

Lumpen Millennium

by Beso Solomanashvili

excerpt

translated by Giorgi Gogilashvili

15. When You Blame Everything on Others While You Yourself Are King; or, The Passion of the Weary King

1744. 1798.

The melancholy king had become weary. Or on the contrary, his weariness had made him melancholy.

Erekle knew everything, but he was also at a loss. He couldn't think anymore, he'd thought so much.

He couldn't make sense of events in sequence – he would build, organize, garner support, do battle, triumph, and then, by some power, it would all come apart – everyone would violate the arrangement that had been agreed upon.

This was not the usual kind of betrayal; it was the diplomacy of the new age, which he never quite got the hang of: you discuss in public, discuss in secret, strike a deal – “This is what we should say openly, but in truth we'll do things differently” – “If three will suit my ends and ten yours, let's not say so aloud for others to hear.” You'll confer, even agree to lies. Everything will be about to conclude and still there will be some lie remaining somewhere, one that wasn't part of the deal, and everything will fall apart.

Up to this point, everyone had dealt with him in accordance with the rules, written or unwritten, but times had changed, a completely different sort of people had come into being, the time of the wretched and the low had arrived. If you stumbled... And stumble he did. Sometimes, he trusted those he should have avoided entirely, and sometimes, he punished those whom he should have placed at his side, and sometimes, he was pained by the thought of whether this contrived peace was worth anything at all.

Who could withstand 65 years of waking up every day – if anyone has let you sleep – with the thought that you must somehow save your people, your kingdom, and yourself – the King?

You want to be a compassionate king doing the best for your subjects, you want to build and enrich, you want to educate them, all while

everyone, from your wife and children to the eternal enemy in their foreign land, is pulling the bed-sheets their way and sapping your strength. Darejan sometimes holds separate councils, and while you're taking the time to deliberate and exercise caution, the Queen has already made a decision without so much as consulting you.

He would then remember Givi Amilakhvari, how he and his father Teimuraz gave the man over to Nader Shah. He had been extremely ashamed, had also been ashamed when they'd stood against the Georgian rebellion, sided with the Persians thinking it was for the best. What a peculiar man this Givi Amilakhvari was! When a man is strong and acts more righteously than you, that is when you call him peculiar. But hadn't Amilakhvari also acted unjustly toward Duke Shanshe? Had he not chosen according to his own whim which allies would be better for Georgia? Maybe if he had been the one enthroned as king, he could have chosen a better path. *And what did we do? – First we surrendered one of our own to that Qizilbash Nader Shah. Then we ourselves rose up against him in lieu of these Russians' promises, though what did we know then what the Russians were? – Erekle regretted these things in his heart, but he justified himself, too. That Nader Shah really lost his mind toward the end, and what were we to do when even his own people turned on him?*

I wonder how things would look if he hadn't come around and forced us onto these thrones.

All right, so you've spoken to the Mukhranis of Kartli and united with them, but yet other princes think that they deserve the royal throne and that the Kakhetian Bagratians hold it unjustly. Someone will crawl out of some hole and strike a deal with the enemy; they'll start speaking in hushed tones, sometimes to the Russians, sometimes the sultans, and sometimes the shahs, pashas, and khans, all so they might tear a piece away from you with their help and establish themselves in their own little kingdoms.

The priesthood is also skulking to and fro among the Russians. I think Darejan is right about them not having the best intentions at heart... That's why a royal prince needs to be the head of the church, else see how the Russians prepare Varlam Eristavi to lead the Georgian church. Hadn't Teimuraz also been there? They were the ones who'd anointed him as Patriarch Anton II, but now they'd dug up this Varlam. This Kharjakhishvili often presumes too much, but he is then exonerated, so one must be cautious.

Sometimes you're obliged to fight in Ganja and other times among

the Avars, sometimes you have to help someone hold Derbent and other times Karabakh. You befriend one and another is offended; befriend both and a third is offended... One will take power and you'll come to an agreement with him, but someone will gouge that one's eyes out and then you'll need to negotiate with the eye-gouger, who himself will soon fall, so that you'll have to negotiate with yet another. You pay tribute to someone, someone else pays tribute to you... Whether it's Azerbaijan or Persia, Tabriz or Shusha, Derbent, Shirvan, Yerevan, Karabakh, Nakhchivan, Isfahan... the Atabegate, Baku, Moscow, Erzurum, Istanbul, Saint Petersburg, and maybe even London or Paris, Venice and Jerusalem... all these may fall within reach of your thoughts and battles.

