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AN IMPORTANT ACQUISITION OF GEORGIAN HISTORICAL SCIENCE

BOOK REVIEW: K. SURGULADZE, I. BARAMIDZE, KH. DIASAMIDZE, T. KOPALEISHVILI. CATHOLICISM AND CATHOLICS IN GEORGIA IN THE 19TH-21ST CENTURIES. (HISTORY, CULTURE, MODERNITY). PUBLISHING HOUSE “UNIVERSAL”, TBILISI, 2022

The relations between Georgia and the Roman Catholic Church go back centuries, which is a very interesting and important event in the history of our country.

The study of these relations also has a long history, which is closely related to Georgian historical science and is an integral part of it. Important monographs were written in this direction, candidate and doctoral dissertations were defended, scientific or scientific-popular papers were published. Interesting archival documents and materials have been published with appropriate academic commentary.

Despite this, this does not mean that there is no potential for continuing scientific research in this direction. We find it quite logical to have a new understanding of the materials that existed so far. In addition, many interesting and important hitherto unknown historical sources are still waiting to be discovered and brought into scientific circulation.

As we mentioned above, much has been written in Georgian historical science about the relations between the Georgian and Catholic worlds, however, these studies left us with a kind of feeling of failure, because the vast majority of works were written and still are written about the history of the 13th-18th centuries, therefore, the history of the 19th-20th centuries remained unnoticed by scientists, which is in no way inferior to the previous period in its diversity and significance.

To fill this vacuum, the aim is to fill the vacuum: a joint monograph study “Catholicism and Catholics in Georgia in the 19th-21st centuries” written by professors of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (Kakhaber

Surguladze, Irakli Baramidze, Khatuna Diasamidze, Tatiana Kopaleishvili). (History, Culture, Modernity, which was published in 2022 and prepared within the framework of the project of the same name [FR17-416] funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia.

The work highlights some very interesting passages. Initially, in the first part of the book, the authors discuss such an important issue as the terminology of Catholics in Georgian historical literature, where they talk about how this issue was reflected in our national literature, how the terms related to the Catholic world were introduced into the Georgian reality and what features it was distinguished by, which was a reflection of the authors' fair conclusion of the corresponding historical thinking of the epoch (p. 13).

In the next section of the work, the issue of the origins of Georgia's relations with the Catholic world is discussed, where, like the esteemed authors of the review book of Georgian historiography (M. Tamarashvili, M. Papashvili), start these relations from the 6th century, but they take a cautious and critical approach to the existing sources. The same attitude can be seen regarding Giorgi Mtatsmindeli's affiliation with the Catholic world, which causes differences of opinion in Georgian historical science.

Due to the importance of the issue, the authors paid special attention to the study of the era of Catholicism in Georgia during the era of George the Brunswick, where the opinion of the Georgian scientist, Nugzar Papuashvili, about the transfer of the episcopal cathedra of Catholics from the city of Smyrna to Tbilisi in 1329, is revised, the reason for which the author cites the existence of a revived country, which the authors of our review work thoroughly criticize and talk about its groundlessness. In this passage, the opinion of Mikael Tamarashvili, who speaks about the particularly successful spread of Catholicism in Georgia in the 14th century, is also rightly criticized, except for one reference to the correct conclusion of the authors of the review book: "Nothing else is documented in the specified book, therefore we have no basis for drawing far-reaching conclusions" (p. 28).

A separate section in the book is devoted to the history of Catholicism in Georgia in the 15th-18th centuries, where it talks about the activities of Catholic missionaries in our country during this period, their relations with representatives of the royal authorities, and their specific goals and objectives.

The situation of Georgian Catholics in the 19th and early 20th centuries is set aside as an extraordinary section, which our esteemed authors begin to discuss by analyzing the attitudes of Erekle II and George XII. This is a perfectly correct and logical approach. It is interesting to show what has changed in Georgia after the Russian domination, when the tsarist Russian authorities declared an active struggle against the representa-

tives of the Catholic Church. In this episode of the work, the evolution that Russian rule had towards the Catholic world is clearly visible, which found concrete expression in our country as well.

The next chapter of the paper is “The Role of Georgian Catholics in the Georgian Economy and Culture”, which discusses the large-scale charity of the Zubalashvili brothers and their role in the financial promotion of the country. Special attention is paid to the multifaceted cultural work of Ivane Gvaramadze and the important scientific work of historian Mikheil Tamarashvili, who played a special role in the development of Georgian historiography, introducing previously unknown historical material, which further broadened our perspective and gave us the opportunity to see many things in a different way.

