of Odishi and by the leaders of the Sacred Congregation di Propaganda Fide in Rome. Castelli expressed his dissatisfaction with this treatment in two letters written in 1642 and 1647, with a considerable gap between them. The first letter is addressed to Pietro della Valle, in which Cristoforo asks him to intercede with the General of the Theatine Order and the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation di Propaganda Fide, Bishop Ingoli, to allow Cristoforo to go to Persia. In this same letter, Cristoforo mentions that he will send a letter to Bishop Ingoli making a similar request (Andreu C.R., 1951: 134-136).

From Cristoforo Castelli's letter dated November 20, 1646, we learn that on August 25 of the same year, two embassies to Persia arrived in Odishi—one from the Polish king and the other from the emperor, led by the Dominican Padre Fra Giovanni and Luca, who could have taken Cristoforo with them to Persia. Castelli agreed to accompany them, but Arcangelo Lamberti resisted, forcing him to stay behind and carry a letter to the embassy for the queen. In the same letter, Cristoforo laments that he has not received a letter from Rome for four years (Licini P. A. 1980: 80).

Particularly interesting is the second letter of 1647, which has no addressee. At the end of this letter, Cristoforo names all those who allegedly did not assist him in going to Persia to be near Elene and to establish the Theatine mission there. Cristoforo wrote: *"There was no answer from the highly respected father general. Maybe he got lost on the big road. Some said that, in their opinion, it would not be good to leave Georgia and go to another country, or they hid it from me, and I should think that they did it with good intentions. I received an instruction from His Eminence, Cardinal Onofrio, Prefect of the Holy Congregation, who desired me to go to Persia and render service to this queen, out of loyalty to our fathers. I wanted to go to Persia. At that time, the ambassador was traveling and suggested that I take advantage of this opportunity and accompany him to Persia, where it would be possible to establish a residence that would be useful for the missionaries in Georgia and India..."* (Licini P.A., 2009: 62-63).

13. P. A. Licini's viewpoint requires refinement that *"something transpired between 1642 and 1643, but Father Castelli's recollection failed him, and after returning to Palermo, he assigned the account to 1647. Atabeg's beautiful daughter subsequently became the queen of Persia."* (Licini P.A., 2009: 53, fn. 25). Cristoforo's letter to Pietro della Valle, published by Francesco Andrews, is dated March 15, 1642, so it is logical that it could not

include news from 1643. We must assume that P.A. Licini was not aware of the 1642 letter from Castelli published by Andrews. Now we have the opportunity to compare both letters, and it seems we cannot conclude that they are the same correspondence. Cristoforo appears to have filled in the events of 1642, namely, Elene's relocation to Persia, the death of her fiancé, her marriage to Abbas II, and so on. However, in my view, the significance of the letter lies in Castelli's open expression of his dissatisfaction with those who prevented him from going to Persia and executing his plans. Castelli is not reprimanding for the understanding of his contemporaries, but for the readers of a later period, creating an alibi to enhance the credibility of everything he wrote about Elene. (What relevance does this information have in relation to Elene? It remains unclear!)

There is a letter from Cristoforo Castelli dated July 12, 1648, addressed to Clemente Galano⁴ Cristoforo states that Queen Elene of Persia, when she realized that he could not decide to travel to Persia, ultimately sent an ambassador to Levan Dadiani, the duke of Odishi, requesting him to invite Cristoforo to Persia. It is unclear whether Castelli himself desired this or if it was customary at the prince's court to publicly discuss letters from abroad. Castelli writes: „ *When I present the letters, our brother Giacomo Argiliosi and Mr. Niccolò Minguati, physician to the said prince, will be at the prince's court and will hear the request addressed... to him [from Elene] by the ambassador. He declared that he had come to the region to take a monk of the Roman religion named Cristoforo Castelli. The chief replied that his authority did not extend to Cristoforo, so he could not compel him, and that he did not wish to allow Cristoforo to leave Odishi, as he needed him.*“ After residing in the palace for several months, the aforementioned ambassador departed without accomplishing his objective. As Cristoforo had suspected, Nicolo informed Elene about the incident. (Licini P. A., 1980: 106).

On March 16, 1647, a despondent Cristoforo remarked: "I write to Elene, but she no longer responds to me, as we laughed and answered her poorly." (Licini P. A., 1980: 106).

