

History

Towards the Clarification of the Identity and Sphere of Activities of the Missionaries who Visited the Orient and Georgia in the 14th century

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ABSTRACT. The article discusses the issue of involvement of Georgia in the Eastern Mission in the 14th century. Scholarly analysis of the sources defining the sphere of the Catholic Mission in Georgia shows that Catholic Bishoprics existed not only in Tbilisi and Sokhumi, but also on the territory of Ganja and Achtamar, both within the realm of Georgia. © 2009 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Key words: Georgia, Pope, Franciscans, Dominicans, catholic bishoprics, missionary.

There are relatively few historical sources and documents about Catholic missions sent to Georgia in the 14th century. Therefore, we believe, any information on this subject will be of special importance to historians and other interested scholars. In this article we review several sources and documents kept in the libraries and archives of Venice, Italy, which, in our opinion, are unknown to Georgian academic circles.

The first half of the 14th century was marked by numerous Catholic missions to Georgia: the missions of Dominicans and Franciscans were represented in relatively large numbers. Once again, their main goal was unification of the Georgian and Vatican churches. This was quite relevant in the previous centuries due to the difficult political situation in Georgia. Our points of interest are the sources about Eastern Missions referring to Georgia, which are kept in Venetian archives and libraries. The objective of our research is to define how Georgia was involved in the Vatican's Eastern Missions in the 14th century; which parts of Georgia were covered by their missionary work; which Catholic missionaries worked in Georgia, and how well can they be identified.

At the beginning of the 14th century, the political environment changed in Georgia. In 1314 A.D., Giorgi V the Brilliant (1314-1346) ascended the throne. During his reign, Georgia returned to its past glory. Almost simultaneously, John XXII (1316-1334) is elected as the Pope and Eastern Missionary movements become more active once again. At this time, Catholic missionary work achieved great success not only in Georgia but all over the East. During this period, there were two bishoprics in Georgia, one in Tbilisi and the other in Sokhumi [1: 92]. In addition, the historian G. Golubovich refers to two more places that remain unidentified in either Georgia or Armenia; they are *Porsicum* and *Pisanith*. These names reappear in 1320 and 1334 tables, which discuss locations of the missions. [2: 267-268]. Golubovich supposes that these two places should be presumably located in either Tbilisi or Erzurum regions. However, no other evidence of this fact could be discovered [2: 267-268].

The strengthened Georgia attracted special attention of the Pope as well as that of European monarchs. The Italian historian G. Fedalto comments in his work [3: 414] that King Philip VI Valois, in order to fight the

Saracens, carried on negotiations with Persian and Georgian rulers in 1332-1333 (during this time Persian territory was the Ilkhan Khanate ruled by Abu Said). The mentioned negotiations were conducted through Franciscan monks. Fedalto bases this comment on a French source referring to the following details. The Georgian king pledged to him 30,000 soldiers to liberate the Holy Land. Negotiations held by Philip VI with European monarchs, especially the doge of Venice, to plan a campaign against the Sultan of Egypt are well documented.

Georgian historians have reviewed several letters of Pope John XXII. We would like to direct your attention to the letter dated October 15, 1321. This letter was sent to the Georgian king and Tatar (Ilkhan) people through minor brothers Jacob and Peter. This letter is similar to the one sent by Innocent IV to the Bulgarians. The purpose of their work with Tatars was establishment of regular, canonical churches [2: 267-268]. As for Georgians, they were being invited by the Pope to the council of the church. In this case the addressees of the letter are of interest to us. Besides King Giorgi V the Brilliant, the letter is addressed to Georgian noblemen: Baro Porcelli, Ysai Vartabet, David, filiis (sons of) Aiaci, Gregorio Toppius from Solagai Palace, Sarkis de Teffelicio, Ioanni Magdanao de Soldania, Manueli de Trapesunda and the population of entire Georgia [4: 210]. This letter is provided in I. Tabagua's work as well [5: 203-209].

Of course, the above-mentioned names are not affiliated with the names of Georgian liegemen. At the first impression, one may think that whoever recommended the addressees of the letter to the Pope had not even been in Georgia. However, at the time of Giorgi V the Brilliant there were active diplomatic relations with the Pope's Curia which negate this theory. We are probably dealing here either with a wrong interpretation of Georgian names, which are difficult to pronounce for Europeans or with spelling errors. In addition, we think that two names, Ysai Vartabet and Sarkis de Teffelicio must be of Armenian origin. This once again points to the fact that Catholic missions were quite successful among the Armenian population (not only in Armenia but in Georgia as well). Therefore, according to this letter, missionaries expected to have a group of supporters among nobles of Georgia. On October 23 of the same year, John XXII renewed the privileges of minor brothers in order for them to preach and bring enlightenment to the lands of schismatics and infidels without interruption [2: 215].

