

Korogodina M.

**A Georgian Embassy to Spain and Rome
(1495–1497) and Lithuanian Diplomacy**

Preface

The Russian scholar Maria Vladimirovna Korogodina, Doctor of Historical Sciences and Head Researcher and Director of the Manuscripts Department at the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences, is the author of the article „*A Georgian Embassy to Spain and Rome (1495–1497) and Lithuanian Diplomacy*“, published in *Scrinium* (28 May 2024, pp. 1–23. https://www.academia.edu/120540718/A_Georgian_Embassy_to_Spain_and_Rome_1495_1497_and_Lithuanian_Diplomacy).

As becomes evident from her study, the author has carried out meticulous research on the diplomatic mission of Kir Nilos, the confessor of King Constantine II of Kartli, who traveled to Spain and Rome in the 1490s.

Although all issues examined in Korogodina’s work are significant, of particular importance for Georgian history is her discovery, study, and publication of a letter from King Constantine II to the Pope, previously considered lost. Alongside it, a second letter sent by Kir Nilos to Isabella of Castile has also been identified. These two documents complement each other and clarify the purpose of the embassy to Spain and Rome.

Thus, both letters are of great importance for the study of the foreign relations and diplomatic history of late medieval Georgia (the Kingdom of Kartli). In the appendix to Korogodina’s article, I have added a Georgian translation of the newly discovered letter of King Constantine, along with one note (#59). I hope the author will forgive this addition made without prior consultation.

I maintain that King Constantine’s letters are diplomatic in nature: their recipients were expected to understand implicitly the king’s intentions and requests. Considering the political context of Kartli, the Caucasus, and the broader international situation, it becomes clear that the king sought protection for his realm against Persian aggression, as well as the preservation of the independence of the Georgian Orthodox Church and Georgian ecclesiastical establishments in the Holy Land. These aims are not explicitly stated in the letters but were likely conveyed orally by the envoy. It is reasonable to assume that Kir Nilos acted in accordance with the king’s instructions (კირ-ნილოს ელჩობის შესახებ ორჯერ გამოვაქვეყნე, პირველად მოკლედ: სასულიერო მოღვაწე დიპლომატი _ ხუცესი ნილო // გორის სახელმწიფო სასწავლო უნივერსიტეტის ისტორიისა და არქეოლოგიის ცენტრი. შრომათა კრებული, #2, გვ. 180-195. ამ პუბლიკაციით ისარგებლა ქალბატონმა მ. ვ. კოროგადინამ; მეორედ ვრცელი ვარიანტი შევიტანე ჩემ წიგნში: ქართლის მეფე კონსტანტინე II-ის დიპლომატი კირ-ნილო // საქართველოს საგარეო პოლიტიკა და დიპლომატია (XIII-XV სს.), 2021, გვ. 557-578; I have published twice about the embassy of Kir-Nilo, first briefly: Religious Worker Diplomat _ Khutsesi Nilo // Center for History and Archaeology of Gori State University. Collection of Works, #2, pp. 180-195. Ms. M. V. Korogadina benefited from this publication; the second time I included an extensive version in my book: Kir-Nilo, Diplomat of King Constantine II of Kartli // Georgian Foreign Policy and Diplomacy (XIII-XV Centuries), 2021, pp. 557-578).

It should also be noted that during this period the Ottomans had not yet invaded Georgia nor conquered the Holy Land. Therefore, the Georgian king had no direct conflict with them. At the time, Georgian ecclesiastical possessions in Jerusalem faced challenges primarily from Greek Orthodox, Armenian Gregorian, and Catholic European groups, although Georgians were still able to defend their interests through their own means and diplomacy. Even after the Ottoman conquest of Palestine, relations between Georgian monks and the Ottomans remained relatively stable for a considerable time (მამისთვალისძვილი ე. ქართველები და ბიბლიური სამყარო, 1998, გვ. 99-112; Mamistvalishvili E. Georgians and the Biblical World, 1998, pp. 99-112).

Consequently, King Constantine sought allies against Persia. However, such support was difficult to obtain from Western Europe, which was itself facing serious economic difficulties due to Ottoman control of major trade routes. Furthermore, the process of state formation in Europe was still incomplete, and internal conflicts, including border disputes, persisted. There was no unified Western response to Ottoman expansion. Some European powers, particularly those

threatened by the Ottomans, regarded both Christian Georgia and Muslim Persia as potential allies. This explains the diplomatic activity of the Venetian Republic, whose envoys traveled to Persia and Georgia to encourage anti-Ottoman cooperation and divert Ottoman military forces eastward (მამისტვალიშვილი ე. საქართველოს საგარეო პოლიტიკა და დიპლომატია, I (XV-XVI ss.), თბილისი, 2009, გვ. 39-102; Mamistvalishvili E. Foreign Policy and Diplomacy of Georgia, I (XV-XVI ss.), Tbilisi, 2009, pp. 39-102).

In conclusion, it can be said that King Constantine II and his political advisors did not fully understand the interests and capabilities of Western European states, as is evident from his correspondence with Spain and Rome. The outcome reflects this miscalculation.

We are indebted to Venetian envoys for preserving invaluable information about the political, economic, and cultural condition of Georgia in the second half of the fifteenth century (XV საუკუნის იტალიელ მოგზაურთა ცნობები საქართველოს შესახებ / იტალიურიდან თარგმნა, შესავალი, შენიშვნები და სამიუბლები დაურთო ელდარ მამისტვალიშვილმა., თბილისი, 1981; Reports of 15th-century Italian travelers about Georgia / Translated from Italian, with introduction, notes and references by Eldar Mamistvalishvili, Tbilisi, 1981).

Eldar Mamistvalishvili

Abstract

Constantine II, King of Kartli, sent an embassy to Queen Isabella of Castile and Pope Alexander VI in 1495 in the hope of concluding an anti-Ottoman alliance. On the way back, the ambassadors visited the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where two letters from King Constantine II were translated. One of them, addressed to Pope Alexander VI, has so far remained unknown. The discovery of this letter, and the study and edition of its

text, which are the subject of this paper, allow us to fill in the gaps in information about the Georgian embassy and to understand more accurately the interests and aspirations of European sovereigns, including far beyond the borders of Georgia and the Vatican.

1 Introduction

The fifteenth century became a turning point for many states in Europe and the Middle East. The collapse of the Byzantine and Trebizond Empires and the rise of the Ottoman Empire echoed not only in the European powers, but also in the East Slavic lands and the Caucasus. The second half of the fifteenth century became a tragic period for the Kingdom of Georgia. A thirty-year internecine war ended with a peace treaty in 1490, which codified the division of Georgia into the Principality of Samtskhe and three independent kingdoms: Kakheti, Imereti and Kartli. The last king of united Georgia, Constantine II, stood at the head of Kartli. His dreams of reuniting the Georgian lands and returning the former greatness of Georgia were not destined to come true, and by the beginning of the 1490s Constantine II had to spend all his strength to preserve his power over at least Kartli. Wars with neighboring Georgian kingdoms took place against the backdrop of constant raids by the “Persians” (Turkomans)

from the state of Aq Qoyunlu, as well as a growing threat from the Ottoman Empire, which in 1461 captured the Empire of Trebizond – the Christian state closest to Georgia. In these conditions, surrounded by hostile Islamic states, King Constantine II of Kartli tried to find allies who would help him resist both the Persians and the Ottomans.¹