In a letter dated October 28, 1648, written in the third person, Cristoforo addresses the Venetian Agostinio Doni, imagining a time when Agostinio was in Palermo and had the opportunity to attend his preaching. Father Don Giacomo Antonio Arsi then learned that Agostinio Doni had a passion for painting, which deepened Cristoforo's suspicions about Agostinio's affection for him. He also requested that when Agostinio wrote to Father General, he should mention that since 1647, the Theatines had baptized approximately nine hundred souls in Samegrelo. Cristoforo then shifts to his most pressing matter, informing Agostinio Doni that in early June of that year, the ambassador of the Shah of Persia visited the court of Levan Dadiani, the duke of Samegrelo (Odishi), to take one of their monks. However, the monk could not accompany him because he had not come from Rome (referring, of course, to himself). During this time at the prince's court, Mr. Niccolò Minguati, Gabriele Simonia, and Giacomo Argiliosi were present, and they found the situation unusual. They documented everything that transpired between the prince (referred to as "the king" in the letter - Re) and the ambassador and sent their accounts to Rome. (Licini P. A., 1980: 123).

⁴ Clemente Galano of Sorrento confessed in February 1628. After completing his studies in 1636, he was appointed to the Iberian mission alongside Father Francesco Maria Maggio and other Theatines. He arrived in Georgia, specifically in the city of Gori, in May 1637. From Gori, they were sent to Samegrelo (Tsifuria), where they stayed for three years. In November 1640, Galano left for Constantinople on the orders of his superiors. In his book (Don Clemente Galano, 1690: 120-184), he discusses Colchis and Iberia (Tabagua Iliia M., 1996: 285).

According to the discussed letters, the impression is created that despite his great determination and efforts, Christopher Castelli did not achieve his goal, he was not able to go to Persia with Elene and, therefore, he was not able to establish the mission of the Theatines.

* * *

14. After concluding the discussion on the relationship between Elene and Cristoforo Castelli, it's important to mention the nun Christine, whose prominent figure holds significant importance in Cristoforo's narrative. According to B. Giorgadze, the translator and publisher of Cristoforo de Castelli's reports and album into Georgian, Christine was a Georgian woman who had converted to Catholicism and embraced a religious life. (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 191, pic. 540).

Bernadete Majorana, in her examination of the images created by Cristoforo towards the end of his life, observes that they reflect themes closely linked to counter-reformist iconography: the Trinity, the Virgin, the Heart of Jesus, the Crucifixion, and the instruments of Passion, all depicted within the faces and hearts of the figures, the guardian angel, seraphim, the ecstatic soul, the raptured Spirit, the workings of God in the human mind, the inner struggles of believers, and the mystery of the Eucharist. (Bernadete Majorana., 1990: 127).

Regarding nun Christine, in his insightful essay on Cristoforo Castelli, Paata Natsvlishvili writes, *"It can be said with certainty that the fictional Georgian nun stands as proof of the Italian monk's duality, revealed through her name and face. Castelli adopts this face and name when he cannot act under his own identity. In the ecstasy of fervent prayer for the Georgian queen of Persia or Georgia, he may have indeed transformed into a Georgian nun."* (Natsvlishvili P., 2012: 10-11).

The letters penned under the name Christine are indeed Castelli's work, with "Christine" serving as his pseudonym. Castelli likely had reasons for concealing his authorship in these communications with Elene, which leads me to consider several aspects.

The shared identity of "Christine" and Cristoforo de Castelli is hinted at through the unique name *"Inutile"* (Italian for *"useless" or "unfit for use"*). Several of Castelli's paintings bear inscriptions with this name, such as: *"Brother Inutile preaches the Holy Gospel in the East"*; *"Pope Urban VIII was moved by the aspiration of the obedient brother Inutile"*; *"obedient brother Inutile"*; and *"The main one painted by the obedient brother Inutile under the decree of the Holy Congregation Propaganda Fide..."*. This self-assigned title, "Inutile," likely reflects the humility of the person who uses such a name. Where Cristoforo refers to himself as "inutile", the word is preceded by "brother". (in italian - *Fra*), and Christine is „sister“ (in Latin - *soror – sister, nun*).

Cristoforo Castelli once mistakenly claimed that "Christine/Cristophoro" was called "Inutile" by Pope Alexander VII (1655-1667), an inscription he included on one of his paintings titled *"Nun Christine Called Inutile by Alexander VII"* (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 160).

Additionally, it is noteworthy that both "Christine" and Cristoforo engaged in painting. In a letter to Elene, "Christine" writes: You should reflect upon, read, and comprehend how and how much I have written and drawn for your sake.

Christine/Cristoforo also reminds Elene on other occasions of this artistic skill and activity (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 160).

The question arises: why did Cristoforo choose to write under the name of Christine, embedding his words with sentimental, heightened sensitivity? It seems that this educated Italian cleric, aware of the era's reverence for strength over sentiment, restrained himself from expressing excessive emotion

even in divine contexts. For him, such sensitivity seemed more fitting for a woman. This may have driven Cristoforo to "become" Christine. Moreover, the pseudonym allowed him to avoid embarrassment if his letters to Elene fell into unintended hands. Thus, one might say that Cristoforo experienced a dual, complex attachment to Elene Atabeg, a product of his own imagination. He was captivated by the beauty and virtue of the Atabeg's daughter, as evidenced in three paintings he created: „*Elene Speaks to Castelli*“ (pic. 67); „*Elene, Queen of Persia*“ (pic. 68); Elene is depicted riding a horse adorned with jewels. „*Queen of Persia Elene Atabeg (daughter of Atabeg of Samtskhe Mahmoud)*“ (pic. 118).

