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PhD in History

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE IREVAN KHANATE AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE 2ND HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY

The Irevan Khanate is one of the small Azerbaijani states that emerged in the South Caucasus in the period of feudal division following the break-up of the empire of Nader Shah Afshar (1736-1747). It maintained flourishing political and diplomatic ties with the neighboring countries, including the Ottoman state (17, 14, 9, 19, and 20).

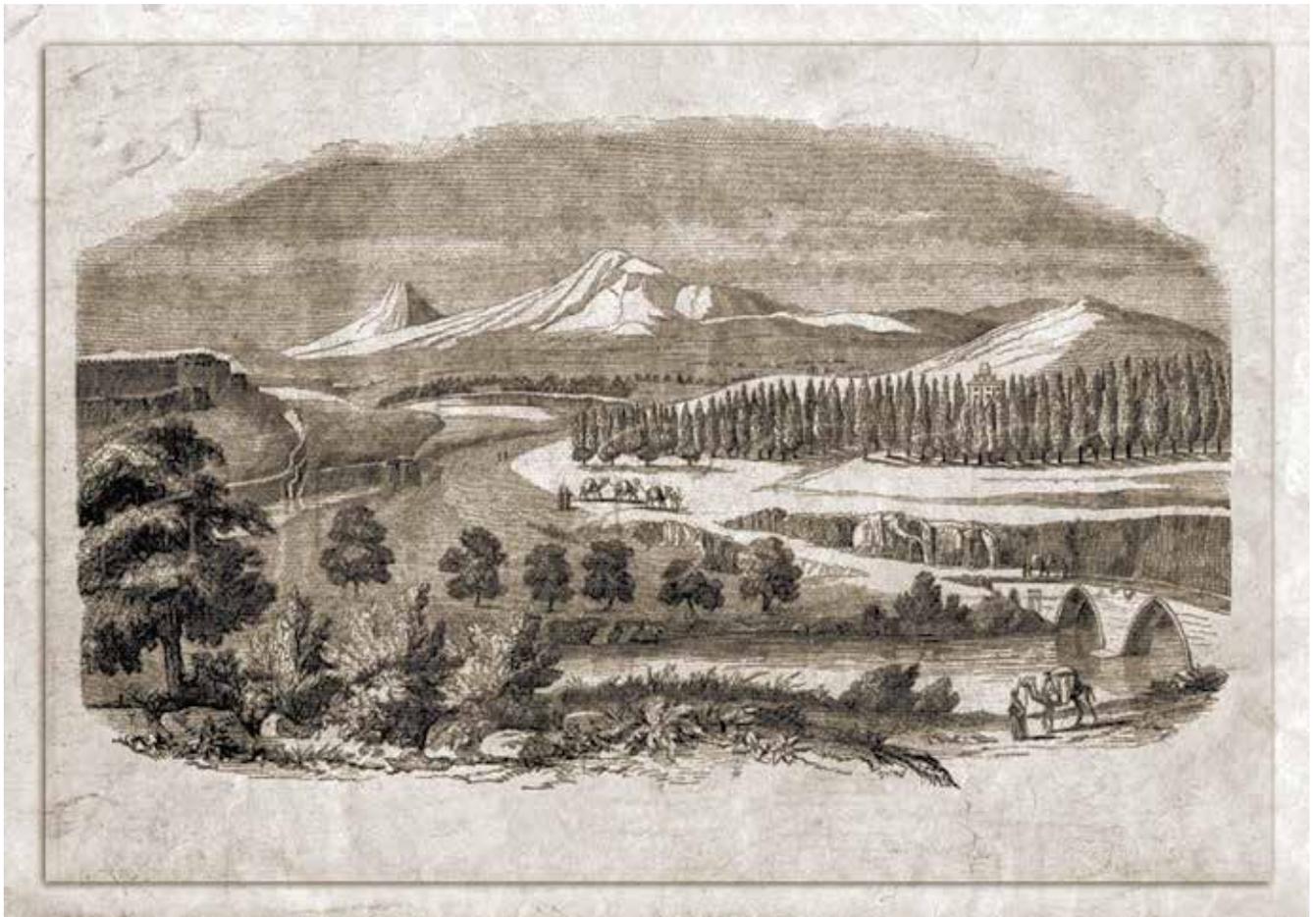
During Nader Shah's tenure and in a short period after his death, the Ottoman state and Russia were wary of openly interfering with the affairs of the South Caucasus, limiting their involvement to closely following the ongoing developments. The region was of strategic importance for the Ottoman Empire due to its territorial, ethnic and religious proximity. Therefore, the Irevan Khanate was a centerpiece in the country's foreign policy.