We put an end to the incursions of the Lekians¹ once Levan had established a standing army, but it collapsed after his death, and no matter what you do, you can no longer defeat the Lekians and Kists, and God knows whom else. Here Nursal-bey will pop up and encourage them, there Omar Khan or Fatali Khan will take matters into their own hands. Then someone called Javad Khan will crawl out of some hole, begging you to help him while stabbing you in the back. And then an Ibrahim Khan, and another khan, and yet another. You have to negotiate with one while opposing another, or vice versa... Or else do both at the same time. You hear tell that the Russians are secretly encouraging them, supplying them with weapons. You don't want to have anyone beheaded or have their eyes gouged out, but what are you to do? They've been emboldened, they'll place your head on the chopping block themselves, and your beheading will mean the beheading of the country.

And these Armenian meliks each have their own kingdom. What they had to take care of, none of them did, and now they all want to revive the Kingdom of Greater Armenia at the expense of Gurjistani land² and perch themselves on the throne. You either come to an agreement with them or subjugate them; build them up, and they slink over to the Persians' side, or they're telling the Ottomans to stop bothering with those Gurjistanis, they themselves will take care of everything, and then it turns out they've already made deals with the Russians. Sometimes there's a Melik Shahnazar and sometimes a Vahtam Melik-Avanian, sometimes a Melik Hasan-Jalalian and sometimes an Abov Melik-Beglarian.

¹From the traditional Georgian term (*lekebi*) for the peoples of Dagestan, especially those near the border with Georgia, who often mounted raids into the country during a period called the Lekianoba.

²Gurjistan: An exonym for Georgia, of Persian origin.

However, if you imagine yourself to be king – God’s chosen and the leader of your people – you should also know that there will always be someone who will get in your way, desire your station and your land, and if they cannot achieve their means through force, they’ll try to trip you up with treachery. But you yourself must be unjust at times, at times treacherous... That thing called diplomacy nowadays: agree on one thing, promise another, and carry out a third. If you don’t get with the times, you’ll perish... What are you king of if you blame everything on the treachery of others? Kingship isn’t all sitting on a throne and waving your sword in battle. Kingship isn’t just being an exceptional commander-in-chief, either. It’s also about seeing to matters in such a way that no one betrays you, no one dares go against you, no one thinks they can fool you, even if you yourself can’t square your gaze with your life’s path without shame... Then again, only God knows which path is better than another.

“The time of the unworthy has come,” he told Emin, the Armenian advisor for trade, whom he trusted too much, whom he could not have imagined was the one causing him trouble. And then that other one, Araratun. “I’ve been sent by Grigory Potemkin so that we can establish trade routes,” he’d said, before proceeding to go to the emissary Shushkevich, assigned to Agha Mohammad Khan by the Russians, and reporting everything he did or didn’t know to him: where Erekle sent ambassadors in secret, and whom he met with in yet greater secrecy. I think they took the practices of buying, selling, and commerce too much to heart. Apparently, they meet often with Colonel Burnashev, and God only knows what they talk about. They are the same sort of Armenians as Pavel Tsitsonianov, Zakharia Baratov, or that Gavril Songhulov: Georgians. Everyone’s been Russified and bastardized. But it would be difficult to punish them. Best keep them close to the throne. Easier to keep an eye on them that way.

And there some Spaniard by the name of Jorge Zazara – the one who made himself out to be a merchant – secretly sends word to Europe.

Where this Europe has gone off to, you haven’t the faintest clue. First they send letters, then you send them ambassadors and emissaries, after which they disappear without granting you so much as a word in answer.

And where did this Saxon doctor Jakob come from? Supposedly sent by the king of Saxony. At first he was a good doctor, even a good ambassador. Then you find out that he mingles with the Russians and the shahs without your knowledge or approval. In Imereti, he addles

Solomon's mind, and he's wormed his way into the company of the khan of Nakhchivan, whom you've barely managed to subdue, and emboldens him. He had an unseemly relationship with that Hungarian noble; they say the Hungarian was cut up by some lord for sodomy in the sulfur baths. This doctor Jakob first slips away to Russia, then returns and wanders here and there, as if a single day's travel were enough for the whole affair. He keeps conducting research... How does he have so many resources, to hire as many workers and assistants as he does? Sometimes he's in Mtiuleti, sometimes in the west, in Samtskhe, Kartli, Kakheti. He speaks to the Ossetians as well as the Avars... Then he sidles up to you, Your Highness, and spreads rumors about Ivan Karaev, the head of your royal doctors' corps, to plant doubts in your mind, and you in turn feel the cracks develop in your sense of loyalty, that maybe it's true the man should not be trusted.