* * *

15. Cristoforo Castelli's attitude toward Elene Atabeg, as reflected in his letters and paintings, can indeed be divided into two distinct periods. For many years, from the time he arrived in Guria, Castelli cultivated the idealized image of Elene, portraying her as a defender of Christianity with an unwavering dedication to her faith, even after her formal conversion to Islam upon her crowning in Persia. This first phase lasted around eight years, during which Castelli emphasized Elene's determination, as seen in her supposed plea to the Pope to permit Castelli's mission to Persia.

Castelli's paintings complement this narrative, where he artistically envisions his desires and perceptions of Elene's faith and piety. One noteworthy painting is "*The Letters of the Persian Queen Elene Atabeg Being Read Before Pope Urban VIII in the Vatican*" (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: pic. 199 Reports and Album about Georgia, pic. 199). hah Abbas II endorsed Elene's wish for Cristoforo Castelli to relocate permanently to Persia, assuring that both the queen and the shah would support the establishment of a Theatine mission and residence, covering all associated expenses. However, when it became clear to both parties that Castelli could not proceed to Persia due to the objections of the Pope, the cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, and the leaders of the mission in Samegrelo, Castelli opted for an alternative, imaginary means of communication with Elene. This second phase can be named as „*Christine (Castelli) against Elene*“.

16. At the end of his life, immersed in mysticism and ecstasy, Cristoforo creates a wholly new representation of a person whom he perceives as embodying the highest Christian morality and ethics—Christine. He portrays her as "the soul transformed into the crucified Christ" (Bernadete Majorana, 1990: 122).

Cristoforo's depictions of Christine leave a profound impact, encapsulating her spiritual journey and emotional depth. Naming the titles of his works alone convey this pathos: "*Christine in Ecstasy Over the Feelings of Christ*," "*The Deeply Sorrowful Nun Christine*," "*Christine Weeping at the Cross*," "*Christine's Fervent Prayer at the Crucifixion*," "*Nun Christine Prays*," "*Praying Nun Christine*," "*Christine's Hopeful Prayer*," "*Weeping Christine*," "*The Fervently Praying Nun Christine*," and "*Praying Christine*." (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 378-381, 384-291).

It is interesting and noteworthy that in the Latin letter penned by the nun Christine/Castelli to Queen Elene, the sentiments and reflections of Castelli regarding Elene are expressed. Christine had previously "sent" a letter to Elene, and now she reminds her that to persuade her of the sorrow felt by her sisters and brothers in the East, she wrote extensively and included many drawings.

"Dearest beloved daughter of Christ, victory. I think and reiterate that you should reflect upon, read, and comprehend how and how much I have written and drawn for your sake. Secondly, to assure

you of this, I have depicted all the faces, so you can perceive how the sisters and brothers of the devil in the East lament for you. Due to the indolence of the servants, he repents for his apostasy from Christ. They will respond in kind for you if you do the same. Be well". At the conclusion of the letter, Christine explicitly conveys to Elene that she is greatly diminished in the eyes of Christine's fellow believers because she has traded Christianity for nothing (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 378-381, 384-291). With this correspondence from Christine, Cristoforo effectively ends his connection with the fictitious Elene. He emerges from Christine's shadow and unveils the truth: "And Christine is the creation of the obedient brother Cristoforo." („Suor Christina l'anima di fra Cristoforo“. Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: pic. 391).

Conclusion

Atabeg Manuchar III's daughter Elene is not known from any Georgian documentary or narrative source. Notably, Manuchar III's mother, the daughter of King Svimon I of Kartli, was named Elene, suggesting that it would have been natural for Manuchar to name his daughter after his distinguished mother, known for her resistance against the Ottomans. Perhaps Cristoforo considered this possibility, naming the fictional daughter of Atabeg "Elene." Moreover, as mentioned at the beginning of the article, Cristoforo incorrectly (and perhaps intentionally) depicted Atabeg as a Muslim who, supposedly to preserve his principality, compromised his faith. By doing so, Castelli transformed Atabeg Manuchar and "his daughter" into symbolic victims of political and religious persecution.

Why, then, do the other missionaries who were with Cristoforo in Guria and Samegrelo not mention Atabeg's daughter? While Castelli himself acknowledges their role in raising Atabeg's daughter and converting her to Catholicism, they remain silent on the matter.