The Russo-Turkish War over the Black Sea coast occurred in 1768-1774, with hostilities taking place in the Balkans and the Caucasus (21, p. 346-363). This war ushered in a new stage of rivalry between the two powers over the South Caucasus. **Russia sought to put pressure on the Azerbaijani khanates and secure its in-**



Banner of Huseyn Khan of Irevan. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Fund of Weapons and Banners

View of the outskirts of Irevan. A drawing by Dubois de Montpereux. 1830s



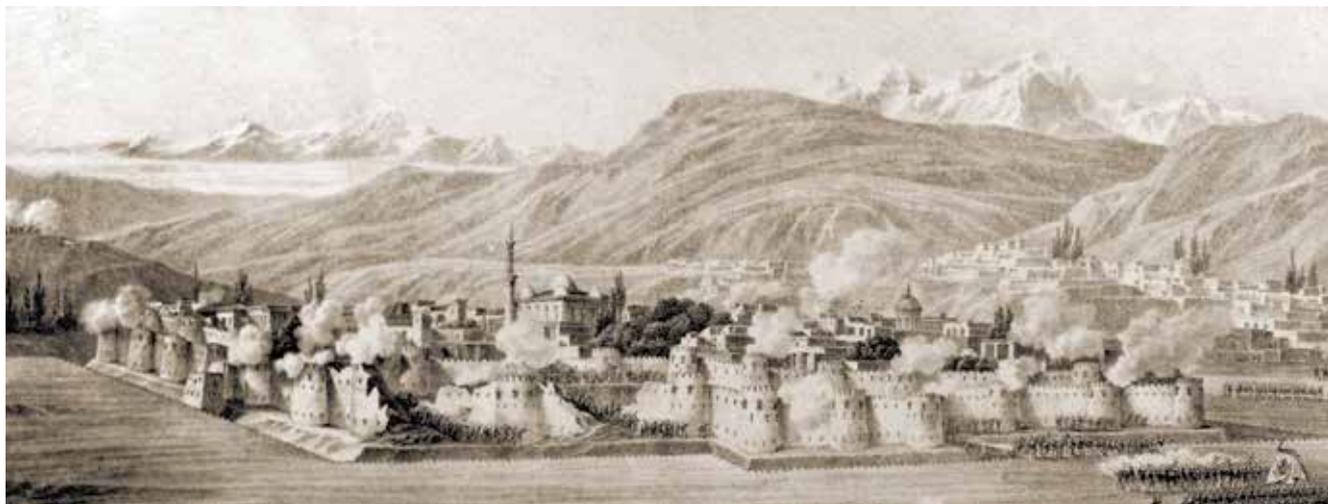
fluence over them by means of the Christian population of the region and the Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, while the Ottoman state was leveraging diplomacy to unite the khans to fight the Russo-Georgian alliance.

The Irevan Khanate, located in the vicinity of the battle ground, was attracting keen interest of both sides. Taking advantage of this, **Huseynali Khan (1759-1783) was doing his utmost to expand his ties with the sultan's court. In his letters to the sultan, he expressed a wish for the khanate to be under the patronage of the Ottoman Empire** (16, p. 39). In the 60s, Ottoman delegations frequently visited Irevan, delivering letters and gifts from the Sultan. The gifts presented to the khan included sable fur, precious stones, a saber with gold inlay and 2,000 pure gold coins (16, p. 41-43). Huseynali Khan also enjoyed friendly ties with the local Ottoman rulers, especially the Pasha of Kars (16, p. 43-44).

