

History

Islamic Studies in 18th Century Georgia

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(Presented by Academy Member Zaza Aleksidze)

The aim of this research is to study the anti-Muslim polemical work “*For Agarians*” (Agariantatvis) written by prominent Georgian religious figure, diplomat and writer Archbishop Timote Gabashvili in the second half of the 18th century as a source of Islamology, to establish its sources and to show what was known about the religion of Muslims and its prophet in Georgian society in the mentioned period. T. Gabashvili’s work “*For Agarians*” is the only original, anti-Muslim treatise of polemical genre created in the 18th century. It contains different records on Islamic preacher and members of his family, which have no parallels in other sources. We also come across original explanations concerning the epithet of Allah and the Muslim symbolism. The scientific value of the research is also determined by the fact that the narrative *For Agarians* is an important source of Islamic studies which reflects the high level of Islamology and dogmatic-polemical writings of the Georgian society in the mentioned epoch. © 2021 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Islam, Georgia, Timote Gabashvili

For centuries, the Georgian church has been engaged in controversy with the doctrine of Islam. In the eighteenth century, Eastern Georgia faced a threat of Islamization twice (known as *Osmaloba* and *Kizilbashoba*) that must have led to the spread of Islam among the Georgian population, final abolition of Georgian statehood and the introduction of Muslim (first Ottoman and then Iranian) system of government.

The aim of this research is to study chapter IX of the work “*Gardamocemuli Ertobisatvis*” (Narrated) by Archbishop Timote Gabashvili in the second half of the eighteenth century [1: 328-344; 2;] from the viewpoint of Islamic studies, to

establish its sources and show what was known on the religion of Islam and its preacher in Georgian society at that period. The composition has not been an object of research so far.

The significance of T. Gabashvili's work “*For the Agarians*” also consists in the fact that this is the only anti-Muslim work written in Georgian language in the 18th century that has come down to us. Its structure is somewhat different from the hitherto existed original Georgian anti-Muslim treatises.

T. Gabashvili talks about the establishment of the family of Muhammad (Ahl al-Bayt), the Shia Imams, the first righteous Caliph - Abu Bakr, and

the origin of Shia and Sunni Islam. A peculiar explanation is given of the epithet for Allah, its uniqueness and the Muslim symbol. The author presents the mythology of the world geography in a fascinating and peculiar way and gives a psychological analysis of the peoples living there.

Two main directions of T. Gabashvili's work are: 1) ideological – anti-Muslim and 2) political – anti-Osmalic.

The architectonics of the narrative is presented in the following way: 1. The biography of Muhammad (activities, family, miracles); 2. The basis for confrontation between Arabs and Jews; 3. The first results of Arab expansion; 4. The issue of persecution and oppression of Christians by Muslims; 5. The issue of the heritage of Muhammad and the formation of Shia and Sunni Islam; 6. Political and religious image of the Ottoman Sultan as a deputy of Muhammad, 7. Comparison of the continents of the world with different animals and the identification of the ethno-political characteristics of the peoples living on these continents.

Timote Gabashvili considers the date of Muhammad's birth as corresponding to 6057 from creation and according to the Christian calendar – on Tuesday, April 22, 571. The Arabian village of Batlay is named the place of birth, [3:376].

In modern scholarly literature on Islamic studies, the date of Muhammad's birth is assumed to be 570 AD (Year of the Elephant) on Friday the 17th Rabi al-Awwal (June 8), [4:11; 5:13; 6:22; 7:47]. However, we also come across another version, which names the date of Muhammad's birth the year of 571 [8:47].

It seems that the Georgian author makes use of those sources which name the date of Muhammad's birth on 22 April, 571. As to the village name, it is not found in Georgian anti-Muslim monuments that have come down to us. In Muslim literature the place of Muhammad's birth is considered Mecca. In Islamic literature, the birthplace of Muhammad is referred to as Mecca, one of its suburbs is Souq

al-Leil [5:13], more specifically, the center of the Batn-Makkah settlement is Batha [9:11]. It is just this Batha that Gabashvili must have meant under Bathlai.