Arcangelo Lamberti references a daughter of the Atabeg family, though he omits the name "Elene", noting her departure to Persia with Shedan Chiladze. Identifying which Atabeg's daughter this was remains challenging, and it is clear she could not have been a child of Manuchar III Atabeg. If she was indeed Castelli's "Elene", it is curious that Lamberti refrains from mentioning her by name.

The character of Elene and episodes of her life, however, are not hidden within European and Persian academic and popular works, many of which provide some description of the Safavid shahs' lives in the early 17th century. Historians of the royal court were expected to record every shah's life and activities meticulously, regardless of how these accounts might be interpreted by future generations.

It is notable that Georgian documentary sources, historical records, and oral traditions make no mention of Elene Atabeg's existence. Additionally, it should be observed that chronicles and historical writings from Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and European states often provide more information about Georgia and Georgians than do Georgian sources themselves. This disparity can be attributed to the distinct socio-political contexts and intentions that shaped Georgian historical literature..

It has been acknowledged that P.A. Licini made a substantial effort to uncover Castelli's archival materials; however, the findings he published still leave room for questions, particularly regarding Elene's identity. A similar observation applies to Bernadette Majorana's book, which aimed to explore all facets of Castelli's life and work, yet left the matter of Elene Atabeg unresolved since she did not set out to specifically investigate this aspect. Majorana appears to have conducted additional archival

research, locating only three letters within the Medici archives in Florence. These letters document the interactions between Levan Dadiani, King Alexander III of Imereti, and Archduke Ferdinand II of Tuscany (including correspondence from Levan Dadiani to Archduke Ferdinand II, dated May 3, 1649; from Ferdinand II to King Alexander III of Imereti, dated April 11, 1651; and from Alexander III to Ferdinand II, undated). These letters were delivered to Ferdinando in Florence by Arcangelo Lamberti and Cristoforo Castelli (Bernadette Majorana, 1990: 66, 67, 267; Mamistvalishvili E., 2024 A: 226-244).

From the discussions by both researchers, P.A. Licini and Bernadette Majorana, it appears that what Castelli tells us about Elene is accepted by them as a complete and unquestionable truth. This approach toward Castelli's letters is clearly evident in their commentaries, as they do not raise a single question regarding Elene's identity.

The story of Shah Safi requesting a bride from the Atabeg family in Samegrelo is recorded in the writings of Arcangelo Lambert (Arcangelo Lamberti, 1938: 49-50). However, there is no mention of which Atabeg's daughter it was, her name, age, or whether she actually became the Queen of Persia. Her later fate also remains unknown. Certainly, the notion of Elene Atabag as the Queen of Persia, much like other aspects noted by Castelli, is fictional. Even without verifying Persian historians, it is likely enough to point out that the distinguished Georgian historian Parsadan Gorgijanidze, who initially served as Taruga in Isfahan, responsible for tax collection, and then as "Ishikaqasi-Bashi" (Master of Ceremonies) at the court of Abbas II, says nothing about an Elene Atabeg becoming the Shah's queen.

Persian chronicles and European literature provide a wealth of information on Shah Safi's wives and children. From this, we might speculate that if Elene existed, she was likely not a queen but rather a concubine without children, holding a lower status in the shah's seraglio, which may have left her existence relatively unremarked. The letters of Pietro della Valle give us considerable insight into the life of Shah Abbas I's harem, which mostly included Christian women (Pietro della Valle, 1843: II, 350-351). Shah Abbas I's mother was a Christian from the Caucasus, and he had several Christian Georgian wives with documented names: the granddaughter of King Svimon I, Luarsab II's sister Tinatini or Lela, and Tinatin, daughter of Teimuraz I. Shah Safi's mother, Dilaram Khatun, was also a Georgian concubine, though her Georgian name remains unknown. Another Georgian concubine, Nakihat Khanum, was the mother of Sam Mirza, Abbas II's eldest son.

It was not easy to make contact with the women of the seraglio, especially for a foreigner, as Cristoforo frequently mentions in his letters. The isolation of seraglio women from the outside world became particularly strict from the reign of Abbas II.

Elene Atabeg, as has been noted, is as much a figment of Cristoforo's imagination as the invented nun Christine. There was no Queen Consort Elene of Shah Abbas II, nor was there any nun Christine.

It is likely that the prototype of Elene for Cristoforo Castelli was Tinatin, the daughter of King Teimuraz I. We have already seen a long excerpt from Parsadan Gorgijanidze's works, in which Tinatin's journey to Isfahan in 1634 and her marriage to Safi in 1637 are recounted. Tinatin and Safi died in 1642.

It is probable that the letters in which Cristoforo speaks of Elene were never actually sent to the indicated persons or addresses. In fact, it seems clear that he did not intend to send these letters at all. Therefore, there cannot be, and indeed there are no, reply letters to them.