Especially interesting is the section of the work dedicated to the Georgian Catholic figure Shalva Vardidze. The authors of the review book refer to him as a “forgotten hero”, and this is also true, because we only had information about this person. The authors of this book added interesting documents to the existing material and presented a person who fought and strived for the revival of the Georgian cause throughout his life, no matter where he was in the world. Shalva Vardidze really deserved and deserves to be appreciated, therefore, his inclusion in this book should be evaluated as a particularly positive moment.

The authors of the book focus on the history of the Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in Batumi, this temple has not become the object of extraordinary scientific research until now, as far as we know, and this time the history of its establishment is told in an interesting way, the reasoning is based on important hitherto unknown sources, and the conclusions and assessments are accordingly convincing.

The monograph pays due attention to the Georgian Catholic Sanctuary of Constantinople (Istanbul), which for many decades played a crucial role in the cultural and political development of Georgia.¹ As the authors of the review book inform, their “present publication is one of the attempts to gather the materials around the savannah in one space in historiography” (p. 124), which should be said to be quite interesting. It would just be desirable for the authors to discuss the important and interesting monograph of Doctor of Philological Sciences, Professor Avtandil Nikoleish-

¹ * It should be noted that in 2017-2024, the Georgian scientific community received the first, second and third volumes of the excellent book “Letters from the Georgian Savannah of Istanbul”, edited by historian Dr. Roin Malakmadze, published by the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University under the editorship of Dr. Roin Malakmadze, where highly interesting and important documentary material is printed. We have already dedicated an extraordinary letter to this publication, so we will not dwell on it in detail now, we will only say that this three-volume book can really be called epochal due to its importance and scale

voli "The Hub of Georgian Culture and Georgians in Turkey", where it is very interesting on this issue. Opinions are expressed. Here is a detailed discussion of the activities of the mentioned monastery in 1918-21. The authors' reasoning in the book contains scientific innovations, which is highly welcome.

The book focuses on the situation of Georgian Catholics in Soviet Georgia, focusing on religious politics, repression, and terror. In Georgian historiography in general, when it comes to Soviet atheist policy, special attention is paid to its repressive attitude towards the Orthodox Church, this approach is easily explained, the communist regime touched it with special cruelty, but this does not mean that the religious minorities in Georgia were in a state of despair, it is necessary to analyze their situation. That is why the authors' decision to study this issue is welcome. It would simply be desirable for the authors to characterize how religious policy towards the Catholic Church changed during the Soviet period and how all this affected the situation of Georgian Catholics.

The last chapter of the paper is "Relations between the Roman Catholic Church and Georgia at the Turn of the 20th-21st Centuries", which discusses the relationship that developed in the post-Soviet period. The authors begin their discussion in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, when the warming of relations becomes evident in the conditions of the Cold War, and the relations between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church become closer. It is also worth mentioning that the Vatican was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Georgia in 1992. We are talking about the visits of Popes John Paul II and Francis to Georgia in 1999 and 2016, respectively, and the educational policy pursued by the Vatican Representation in our country. All this is very good, but it would be desirable if the authors paid attention to the fact that during the reign of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, on May 13-16, 1991, a delegation led by Archbishop Francesco Colasau visited Georgia, which met with the First President of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of All Georgia, which was touched upon by the article "Relations between Georgia and the Vatican in the 1990s" by TSU doctoral student Giorgi Butskhrikidze. At the Beginning of the Years", which was published in the collection "Zviad Gamsakhurdia: Politics, Science, Literature" (Tbilisi, 2020).

It should also be noted that the work is accompanied by extensive annotations in English (pp. 335-391), which gives foreign readers interested in the subject the opportunity to present research in this direction, which should be of great scientific and cognitive importance, especially at the modern stage, when we should pay special attention to the coverage of the history of our country on an international scale.

We also consider it an important fact that the authors dedicated

the monograph to the memory of the outstanding Georgian public figure, philanthropist and versatile personality – Pavle Zazadze.

In conclusion, we would like to note in the form of an additional note, which is of the nature of a desire only, that we think it would be good if respected authors summarized their research in the form of a conclusion at the end of the paper. In addition, the book would win if it was accompanied by searches for persons and geographical names, which would make it somewhat easier for the reader to find the information they want.

Nevertheless, the wishes mentioned in the review do not completely detract from the important work done by the collective of authors (Kakhaber Surguladze, Irakli Baramidze, Khatuna Diasamidze, Tatyana Kopaleishvili). It is quite obvious that important research has been carried out, which we are sure will give impetus to the activation and deepening of research in these directions, and this book will remain a work that cannot be bypassed by the scientific or general readership interested in the issue.