At the end of the fifteenth century Georgian rulers sent a number of embassies to distant lands in search of allies: the embassy of King Alexander I of Kakheti to the Grand Duke of Moscow Ivan III (1491)² and the embassies of King Constantine II of Kartli to the Mamluk Sultan in Egypt (1493–1494), as well as to Spain and Rome (1495–1497).³ The embassies sent by the king of Kartli have invariably attracted the greatest attention of researchers.⁴ In search of support against growing external threats, in 1493 Constantine II sent his confessor, Hieromonk Nilus, on an embassy to Cairo to the Mamluk Sultan Sayf ad-Din Qaitbay. The circumstances of the embassy are not reliably known. According to E. Mamistvalishvili, the main purpose of the embassy was to discuss the fate of Jerusalem, which was under the rule of the Ottomans,⁵ while other researchers are inclined to believe that the purpose of the diplomatic missions of Constantine II to Egypt and Europe was more general: the conclusion of an anti-Ottoman alliance.⁶ In any case, negotiations with the Mamluk Sultan apparently did not lead to tangible results. On the way back from Cairo, Georgian diplomats stopped in Jerusalem, where they met with another embassy sent by Queen Isabella of Castile and her husband, Ferdinand of Aragon. The result of this chance, but probably very cordial, meeting was the decision of the Spanish ambassadors to travel with Hieromonk Nilus to Constantine II.⁷

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- ¹ Вахушти Багратиони, История царства грузинского [Vakhushti Bagrationi, History of the Kingdom of Georgia], trans. Н. Т. Накашидзе [N. T. Nakashidze], Tbilisi, 1976, pp. 21–25.
- ² Русский феодальный архив XIV–первой трети XVI века [Russian Feudal Archive of the 14th–First third of the 16th Centuries], part 2, ed. А. И. Плигузов, Г. В. Семенченко, Л. Ф. Кузьмина [A. I. Pliguzov, G. V. Semenchenko, L. F. Kuzmina], Moscow, 1987, p. 238, no. 71.
- ³ ე. მამისტვალიშვილი, “სასულიერო მოღვაწე დიპლომატი – ხუცესი ნილო [E. Mamistvalishvili, Ecclesiastic figure diplomatist – priest Nilo]”, შრომათა კრებული, გორის სასწავლო უნივერსიტეტის ისტორიისა და არქეოლოგიის ცენტრი [Collection of the Works, Gori Teaching University, Centre of History and Archaeology], № 2, 2011, p. 180–196.
- ⁴ Н. Г. Джавахишвили, Очерки истории грузино-балтийских взаимоотношений [N. G. Javakhishvili, Essays on the History of Georgian-Baltic Relations], Tbilisi, 2019, pp. 31–32.
- ⁵ მამისტვალიშვილი, “სასულიერო მოღვაწე დიპლომატი – ხუცესი ნილო [Mamistvalishvili, Ecclesiastic figure diplomatist – priest Nilo]”, pp. 180–182.
- ⁶ М. Г. Папашвили, Грузино-ватиканские взаимоотношения в XVII–XVIII вв. [M. G. Papashvili, Georgian-Vatican Relations in the 17th–18th Centuries], автореферат диссертации на соискание ученой степени доктора исторических наук [author’s abstract of a Doctor of Historical Sciences dissertation], Tbilisi, 1998, pp. 16–17; Н. Г. Джавахишвили, “Малоизвестные страницы истории грузино-балтийских отношений (X–XVIII вв.)” [N. G. Javakhishvili, “Little-known Pages in the History of Georgian-Baltic Relations (10th–18th Centuries)”], Кавказ и глобализация [The Caucasus and Globalization], 4.3–4 (2010), p. 171; Н. Г. Джавахишвили, Очерки истории грузино-балтийских взаимоотношений [Javakhishvili, Essays on the History of Georgian-Baltic Relations], p. 31.
- ⁷ მამისტვალიშვილი, “სასულიერო მოღვაწე დიპლომატი – ხუცესი ნილო [Mamistvalishvili, Ecclesiastic figure diplomatist – priest Nilo]”, pp. 183–184.

2 The Embassy of Hieromonk Nilus to Spain and Rome

The king of Kartli was pleased by the news brought by the Spanish ambassadors who arrived on an unexpected visit to Tbilisi. Having learned about the long-standing enmity of the Spanish sovereigns and the Muslims, the recent decisive victory of the Spanish army and the capture of Granada (1492), as well as about the alliance of Spain with the Mamluk Kingdom against the Ottoman Empire,⁸ Constantine II decided to send his own embassy to Isabella of Castile. After visiting Spain, the Georgian ambassadors were instructed to report to the Roman Pontiff. This was not the first embassy from Georgia to Europe and Rome. Close ties between the Georgian kings and the Papacy were established already in the first half of the thirteenth century – several letters exchanged between the Georgian kings and Popes Honorius III and Gregory IX date to this period.⁹ Having persisted for centuries, contacts with the Latin world did not stop in the fifteenth century: the Georgian embassy took part in the work of the Council of Florence, although it did not join the Union.¹⁰ Pope Alexander VI, to whom the king of Kartli sent his envoys in 1495, was the nephew of Pope Callixtus III, who in 1457 took care of supporting the Catholic mission in Georgia.¹¹ All of this speaks of long-standing, although irregular, connections between the Georgian kings and the Roman Papacy.

The embassy to Europe in 1495 was headed by the same Hieromonk Nilus who managed to make friends with the Spanish ambassador in Jerusalem. It can be assumed that the Georgian and Spanish ambassadors set off on the journey from Tbilisi to Castile together. In addition to the king's spiritual father Hieromonk Nilus, the Georgian embassy included his assistant, Zacharias. The ambassadors spent several months in Spain and presented Queen Isabella of Castile with both a letter and gifts from Constantine II, as well as oral instructions from the king, but received in response only general assurances of friendship, not supported by any military alliance.

⁸ J. F. O'Callaghan, *The Last Crusade in the West: Castile and the Conquest of Granada. The Middle Ages*, Philadelphia, 2014, p. 176.

⁹ ი. ტაბაღუა, საქართველო ევროპის არქივებსა და წიგნსაცავებში (XIII–XVI სს.) [I. Tabagua, *Georgia in the Archives and Book Depositories of Europe (13th–16th Centuries)*], Tbilisi, 1984, pp. 176–190, nos. 5–12.

¹⁰ ტაბაღუა, საქართველო ევროპის არქივებსა და წიგნსაცავებში [Tabagua, *Georgia in the Archives and Book Depositories of Europe*], pp. 214–215, no 19; ე. მამისტვალიშვილი, “ქართველები ფერარა-ფლორენციის კრებაზე (XIII– XV სს.) [E. Mamistvalishvili, *Georgians at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (13th–15th Centuries)*]”, კადმოსი. ჰუმანიტარულ კვლევათა ჟურნალი [Kadmos. A Journal of the Humanities], 8 (2016), pp. 250–268.

¹¹ ი. ტაბაღუა, საქართველო ევროპის არქივებსა და წიგნსაცავებში (XIII–XVI სს.) [I. Tabagua, *Georgia in the Archives and Book Depositories of Europe (13th–16th Centuries)*], Tbilisi, 1984, pp. 176–190, no. 5–12.

From Burgos, the capital of Castile, Hieromonk Nilus set off for Rome, no longer, for reasons unknown, accompanied by Zacharias.¹² His task was to complete the second part of the mission: to deliver a letter and gifts to the Pope in the hope of creating a coalition against the Ottomans. However, this part of the embassy, too, was not successful in calling for a new crusade. Pope Alexander VI ignored talk of an anti-Ottoman coalition and considered the main objective of the mission to be the desire for church union, so his response was largely devoted to setting out the decisions of the Council of Florence.

Thus, the main goals of the embassy were not achieved. Although Hieromonk Nilus arrived safely at both destinations and was accorded a favorable reception both at the Spanish court and in the Vatican, it was not possible to conclude an alliance to confront the Ottomans, as the King of Kartli had desired in his letters.