Huseynali Khan, who was essentially dependent on the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti at the time, suspended payments of levied duties to the kingdom and joined some other Azerbaijani khans in seeking military aid from

the Sultan. King Heraclius II described the Irevan Khanate's policy in a letter to Count Panin dated October 5, 1770 as follows: *"In addition to the Lezgins and other barbarians surrounding us, the Irevan Khan has become our adversary. Having defied the oath he took before us, he rejected our patronage and sided with the Turkish party; he provided much assistance to the seraskier who previously arrived in Kars, both with food supplies and otherwise, urging him to demand more troops from the sultan to fight us; likewise, he is trying to prompt Kerim Khan and the Kuban Khan to take up arms against us. The Turks, capitalizing on the Irevan Khan's zeal, are seeking to win over a few more khans through him and by presenting valuable gifts"* (13, p. 244).

Huseynali Khan requested military and financial assistance from the Sultan in order to launch a campaign against the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti (17, p. 301-302). While expecting the assistance, he managed to repel an attack by Heraclius II in 1769 and the siege of Irevan (11, p. 67). Nevertheless, the anticipated assistance was never provided. The Ottoman state was waging a grueling war with Russia and faced dire challenges. As a result, the khan had to conclude a peace treaty with Kartli-Kakheti



View of the Irevan Fortress on a painting by V. Mashkov (derived from the “Irevan offensive in 1828” painting)

to avoid a new offensive and resume payments of duties to the Kingdom (13, vol. 1, p. 301-302; 25, p. 187).

In conclusion of the triumphant war waged in 1768-1774, **Russia bolstered its positions in the Black Sea and the northern Caucasus region and became noticeably more active in the South Caucasus. Such a course of developments was certainly in line with the long-standing plans of Heraclius II, Russia’s ally, to take over a number of Azerbaijani territories**, including the Irevan Khanate. Faced with this imminent threat, the Azerbaijani khans began to seek assistance from the Ottoman Sultan.

Correspondence of numerous Azerbaijani khans with the Sultan indicates that the latter was utterly concerned over a potential new attack on the Irevan Khanate by Heraclius II. Shaki Khan Mahammad Hasan, Ardabil Khan Nazarali and Khoy Khan Ahmad stated that they would forge an alliance in that case and in return asked the Sultan to render military and financial assistance (22, p. 67).

In 1776, Huseynali Khan, who was relying on the support of the Sultan and Karim Khan Zand of Isfahan (1759-1779), suspended tribute payments to Heraclius II again. Using this move as a pretext, the latter launched a new attack on Irevan in September 1779 (5, p. 156; 11, p. 68-70). A part of the khanate’s population took their belongings and fled to the neighboring Kars and Bayazet pashaliks (provinces) of the Ottoman Empire (15, p. 68; 5, p. 22). Heraclius II besieged Irevan, but faced tough resistance from the fortress defenders led by the Khan himself and was forced to retreat (11, p. 69), ruining the areas around the city. **The position of Suleiman Pasha, the Childir city governor, significantly contributed to the lifting of the siege. Though Suleiman Pasha**

did not render the requested military assistance to the Irevan khan, he threatened to attack Tiflis (22, p. 74-75). In turn, Huseynali Khan decided to conclude a peace deal with Heraclius II to avoid new devastating raids on his possessions and sent several delegations to Tiflis for this purpose (2, p. 451; 16, p. 88-89 and 91-96; 14, p. 18-20). The Khan also sent several letters to the Kartli-Kakheti ruler asking him to release the residents of the Irevan Khanate who were taken captive. However, the Kartli-Kakheti czar was in no hurry to reach peace and release the prisoners. Therefore, **the Irevan khan sought mediation from the Childir and Akhalsikh Pashas, who were instrumental in the conclusion of peace.**

The successor of Huseynali Khan, his son Gulamali, wrote about this in one of his letters to the Ottoman Sultan. “In past years, a special agreement on borders was concluded with Georgia upon the initiative and thanks to the efforts of... Your Honorable Vizier, ruler of the Childir province, Suleiman Pasha,” the letter said (16, p. 73).