The information provided by the author on Muhammad's origin exactly coincides with the tradition. There is a slight difference only in the names of the parents – his father is called Abdullah and his mother is called Aminah [3:376]. The text does not mention Abu Mutalib and Abu Talib.

According to the Georgian author Muhammad was a shepherd of camels. In fact, however, in his childhood Muhammad was engaged in grazing the goats of his uncle Abu Talib, and later he was hired by a wealthy Meccan widow named Khadija bint Khuwaylid (later his wife) to oversee her caravan [5:14]. This is what the author should refer to when he calls Mohammed a shepherd of camels [3:376]. The latter was supposed to be implied by the author when he calls Muhammad the shepherd of camels.

According to the Georgian manuscript, Muhammad started preaching Islam at the age of 42 [3:376] (i.e. Hijr. 612). There is also a slight inconsistency with the tradition that Muhammad preached at the age of 40, Hijr. It began in 610 [9:17].

T. Gabashvili mentions the founders of Christian heresies in the 5th-6th centuries: Origenists, Arian, and Nestor and states that after failure to seduce the human race with their help the devil sent Muhammad [3:376].

The author of the anti-Muslim work describes Muhammad's teacher, Bahira, whom he refers to as Bekir. T. Gabashvili holds the view that Bekir was a follower of Arian heresy. The author states that it was Bakir from whom Muhammad learned that Christ was one of the angels created by God [3:376]. According to the view established in Islamic studies, Bahir//Bekir was a Nestorian monk [10:27-32]. Nestorianism teaches that Jesus Christ was a man in whom the divine Logos by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelt, that the human and divine essences of Christ are separate and the Man Jesus

was born of the Virgin Mary [11:673-674]. This attitude towards the Savior is accepted in the Muslim religion.

In this piece of work we find Islamic tradition of a later period, according to which instead of Jesus the Jews arrested another man who looked very much like Jesus and tortured him. And Jesus miraculously disappeared [3:380].

The crucifixion of Jesus is not presented in the Quran. It is said that Isa was not killed nor crucified, it just seemed to them. Similar kind of information is preserved in work of the Gnostic Basilides (second century) according to which a certain Simon of Cyrene assumed the face of Jesus, carried the cross for him and was crucified instead of Jesus.

According to the Koran, Allah raised Isa or Jesus up into Himself (4:156/157). Jesus will be the “sign” of the coming Judgment Day. According to the Islamic tradition, he will appear again the second time and kill the Antichrist. This information about Jesus in the religion of Islam is due to the proximity to the Christian environment. Christian legends widespread in Arabia indicate this. In this geographical area there were Ethiopian and Yemenite monophysitism, Syrian Orthodoxy and various small Christian sects [12:89, 90].

It becomes obvious from the work that along with Sunni theology T. Gabashvili was also familiar with Shia theology. Beginning from the 16th century until the end of the 18th century Eastern Georgia was under political influence of Iran. With a certain periodicity, Shia Islam carried an important political and religious burden in Tbilisi. Mosques were built in Tbilisi during Muslim rule and in the reign of the Bagrationis people were forcibly converted to Islam [13:88], Muslim theological literature penetrated from Iran, etc. Apparently, it is this literature that was available to the author. He also must have deepened his knowledge of Islam while being in the Ottoman Empire.

This work has a narrative which is not recorded in any anti-Muslim works came down to us either in Georgian translation or in the original. The author was supposed to get acquainted with them while traveling to the East [1:333]. For example, in order for the 400-year marriage tradition to be realized, he (presumably, Christ) had to marry Fatman. After this, Jesus and Muhammad would become parents-in-law and Muhammad the head or Keha of the door of Christ [3:381].

The author describes the spread of Islam to Asia and Africa and why it did not take roots in Europe and America. T. Gabashvili holds the view that old geographers represent various parts of the world in the form of different animals: "Asia is an image of a bloodthirsty lion, Africa – a bull, America – a fox, and Europe – a human". According to the author, Europe is a beautiful and wise woman, who would not share the senseless teaching like Islam [3:393-395].

The work bears a strong anti-Ottoman character. The author calls the Ottoman Sultan the Assyrian Satan. He compares the Ottoman Empire to a terrible whale that lies between on the White Sea (Mediterranean Sea) and the Black Sea [3:403-404].