Nilus's return route to Georgia lay through Europe. Probably, the embassy moved through Hungary and Poland to Novogradok in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. From there, bypassing the lands of Muscovy probably via the Dnieper River, the members of the embassy reached the Black Sea and then traveled to Jerusalem by ship, from where an already familiar route led them

to Tbilisi. The long journey to the Caucasus through the Grand Duchy of Lithuania may be explained by the fact that on the way back the ambassadors were forced to go through Hungary and Poland. At that time, in the 1490s, these neighboring states were headed by brothers, the sons of Casimir IV Jagiellon: Vladislaus in Hungary and Bohemia, John I Albert in Poland, and Alexander in Lithuania. These, as in a fairy tale, directed the embassy cortege farther and farther into the East Slavic lands.¹³

Unlike the embassy of the king of Kartli to Egypt, from which no document has survived, a complete set of diplomatic correspondence has been preserved from the journey of the Georgian ambassadors to Spain and Rome, including both the letters from the Georgian king and the replies. Only one document message from Constantine II to Pope Alexander VI – had so far remained unknown and so, invariably, raised questions among scholars. However, this document, too, has been preserved thanks to the intervention of a third party – Lithuanian diplomats – in the affairs of the Georgian embassy.

3 The Georgian Embassy in Novogradok

Whatever the motives of Hieromonk Nilus in choosing the return route, in 1496–1497, after leaving Spain and Rome, the Georgian embassy ended up in Novogradok, which lay far away from the route to Tbilisi. Nilus's

¹² ე. მამისტვალიშვილი, “სასულიერო მოღვაწე დიპლომატი – ხუცესი ნილო [Mamistvalishvili, Ecclesiastic figure diplomatist – priest Nilo]”, p. 192.

¹³ В. А. Варонін, “Асманская пагроза і першыя кантакты Вялікага Княства Літоўскага з Грузіяй [Varonin V. A., The Ottoman Threat and the First Contacts of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with Georgia]”, Палітычная гісторыя. Беларускі гістарычны часопіс [Political History. Belarusian Historical Journal], 11 (2018), p. 10.

stay in the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is evidenced by a note left on a copy of Nilus's letter of credence kept in the Vatican: "Hic orator in reditu suo de Urbe

fuerat in Nowogrodek Lithuanie apud Alexandrum Regem Polonie"¹⁴ ("This ambassador, on his way back from the City, was in Lithuanian Novogrudok at the court of Alexander, King of Poland"). As V. A. Voronin convincingly showed, this note was made in 1501, while in Rome on a mission, by the Lithuanian ambassador Erasmus Ciolek (Vitellius), who had assisted at the audience of the Georgian ambassadors with Grand Duke Alexander in January of 1497.¹⁵

The note indicates that Hieromonk Nilus received an audience in Novogrudok with the Grand Duke of Lithuania Alexander (who became king of Poland in 1501), testifying to the interest of Lithuanian diplomacy in the results of distant Georgia's embassy to Europe. The surviving translations of diplomatic documents, carried out in the chancery of the Lithuanian grand duke, speak even more convincingly about his interest in Georgian affairs.

Indeed, no matter how far Georgia was, the grand duke of Lithuania wanted to be aware of everything related to the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶ This forced Lithuanian diplomats to seek copies of those documents that were not sealed. Probably due to this interest, an abbreviated version of the letter from King Alexander I of Kakheti to Grand Duke Ivan III of Moscow (1491) has been preserved in a Miscellany containing a collection of metropolitan charters kept in Smolensk.¹⁷ The same interest explains the translation of two letters from King Constantine II of Kartli to the Spanish queen and to the Pope, completed in Novogrudok in 1496, and preserved in the manuscript tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The letters of the king of Kartli could only have been translated when the ambassadors were on their way home. Indeed, in his letters to Queen Isabella and Pope Alexander VI, King Constantine II specifically emphasizes that the ambassadors are carrying sealed letters and it is in this untouched form that the addressees must receive them, so that secret correspondence does not become accessible to a prying and hostile eye: "we sent our spiritual father ... with sealed letters ... since there are many enemies along the way" («послали есмо духовника своего ... з листми запечатаными ... того ради, што суть на пути врази мнози»¹⁸). Thus, these documents could not be read by anyone on the way to Europe. It was a different matter during the return voyage: Hieromonk Nilus carried sealed responses to the King of Kartli to Tbilisi, which could not be read and translated, unlike the letters of

¹⁴ *Vetera monumenta Poloniae et Lithuaniae gentiumque finitimarum historiam illustrantia maximam partem nondum edita ex tabulariis Vaticanis, deprompta collecta ac serie chronologica disposita, ab Augustino Theiner, vol. 2: Ab Ioanne pp. XXIII usque ad Pium pp. V, 1410–1572, Romae, 1861, p. 261, no 289.*

¹⁵ Варонін, "Асманская пагроза [Voronin, The Ottoman Threat]", p. 9.

¹⁶ Варонін, "Асманская пагроза [Voronin, The Ottoman Threat]", p. 4.

¹⁷ Smolensk Museum-Reserve, inv. 9907, ff. 216r–216v

¹⁸ Lietuvos Metrika. Knyga no 5 (1427–1506) [Lithuanian Metrica. Book 5 (1427–1506)], pratarinė bei komentarus parašė E. Banionis [preface and comment. by E. Banionis], Vilnius, 2012, p. 398.

Constantine II, which had already been unsealed. It is not known how the hospitable Lithuanians managed to convince Nilus to hand over the first part of the correspondence for translation, however, thanks to the successes of Lithuanian diplomacy, we have the opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the letters of Constantine II.

4 The Documents of the Embassy of 1495–1497

Thus, a set of documents relating to the Georgian embassy to Europe has been preserved in different languages and in different countries. Let us list the diplomatic documents related to the embassy of Hieromonk Nilus:

1) The letter from King Constantine II of Kartli to Queen Isabella of Castile (March 10, 1495), translated into Ruthenian. The translation has been preserved as part of the Lithuanian *Metrica*.¹⁹

2) The letter from King Constantine II of Kartli to Pope Alexander VI ([March 1495]), translated into Ruthenian. The translation is preserved in the Smolensk collection of metropolitan charters (*Smolensk Miscellany*).²⁰

3) The reply of King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella to Constantine II, King of Kartli (July 30, 1495), in Latin. A copy of the letter is preserved in an archive in Spain.²¹

4) The reply of Pope Alexander VI to Constantine II, King of Kartli (June 8, 1496), in Latin. A copy of the letter is preserved in the Vatican Archives.²²

5) Resolutions of the Council of Florence, sent by Pope Alexander VI together with his letter to Constantine II, King of Kartli (June 8, 1496), in Latin. A copy of the resolutions is preserved in the Vatican Archives.²³

6) A letter of credence for ambassador Nilus from Pope Alexander VI (June 8, 1496), in Latin. A copy of the letter of credence is preserved in the Vatican Archives.²⁴

¹⁹ Lietuvos Metrika. Knyga no 5 [Lithuanian Metrica. Book 5], pp. 397–398, no 587. Later, corrupted copies of the letter have also survived: იცინცაძე, მასალები პოლონეთისა და საქართველოს ურთიერთობის ისტორიისათვის (XV–XVII სს.) [J. Cincadze, Historical Materials Concerning Polish-Georgian Diplomatic Relations from the 15th to the 17th Century], Tbilisi, 1966, pp. 73–80; S. Jaśkowski, D. Kołodziejczyk, P. Mnatsakanyan, *Stosunki dawnej Rzeczypospolitej z Persją Safawidów i katolikosatem w Eczmiadzynie w świetle dokumentów archiwalnych* [The Relations of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with Safavid Iran and the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin in the light of archival documents], red. naukowa i wstęp D. Kołodziejczyk [ed. and introduction by D. Kołodziejczyk], Warszawa, 2017, p. 10.

²⁰ Smolensk Museum-Reserve, inv. 9907, ff. 216v–218r.

²¹ *Documentos sobre relaciones internacionales de los reyes católicos*, ed. prep. por A. de la Torre, vol. 5: 1495–1497, Barcelona, 1965, pp. 114–115, no 172.