It seems Cristoforo's letters might be passages from a memoir he envisioned for his life, blending the real with the imaginary. In these letters, he would highlight the social and religious conflict between two social strata—the feudal aristocracy and the general populace in Georgia during the first half of the 17th century.

Cristoforo's conflicting reflections are voiced by Elene Atabag and the "humble" nun Christine.

Elene Atabeg, despite Cristoforo's efforts and inspiration, did not abandon her comfortable life; she renounced Christianity and became queen of Persia. This apostate queen, while trying not to entirely sever her ties to Christianity, remained somewhat drawn to it. Cristoforo likely knew not only high-ranking women who had renounced Christianity for wealth and status but also men who found similar paths to fortune and power.

In his letters, Cristoforo often emphasized the hardships of the Georgian commoners, the prevalence of disease and death among them, and the economy ravaged by ongoing conflicts between Muslim states and the influential feudal lords. The majority of aristocrats made no effort to ease the suffering of the lower classes. Instead, many engaged in exploitative practices against their own people, further deteriorating the nation's vitality and heritage.

Christine (Castelli) addresses Elene: "*Sinner sister, Christine, you have wrought so much harm, you have accumulated so many sins that you have become useless. You intended to do good, yet you have become the cause of many downfalls, leading you to fall into the hands of God's adversaries through your own actions*" (Cristoforo Castel, 1976: 202). Particularly noteworthy is the lamentation-glory of "*Weeping and Grieving Sister Christine*" (Castelli), composed of five stanzas that express sorrow and heartbreak for Georgia, vividly reflecting de Castelli's sentiments toward the land where he spent nearly a quarter of a century.

"Oh, I gaze upon Georgia and [my heart fills with tears], which once was a paradise on earth, now transformed into a realm of sorrowful chaos.

I mourn for those who were steadfast and valiant fighters [leaders] for my banner of Christ, now ensnared by the devil.

I lament for that land of Georgia, which nourished His lambs, the promised holy land and the imitator of Christ; and now thorns have overtaken the church's pasture.

I weep for that country whose inhabitants once illuminated the world, but now it has become a wellspring of darkness and despair.

I grieve for the land that birthed ancient Greek wisdom, now a source of ignorance, where many have succumbed to poverty due to the blindness of their understanding, and where all the gods have been forsaken." (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 203, pic. 570). These reflections on Georgia could only have been articulated by someone who possessed two remarkable phrases: "*Blessed Lord, Georgia was the subject of my admiration for 26 (22-E.M.) years, but I was compelled to leave it due to my serious illness and old age,*" and "*For many years, Georgia was my love*" (Cristoforo Castelli, 1976: 203, pic. 570). In this manner, Cristoforo crafted diaries through his letters, which were intended to serve as the foundation for a significant work in which he would allegorically convey the reasons behind the decline of the once powerful and educated Georgia.

If we had access to samples of Castelli's literary work, we would gain a relatively comprehensive understanding of Cristoforo's writing style, manner, and analysis of facts. This would be further enriched by examining his letters written in Georgian, addressed to the Georgian kings and princes he

named. In one of his letters sent from Samegrelo (September 20, 1648), Cristoforo Castelli proudly noted that, while only a small segment of the local population was literate, they were astonished by his use of two Georgian scripts (ecclesiastical and secular: Nuskhā-khtsuri and Mkhedruli). He mentioned that he wrote letters in Georgian to the Queen of Persia, Prince Gurieli, the King of Kartli, and the King of Imereti, from whom he received significant kindness. Of particular importance are three works by Castelli that, according to Giuseppe Cotonno (Cottonno, Gajetano Maria, C. R., 1733: 280), he produced. While still a layman, he anonymously published one titled *"Judgment and Admonition Concerning the Secret Passions of Christ."* During his time as a missionary, he wrote two works in Georgian, which exist as manuscripts preserved in the archives: *"Tenderness of Divine Love,"* dedicated to Elene Atabeg, and *"Judgment of Christ's Passions,"* dedicated to Patriarch Malachi II. As Castelli's biographer, Luigi Caiani, noted, he had no further information regarding Castelli's writings.⁵

