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FOR THE FLORUIT OF TSKIR AND EZRA, BISHOPS OF ANCHA

Ancha was a theological and cultural centre in Klarjeti. Bishops of Ancha actively participated in the political and cultural life of Georgia. According to historical sources, there are fourteen prominent bishops. The purpose of this study is to determine the floruit of two bishops from the episcopacy of Ancha.

KEYWORDS: Ancha, Ezra, Tskir, Ashot Kourapalates, Prince of Princes Bagrat.

Ancha was one of the most important episcopal centres in Tao-Klarjeti region. The Ancha Cathedral is located in historical Klarjeti, Artvini region, village Ancha in Artanuji district (Artvin İli, Ardanuç İlçe, İncilli köyü), to the north-west of the village, in 600m from the village, on the left side of the Samtskari river (Tao-Klarjeti Catalogue 2017, 128).

We infer firstly about the Ancha episcopacy from the *Vita of Grigol of Khandzta*. We read in the writing that the Ancha Church had a long history and many miraculous bishops: „დალაცათუ ფრიად ურიცხუნი ჟამნი ჰქონან საყდარსა მას ანჩისასა უწინარეს აღშენებისანი და ეპისკოპოსნიცა მრავალნი კეთილად სასწაულთა მოქმედნი ყოფილ არიან“ (Merchule 1963, 303). According to this passage of the *Vita of Grigol Khandzteli*, scientists claim that the Ancha eparchy was founded during the 6th-7th centuries. This date is shared by Pavle Ingorokva (Ingorokva 1954, 377-378), Levan Menabde (Menabde 1962, 436), Vakhtang Jobadze (Jobadze 2007, 70), and Valeri Silogava (Silogava and Shengelia 2006, 46).

The eparchy consisted of Artanuji district, the territory with the Klarjeti monasteries, the Ligani ravine with both sides up to Gonio and the valley of the Phorchiskhevi river. In the historical documents composed during the 16th century the boundaries of the Ancha eparchy is described as the following: “the place is between Khandzta and Opiza. Nagali ravine is beyond this place and it reaches Gonio border”. According to the document,

Ancha bishops are in the 4th place in rank after Matskveri, Kumurdo and Ishkhani among 13 archbishops of Samtskhe-Saatabago (Dolidze 1970, 245).

According to the *Regulations of the Royal Court*, Ancha bishop has a high rank. The document states that during the receptions at the court the bishops of Ishkhani, Matskveri, Ancha, Tbeti and Golgotha rendered homage to the King and they took their seats, „მათ, რა ეთაყვანენ ჴელნი მეფემან ნობთა ზედა დასხნეს“. Ancha bishop is mentioned in the 3rd place among other 5 invited bishops (Takaishvili 1920, 14).

The Vita has preserved some information about five bishops of Ancha – Tskir, Zaharia, Makar, Ezra and one more bishop whom Giorgi Merchule does not name. In this paper, I will endeavour to determine the floruit of Ezra and Tskir.

TSKIR

Giorgi Merchule tells us that deacon Tskir when visiting Artanuji for a diplomatic mission, the royal residence of Ashot Kourapaletes, found out that the bishop's post was free due to the bishop's death. After that, Tskir demanded from Ashot the Ancha Cathedral with the help of Emir Sahaq. Tskir conquered Ancha and committed many crimes. Merchule points out: „მძლავრებით დაიპყრო ანჩი... შესძინა ძვრი ძვრსა მისსა ზედა მრავალი... მოჴსენებად ამას წიგნსა შინა არა ჴერ-არს შთანერად ყოველი“ - concludes the author.

Tskir's behaviour was condemned by Grigol and other saint fathers lawfully criticizing him all the time. They jointly addressed Ashot Kourapaletes and under his order sent a letter to the catholicos of Kartli. The fathers called a meeting and invited all hermits. The council put Tskir under an interdict.

However, it was not enough to topple Tskir. Excommunicated Tskir went to his patron Emir Sahaq. Ashot avoided to provoke Sahaq and Tskir again seized the Ancha Church. Now his aim was to take vengeance on Father Grigol.

Tskir gathered people from Ancha and sent to despoil Khandzta. Grigol Khandzteli ask for some time to give a prayer. God heard his entreaty and plea for help. An angel told them that a “preacher” would come and let them know about Tskir's death, „დაღაცათუ ორ დღე ცოცხალ ამისათჴს არს, რადთა ვერ ღირს იქმნეს დამარხვად საყდარსა საეპიკოპოსოსა, და ყოველთა ჰრწმენეს განკუეთად მისი, ხოლო გული მისი აწვე მომუკვდარ არს“. When Tskir sent his people to Khandzta, he himself went to Korta. Tskir passed away in Korta and he was buried there (Merchule 1963, 305-307).