²² *Vetera monumenta Poloniae et Lithuaniae*, vol. 2, pp. 258–259, no 287.

²³ *Vetera monumenta Poloniae et Lithuaniae*, vol. 2, pp. 259–261, no 288.

²⁴ *Vetera monumenta Poloniae et Lithuaniae*, vol. 2, pp. 261, no 289.

Much work on the Spanish documents related to the embassy of Constantine II has been carried out by E. Khintibidze.²⁵ The documents emanating from the Pope were edited already in the nineteenth century. Of the entire complex of documents, only the copy of the letter of Constantine II to the Roman Pontiff, preserved in the Smolensk Miscellany, remained unknown until now. This letter was briefly mentioned by G. V. Semenchenko in his comments on the content of the manuscript: “next to the gr[amota] of Alexander, (fol. 216v–218v) SoKM 9907 contains another document related to Georgia and, probably, originating from the same collection: the letter of credence of Nilus, the ambassador of Constantine, the ruler of Kartli (in 1479–1505) to the Pope of Rome (Alexander VI?)”.²⁶ The remark, which was not very accurate and was made casually in a work completely unrelated to the study of Georgia, remained unnoticed by researchers. Meanwhile, it is no coincidence that a copy of the letter was preserved specifically in the Smolensk Miscellany. It is placed in the manuscript next to another Georgian letter sent by the King of Kakheti, Alexander I, to Ivan III, the Grand Duke of Moscow, a few years earlier than when the European embassy left Kartli. Thus, the three most important diplomatic documents testifying to the foreign policy of the Georgian lands have been preserved in the manuscript tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, of which, until 1514, Smolensk was a part. This forces us to turn to the entire complex of documents collected in Lithuania when commenting on this previously unknown letter to the Pope.

5 The Smolensk Miscellany

The translation of the letter from King Constantine II to Pope Alexander VI into Old Russian has pronounced Ruthenian features. These include lexical features characteristic of the chancery language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the fifteenth century: «лѣпшенье побѣды» (“the best victory”), «з листъми» (“with letters”), «пилностью» (“diligently”), «мешкати» (“to delay”). To these can be added the substitution of в- for у- and vice versa: «вчини» (“united”), «усхотятъ» (“they want”), as well as some syntactic constructions, such as: «писал есми до госпожи» (“sent to the lady”), «вослали есмо . . . до салтъана» (“sent to the sultan”). Such examples confirm that the translation was, in fact, carried out in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, probably in Novogradok, where the ambassadors stopped on their way back. This proves also that the Smolensk collection of charters included not

²⁵ E. Khintibidze, “Negotiations between the Georgian and Spanish kings at the end of the fifteenth century”, in: *Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean World After 1492*, ed. A. Meyuhar Ginio, London, 1992, pp. 78–85.

²⁶ *Русский феодальный архив XIV–первой трети XVI века [Russian Feudal Archive of the 14th–First Third of the 16th Centuries]*, part 3, ed. by А. И. Плигузов, Г. В. Семенченко, [A. I. Pliguzov, G. V. Semenchenko, L. F. Kuzmina], Moscow, 1987, p. 628

only documents from the chancery of the metropolitans of Moscow, but also texts from other sources, including those originating in Novogradok.

As was shown by A. I. Pliguzov and G. V. Semenchenko, the Smolensk manuscript has a common core with another Miscellany – a metropolitan collection of charters related to the activities of the metropolitans of Moscow and collected by the 1470s (the latest document is dated 1473).²⁷ Following a set of chapters common to the metropolitan collection, the Smolensk manuscript contains several patristic and anti-Latin works, the Donation of Constantine,²⁸ and a number of letters and acts. These texts indicate ongoing work on the collection of acts, with almost all additional documents relating to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Directly adjacent to the letter of the Georgian King of Kartli is a set of letters about the installation of three metropolitans of Kiev in 1497–1503 – Macarius I Chyort, Joseph Bolgarinovich and Jonah II²⁹ – followed by the letter of Metropolitan Misail of Kiev to Pope Sixtus IV recognizing the Union of Florence, sent in 1476.³⁰ As can be seen, most of the documents date to the end of the fifteenth–beginning of the sixteenth centuries and are associated with the activities of both the chancery of the grand duke, located in Novogradok (the Georgian letter), and the metropolitan (all other documents). At the end of the fifteenth century Novogradok was one of the most important political centers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the permanent residence of the metropolitans of Kiev. This suggests that the entire complex was reworked and added to the collection in Novogradok in the first decade of the sixteenth century, given that the youngest document dates to 1503. This assumption is contradicted by the letter of the Georgian King Alexander I to Grand Duke Ivan III of Moscow, dated 1491. The Old Russian language of this translation does not contain Ruthenian features, which undoubtedly indicates that the letter was translated where it was sent, that is, in Moscow. In this case, it remains a mystery how, 15 or 20 years later, the letter passed from Moscow into a collection created in the Lithuanian lands. The exact time and place of creation of the Smolensk manuscript is unknown, but it may be dated by watermarks to the end of the 1510s or the 1520s, that is, a later time than the documents it contains. In an effort to reconcile these data, G. V. Semenchenko suggested that the manuscript was formed in Smolensk after 1514, when the city was captured by Muscovite troops, and for this reason the codex included both Lithuanian and Muscovite material. However, after 1514, the episcopal see in Smolensk was abolished, and Bishop Barsanuphius was deposed and exiled, so it is difficult to imagine that scribes in Smolensk still had an opportunity to access materials from Novogradok.

²⁷ Русский феодальный архив [Russian Feudal Archive], part 3, pp. 627–628.

²⁸ The text of the Donation of Constantine belongs to the 2nd version according to the classification of T. I. Afanasyeva. See: Т. И. Афанасьева, “Donatio Constantini в славянских переводах XIV–XV вв.: к проблеме их датировки и локализации [T. I. Afanasyeva, The Donatio Constantini in Church Slavonic Translations of the 14th–15th Centuries: toward the Problem of their Dating and Localization]”, *Slověne*, 8.1 (2019), pp. 109–133.

²⁹ Русский феодальный архив [Russian Feudal Archive], part 3, pp. 633–639, no 20–22.

³⁰ Н. Заторский, “Послання Мисаїла за Смоленським списком [N. Zatorskyu, Misail’s Letter according to the Smolensk Manuscript]”, *Український археографічний щорічник [Ukrainian Archeographic Yearbook]*, 2013, pp. 401–428.

In the letter of the King of Kartli to the Pope, in addition to the mistakes of the translator (which will be discussed below), one can find many mistakes of the scribe, who missed or confused letters or sometimes did not understand a word. This can be explained by the fact that the scribe, accustomed to the literary semiuncial (Poluustav) script, had to copy from the sloppy notes of the translator, written in poorly legible clerical cursive writing (Skoropis). The work on the collection of acts should be dated to the first decade of the sixteenth century and localized in Novogradok, since it was there that the original documents copied in the Smolensk manuscript were located. The presence among the texts of a revised version (discussed below) of a letter to the grand duke of Moscow may be explained by the successes of Lithuanian diplomacy, which had the ability to gain access to documents carried by ambassadors. It is impossible to indicate with certainty the place where the manuscript now stored in the Smolensk Museum-Reserve was created. It seems unlikely that the codex was rewritten in Smolensk during the siege or immediately after the capture of the city, given not only the situation in the devastated city, which would not be conducive to the copying of books, but also the absence of materials directly related to Smolensk in the collection of documents. It seems more likely that the manuscript was prepared in Novogradok and came to Smolensk from there. This could have happened not only in the sixteenth century, but also much later, including in the seventeenth century, when control of the city passed from the Muscovite state to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and back. The late arrival of the codex in the Muscovite state is indirectly supported by the absence of borrowings from it in the Muscovite manuscript tradition of the sixteenth century, when interest in such compilations was great.³¹

6 Dates in the Document

Of those documents that are known in translation into Old Russian, the dates were preserved in the letter of the king of Kakheti to Ivan III and in the letter of the king of Kartli to the Spanish queen. In both cases these dates have raised questions among researchers. In the letter to Ivan III, only tens and units of the year and the month are named: “written in the ninety-first year, in January” («писана лета девяносто первого января»), which made the editors of the document question if the chronology is from the creation of the world (Byzantine Era) or from the birth of Christ (common era).³² Comparing with the letter of the king of Kartli, we see that in diplomatic correspondence the Georgian rulers used the chronology from the birth of Christ, therefore the embassy from Kakheti to Muscovy, without a doubt, should be dated 1491. The embassy is

³¹ For a review of the copies of the metropolitan collection of charters created in the sixteenth century, see: *Русский феодальный архив XIV–первой трети XVI века* [Russian Feudal Archive of the 14th First Third of the 16th Centuries], part 1, ed. by А. И. Плигузов, Г. В. Семенченко, Л. Ф. Кузьмина [A. I. Pliguzov, G. V. Semenchenko, L. F. Kuzmina], Moscow, 1986, pp. 9–18.