The work shows that the author knows the history of Islam very well. He describes historical and theological reasons for the spread of Islam worldwide.

In order to write his own composition, Timote Gabashvili could make use of a number of anti-Muslim treatises created in Georgian and translated: for example, the anti-Muslim polemical work “An Account of the polemics and judgment about the belief of Christians and Saracens” (*X'senebay sitqwisgebisay*), which was introduced into *Dogmaticon* (a book of teachings) by Arsen Vaches-Dze in the 12th century [11:674; 14:189-194; 15:12; 16:193-204], “Muhammad Story Given in the Translated Psalm...” – an original work of the late 15th century; Bagrat Batonishvili's „A Dialogue between the infidel Muhammad and the

Christians“ written in the 16th century [17:156; 15:102-104; 18; 19:30-125]. At the end of the 17th century, by the order of King of Kartli Giorgi XI, Iakob Shemokmedili made verse adaptation of this composition [15:105-106; 19:30-125].

To specify the sources, we compared Gabashvili's work with all the above-mentioned writings. A certain similarity that makes us think that the author used as a source can be assumed with respect to each of them but the closest proximity is revealed with the text of the Polemic by Psalm “Muhammad Story Given in the Translated Psalm...”, especially in the issues of evaluation of the Arab ethnarch – Ishmael, Muhammad's background, his early life and preaching of Islam [20:227-246].

In addition to the material available in the literature on Islam, the author included in his work Muslim narrations heard by him during the trip to the East, which bear a folkloric image (for example, Fatma standing at the gates of the paradise and the marriage of Fatma to Christ, etc.).

The unique feature of the work consists in the fact that it contains the unknown information about Islam for Georgian anti-Muslim compositions created before. The author enriches Georgian Islamic studies with the material obtained during the trip to the countries of the East. T.Gabashvili's work contains all the available information about the religion of Islam, which existed in the 18th century not only in Georgian society, but also in the countries of the East in that period.

ისტორია

ისლამმცოდნეობა XVIII საუკუნის საქართველოში

ბ. ბაინდურაშვილი

საქართველოს განათლების, მეცნიერების, კულტურისა და სპორტის სამინისტრო, სსიპ კორნელი კეკელიძის სახ. საქართველოს ხელნაწერთა ეროვნული ცენტრი, თბილისი, საქართველო

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ზ. ალექსიძის მიერ)

კვლევის მიზანია XVIII საუკუნის მეორე ნახევარში მიტროპოლიტ ტიმოთე გაბაშვილის მიერ დაწერილი ანტიმუსლიმური პოლემიკური ნაშრომის „აგარიანთათვის“, როგორც ისლამმცოდნეობითი წყაროს შესწავლა, მისი წყაროების გამოვლენა, ისლამის რელიგიური მოძღვრებისა და მისი მქადაგებლის შესახებ იმ ცოდნის ჩვენება, რომელიც აღნიშნულ პერიოდში ქართულ საზოგადოებაში არსებობდა. ტ. გაბაშვილის ნაშრომი, „აგარიანთათვის“ XVIII საუკუნეში შექმნილი ერთადერთი ორიგინალური, ანტიმუსლიმური, პოლემიკური ჟანრის თხზულებაა. იგი შეიცავს განსხვავებულ ცნობებს ისლამის მქადაგებლისა და მისი ოჯახის წევრების შესახებ, რაც არც მანამდე არსებულ და არც შემდგომდროინდელ მუსლიმურ ლიტერატურაში არ ფიქსირდება. ნაშრომში ასევე ვხვდებით ალაჰის ეპითეტისა და მუსლიმური სიმბოლიკის შესახებ ავტორისეულ განმარტებებს. კვლევის სამეცნიერო ღირებულებას ისიც განსაზღვრავს, რომ თხზულება „აგარიანთათვის“ მნიშვნელოვანი ისლამმცოდნეობითი წყაროა, რომელიც ნათლად ასახავს აღნიშნულ ეპოქაში ქართული საზოგადოების ისლამმცოდნეობისა და დოგმატიკურ-პოლემიკური მწერლობის მაღალ დონეს.

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