I think the head of Darejan's household – Osepa Qorghanashvili – is also making sideward glances; I think Darejan trusts him overmuch... Kharjakhishvili swears that the Orbelianis have exaggerated his reliability.

“We have to learn our lesson about the Russians,” Kaikhosro Kharjakhishvili kept pestering him. How early it was that they forced Prince David to swear fealty to them. Then Peter the Great fooled Vakhtang³ and abandoned him somewhere in the fields of Astrakhan with all his retinue, and so many there were... Whyever did they pack up with all their belongings? Where were they going? They all returned as enemies... Much later, they brought many troubles upon Georgia, all of them, from the emissaries to the most treacherous generals. How have the Russians changed their minds so much? What are they feeding them to turn them into the enemies of their homeland?

The Russians think one thing, say another, do a third, want a fourth, and manage a fifth... That rogue Tottleben rears his head somewhere. Over there that upstart Gudovich struts about. This son of a swine who, supposedly without meaning to, let slip to the Iranian ambassadors that the Russians did not plan to come to our aid. Meanwhile, Pavel Tsitsianov, one of your own kinsmen, is consistently hostile to you; the Russians are preparing him for something.

This rat Orbeliani reports everything to Tsitsianov by the earful. *Maybe I don't want him to hear everything. At first, I thought he was an ally, but later... I have a suspicion that they informed Agha Mohammad*

³King Vakhtang VI.

Khan about everything from the palace.

Look, haven't we assembled such grand artillery? Which of our neighbors had such factories for making cannon? To the cannons just barely arrived from Catherine, Paata Andronikashvili added those made in Georgia. It wasn't at all an easy task to organize the pouring of cannons in Georgia, to put the factories in working order, to mine the metal deposits and start smelting. But it was accomplished – thanks to Andronikashvili's education and expertise. Ah, Prince Paata also made great contributions to that end, but...⁴

Paata Andronikashvili had help in the artillery business from Joseph Goetting, Prince David's Austrian tutor, so that everyone and everything would work as needed. Meanwhile, Savely Yazikovich and Pavel Groshev followed Andronikashvili from Russia to serve as his teachers and mentors. Kharjakhishvili did say to be wary with that Captain Yazikovich and even more so with his assistant Groshev, having seen him in the secret gendarmerie in Moscow. *My children trained as artillery officers under him, and several times he brought someone and counted for them how many cannons there were, how many cannons were being trained for the job... It seems they sent him along with Andronikashvili so he could spy for them.* How loyally he had conducted himself at the start, how caringly, as if it was his own homeland; they trained 400 artillerymen in Georgia as true professionals, but it turns out they had ulterior motives. They were after Joseph Goetting, those Russians – Yazikovich, and Groshev especially. They knew, Agha Mohammad Khan's people; they took Goetting prisoner. They knew exactly where he was hiding and they kidnapped him. Poor man. His captivity took its toll.

King Erekle had cannons and cannoners. The suspicion is that Groshev killed them all... Or else brought Persians in from the rear... The 15-year-old Zaal Kharjakhishvili would take food and water to the cannoners from time to time. He came across Groshev waving a red cloth, apparently signaling someone. The boy had just barely gotten away and taken word to his father. When Andronikashvili's regiment arrived, they found the cannoners slaughtered to a man. The 12 cannoners assigned to the 35 cannons stationed at Narikala and Seidabad had apparently been slain mid-battle thanks to Groshev. The rest joined the war.

It seems Groshev himself had been discovered; they found him cut open on the path to Narikala.

⁴Prince Paata was Erekle II's half-uncle. He led a failed coup attempt against Erekle, which led to his trial and execution.