³² *Русский феодальный архив* [Russian Feudal Archive], part 2, p. 238, no 71.

mentioned in the Nikon Chronicle under the same year: “In the same winter, an ambassador named Murat came to the grand duke from the land of the Iberians from Prince Alexander” («Тоя же зимы прииде посол к великому князю из Ыверския земли от князя Александра, именем Мурат»³³).

The dating of the message of Constantine II to Queen Isabella, known only in translation as part of the Lithuanian *Metrica*, for a long time misled scholars who read the Cyrillic numerals used to record the year as 1465. Since this dating contradicts the historical record, scholars expended much effort to explain why the real date of the letter should be 1495. In this case, the penultimate letter in the date was read as *ž* and was considered a scribal error, since this letter has the numerical value of 60. However, the Lithuanian *Metrica* does not contain an error, rather, the penultimate letter in the date is not *ž*, but *ç*. This letter, not used in the Cyrillic alphabet, was used in Cyrillic numerals to denote the number 90. In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the designation of the number 90 through *ç* was maintained throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,³⁴ while in manuscripts from Muscovy the symbol was replaced by the graphically similar letter *ч*. Thus, as part of the Lithuanian *Metrica*, the letter is dated 1495 and does not contain an error.

7 Abridgment of Texts in the Smolensk Miscellany

The letter of the King of Kakheti Alexander I to Grand Duke Ivan III of Moscow is known both in the Miscellany of the Moscow metropolitan collection of charters, which is the most complete in terms of content (SHM, Sin. 562), and in the Smolensk Miscellany. A comparison of the text from the two manuscripts shows that the compiler of the Smolensk Miscellany significantly abridged its text. He excluded a significant part of the laudatory epithets of Ivan III, which King Alexander I did not skimp on, removed the etiquette message about the good health of the king of Kakheti and the expression of joy over the health of the grand duke of Moscow, and also did not copy the date at the end of the message. In general, the reduction affected almost exclusively etiquette formulas, without affecting the core message of the letter. At the same time, the Lithuanian copyist was unable to correctly reproduce the unusual names of the Circassian ambassadors, which led to significant distortions:

³³ Полное собрание русских летописей [Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles], vol. 12: Летописный сборник, именуемый Патриаршей или Никоновской летописью (продолжение) [The Chronicle Collection Called the Patriarch's or Nikon's Chronicle (Continuation)], Moscow, 2000, p. 232.

³⁴ An example of a similar research error is the donation note in the Apostle with Commentaries of Alexander Soltan, which for a long time was dated by researchers to 1462, although in fact it dates to 1492. Other examples of errors associated with the incorrect reading of the *сорра* are given by С. Ю. Темчин, “Послесловие к четъему апостолу 1183 года монаха Исаии в супрасльском списке Матвея Десятого 1502–1507 годов [S. Yu. Temchin, The Afterword of the Monk Isaiah to the Apostle of 1183 in the Suprasl Manuscript of Matthew the Tenth of 1502–1507]”, in: Сербское рукописное и печатное богослужбное наследие XII–XIX веков: Источниковедение и культурные связи [Serbian Manuscript and Printed Liturgical Heritage of the 12th–19th Centuries: Source Studies and Cultural Connections], Belgrade-Podgroica-Vilnius, 2021, pp. 15, 35.

«Дамияна к твоему порогу» (“Damian to your doorstep”) – «Амина ка стоваему порогу» (corrupted text), «Хозе-Марума шекенца» (“José-Marum the Chechen”) – «Ахокма-Арома шеньца» (corrupted text).

Considering the abbreviations made when copying the letter of King Alexander I of Kakheti in the Smolensk manuscript, it cannot be ruled out that the letter of King Constantine II of Kartli was also abridged for this formulaic collection of acts. This is indicated by the fact that the letter to the Pope is much shorter than a similar message to the Spanish queen, part of the Lithuanian *Metrica*, where the full texts of documents were recorded. The letter to Pope Alexander VI lacks some required fragments of text, for example, a note about gifts sent by the Georgian king with the embassy. A detailed list of gifts is found at the end of the letter to the Spanish queen: “we have sent to you small gifts: thirteen by nine [pieces] of Yazdin kamka,³⁵ half of forty zolotniki³⁶ of large pearls, and two by nine [furs] of lynx” («послали есмо тобе невеликии поминки: тринадцать девяти камок яздинских, а полчетвертацать золотников жемчугу великого, а две девяти рысеи»). A similar list, undoubtedly, was in the letter to the Pope, given that in the response letter Alexander VI thanks for the gifts: “with endless gratitude for your gifts, which we gratefully accepted” («habentesque serenitati tue gratias innumeras de suis oblationibus, quas admisimus libenter»³⁷).

In addition, the letter to the Spanish queen contains a lengthy fragment discussing the fall of Christian lands under the rule of the “godless Hagarites” and with an extensive quotation from the Book of Proverbs. Such references to the Holy Scriptures would, undoubtedly, also be very appropriate in a letter to the Pontiff, but they are absent from the surviving copy containing the translation of the letter. As well, in the letter to the Pope there is no date, which should have been at the end of the text. Perhaps it was excluded in the Smolensk manuscript, as happened with the date in the letter to Ivan III, copied in the same manuscript. This suggests that the translation of the letter to the Pontiff was shortened at the stage of the preparation of the Smolensk Miscellany, and only the substantive core of the letter was copied.

8 The Original Language

None of the Georgian diplomatic letters of the end of the fifteenth century has survived in the language in which they were written; all of them were preserved only in translations made in Muscovy or Lithuania. This makes one wonder, in what language the Georgian kings conducted their diplomatic

³⁵ 35 Yazd or Yezd is an ancient town in Iran, the center of silk-weaving. Kamka is a silk, colored, patterned fabric. See: *Словарь русского языка XI–XVII вв.* [Dictionary of the Russian Language of the 11th–17th Centuries], issue 7, Moscow, 1980, p. 48.

³⁶ Zolotnik – a measure of weight equal to approximately 1/96 of a Russian pound or 4.226 grams. See: *Словарь русского языка XI–XVII вв.* [Dictionary of the Russian Language of the 11th–17th Centuries], issue 6, Moscow, 1979, p. 57.