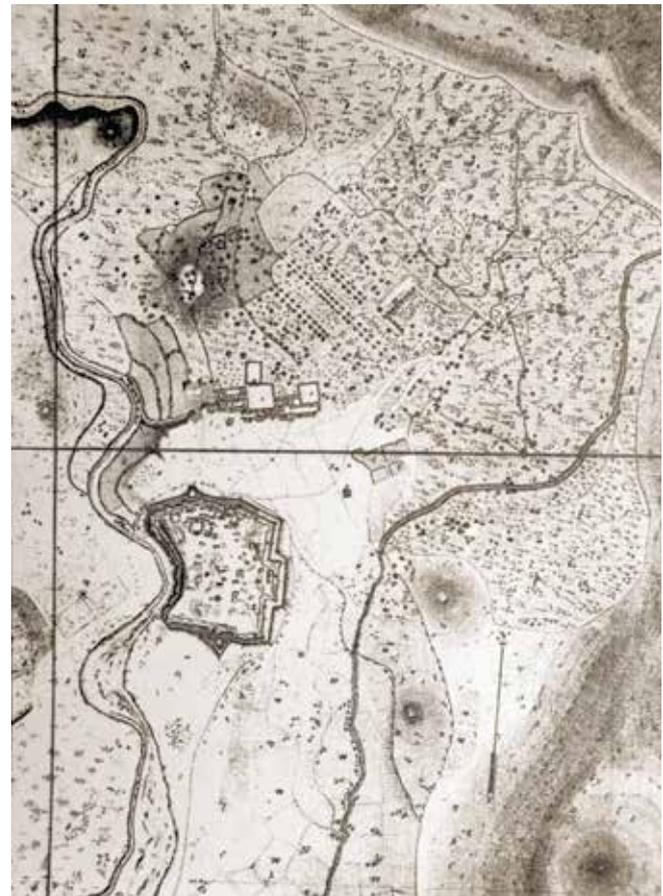
Following the conclusion of the peace treaty, the Irevan khan began pursuing a more cautious foreign policy. However, **Heraclius II had no intention to relinquish his claims to Azerbaijani land. In order to realize his plans, he presented a special project to the Empress of Russia Catherine the Great.** For Russia, which had expansion plans in the South Caucasus, this initiative came in handy. On July 24, 1783, the parties concluded the Treaty of Georgievsk, which turned the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti into a protectorate of the Russian Empire (7, p. 2, p. 11; 6, p. 277-286; 17, p. 168-171; 24, p. 118-128). Afterwards, two battalions of the Russian army under the command of S. D. Burnashov were stationed in Tiflis (8, 18).

Fortress and city of Irevan on a sketch drawn up by the Russian military command in 1828

The Treaty of Georgievsk triggered **further aggravation of the Russian-Ottoman rivalry over the South Caucasus, including the Irevan Khanate.** The Ottoman court embarked on a new diplomatic offensive to convince the Azerbaijani khans to jointly wage struggle against the Russian-Georgian alliance. **Even a special decree of the Sultan was issued whereby the Azerbaijani khans were urged to unite around the cause of Ahmad Khan of Khoy for the sake of defending Irevan** (16, p. 73). In turn, the most powerful khans, who maintained close ties with the Sublime Porte, Fatali Khan of Guba, Ibrahim Khalil Khan of Karabakh and Ahmad Khan of Khoy, openly opposed Heraclius II. At the same time, the Sultan sent out decrees to the governors of the eastern Erzurum, Kars, Childir, Bayazet and Akhaltsikh Pashaliks, urging them to provide comprehensive assistance to Huseynali Khan (22, p. 102-103; 17, p. 203). Simultaneously, in order to ensure the latter's loyalty, the Sultan issued a special decree awarding him the title of Beylerbey of the Anatolian provinces (16, p. 119-120). Nevertheless, the Irevan khan sought to pursue a balanced foreign policy and hosted both Ottoman and Russian diplomatic missions with equal honors (16, p. 115-116; 5, p. 265-266). This political course of Huseynali Khan apparently did not go down well with some circles in the Ottoman Empire.