1321 turns out to be most productive in terms of missions and related correspondence. On November 22,

1321 yet another letter is written in Avignon. The reasons behind this letter are "schismatic people who are a part of Tatar Empire, and Bishop of the Armenian Church" [6: 215]. They ask the Pope to establish Catholic churches, to teach divine service and to bring them under the protection of the Roman church. It is established that prior to 1321 Catholic churches already existed in the East. Presumably, the existing number of them was not enough for the enlarged congregation and there was a necessity for new ones. The Pope's response was forwarded to the bishops of *Aguemaz* and *Acthamar*. Definitions of these geographical names are provided in the above referred work by Golubovich: "Aguemaz – the Caucasian Agunia or Albania, where resident monastery of the Patriarch was located near the town of Kandza, was also called Gungieh, today referred to as Elizabethpole and is located to the south-east of Tbilisi" (apparently speaking of Ganja). According to the same Golubovich *Acthamar* or *Aghthamar* was the residence of non-Catholic patriarchs on the island of the same name located in Lake Van to the south-west of the town of Van [2: 216]. It becomes apparent from the Pope's letter that he dispatched selected minor monks Jacob and Peter to successfully carry out this mission. He asks the addressee of the letter to respect and take care of them. Their names are also mentioned in the above-referred letter dated October 15, 1321. It is doubtful that these persons would have managed to travel back and forth to Georgia and Persia twice within slightly over a month. It is more probable that during preparation for the departure, which at the time took quite a long time, the Pope gave them several letters. The more so because in his November 22 letter the Pope is generous on the praise of these monks and the last part of the missive has an advisory tone.

Who were Peter and Jacob? Based on the Pope's bullas, historians I. Vading and P. Civezza mention two names, eastern vicar Brother Peter from Tur and Brother Jacob (Jacommo) from Cameron who worked in Tabriz (Persia) custody. P. Civezza writes that "they are mentioned neither in their home country nor in the land whose sons they were. It is without doubt that during a certain period of time they worked as missionaries." [7: 410]. Jacob is also mentioned in the Pope's aforementioned letter to the Persian king Abu Said as "chosen son Jacob from the Order of Friars Minor (branch of Franciscans), our envoy, and the bearer of the previous letter." This indicated that on more than one occasion these persons, in addition to their missionary work, performed diplomatic functions. This theory is supported by the fact that the story of four Tana martyrs is referred to in the correspondence between each other. I. Tabagua,

in his work "Georgia in European Archives and Libraries", mentions a letter which speaks about the martyr's deaths of brothers of the Order of Friars Minor and their accompanying translator, Dimitry of Tbilisi in Tana, India. It is in this context that the aforesaid Peter from Tur or Pietro de Torre is mentioned as the overseer of the northern regions, and brother Jacob Camerino (Cameron) who is referred to as the protector of Tabriz vicariate in the East. [5: 202]. The fact that both of these docile brothers were carrying out substantial missionary work in the East and described the heroic work and torture of Minor brothers in Tana in their letters from the East is also provided by M. Tamarashvili in his work [8: 301]. As it appears from the letters, they were elderly, experienced missionaries who had been to the East more than once. They discussed Persian affairs quite competently at the papal court. As for Peter from Tur (Petrus de Turii), in 1321 he also presents himself in Avignon together with Brother Jacob. They departed from the East to notify the Holy See about the condition of Franciscan missions in the East and care for their development. Presumably, they would not have reported good news to the Pope, although they had the help of the Armenian population and the clergy [2: 214] as well as support of the Ilkhan ruler, Abu-Said-Khan (1316-1336) and his Great Vizier Emir Zupan Begilai. In 1316, a new khan, 12 year old Abu Said ascended the Ilkhan throne. Nomad aristocracy prevailed at the Ilkhan court and the vizier became Choban Noin, their spokesperson, an old friend of Beka Jaqeli. It appears that we shall imply Choban Noin under the name of Zupan Begilai; he conducted affairs in the Ilkhan Empire during the khan's youth. Accordingly, in 1318 Giorgi V had little difficulty in obtaining the title of king of Georgia from the khan. It is noteworthy that in 1318 the Pope founded an archiepiscopate in *Sultanie*, the capital of the Ilkhan state, and subjected the newly created Tskhumi (*Sebastopol*) episcopate located in Georgian Black Sea region to it. P. Mori was appointed the first Catholic bishop of Sebastopol. In his article *Latin Sources about 14th century Georgia*, the historian V. Kiknadze indicated that the French author, J. Richard deems Bernard More the first Catholic bishop of Sebastopol [9: 97]. In 1321, Pope John XXII sent a special address to "Giorgi, the illustrious king of the Georgians, his sister and noblemen". After this missive, we think, negotiations were held between the Georgian royal court and the Pope, and Giorgi V allowed them to establish an Episcopal chair in Tbilisi." [10: 210]. The Pope gave letters (which we already discussed) to the above mentioned brothers to take them to the East. It is noteworthy