გამოყენებული ლიტერატურა და წყაროები

- არკანჯელო ლამბერტი. (2020). წმინდა კოლხეთი, იტალიურიდან თარგმნა გეორგი ცეციტიშვილმა, ტექსტი გამოსაცემად მოამზადა, გამოკვლევა, განმარტებები და საძიებლები დაურთო დავით მერკვილაძემ. თბილისი.
- არქანჯელო ლამბერტი. (1938). სამეგრელოს აღწერა. თარგმანი იტალიურიდან ალექსანდრე ჭყონიასი. მეორე გამოცემა. ლევან ასათიანის წინასიტყვაობით, რედაქციით და შენიშვნებით. თბილისი.
- გაბაშვილი, ვ. (2016). უნდილაანთ ფეოდალური სახლი XVI-XVII სს. სპარსეთში, (ქართული წყაროების მიხედვით). გაბაშვილი ვ. სტატიების კრებული, I. თბილისი.
- გუგუშვილი, ნ. (2022). ქალი შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში. საქართველოს ისტორიის პალიტრა, ტ. 5, თბილისი.
- დონ კრისტოფორო დე კასტელი. (1976). ცნობები და აღბოძი საქართველოს შესახებ. ტექსტი გაშიფრა, თარგმნა, გამოკვლევა დ კომენტარები დაურთო ბეჟან გიორგაძემ, თბილისი.
- თამარაშვილი, მ. (1902). ისტორია კათოლიკობისა ქართველთა შორის, თფილისი.
- თამარაშვილი, მ. (1995). ქართული ეკლესია დასაბამიდან დღემდე. რედაქცია გაუკეთეს, წინასიტყვა დაურთეს და გამოსაცემად მოამზადეს ზაზა ალექსიძემ და ჯუმბერ ოდიშელმა, თბილისი.

⁵ Secondo un suo biografo, il Cottone, il C. avrebbe pubblicato anonime, quando era ancora laico, le Meditazioni, ed orazioni giaculatorie sopra i misterj della Passione di Christo. Durante il periodo missionario avrebbe poi composto due opere in georgiano, rimaste manoscritte: Le tenerezze del divino Amore, dedicata alla principessa georgiana Elena Artabachi, e le Meditazioni sulla Passione di Cristo, dedicata al patriarca Malachia II. Di esse non abbiamo altre notizie. Caiani luiji, Casteli Teramo, in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, V. 21, 1978. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/teramo-castelli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/teramo-castelli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

- ლიჩინი, პ. ა. (2009). კრისტოფორო კასტელი და მისი მისია საქართველოში. თარგმანი და შენიშვნები მურმან პაპაშვილისა. თბილისი.
- მამისტვალიშვილი, ე. (2011). საქართველოს საგარეო პოლიტიკა და დიპლომატია, II. თბილისი.
- მამისტვალშვილი, ე. (2022). საქართველოს საგარეო პოლიტიკა და დიპლომატია, VI. პიეტრო დელა ვალე – დიპლომატი და მოგზაური საქართველოს შესახებ (XVII საუკუნის პირველი მესამედი), გორის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა.
- მამისტვალიშვილი, ე. (2020) როსტომი და ვახტანგ V. ქართველი მეფეები, თბილისი.
- მამისტვალიშვილი, ე. (2024)ა: კრისტოფორო კასტელი საქართველოს მედიატორე. ისტორია, არქეოლოგია, ეთნოლოგია, #11.
- მამისტვალიშვილი, ე. (2024) ბ: საფარ-ფაშა // ისტორია, არქეოლოგია, ეთნოლოგია, #11.
- ნაცვლიშვილი, პ. (2012). აღმოჩენის მოლოდინი. დონ კრისტოფორო დე კასტელი ახალი თვალთ // ლიტერატურული გაზეთი, 28 დეკემბერი.
- ტაბაღა, ი. (1987). საქართველო ევროპის არქივებსა და წიგნსაცავებში, III, თბილისი.
- ფარსადან გორგიჯანიძე. (2022). საქართველოს ცხოვრება. ტექსტი გამოსაცემად მოამზადა, გამოკვლევა, შენიშვნები და საძიებლები დაურთო გიული ალასანიანი, თბილისი.
- ქართლის ცხოვრება. (1973). IV. ბატონიშვილი ვახუშტი, აღწერა სამეფოსა საქართველოსა. ტექსტი დადგენილი ყველა ძირითადი ხელნაწერის მიხედვით ს. ყაუხჩიშვილის მიერ, თბილისი.
- Arch. Gen. Teatin. (1642). *Lettere dei Missionari in Mingrelia dal 1626: Cristoforo Casteli, dalla Mingrelia*, 12 Novembre, al Rev. Padre D. Francesco Bolvito.
- Babayan, K. (1993). *The Waning of the Qizilbash: The Spiritual and the Temporal in Seventeenth Century Iran*. Princeton University.
- Bernadete Majorana. (1990). *La gloriosa impresa*, Storia e immagini di un viaggio secentesco. Elerio editore Palermo.
- Bellio V. (1884). *La Georgia e la Mingrelia secondo un missionario ital. del sec. XVII*, in *Boll. della Soc. geogr. ital.*, s. 2, IX, pp. 673-708 (studio dettagliato sui manoscritti conservati a Palermo: vi sono riprodotti molti disegni).
- Bib. Naz. (1642). V. E. III Ms S. Martino 510, f. 131 V: Cristoforo Castelli al R.do P.re D. Stefano MediCi, prep.to Generale del Ch.ci reg.ri, Roma. Questo frammento è certamente la prima parte del resoconto scritto da P. Christoforo il 22 Marzo dalla Mingrelia, conservato nell'Archivio Generale dei P.ri Teatini. (v. pp. 32-34).
- Caiani Luiji, (1978). *Casteli Teramo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, V. 21, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/teramo-castelli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/teramo-castelli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)
- Cottono, Gajetano Maria, C. R. (1733). *De scriptoribus venerabilis domus Divi Josephi clericorum regularium Urbis Panormi...* auctore Cajetano Maria Cottono panormitano..., Panormi, ex Typographia Angeli Fellicella.
- Clemente Galano. (1690). *Conciliationis Ecclesiae Armenae cum Romana*, Pars Prima, Romae.