In Erzurum, a group of Irevan pilgrims was arrested on its way back from Mecca. Each of the pilgrims had to pay a fine worth 200 Tomans, and they were released after their horses, wagons and other belongings were confiscated. The incident significantly heightened tension in the relations between the Irevan Khanate and the Erzurum Pashalik. The tension subsided only after the Khan sent a letter to the Sultan asking him to facilitate return of the confiscated property and the issue was solved thanks to the latter's involvement (16, p. 121-122). Moreover, **the governor of the Bayazet Pashalik, Iskhak Pasha, was organizing raids on the borderline villages of the Irevan Khanate from time to time** and kidnapping their residents, and also strongly supported those opposing the Khan and incited riots (16, p. 12-14).

On November 9, 1783, Huseynali Khan died unexpectedly (5, p. 274; 4, p. 342; 12, p. 55). Gulamali, his eldest son, ascended to the throne. The Irevan Khanate's further rapprochement with the Ottoman Em-



pire occurred during his eight-month tenure. Taking advantage of the new khan's young age and lack of experience, representatives of neighboring Ottoman pashaliks attending the condolence ceremony strongly urged him to hand over the Irevan Fortress to the Sultan (1, p. 285). In addition, a confidential Ottoman mission led by Khalil-Efendi visited the South Caucasus in late 1783 and early 1784 (18, p. 147-148; 17, p. 203). The latter held talks with Gulamali Khan in Irevan, which were successful. **The Sultan ordered the governors of the eastern pashaliks to provide comprehensive aid to the Irevan khan, if necessary, while** the latter, in turn, requested the assistance to be rendered as soon as possible (16, p. 68-69). **Gulamali Khan also established close ties with Ahmad Khan of Khoy, an active ally of the Ottoman state,** and even sought to become a member of his family (16, p. 62-63, 80-81). As a result of diplomatic moves taken by the Ottoman court, the Irevan khan severed his ties with the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti and stopped tribute payments (1, p. 243). On June 8, 1784, he fell victim of a conspiracy staged by his internal and external foes (18, p. 183-184, 193-203).



*Horseback stunts near the Sardarabad Fortress walls.
Drawn by Prince G. Gagarin. 1830s*

Following the death of Gulamali Khan, his step-brother, 12-year-old Muhammad (1784-1805) became the Khan at the insistence of the majority of the population. In this period Irevan was a stage of stand-off between the supporters and opponents of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. Heraclius II decided to take advantage of this situation to subdue the Irevan Khanate, but **Ahmad Khan of Khoy and Bayazet governor Iskhak Pasha countered his plans by sending their representatives to Irevan**, who managed to end civil strife and restore stability there (22, p. 95-96). Nevertheless, Sultan Abdul Hamid I beared of a possible increased influence of Heraclius II on Muhammad, whose mother was Georgian. In fall 1784, he sent a delegation comprised

of 60 people to the Caucasus (17, p. 206; 9, p. 75-76; 15, p. 115-116). The delegation members also visited Irevan, handing the Khan a decree and gifts on behalf of the Sultan. In the decree, the Sultan called on the Azerbaijani khans to join effort with Ahmad Khan of Khoy in the struggle against the Russo-Georgian alliance.