³⁷ *Vetera monumenta Poloniae et Lithuaniae*, vol. 2, p. 259.

correspondence. Leaving aside the letter to Grand Duke Ivan III, we can try to answer the question about the language of diplomatic correspondence with Western Europe. Obviously, the letters were not sent in Georgian, so we have a choice between Greek and Latin. E. Mamistvalishvili believed that Georgian diplomatic correspondence was conducted in Greek; V. A. Voronin was inclined to the same opinion. Probably, the basis for this conclusion was the mistake of the translator, who considered the indication of the ambassador's ecclesiastical rank to be part of his name: Kyr Nilus became Cornelius in the letter to the Spanish queen. However, the word κύριος, which was Greek in origin, in the Christian churches of the Byzantine Rite acquired the meaning of a title that did not require translation, and therefore was equally used in Greek, Slavonic, Georgian and other traditions. The fact that the translator did not recognize the word Kyr suggests that the letter was written not in Greek, but in another language. In other words, a translator from Greek could not help but know the word Kyr, while a translator from Latin not accustomed to honorific church titles according to the Byzantine Rite, might not understand a Greek word inserted into a Latin text. Without a doubt, the title Kyr, being an indication of the high rank of the royal confessor Nilus, must have been preserved without translation in the Latin text. Furthermore, the two letters of the Georgian king must have been written in the same language.

E. Khintibidze came to the conclusion that the letter to the Spanish queen was originally written in Latin: the researcher noticed that the title of Isabella in the Ruthenian translation repeats the Latin formula “rex et regina Castelle”, and the translator made a mistake, reading the last word Castile instead as castellum (“castle”), which led to the appearance in the translation of the phrase “queen of the Spanish city”.³⁸

The Latin original is indicated even more clearly by an error made by the translator of the letter to the Pope. The Georgian king, addressing the Pontiff, repeatedly mentions Queen Isabella, and each such mention is accompanied by the same corrupted reading: “about Elizabeth and all bresi”, “she and all bresi”, “to Elizabeth and all bresi”, “to your holiness and to all bresi”. Clearly, “all bresi” means “all of the Spaniards”. This corrupt reading could only arise through the Latin name of the Iberians – hiber, eris (III, pl. nom. -es) – for the people inhabiting the Iberian Peninsula, which was not understood by the translator. It is not surprising that the translator in Novogradok was not familiar with this archaic name of the Spaniards and divided the Latin word into two: hiberes → hi beres, translating the first syllable as a demonstrative pronoun. Perhaps the translation “these bresi” did not suit the translator stylistically and so he replaced it by “all bresi”, similar to the etiquette term “all Christians”. This is exactly how a similar passage was translated in the letter to

Isabella of Castile: “to Elizabeth, [queen] of the God-blessed Spanish city, and to all Christians”.

If our assumption is correct, and the corrupted expression “all bresi” comes from hiberes in the Latin original of Constantine II's letter to the Pope, then calling the Spaniards Iberians is an undoubted anachronism for the end

³⁸ E. Khintibidze, “Negotiations between the Georgian and Spanish kings”, pp. 78–85.

of the fifteenth century. It was a widely-used term among Antique and early Christian authors, who assumed the common origin of the two Iberias – the western (on the Iberian Peninsula) and the eastern (in the Caucasus). By the fifteenth century, however, the name “Iberians” almost ceased to be used for the Spaniards, and, as a result, theories about the common origin of the Spaniards and Georgians no longer attracted attention. However, at the end of the fifteenth century such theories could still be known in Georgia, for example, from the “Life of John and Euthymius of the Holy Mountain” by George Mtatsmindeli, abbot of the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos (eleventh century).³⁹

9 Two Letters – Two Translators

The letters to Queen Isabella and Pope Alexander VI have much in common. This is not surprising, since they were prepared within the same embassy and, obviously, both texts were written by the same Georgian diplomats. As a result, there are verbatim repetitions in the two letters:

“we sent the hieromonk and our spiritual father Cornelius to the Sultan of Egypt in Cairo” («послали есмо священноинока и духовника нашего Корнила ко салтану египетскому до Кария», Iz) – “we sent the hieromonk and our spiritual father Кур Nilus to the Sultan of Egypt in Cairo” («священноинока и духовника нашего ... кир Нила вослали есмо посло[м]ъ до салътана египѣтскаго до Кария», Al);⁴⁰

“when he returned from Egypt” («как возвратился он от Египта», Iz) “when he returned from Egypt” («как възрат[и]лъся от Египта», Al);

“we heard about the victories of your reign and rejoiced greatly” («слышали есмо победы царствия твоего и велми радовалися есмо», Iz) – “I rejoiced hearing about this, and about her victories” («радовахся и тѣ же слышах и еѣ побѣды», Al);

“victory over the godless Hagarites” («победы на безбожныя агараны», Iz) – “victories and courage against the godless and lawless Hagarites” («побѣды и мужество на бѣз[б]ожных безаконных агарянь», Al);

“we sent our spiritual father ... with letters” («послали есмо духовника своего ... з листми», Iz) – “I sent our ... spiritual father with letters” («послал есми ... нашего духовника з листъми», Al);

“we are always tormented by the godless Persians” («всегда мучими есмо от безбожных персь», Iz) – “we are always tormented by the godless Persians” («мы всегда от безъбожных персь мучими есмо», Al);

“since there are many enemies along the way” («того ради, што суть на пути врази мнози», Iz) – “because there are many enemies along the way” («понеже на пути суть врази мнози», Al);

³⁹ Э. Габидзашвили, Н. Н. Крашенинникова, “Георгий Святгорец [E. Gabidzashvili, N. N. Krasheninnikova, George of the Holy Mountain]”, in: Православная энциклопедия [Orthodox Encyclopedia], vol. 11, Moscow, 2006, pp. 75–78.

⁴⁰ Here and below, we indicate the source in abbreviated form: Iz – letter to Queen Isabella, Al – letter to Pope Alexander VI.

“they present us with three demands: either pay us great, immeasurable tribute, or fight against us, or convert to our faith” («три прошения просяты в нас: либо дань великую немеръную намъ дадите, а либо биитеса с нами, а либо к нашей вѣрѣ приступите», Iz) – “they present us with three demands: either pay us great, immeasurable tribute, or fight against us, or convert to our faith” («три прошения просяты в нас: либо дань великую немеръную намъ дадите, а либо биитеса с нами, а либо к нашей вѣрѣ приступити», Al).

Other expressions in the two documents are extremely close. It is possible that the phrases in question were formulated differently by the authors of the diplomatic correspondence, although the different formulations may also have appeared during the translation process:

“we greatly rejoice about this and send up glory to our almighty God” («велими тому радуемся и славу возсылаем всесилному Богу нашему», Iz) – “I rejoiced greatly about this and thanked God” («велими о том есми възвеселился и б[ла]годарих Бога», Al);

“go against Constantinople, do not tarry ... let the Lord God fulfill your desire” («поедь на Царьград, а не взленися, ... Господь Бог да исполнить желание твое», Iz) – “you will work hard, go, and our God will arrange it and grant victory against our enemies” («дайте труд, двигньтеса, а Богъ нашъ дасть управления и побѣду на врагъ наших», Al).

Thus, some passages that were no doubt identical in both letters in the original were rendered differently in the translation. This is evidenced by the already mentioned reading of the ambassador’s name: “Cornelius” (Iz) – “Kyr Nilus” (Al). In addition, since in the letter to the Pope the Spaniards are called Iberians, we would think that this term should have been used in the letter to the Spanish queen also. However, it does not appear in the translation, but rather the expression “to all Christians” is used four times. We can assume that the translator of the letter to the Spanish queen was also unfamiliar with the ethnonym *hiberes* (“Iberians”), but did not dare to leave it in the form of an incomprehensible untranslated word, preferring rather to change the meaning to “all Christians.”

In the two letters there are many examples of different renderings of the same concepts or expressions. These include some phonetic differences: “of Kafeti” (Iz) – “of Kakheti” (Al). In a number of cases, the two translators understood the text differently or could not immediately find the right words:

“for the confirmation and accommodation of the people named for Christ” («на утверженье и *подобность* всим христоименитымъ людемъ», Iz) – “for the confirmation and *perfection* of the people named for Christ” («на утвержение и совершения христоименитымъ людемъ», Al);

“our spiritual father and *confidant*” («духовника своего и тайбника», Iz) – “our spiritual father and *keeper of the secrets of my words*” («духовника нашего и *словъ тайн моих хранителя*», Al);⁴¹

“were united” («едналися», Iz) – “were all brought together” («вчини вси еднанье», Al).