- Don Francesco Andreu C.R. (1951). *Carteggio inedito di Pietro Della Valle col P. Avitabile e I Missionari Theatini della Georgia // Regnum Dei*. Collectanea Theatina. A Cleriois Regularibus quarter in anno VII, Roma, pp. 134-136.
- Farhad, (2003). *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran*, Tauris.
- Ferro B. (1704). *Istoria delle missioni de' Chierici regolari teatini*, I, Roma.
- Licini P. A. (1980). *Carteggio inedito di Cristoforo Castelli Chierico Regolare, missionario in Georgia e Mingrelia*, Milano.
- Matthee, Rudolph P. (2005), *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press,
- Matthee, Rudi. (2012). "*Abbas II*". In *Yarshater, Ehsan* (ed.). Encyclopædia Iranica, Online Edition. Encyclopædia Iranica Foundation.
- Matthee, Rudi. (2015). "*Solayman I*". In *Yarshater, Ehsan* (ed.). Encyclopædia Iranica, Online Edition. Encyclopædia Iranica Foundation.
- Roemer, H.R. (1986). "*The Safavid period*". *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 5: The Timurid and Safavid periods*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Silos G., *Historiarum Clericorum Regularium a Congregatione condita*, II, Romae 1655, pp. 612-613, 632; III, Panormi 1666, pp. 175, 303-308.
- Sussan Babaie, (2004). Kathryn Babayan, Ina Baghdiantz-McCabe, Massumeh. *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris).
- Tabagua Ilia M. (1996). *I rapport tra la Georgia Cristiana e la Santa Sede*, vol. I, Tbilisi.
- Viaggi di Pietro della Valle*. (1843). *Il pellegrino descritti da lui medesimo in lettere familiari all'erudito suo amico Mario Schipano, divisi in tre parti cioè: La Turchia, La Persia, e l'India, colla vita dell'autore*. Brighton G. Gancia. Vol.II.351. <https://ia800509.us.archive.org/28/items/viaggidipietrode02vall/viaggidipietrode02vall.pdf>

References

- Arcangelo Lamberti, (2020) *Saint Colchis*, translated from Italian by Giorgi Tskitishvili, the text was prepared for publication, research, explanations and references were added by Davit Merkviladze, Tbilisi.
- Arcangelo Lamberti. (1938). *Description of Samegrelo*. Translated from Italian by Aleksandre Chkonia. second edition. With a foreword, editing and notes by Levan Asatiani, Tbilisi.
- Gabashvili V. (2016). *Undiladze Feudal House of XVI-XVII centuries in Persia (According to Georgian Sources)*. Gabashvili V. Collection of Articles, I, Tbilisi.
- Gugushvili N. (2022). *A Woman in Medieval Georgia. Palette of Georgian History*, vol. 5, Tbilisi.
- Don Cristoforo de Castelli. (1976). *Reports and Album about Georgia*. The text was decoded, translated, researched and comments added by Bezhan Giorgadze, Tbilisi.
- Tamarashvili M. (1902). *History of Catholicism among Georgians*, Tiflis.