*"We want to prevent harm to the laws of Islam, but first and foremost, to free your khanate from liars and murderers. We hereby warn **that the Tiflis tsar, having united with Russia, set out to disrupt the unity between Azerbaijani khans by means of lies** and treacherously do away with them by prompting them to side with Russia. May Allah save us from this. We should strive for successful, legitimate unity. In order to encourage the Azerbaijani khans to be vigilant, we ordered the governor of Childir Salman Pasha and the ruler of Bayazet Iskhak Pasha to conduct uninterrupted correspondence with them. We urged everyone to be particularly cautious when giving promises to Russia and King Heraclius. King Heraclius has sold out to Russia. According to the orders of our envoy, proceed the same as other khans... We warn that you must act in the name of the laws of Islam and endure all the hardship. On that condition you can rely on any help from us. Be vigilant to make sure that King Heraclius does not harm the Irevan Khanate and your governance. We have ordered all the leaders to gather troops at*

View of the Sardarabad Fortress on a painting by V. Mashkov (derived from the "Sardarabad offensive in 1828" painting)



View of the outskirts of Irevan on a 19th century painting



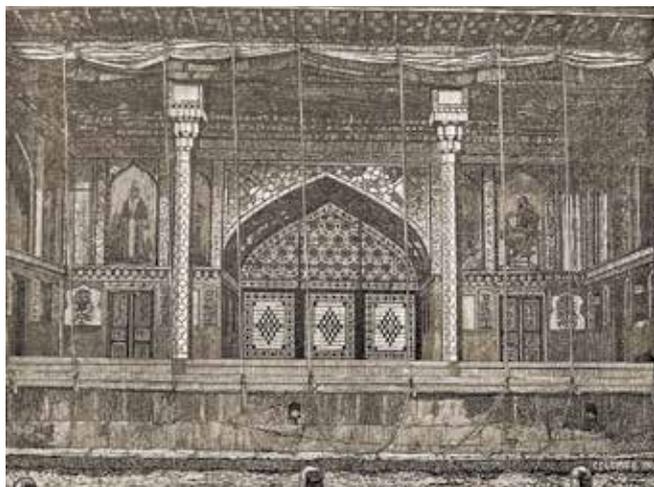
the border should you need any assistance...Let neither the Azerbaijani khans nor your khanate be harmed. We wish that all Azerbaijani khans would rally around Ahmad Khan of Khoy for the sake of the canons of Islam” (3, p. 964).

In addition, the new Khan's mother, who was an ethnic Georgian, maintained close ties with the Tiflis court and regularly informed it of the developments ongoing in Irevan. Thus, she passed on the above-mentioned decree of the Ottoman Sultan to Tiflis through Mirza Gyurgen, an authorized representative of Heraclius II (3, p. 967-968). Therefore, Russia was promptly receiving comprehensive information about the contacts between the Irevan Khanate and the Ottoman state. Moreover, **the mother of the young Khan and her supporters returned the Sultan's gifts and sent a letter in August 1784 on behalf of the Khan to the ruler of the Akhaltsikh Pashalik Suleiman declaring loyalty to Heraclius II** (3, p. 717). Influenced by this letter, Usmi Bey, an Irevan nobleman, and his son, encouraged by Suleiman Pasha, masterminded a plot against Muhammad Khan in March 1785, which was later exposed. Usmi Bey fled the scene, but was detained on the border of the Kars Pashalik and imprisoned (3, p. 324). Following this incident, the Irevan Khanate stopped paying dues to the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti.

The second Russo-Turkish war of 1787-1791 further heightened tension in the South Caucasus (21, p. 363-387). Against the backdrop of growing strife among

the Azerbaijani khans, the Ottoman court once again resorted to active diplomacy, seeking to foster reconciliation and bring the Azerbaijani khanates together to ward off the Russo-Georgian threat (3, p. 771).