In both letters one can observe obvious translation errors:

“to the glorious lady and *queen* Elizabeth” («к славнои ... госпожи и *царицы* Елисавети», Iz) – “about the glorious lady and lady *King* Elizabeth” («о славную госпожу и *госпожу цару* Елисаветъ», Al). Further down, the translator of the letter to the Pope uses the correct translation “queen”;

“in addition to letters, you will hear from him other *spiritual talk*” («опрочь листов и иншыи речи *духовныи* услышите и от него», Iz) – “in addition to our letters, you will hear [the rest] from our envoy and *spiritual father*” («ино опрочь листовъ наших услышишь от посланника нашего и *духовника*», Al). It is likely that the translator of the letter to Isabella of Castile did not understand the syntax of the original, which led to an error, since the oral message to the queen, which could not be ⁴² entrusted to paper, clearly contained not “spiritual talk”, but diplomatic proposals regarding an anti-Ottoman coalition. Such differences in the texts indicate that the translation of the documents was entrusted to several people. Perhaps this is due to the need to prepare the translation as quickly as possible, so as not to delay the Georgian ambassadors, who needed to return home. We can assume that Erasmus Ciolek took part in the translation of the documents, as he was a secretary of Grand Duke Alexander of Lithuania in 1497 and served as a Latin scribe earlier.

10 The Letter to Pope Alexander VI: New Information

Although the text of the letter to Pope Alexander VI was previously unknown, its content is not unexpected. First of all, the Pope mentions the proposals made by King Constantine in his own reply message. However, different political points are stressed in the letter of the Georgian king and in the response of the Pope. Second, the two diplomatic letters – to the Pope and to the queen – were written simultaneously and so are largely similar in content. When comparing the two letters, the additional details mentioned in one letter, but omitted in another seem significant.

⁴¹ Taibnik is a confidant. See: Словарь русского языка XI–XVII вв. [Dictionary of the Russian Language of the 11th–17th Centuries], issue 29, Moscow, 2011, p. 177.

⁴² მამისტვალიშვილი, “სასულიერო მოღვაწე დიპლომატი – ხუცესი ნილო [Mamistvalishvili, Ecclesiastic figure diplomatist – priest Nilo]”, p. 185.

Negotiations with Isabella of Castile were undoubtedly the most important task of the entire embassy to Europe. Both the letter to the queen and the letter to the Pope are focused on an anti-Ottoman alliance with the Spaniards. In the letter to Pope Alexander VI, after introductory greetings and prayerful addresses, the Georgian king moves on to Spanish affairs: praise for the victory in Granada, the story about the embassy to Queen Isabella that preceded the trip of the Georgian ambassadors to Rome, and requests to support the intention of Constantine II to conclude a military alliance with the Spaniards. The letter of the Georgian king was intended to convince the Pope to influence the Spanish queen so that she would oppose the Ottomans together with the Georgian army. The King of Kartli calls on Alexander VI to organize a crusade to liberate Constantinople and Christian shrines, but writes nothing about the fate of Jerusalem. Thus, contrary to the assumption of E. Mamistvalishvili, the main task of the embassy was not to save the Holy Land,⁴³ but to join forces with European allies in confronting the Ottoman threat and expelling the Turks from Constantinople.

One significant detail in the letter to Pope Alexander VI, absent from the letter to Isabella of Castile, is the intention of King Constantine II to send his son with the main army, and to remain in the rear to guard the borders: “And as many troops as they want from me, I will give them, and I will send my son with that army. And I myself will stand at the borders of my land” («А от мене колко войска усхотятъ, то им дамъ, и сына своего с тым войском пошлю, а я буду самъ на рубежи земли свояя стояти»⁴⁴). This refers probably to Constantine II's eldest son, David, who inherited Kartli ten years later. The Georgian king obviously counted on the support of the Spanish army, which had recently won a decisive victory over the Muslims. The meeting with the Pope was needed in order to gain additional support in this endeavor. From the text of the letter to Alexander VI, it can be assumed that King Constantine intended for the papal army to also directly participate in the campaign: “may rise up and go ... you – from there, and we – from here” («да подоимутся поити ... вы оттолъ, а мы отселъ»). He was expecting more than just the blessing of the Pontiff for the liberation of Constantinople.

The Pope's response serves as a striking example of the game of diplomacy. It can be assumed that Pope Alexander VI by that time was already aware that Queen Isabella did not support King Constantine's intention to conclude a military alliance, evasively wishing the Georgian army success, but not showing any desire to act together. The Pope ignored calls for unified military action. If one reads solely the response of Alexander VI, the sole purpose of the Georgian king's embassy was to join the Union of Florence, and so the entire response of the Pontiff was built on praise for this wise decision. Meanwhile, in the letter of the king of Kartli there is not a word about church affairs: the long discussions at the Council in Ferrara and Florence, the refusal of the Georgian bishop

⁴³ მამისტვალიშვილი, “სასულიერო მოღვაწე დიპლომატი – ხუცესი ნილო [Mamistvalishvili, Ecclesiastic figure diplomatist – priest Nilo]”, p. 185.

⁴⁴ Smolensk Museum-Reserve, inv. 9907, f. 217v.

to sign the decisions of the Council, and the church union are not mentioned at all. Perhaps Hieromonk Nilus was instructed to address this topic orally: to express regret about the church schism and to mention the participation of the Georgian bishop in resolving issues related to the unification of churches. Without a doubt, however, church union was not the purpose of King Constantine's embassy. The response of Pope Alexander VI, in which he expresses his readiness to accept the Georgian church into the Union, and the acts of the Council of Florence attached to the letter, create a false impression of the intentions of the Georgian king, which until now have not been reliably known to researchers.

11 Conclusion

As we see, the diplomats of Grand Duke Alexander of Lithuania closely followed all events occurring abroad, even concerning such distant countries as Georgia and Spain, with which they had no contacts of their own. Thanks to them, we have three letters from the Georgian kings, addressed to Grand Duke Ivan III of Moscow, Queen Isabella of Castile, and Pope Alexander VI.

The last two secret diplomatic documents, as one can assume, became available to Lithuanian diplomats in Novogradok during the return journey of the Georgian embassy from Europe to Tbilisi. A study of the translation of the letter to Pope Alexander VI suggests that the original was written in Latin. A comparison of the translations of two letters from the king of Kartli – to Isabella of Castile and to Pope Alexander VI – indicates that two different translators worked on them. A set of Georgian documents in the archives of the Grand Duke of Lithuania shows that Alexander Jagiellon sought to keep abreast of all events related to the European powers and the Ottoman Empire.

The letter of King Constantine II of Kartli to Pope Alexander VI, which was considered lost, but has now been found, speaks of the persistent attempts of the Georgian king to form a military alliance against the Ottoman Empire for a campaign to retake Constantinople. The son of Constantine II was supposed to lead the Georgian army, while the king himself was supposed to remain on the border, ready to come to the aid of his son or protect Kartli from an unexpected attack from the outside. The information obtained from the letter to the Pontiff allows us to significantly correct ideas about the goals of the Georgian embassy. Until now, only documents sent by Pope Alexander VI in response to the letter from the Georgian king were available, which are silent about the true purpose of the embassy to create a military alliance.

Acknowledgement

The author is grateful to Aleksandr Andreev for translating the article into English, but any responsibility for possible mistakes remains with the author.

Appendix

The letter of King Constantine II of Kartli to Pope Alexander VI, sent in 1495, is edited from the only known copy: Smolensk Museum-Reserve, inv. 9907, ff. 216v–218r.