“The King clings to the Treaty⁵ as if it were moss,” Kharjakhishvili wrote, “though already he has lost hope in it. Sometimes I wonder whether he is taking orders from the Empress, why he is so bent on it.” Kaikhosro had this part circled in black. “He did eventually heed me and Solomon. Solomon even said that, as the one who drafted the Treaty, he knew the Russians were only buying time, but it was too late.” It was the start of the summer of 1795 and Agha Mohammad Khan was at the gates. It was said that there was a bit of Russian money and weaponry involved. Not only that, in some villages they recounted how Russian shouts could be heard as the Persians invaded. But how is one to prove such a thing?

In pursuit of Erekle’s retinue west of Tbilisi, the Persians left three of Kharjakhishvili’s villages burned to the ground in their wake. Kaikhosro was aided by his sons in evacuating the women and children from Tbilisi. Zaal was 15 years old at the time, Levan 13. It was as if the country had become infested with fiends, such was the situation in the capital and its surroundings.

When Agha Mohammad Khan’s fiends and the treachery of the Russians passed over Georgia, everyone was left with much to consider. Yet what was there to consider? Everything was plain as day. Here Lionidze and Kharjakhishvili advised that the country needed to unite. There Garsevan Chavchavadze regretted the signing of the Treaty with Russia. Darejan harried Erekle without end for having trusted the Russians. Separately, that misbegotten Giorgi⁶ made a fuss that they should’ve submitted to the Russians even more, claiming that the Russians hadn’t helped because they’d found out about the missions that had been sent to the Ottomans and to Europe... At one point his own son Ioane shouted his way, “Weren’t you the one who said the Russians needed to know about all our missions if we were to become subservient to them on the basis of our common faith?”

Each of these sons of mine wants his own princedom. When I’m no longer around, they’ll fall out with each other, and it is better if each receives his own lot. We’ve united with Solomon of Imereti but kept it a secret from the Ottomans so as not to irritate them. They’re inscrutable. They fear Russia and dislike our alliance. You need to gain the support of the Dadianis and Sharvashidzes and help them fight the Ottomans;

⁵The Treaty of Georgievsk, which established the eastern Georgian kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti as a protectorate of the Russian Empire.

⁶Erekle II’s heir and successor. His death in 1800 was followed by the Russian Empire’s annexation of the kingdom the following year.

the Eristavis, the Atabegs, Orbelianis, the Dadianis along with Odishi,⁷ the Abkhazians, the Gurians, Samtskhe, the people of the mountains, the Pshav-Khevsurians and Tushetians... “Why couldn’t an army be assembled during the war? Didn’t everyone yearn for victory?” the King lamented. He was weakened toward the end. His wounds bothered him. “Leave me be awhile. I need to rest,” he’d say.

After this, Godfather Kaikhosro had another letter, written to Lionidze. “What I write now, if anyone feels the need to show it to any other kings, bring it to them and have them read it. Georgia wasn’t in straits so dire at the time as to require that we enter into submission. A new age is coming. If we’ve held on this long, let us hold on a bit longer. The Russians are a dangerous people; lawless, unheeding. This isn’t the kind of peace that will bring any good. A people living in such a submissive peace will lose that which they are supposedly protecting anyway. Sooner or later they will give it up willingly. The taker will not even need to worry about incurring a human toll.

“See, this is what we will ultimately accomplish through such a peace... This is not a desire for peace, but rather cowardice and laziness. Your Highness, I know you endure great adversity now, but who said that we don’t have the people, or that we can’t achieve our aims? Such traitors abound in every land. The main thing is to endure a bit longer... Giorgi will heed you, and so will his son; we are greater in number... The Russians have always been in the habit of deception, Your Highness, and they will deceive us now as well. Ah, but you, Your Highness...”

* * *

A year after the incursion of Agha Mohammad Khan’s armies, Erekle gave Godfather Kaikhosro a special mission. However, of his own will, Kaikhosro altered this mission while on the way, thus taking on a great responsibility, and if he hadn’t been lucky, it’s possible the entire Caucasus may have suffered an eternal loss.

But lucky he was!