Having learned about the plans of Heraclius II to seize Irevan with the aid of Russia, Muhammad Khan sent a letter to the Sultan on November 26, 1787 requesting military aid to counter this threat (22, p. 122-125). However, amid the ongoing war with Russia the Ottoman authorities were unable to provide such assistance and confined themselves to ordering the borderline pashaliks to assist Irevan and other Azerbaijani khanates, if necessary. On the other hand, **the Irevan Khanate's relations with the pashaliks in that period were far from perfect. In the summer of 1787, the tension even sparked a war with the Bayazet Pashalik.** The war was caused by the policy of Iskhak Pasha of Bayazet, who openly supported rebels in the Irevan Khanate and provided them with refuge if necessary (16, p. 128-131). Furthermore, the relations between the Irevan and Karabakh Khanates soured in May as their rivalry continued over the throne of the Nakhchivan Khanate. Iskhak Pasha, who had been instructed by the Sultan to reconcile the parties, sent a letter to Muhammad Khan with relevant advice, but the latter replied that he could not establish friendly ties with the Karabakh ruler Ibrahim Khalil without consent of his friend, the Tiflis czar (23, p. 92, 333). This response letter triggered a conflict that lingered on for two years.



Mirror salon at the Sardar Palace on a painting. 1890

On August 12, 1789, the Irevan khan besieged the Bayazet fortress. However, the besiegers began to loot the surrounding villages, which allowed Iskhak to launch a sudden foray into the rear area. The battle ended with an overwhelming defeat of the besiegers. Nevertheless, Muhammad Khan managed to mobilize new forces and attacked Bayazet again after receiving reinforcement from Nakhchivan. Having failed to seize the fortress, the Irevan army plundered several villages and took home a plentiful prey (14, p. 137).

Realizing that a protracted war could have bitter ramifications, Muhammad Khan sent a complaint to the Sultan. Amid the ongoing war with Russia, it would have been completely useless for the Ottoman Empire to estrange Azerbaijani khanates, therefore, the Sultan issued a decree to both sides urging them "to forget the bygone grievances and establish good-neighborly relations and friendship" (16, p. 132-133). Afterwards, the parties halted the hostilities and concluded a peace treaty in fall with the mediation of the head of the Erzurum Pashalik Abdullah (16, p. 132-133).

Meanwhile, tensions rose in the region again. Agha Mohammad Qajar, who seized power in Iran in 1779 as a result of struggle against the Zends (10, p. 110-113), put forward his claims to the Azerbaijani khanates and Kartli-Kakheti and managed to subjugate most of the South Azerbaijani khanates by 1791 (10, p. 111). However, a number of other rulers, namely, the khans of Karabakh, Irevan, Lankaran, Khoy, and Urmia, as well as the Kartli-Kakhetian czar, led by Karabakh Khan Ibrahim Khalil, opposed the Qajar leader (7, p. 2, 320). At the same time, the khanates came under growing pressure from Russia. **Caught between a rock and a hard place, some Azerbaijani khans, including the Irevan**

ruler, requested support from the Ottoman state to counter Agha Mohammad Khan. On May 9, 1794, the Irevan khan sent an authorized delegate to the Ottoman court. P. Butkov wrote about this in his commentary. "In 1794, Shusha Khan Ibrahim-Khalil and the Irevan Khan, who hoped that the Porte would not leave them to their own devices, came out against Agha Mohammad Khan. Relying on the old-time friendship between them, they delegated their representatives to Istanbul to secure patronage of the Porte against an attack by Agha Mohammad Khan. However, the Porte turned a deaf ear to their request, saying that it had an agreement with the Iranian people," he wrote (7, p. 332).