- Tamarashvili M. (1995). *Georgian Church from the Beginning to the Present Day*. Edited, preface added and prepared for publication by Zaza Aleksidze and Jumber Odisheli, Tbilisi.
- Licini P. A. (2009). *Cristoforo Castelli and His Mission in Georgia*. Translation and notes by Murman Papashvili, Tbilisi.
- Mamistvalishvili E. (2011). *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy of Georgia*, II, Tbilisi.
- Mamistvalishvili E. (2022). Foreign policy and diplomacy of Georgia, VI. Pietro Della Valle - diplomat and traveler about Georgia (first third of the 17th century), Gori State University Publishing House,
- Mamistvalishvili E. (2020) Rostomi and Vakhtang V. Georgian Kings, Tbilisi
- Mamistvalishvili E. (2024) A: *Cristoforo Castelli Mediator of Georgia*. HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY, ETHNOLOGY №11,
- Mamistvalishvili, E. (2024) B: *Saphar-Pasha* // HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY, ETHNOLOGY. №11.
- Natsvlshvili, P. (2012). *Anticipation of Discovery*. Don Cristoforo de Castelli with New Eyes // Literary Newspaper, December 28,
- Tabagua, I. (1987). *Georgia in European Archives and Libraries*, III, Tbilisi,
- Parsadan Gorgijanidze. (2022). *Chronicles of Georgia*. The text was prepared for publication, research, notes and references were added by Giuli Alasania, Tbilisi,
- Chronicles of Kartli. (1973) IV. Batonishvili Vakhushhti, *Description of the Kingdom of Georgia*. The text established according to all the main manuscripts by S. Kaukhchishvili, Tbilisi.
- Arch. Gen. Teatin. (1642). *Lettere dei Missionari in Mingrelia dal 1626: Cristoforo Casteli, dalla Mingrelia*, 12 Novembre, al Rev. Padre D. Francesco Bolvito.
- Babayan, K. (1993). *The Waning of the Qizilbash: The Spiritual and the Temporal in Seventeenth Century Iran*. Princeton University.
- Bernadete Majorana. (1990). *La gloriosa impresa*, Storia e immagini di un viaggio secentesco. Elerio editore Palermo.
- Bellio V. (1884). *La Georgia e la Mingrelia secondo un missionario ital. del sec. XVII*, in *Boll. della Soc. geogr. ital.*, s. 2, IX, pp. 673-708 (studio dettagliato sui manoscritti conservati a Palermo: vi sono riprodotti molti disegni).
- Bib. Naz. (1642). V. E. III Ms S. Martino 510, f. 131 V: Cristoforo Castelli al R.do P.re D. Stefano MediCi, prep.to Generale del Ch.ci reg.ri, Roma. Questo frammento è certamente la prima parte del resoconto scritto da P. Cristoforo il 22 Marzo dalla Mingrelia, conservato nell'Archivio Generale dei P.ri Teatini. (v. pp. 32-34).
- Caiani Luiji, (1978). *Casteli Teramo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, V. 21, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/teramo-castelli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/teramo-castelli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)
- Cottono, Gajetano Maria, C. R. (1733). *De scriptoribus venerabilis domus Divi Josephi clericorum regularium Urbis Panormi...* auctore Cajetano Maria Cottono panormitano..., Panormi, ex Typographia Angeli Fellicella,
- Clemente Galano. (1690). *Conciliationis Ecclesiae Armenae cum Romana*, Pars Prima, Romae.
- Don Francesco Andreu C.R. (1951). *Carteggio inedito di Pietro Della Valle col P. Avitabile e I Missionari Theatini della Georgia* // *Regnum Dei. Collectanea Theatina. A Clericis Regularibus quarter in anno VII*, Roma, pp. 134-136.
- Farhad, (2003). *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran*, Tauris.

- Ferro B. (1704). *Istoria delle missioni de' Chierici regolari teatini*, I, Roma.
- Licini P. A. (1980). *Carteggio inedito di Cristoforo Castelli Chierico Regolare, missionario in Georgia e Mingrelia*, Milano.
- Matthew, Rudolph P. (2005). *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Matthew, Rudi. (2012). "*Abbas II*". In *Yarshater, Ehsan* (ed.). Encyclopædia Iranica, Online Edition. Encyclopædia Iranica Foundation.
- Matthee, Rudi. (2015). "*Solayman I*". In *Yarshater, Ehsan* (ed.). Encyclopædia Iranica, Online Edition. Encyclopædia Iranica Foundation.
- Roemer, H.R. (1986). "The Safavid period". *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 5: The Timurid and Safavid periods*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Silos G., *Historiarum Clericorum Regularium a Congregatione condita*, II, Romae 1655, pp. 612-613, 632; III, Panormi 1666, pp. 175, 303-308.
- Sussan Babaie, (2004). Kathryn Babayan, Ina Baghdiantz-McCabe, Massumeh. *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris).
- Tabagua Ilia M, (1996). *I rapport tra la Georgia Cristiana e la Santa Sede*, vol. I, Tbilisi.
- Viaggi di Pietro della Valle. (1843). *Il pellegrino descritti da lui medesimo in lettere familiari all'erudito suo amico Mario Schipano, divisi in tre parti cioè: La Turchia, La Persia, e l'India, colla vita dell'autore*. Brighton G. Gancia. Vol.II.351.
<https://ia800509.us.archive.org/28/items/viaggidipietrode02vall/viaggidipietrode02vall.pdf>

The author would like to extend his gratitude to Ana Chochia for her translation of the presented article into English.