The text of the letter is set in the modern Russian typeface, but preserving the letter ъ, as well as the letters ѣ and ѥ in all positions. Superscript letters are placed inline. The letters following the superscript letters and titlo abbreviations are reconstructed in accordance with the norms of the clerical language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Letters omitted by the scribe are reconstructed in square brackets according to their meaning. Obvious scribal errors are corrected, with the original readings indicated in the footnotes.

The English translation of the letter does not reproduce all complex syntactic constructions of the Ruthenian text. Interpolations required to reproduce the meaning in English are set in square brackets [].

https://www.academia.edu/120540718/A_Georgian_Embassy_to_Spain_and_Rome_1495_1497_and_Lithuanian_Diplomacy?auto=download&email_work_card=download-paper

**Вѣрныи у Христа Бога нашего царя самодержецъ Костянтин
Пангратиос всеи Иверьской земли и Колхи Менкгрелскии, Апхаскии,
Имирелс[к]ии,⁴⁵ Месхонскии, Кахетскии и Турьбанскии.**

Блаженому и святѣишому отцу, божественому ученику и подобному Господа нашего Исус Христа и проповѣднику божественныхъ словесъ Его, и намѣстнику святаго и славнаго апостола Петра, яко подобному пастырю ове[ц]⁴⁶ словесныхъ стада Христова. Молю Бога вѣчнаго и освятившаго тя благодатию святаго Духа, да здравствуется блаженство твое и святос т[в]оя⁴⁷ на утверждение и совершения христоименитымъ свездѣ си (так!) людемъ, и Его же силою и твоими святыми молитвами здравствуемъ и мы // (f. 217r).

И священной[но]ка⁴⁸ и духовника нашего и словъ таин моихъ хранителя, кир Нила, вослали есмо пословъ (так!) до салтана египѣтскаго до Кария о некоторыхъ делехъ своихъ. Ино какъ възрат[и]лься⁴⁹ от Египта и повѣдалъ намъ о твоемъ блаженствѣ и о славную госпожу и госпожу царю Елисаветѣ и о всѣхъ бресехъ,

⁴⁵ Corrected, the MS reads Имирелснии .

⁴⁶ Corrected, the MS reads овес.

⁴⁷ Corrected, the MS reads тоя.

⁴⁸ Corrected, the MS reads священноика

⁴⁹ Corrected, the MS reads възратлься.

како есте вчини вси еднанье Божьею благодатию единомушно и единосердечно, и радовахся и тѣ же слышах и еѣ побѣды, и мужество на бѣз[б]ожных⁵⁰ безаконных агарянь. Велми о том есми възвеселился и б[ла]годарих⁵¹ Бога, давшего вамъ толику силу и по[б]ѣду.⁵²

И того ради яко образу Христову и великаго владыки и учителя молютися и прошу, яко дабы повелениемъ твоимъ двинуся она и вси бриси.

Всѣмъ християномъ силою и помощью Божьею и честнаго Его крѣста, папо, лѣпшенье побѣды на невѣрующих в Него. Того ради послал есми къ твоеи святости и къ всим бресемъ преднареченаго нашего духовника з листъми от насъ. И Господа ради // (f. 217v) бди и трудися, колико възможешъ, без лѣности пилностию, да подоимутся поити каждъ си одному на помочь. Благодатию Божьею побѣды имамы, да не раскаемся мешкати. Вы оттолѣ, а мы отселѣ, да избавим давно плѣненаго Костянтинаграда, да освятим и очистим от нечестивых и безбожных, от скврѣненных наших святых церквѣи и освятится от нас Христовою одежаю. Мы всегда от без ѣбожных персѣ мучими есмо. Три прошения просятъ в нас: любо дань великую немерѣную намъ дадите, а любо биитеса с нами, а любо к нашей вѣрѣ приступити. Ино лши того злых и неподобных с тых (так!) речеи не можем терпѣти! И писал есми до славной госпожи и царици Елисавети и до всих бресеи пословъ своих. А от мене колко воиска усхотятъ, то им дамъ, и сына своего с тым войском пошлю, а я буду самъ на рубежи земли своея стояти, а Христовы ради // (f. 218r) любѣви да не лишимся. Вы дайте труд, двиньтеса, а Богъ наш дастъ управления и побѣду на врагъ наших, его же млѣбы да сокрушатъ враговъ наших и подложатъ под ноги наши.

Хотѣл есми писати вси дѣла свои святости твоеи, но не мощно, понеже на пути суть врази мнози. Ино опрочъ листовъ наших услышишь от посланника нашего и духовника⁵³ киръ Нила. И святыя и богоприятныя молитвы твоя да будут ми хранитель. Аминь.

Constantine Bagrationi, Autocrat of all the Iberian lands and of Colchi

Mingrelia, Abkhazia, Imereti,⁵⁴ Meskheta, Kakheti, and Turban,⁵⁵ faithful to

Christ our God and King.

To the blessed and most holy father, the divine disciple, and fitting preacher of the divine words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and vicar of the holy and glorious Apostle Peter, as fitting shepherd of the spiritual sheep of the flock of Christ. I pray to the eternal God who has sanctified you with the grace of the Holy Spirit, may your blessedness

⁵⁰ Corrected, the MS reads бѣзбожных.

⁵¹ Corrected, the MS reads благодарих.

⁵² Corrected, the MS reads повѣду.

⁵³ Corrected, the MS reads духовниика.

⁵⁴ Corrected, the MS reads Imirelsnyi.

⁵⁵ Probably, Tori.

and your holiness live in health for the confirmation and perfection of the people named for Christ who dwell everywhere, and by His power and your holy prayers may we, too, live in health // (f. 217r).

And we sent the hieromonk and our spiritual father and keeper of the secrets of my words, Kyr Nilus, as an ambassador to the Sultan of Egypt in Cairo concerning some of our affairs. And when he returned from Egypt, he told us about your blessedness and about the glorious lady and lady King Elizabeth and about all bresi,⁵⁶ how you were all brought together unanimously and with one heart by God's grace, and I rejoiced hearing about this, and about her victories, and about [her] courage against the godless and lawless Hagarites. I rejoiced greatly on this occasion and thanked God, who gave you such strength and victory.

And therefore I pray and ask you, as the image of Christ, the great Master and teacher, that by your command she and all bresi be moved. O Pope, all Christians by the power and help of God and His honorable cross [will be granted] the best victory against those who do not believe in Him. Therefore, I sent our above-mentioned spiritual father with letters from us to your holiness and to all bresi. For the sake of the Lord // (f. 217v) be vigilant and labor as much as you can, without laziness, diligently, so that [they] may rise up and go to one another's aid. By God's grace we will overcome, lest we regret it because of [our] delay. You – from there, and we – from here, that we may deliver Constantinople, captured long ago, and sanctify and cleanse our holy churches, desecrated by the wicked and godless, and let it be sanctified by us by the robe of Christ.

We are always tormented by the godless Persians. They present us with three demands: either pay us great, immeasurable tribute, or fight against us, or convert to our faith. However, we cannot tolerate the lies of these evil and inappropriate demands!

And I sent⁵⁷ to the glorious lady and queen Elizabeth and all bresi my ambassadors. And as many troops as they want from me, I will give them, and I will send my son with that army. And I myself will stand at the borders of my land, so that we do not lose for the sake of Christ's // (f. 218r) love. You will work hard, go, and our God will arrange it and grant victory against our enemies, and may His prayers crush our enemies and put them under our feet.

I wanted to write all of my deeds to your holiness, but I cannot, because there are many enemies along the way. However, in addition to our letters, you will hear [the rest] from our envoy and spiritual father Kyr Nilus. May your holy and God-pleasing prayers protect me. Amen.

⁵⁶ Corrupted reading. See the section "The Original Language".

⁵⁷ Probably, a corrupted reading. The Ms has "wrote", which is perhaps a scribal error, since the words "sent" (послал) and "wrote" (писал) are similar in Slavonic.