that all the letters are dated between November 15 and 22, 1321. Presumably, their return to the East must have taken place in 1322. Brother Pietro returned as the head of the entire eastern vicariate. He replaced Brother Salone or Salomone, who held this position until then. And Brother Jacob replaced Brother Bartolommeo in Tabriz custody. It is quite probable that this Brother Bartolommeo is the Dominican bishop Bartolommeo Porgo who worked in Armenia. He could be the same humble Brother Bartolommeo living in Tavriz who is mentioned in I. Tabagua's aforesaid letter as the principal head in the East and related the story of Tana martyrs in his correspondence with the vicar [5: 202]. In his work *Georgian-Roman Relations* the historian M. Papashvili refers to John of Florence, appointed by Pope John XXII as Dominican missionary on August 19, 1329, as the first Dominican bishop in Tbilisi and Pietro Geraldini in Sokhumi [1: 94]. It is possible that this Pietro Geraldini is the above-mentioned Brother Pietro from Tur. In any case, their work at the missions was roughly during the same years. However, the historian O. Loenertz thinks that the leader of Dominican missions in Georgia and Armenia was Bartolommeo Porgo. He was almost a legendary figure; we know about him from the works of Jean de Qrna. It is Jean and Bartolommeo who are considered founders of the missions in Armenia. He died approximately in 1333. He was succeeded as leader of the mission by John of Florence, bishop of Tbilisi, who was elected to this position in either 1329 [11: 454] or 1330 [12: 193]. At any rate, one of the letters from the following period proves the fact that missionary movement was quite active during this period. It is dated 1370 and was sent to Brother Antonio, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, who was later moved to the Maltese residence. According to G. Golubovich, he was a quite experienced missionary in the East before becoming Archbishop of Thessaloniki. In the letter he is asked to forward 26 Franciscan missionaries because "*many brothers must be sent where a lot of schismatics and infidels live to whom we must provide apostolic care.*" They must have had strained relations with the local clergy during this period, because the letter also says "*use all currently available means to limit the prelates' (presumably local clergy) lack of discipline towards the laws and rules of the order...*" [2: 155]. The incident with Brother Nicolas (de Butigellis di Pavia), who was a bishop of Lajazzo, points to many problems the missionaries had. Brother Nicolas worked in Armenia and had a disagreement with King Leon V (or IV) of Armenia (1320-1341). The disagreement was about a Georgian woman in the queens' retinue whom

Brother Nicolas decided to baptize for the second time because he suspected that she had not been baptized. We learn about this from the letter of Brother Daniel who relates the story in detail [2: 347].

Brother Daniel wrote this letter in approximately 1341. Golubovich notes that Brother Nicolas made a mistake because he was unaware of the Georgian rule that baptism can be had only once [2: 347]. Similar instances of the aforesaid example could have possibly happened in Georgia too. This example shows the types of disagreement that may have existed between the missionaries and local societies.

Regrettably, we do not know if Brother Antonio together with his brethren reached his destination, because one year later he died. This must have occurred sometime before September 3, 1371. This is indicated by the election of his successor in Malta [13: 340].