To Valeri Sologava and Anri Bogveradze, Tskir must have been the bish-

op of Ancha during the 840s CE. As mentioned above, Tskir was Emir Sahaq's and Ashot Kourapalates' contemporary. Nevertheless, to one part of researchers this fact is irrelevant. Ivane Javakhishvili was the first who paid attention to this circumstance pointing out that there was a mistake made in the *Vita of Grigol Khandzteli*, the author either erred in the name of Tbilisi Emir or the name of Kourapalates (Javakhishvili 1945, 123).

Korneli Kekelidze explained this fact by changing the date of Ashot's death. He concurred with the view which was asserting that Emri Sahaq was appointed as the Emir of Tbilisi in 830 CE:

“Thus, before 830 CE, when Sahaq becomes the Emir of Tbilisi, Ashot's death is not assumed... Due to all viewpoints, we should say that in Sumbat's chronicle a letter denoting ten years is damaged and replaced in მვ. Here ნ instead of მ can be assumed. Therefore, ნვ rather than მვ in “koronikon” (a Christian 532-year cycle) must be the date of Ashot's death, i.e. 836 CE” (Kekelidze 1935, 103).

Simon Janashia dated the story of Tskir to the 820s CE. He points out: “This event took place during the 820s when Arabs were already weakened in Kartli (Janashia 1936, 67).

Tamar Lomouri emphasized one fact from the *Vita of Grigol Khandzteli*: „ხოლო უწესობად მისი მრავალგზის ემხილა წმიდათა მათ პირველთა კლარჯეთისა მეუდაბნოეთაგან მამათა და ყოველთა მათგან სამწყსოთა კათოლიკე ეკლესიისათა, უფროდს ხოლო მამისა გრიგოლისგან, რამეთუ არქიმანდრიტი იყო იგი დიდებულთა მათ უდაბნოთა” (Merchule 1963, 305). As is known, Grigol received the rank of archimandrite during the time of Ashot's heirs. Correspondingly, Lomouri supposed that Tskir conquered the Ancha Church during the reign of Bagrat Kourapalates rather than that of Ashot. The researcher explained the fact of confusing the name of historical figures in the chronicle by means of the statement that a copyist or a person who informed Giorgi Mechule about this story provided false information (Lomouri 1925, 55-56).

Tamar Lomouri's view was shared by Anri Bogveradze. He substituted each part naming Ashot Kourapalates by Bagrat Kourapalates: “this relationship between Emir and Kourapalates is imposed upon Bagrat... Bishop Zakaria died during Tskir's journey. The ambitious deacon demanded from Bagrat the Ancha Cathedral with the help of Emir Sahaq”. Hence, Anri Bogveradze assumes that Tskir was the bishop of Ancha during the 840s CE (Bogveradze 1970, 136).

Tskir must have been the bishop of Ancha during the reign of Ashot Kourapalates. First of all, I touch upon the chronology of Emir Sahaq. In 214/829-830 CE, Emir Sahaq's earliest date was given in the history written

by Yaqub. According to Yaqub, caliph Al-Mamuni's trustee Hasan ibn Ali al-Bazagisi appointed in Armenia demands from Ishaq ibn Ismail at-Taflisi to pay tribute who disobeys the trustee and misappropriates the tribute. Already during 829-830, Sahaq disobeys the caliph, sends no tribute to the Emirate and keeps it. It is evident that Sahaq is the Emir of Tbilisi from 829 CE (Sikharulidze 1976, 139-142).

One passage from an Arabic chronicle that belongs to a 9th century author¹ is preserved in a 17th century piece of work written by Munejim-bashi. V. Minorskii, a researcher and editor of this chronicle, calls the author of the chronicle conventionally "Tarih Bab al-Abwabi". According to the source, Sahaq must have been appointed as Emir of Tbilisi earlier than 829-830 CE. "the defiance (he did not obey the Caliphate) of Ishaq ibn Ismail ibn Shukaib (Sahak) continued over 35 years up until his death. Due to his disobedience, his sons lost the kingdom". Eter Sikharulidze writes:

"We know well the date of Sahaq's death – 853 CE. And if his defiance lasted for 35 years, he must have been appointed as Emir of Tbilisi not later than in 817. Approximately from that time he started to strive for independence. Hence, the evidence of relationship between Ashot Kourapalates and Sahaq causes no doubt. In Georgian historiography, Sahaq's and Ashot Kourapalates' link is considered suspicious because the date of Ashot's death 826 CE and the date of Sahaq's appointment in 831or 842 do not correspond to each other" (Sikharulidze, 1976, 139-142).

It is unknown when Emir Sahaq fell from power. Gocha Japaridze assumes that Sahaq was appointed again as Emir in 832 (Japaridze 2014, 18).

I think that the date of Ashot Kourapalates's death given by Sumbat Davitis Dze cannot be reconsidered, as the reliability of the source is proved also by other sources. According to the chronicler, Ashot II, also known as Ashot IV Kourapalates died in 954 CE. The reliability of Ashot's death date is proved by an Asomtavruli inscription revealed in village Meredis, Erzurum, Republic of Turkey, historical Tao, in 2017. The inscription mentions the day and year of Ashot's death (Jojua 2018, 103-104).