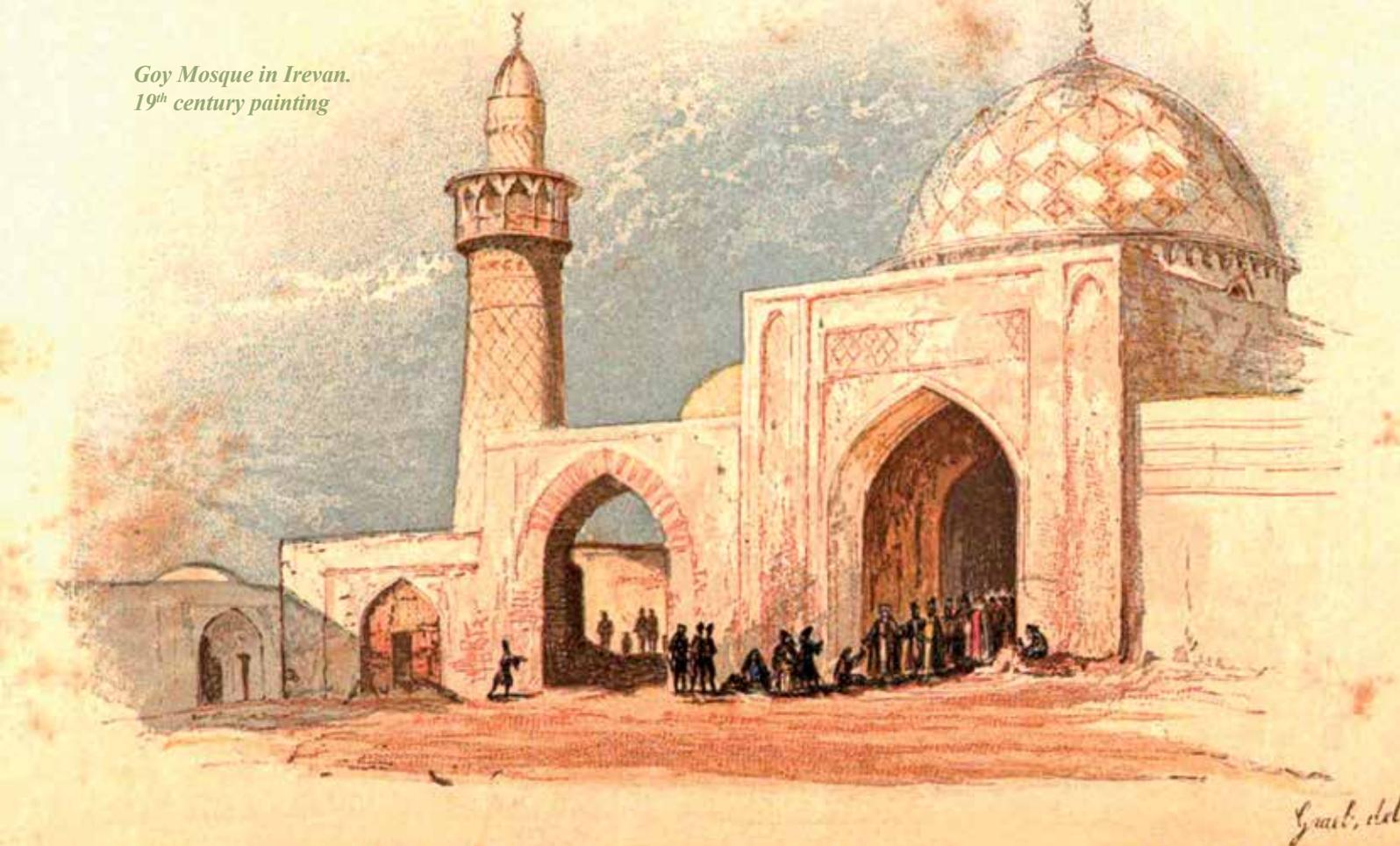
In the meantime, Agha Mohammad also sent a decree to the Irevan Khan urging the latter to personally host him. This served as clear evidence of an imminent threat. Therefore, Muhammad Khan ordered to reinforce the fortress, simultaneously sending letters to the Sultan and the rulers of the neighboring pashaliks whereby he asked them to provide shelter for the Irevan Khanate's residents. Thus, **a letter, which was dated May 15, 1795 and sent to the Sultan, cited a likely outflow of 20,000 to 30,000 refugees from the Khanate in the event of an attack by Agha Mohammad Khan** (22, p. 145-146).

Thus, the unfavorable outcome of the two wars with Russia prompted the Ottoman state to pursue a more cautious policy in the Caucasus. According to available sources, in the researched period the Ottoman court refrained from military intervention in the region, confining itself to measures of active diplomacy with regard to the Azerbaijani khanates, including the nearby Irevan Khanate, in order to bring them together for the struggle against the Russo-Georgian alliance. 🌱

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*Goy Mosque in Irevan.
19th century painting*



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