Two years later, Erekle passed on. After Erekle’s passing, relations between Queen Darejan, her children, and Erekle’s first child, Giorgi, became strained. Giorgi was inclined toward Russia. His son David became a major general in the Russian army. Finally, in 1798, he fought together

⁷A historical name for the region of Mingrelia.

with his uncle, Russia's ever-wakeful enemy Prince Aleksandre, against the Ottomans in support of Russia, and he eventually faced off against Queen Darejan and his uncles. Kharjakhishvili and Lionidze stood together in support of the Queen. A year later, Lionidze was captured by Prince David's people, and a few months later, someone set an ambush for Godfather Kaikhosro, fatally wounding him in the shoulder. No one could figure out who had killed him. Prince Aleksandre's 43-year-old godfather struggled with death for three months before giving up the ghost. At the time, Zaal was already 18 years old, Levan 16. They cared for their sister Tekla and their mother Anna as if they were the crown jewels. Like all the Kharjakhishvili women, the two were exceptionally hard-working, bold, and independent, but this boldness was the death of them both. When plague broke out in the city, everyone fled, but they stayed, caring for the sick. They soon fell ill themselves and were unable to overcome the disease.

These events were the last to be recorded by Godfather Kaikhosro, as the following records already belonged to Zaal Kharjakhishvili, who long after was dubbed "Zaal the Rabid" but couldn't remember who had been the one to give him that name: Prince Aleksandre, Aleksandre Chavchavadze, or even Abbas Mirza, Agha Mohammad Khan's nephew.

Prince Aleksandre felt indebted to the Kharjakhishvilis and from his royal holdings granted property to the brothers – Zaal and Levan – so they could get back on their feet. The Kharjakhishvilis were loved by their serfs, because they did not treat them like serfs as others did. In a year, both brothers had such homesteads as were only fitting for the Kharjakhishvilis. Even in that hardship, in that ruined and burnt-out country, the brothers, left alone in all the world, pulled each other forward, and the only things they had left were the memory of the past, their having come from nothing, and their love for each other.

The Kharjakhishvilis hadn't lacked perseverance and fearlessness before, either, but now even less so. They turned everything into a fortress, and used their wit as a sharp instrument, their misfortune working as a whetstone.

The royal family moved to Telavi because of the plague that had broken out in Tbilisi. A year later, Erekle II passed away in the same room in which he had been born.

God only knows if any of these records made it to the King. Probably not, as there were no more kings after that... And how could there be when you blame everything on others while you yourself are king?

Afterward, the Emperor said with surprise, "What a strange people these Georgians are. They lost their homeland and yet they acknowledge that king as a hero." Later, he remarked, "It seems they don't want to have a king of their own anymore; we'll carry out their will and they will have kings no longer." The Emperor of Russia was in the habit of deception, but maybe that incontinent sloth Giorgi told him, "This is what most of the Georgian people want, Emperor. You have few opponents left. Come and force that handful of people into submission and everything will calm down. I find myself hungry now, so I will go and eat, else I won't have energy enough to speak with you. I'm tired of all this war and I thirst for peace, and I'd rather that peace come at your expense. It's proven too difficult and bothersome to care for something oneself. I am the King and demand respect and contentment, and my children look very nice indeed in the medals you've given them. How prettily they glimmer on their chests and shoulders."

34. The October Weather Tends to Be Warm in Tbilisi

1837-4

The October weather tends to be warm in Tbilisi, but the October of 1837 was rainy. Nature did not give Nicholas I a very pleasant welcome. It rained constantly, and everything around was mired in mud. At one point his carriage almost toppled over. In fact, it did topple over, and he barely survived the incident. The furious emperor rained hell on his deputy, Viceroy Rosen. He noticed that the nobility here distinguished themselves with exceptional avarice. For example, he ordered the exile of the head of the Yerevan Regiment of Carabineers, aide-de-camp Aleksandre Dadiani himself, who had been putting his soldiers to work in his own fields... On the spot, right then and there. Dadiani was only allowed a farewell with his wife.

The viceroy for his part stood before the Emperor with tears in his eyes. Things really weren't going well. He explained that these savage Caucasians were particularly lazy, and he hadn't been able to build roads even after all this time because he needed to bring in workers from Russia and engineers from Europe, but the costs were too high. The Emperor was apoplectic. He didn't simply want to punish Count Rosen, he wanted to utterly destroy him, but he remembered that he himself had given the order that not a kopeck was to be spent on improving the conditions in this country of savages. If they saw a bit of good, they'd want even better, and what good would that be to him? At worst, Rosen would have a heart attack, but both knew well that the viceroy was carrying out his orders exactly as he'd received them, even if that exactitude had nearly gotten the Emperor killed.

Despite the viceroy's faultless execution of his duties before the Empire, the Emperor did not forgive him for the dangers of the road. Not that it matters much, but he also mocked him with his customary cynicism, at a time when Rosen thought everything had passed him over, in a place where he didn't expect it.