Appointment of the inquisitor in Georgia took place at about the same time. Pope Innocent VI died in 1362 and was succeeded by Urban V, who was in turn succeeded by Gregory XI later on. According to the source, on the fourth year of his papacy, i.e. 1374, he sent Brother Jovani (John) Galo as inquisitor to Armenia, *Tatarstan*, *Rufia* and *Valakhia*. In 1378 Urban VI became the Pope and called for the General of Dominican Order. The reason behind the meeting was Brother Jovani's death. The Pope charged the general of the order with naming three inquisitors for same provinces. The first inquisitor was supposed to be sent to Georgia and Armenia, the second - to Rufia, and the third - to Valakhia. According to the source, brothers of this order had inquisitors' residences in neighboring countries, although there is no list of countries provided. Their appointment in Georgia and other countries meant that they wanted to broaden their influence in these countries [14: 133]. Also, in the 14th century, an inquisitor was a requisite member of any religious mission. The same information is provided by Ch. Lee in his work *History of the Inquisition* [15: 387].

Unfortunately we could not discover any additional information about the work of inquisitors in Georgia. In the second half of the 14th century Georgia is governed already by Bagrat V (1366-1393). The country has suffered as a result of the plague, which ravaged in Georgia on and off for more than twenty years, starting in 1348. During this period, the Turkish state gains strength in the south-west of Georgia. It combines a substantial part of Asia Minor and periodically disturbs Georgia as well as the other neighbor countries with invasions. And in the south-east *Chobanain* (the territory of so called 'Adarbadagan') and *Jalair* (Iran proper and Iraq) states

formed on what used to be the Ilkhan state which also didn't shy away from invasions into Georgia. The country was quite devastated in terms of economic and human resources from the plague epidemic. However, Bagrat V was a strong-willed person who managed to deal with the country's internal and external enemies quite energetically and even helped to strengthen the country. Georgia started to regain peace and power, but it was not for long. Beginning with 1386, a new, fierce enemy, Tamerlane, started invading it. This is why we think these persons never came to Georgia, and their appointment simply served the purpose of broadening the mission. Inquisitors' work was more related to punitive measures and was directed against heretics. Despite the existence of bishops and missions in Georgia during this period, the number of Georgian Catholics was not so large to have added heretic denominations. It is less probable that appointment of inquisitors would have made any changes here.

In a letter dated March 30, 1382, the Pope ordered Cardinal d'Agrifolio to elect Franciscan Brother Enrico Ratz bishop of Tbilisi (Ratz's predecessor Brother Bernardo was dismissed for his support of Pope Urban VI). It is less probable that Enrico ever took the position of Bishop of Tbilisi because until 1392 he was busy with settling quite important and delicate matters in Europe [16: 242].

In conclusion it can be said that in the 14th century the Vatican paid great attention to Georgia's inclusion in the Eastern Missions. This is clearly demonstrated by the letter of Pope John XXII to Giorgi the Brilliant in which Georgian noblemen are invited to a church gathering in Rome. As for the sphere of work of the Catholic Missions in Georgia, research has shown that as early as in the 14th century bishoprics existed in Tbilisi and Sokhumi as well as in other parts of the Georgian kingdom, such as Achtamar near Lake Van and Ganja episcopates. Among the missionaries working in Georgia it is worth mentioning the minor brothers Jacob and Peter, then their successors Salones and Bartolommeo Porgo, Bishop F. Mori, John of Florence and Pietro Geraldini. Thus, the 14th century is distinguishable in the history of Georgian-Roman (European) relations. However, complicated political situation at the end of the 14th century Georgia made the future of such relations doubtful. In the absence of substantial military support against the external enemy, success of Catholic policy in one of the oldest Christian Orthodox countries was impossible. And the Roman Curia could never provide such assistance to the eastern Christian country.

ისტორია

მე-14 საუკუნეში აღმოსავლეთსა და საქართველოში გამოგზავნილ კათოლიკე მისიონერთა იდენტობისა და სამოღვაწეო ასპარეზის დაზუსტებისთვის

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(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის კ. ფიცხელაურის მიერ)

სტატიაში განხილულია მე-14 საუკუნეში აღმოსავლეთის მისიებში საქართველოს ჩართულობა. რაც შეეხება საქართველოში კათოლიკური მისიის მოღვაწეობის არეალს, კვლევებმა გვიჩვენა, რომ უკვე მე-14 საუკუნეში თბილისსა და სოხუმში, ასევე ამ პერიოდში საქართველოს სამეფოს შემადგენლობაში შემაჯალ ტერიტორიებზეც — ახთამარის (ვანის ტბასთან) და განძის საეპისკოპოსოები არსებობდა.

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