Taking into consideration the regnal years of Ashot Kourapalates and Emir Sahaq, we can assume that Tskir was the Ancha bishop in the 810s CE.

¹ The author of the chronicle must be Shaikh Abu Abd Allah Mamus ibn al-Hasan ibn Muhamed al Laqzi ad Darbandi (died in 504/1110). The identification of the author belongs to A. Alikberov, a Dagestani historian. Gocha Japaridze, taking into account the Arabic source, states that Sahaq became Emir first time in 818 CE. However, it is unknown when he lost power. The researcher also points out that Sahaq was appointed again as Emir in 832 (Japaridze 2014, 17-18).

An inscription on one of the stelae in St. Mary Church in village Davati mentions Tskir. Valeri Silogava copied the inscription „მე, ცქირი შემ(ი) წ[ყალუ...]“. (Silogava 1999, 48). He assumed that Tskir in the Davati inscription and Bishop Tskir of Ancha are one and the same person (Silogava and Shengelia 2006, 55).

EZRA OF ANCHA

Giorgi Merchule writes about Ezra of Ancha the following:

„ხოლო უკუანადსკნედთა ამათა ჟამთა ჩუენთა გდახაკნი იხაიებენ მადრითა უფრისადთა, ოხითა საუკუნითგან წმიდათადთა და წოხცივიდად მოღუაწებითა მეფეთა ჩუენთა დიდებურთადთა, რომედნი იყვნეს კეთილად ღმითისმსახუხ, წმიდათა ეკდესიათა აღმაშენებედ, ბახბახობთა ბანაკსა დამახლუევედ, ჭეშმახიგთა ქჩისტვანეთა სიქადედ და მოწესეთა სიხაჲედ, რომედთა შოხის იპოვა ძმ დიდისა ადახნეხსე კუხაპადატისად, ბაგხატ ეხისთავთაეხისთავი, ძადრითა ღმითისადთა დიდი ჴედმწიფც, ეზხაჲ ზე, ღიხისისა ანჩედ მამათ-მთავისისა ეპისკოპოსისისა, დიდებურთა აზნაუხთა დაფანჩუდთა შვირისა“ (Merchule 1963, 307).

According to the *Vita of Grigol Khandzteli*, Ezra I of Ancha represents the Dapanchuli noble family. The Dapanchuli family was one of the powerful feudal houses in Georgia.

Ezra of Ancha is considered the author of a 20th January chant of Eptvime of Palestine included in the *Iadgari* by Mikael Modrekili (Kekelidze 1980, 177). He was the contemporary of Adarnase Kourapalates' son Prince of Princes Bagrat.

Valeri Silogava dates Ezra's floruit to the 930s-940s CE because under Price of Princes Bagrat he means Adarnase II, son of the King of the Georgians. Nevertheless, having scrutinized various sources on this issue, I would like to express an different viewpoint (Silogava and Shengelia 2006, 56).

There are two Adarnase Kourapalates who had sons named Bagrat mentioned in the *Chronicle* by Sumbat Davitis Dze: King of the Georgians Adarnase II and Adarnase III Kourapales, father of David III Kourapalates (Sumbat Davitis Dze 2008, 368-369).

So far, we have not found any source that would verify the activity of Price of Princes Bagrat, son of the King of the Georgians Adarnase II. According to Ishkhani inscriptions, Bagrat held the title of King of the Georgians between 937-945 (Takaishvili 1960, 22), whereas he is referred to as

only Magistros in the *Chronicle* by Sumbat Davitis Dze, in the *Vita of Grigol Khandzteli* and by Constantine Porphyrogenitus (Sumbat Davitis Dze 2008, 368; Merchule 1963, 316; Kaukhchishvili 1952, 269, 271). Vakhushti Batonishvili remarks that Bagrat had the title of Kourapalates together with title of Magistros (Batonishvili 1979, 699).

According to Sumbat Davitis Dze, his contemporary Great Prince of Princes Gurgen received this title in 918 CE after Ashot Kukhi's death. The same source states that Gurgen died on the 14th of February 914 CE (Sumbat Davitis Dze 2008, 368). As Anri Bogveradze points out, it can be assumed that after Gurgen's death Sumbat, son of Adarnase II was assigned as Prince of Princes. During the writing of the *Vita of Grigol Khandzteli*, that is, in 951 CE Sumbat possessed the title of Prince of Princes (Merchule 1963, 316). Furthermore, it is worthwhile to note that within the Bagrationi house different persons never held one and the same title at a time that must have been one of the signs of their collective governance (Bogveradze 1993, 22, 32).

Taking into account the floruit of Prince of Princes Bagrat, son of Adarnase III Kourapalates, we can date Ezra's activities in the Ancha eparchy back to the 960s CE.

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