Some things he truly did like, other things it made him sick to behold. One thing surprised him – everyone informed on everyone else:

Russians – on Georgians and Armenians; Georgians – Russians, Armenians, Persians, Ottomans, Greeks, and Jews; Armenians – Georgians, Russians, Greeks, and especially Jews; the nobility – each other; peasants – the gentry, and vice versa; women – men; men – women; fathers – their children; children – their fathers; merchants – soldiers; soldiers – doctors; doctors – builders; builders – writers; writers – innkeepers; innkeepers – craftsmen; craftsmen – water-bearers; water-bearers – prostitutes; prostitutes – merchants; merchants – Russians; Russians – Georgians and Armenians; Georgians – Russians, Armenians, Persians, and so on, in a circle.

The Emperor strolled about in the backyard of his empire, and the inhabitants of this backyard greeted him with a delighted clamor. It was the first time they were seeing the grand emperor of this grand empire, and they enjoyed the feeling of subservience.

The next day the entire city was preparing for the banquet... At least, everyone who was granted the honor of being there. Even those celebrated who knew very well that they would never be invited to such a banquet; the main thing was that rich feeling of subordination.

“My little rascal,” the Emperor said as he pinched the cheek of “Ivane the Rascal,” one of the children of the royal throne; if not for the Russians, he may well have sat on that throne as king, but he liked this well enough, too. He flitted about the Emperor, arousing envy in the head of the city, Niko Palavandov, as well as the head of the Chavchavadzes, Major General Aleksandre, and the prominent nobleman Colonel Orbeliani, who had, because of their past service, been forgiven for their part in a conspiracy betrayed by the same Niko Palavandov five years earlier.

So said the head of the secret police, Adjutant General Alexander von Benckendorff: “We forgave them because of their past accomplishments.” First they exiled them as punishment, and then awarded them with positions and medals. This punishment-award system was a strange custom of the Russians; it’s possible that they had been forgiven not for past but rather “present” accomplishments. The conspirators said as much: “They had a very dubious relationship with us.” Meanwhile, they all tried not to think about the other rebels, especially that peasant, Dodashvili, whose soul had departed somewhere in Siberia in the past year, and the priest-monk Philadelphos, whose soul had fled his body in a prison a year after the conspiracy.

Well, what did they expect? If they didn’t have what it would take,

why did they fight? Shouldn't they have realized that if the Empire hanged its own from the gallows, it would do worse to them?

And one other thing: There was one person whom no one mentioned even in passing during the interrogations, whose name didn't make it into any of the records.

This allowed one to hope that Georgians would never accept the loss of their homeland, especially through treachery and force.

But now everyone lived in a happily-ever-after: the Russian higher-ups and officers, the Georgian socialites in love with them – how dashing these military types were! A Georgian in a Russian uniform was something else, something else entirely. Even that Meliton's son,¹ the poet, isn't that why he was spurned? And he didn't come from a common family, either, being directly descended from kings, though what does it matter? Ekaterine Chavchavadze, daughter of Aleksandre, loved this royal descendant of a poet, but she married another man anyway. In fact, she didn't just marry another man, she married a Russian officer's uniform – “My queenly pretensions would be better served by an imperial officer than a Georgian poet, even one descended from the royal line,” she reasoned. She worried over her choice for the rest of her life, though the man himself perished because of it. However, it was said it was her doing that Niko's works survived. Years later, she brought them to a certain great man, telling him that these were likely to be truly great poems and that he would be able to discern that better himself, that her father liked them too and maybe she could at least save these for the Georgian people and so score a few points for love of country... That journal of his, *Iveria*, maybe it would be possible for him to have them printed there for the people to read.

She likewise regretted having thought she was doing good for the nation; look what that had left them with.

It is said that Ekaterine was muttering the following before she died:

“As the butterfly
Gently shakes
The brilliant may bell, standing splendidly,
So does the earring,
The strange earring,

¹Meliton Baratashvili was the father of famed Georgian poet Nikoloz (“Niko”) Baratashvili. Nikoloz was a descendant of Erekle II through his mother.

Play with its shadow.

Ah, the one who..."²

This was the very poem Niko was supposed to have given Ekaterine at this banquet. It may be that this was the last poem by Niko that Ekaterine would read, because...

²"The Earring" by Nikoloz Baratashvili.