

**“IVIRON OF ATHOS” – THE OBJECT OF CONFLICT BETWEEN
RUSSIAN AND GREEK CHURCHES AND THE STRUGGLE OF
GEORGIANS FOR PRESERVATION OF IVIRON (XIX CENTURY)**

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Abstract. Since the Middle Ages, Georgia was in a very close political-cultural cooperation with Byzantium, what made Georgia to be in touch with the world’s Christian center of that time - Constantinople. The manifestation of this relationship was “Iviron” of Athos [Khintibidze, 1969:27-31]. From the end of 18th century, religious-political interests of Greece and Russia had collided and “Iviron” of Athos became the subject of these interests. From the beginning of 19th century, for Russia, “Iviron” would had become a guide of Russian Orthodoxy, its cultural and political orientation in Europe.

During the Russian tsarism in Georgia, Georgian Church used to experience the most difficult processes: the abolition of autocephaly, the struggle with national self-consciousness, russification of churches and monasteries. In such circumstances, Georgian cultural centers abroad appeared in a difficult situation. From the beginning of 19th century, Georgian monasteries found themselves under pressure of Greek clergy and “Iviron” as well faced a danger from the latter. Greek and Russian Churches both began striving for incorporation of “Iviron” to them, so confrontation between them became critical. In the end, Greek Church won this “battle”. Throughout the 19th century, both sides were trying to gain control over “Iviron” using different meth, in the second half of 19th century, the struggle of the fathers of “Iviron” for the restoration of the rights over Georgian monastery on Mount Athos took place against the background of the political-religious aggression of the Russian Empire, what was really a struggle between the churches of Greece and Russia. Its first stage ended with the victory of Russia; Russia took away “Iviron” from Greeks. With the above, Russia has solved two

problems simultaneously: 1. “sheltered” Georgian monks, persecuted by Greeks and enrolled them in “Rusik” brotherhood; 2. established the so-called “New Athos” In Abkhazia, thereby strengthening its positions in the Caucasus. At the beginning of 20th century, the situation changed radically due to Russian February Revolution; the Menshevik government of Georgia did not have enough strength to return “Ivion”; And, if before, Greek clergy was not able to fully master “Ivion”, the current unrest in Russia gave them the opportunity to gain full domination over the monastery, what they did without wasting time as soon as the last Georgian monk of “Ivion” died.

Keywords: *“Ivion”, Monastery, Russia, Holy Mount Athos, “Rusik”.*

Historically, Georgian cloister – “Ivion” used to play a great role in Christianization of Russian principalities (XI century). From the time of establishing of centralized Russian State (XV century), it became an object of political and religious interests of the latter, what collided with that time interests of Greece and became a subject of intense controversy between these two entities [Pavliashvili, 2008:417-421; Natroev, 1910:12-14].

Since the Middle Ages, Georgia was in a very close political-cultural cooperation with Byzantium, what made Georgia to be in touch with the world’s Christian center of that time - Constantinople. The manifestation of this relationship was “Ivion” of Athos [Khintibidze, 1969:27-31]. From the end of 18th century, religious-political interests of Greece and Russia had collided and “Ivion” of Athos became the subject of these interests. From the beginning of 19th century, for Russia, “Ivion” would had become a guide of Russian Orthodoxy, its cultural and political orientation in Europe [Uspenski,1892:110-116; Russki, 1886:7-11].

During the Russian tsarism in Georgia, Georgian Church used to experience the most difficult processes: the abolition of autocephaly, the struggle with national self-consciousness, russification of churches and monasteries. In such circumstances, Georgian cultural centers abroad appeared in a difficult situation. From the beginning of 19th century, Georgian monasteries found themselves under pressure of Greek clergy and “Ivion” as well faced a danger from the latter. Greek and Russian Churches both began striving for incorporation of “Ivion” to them, so confrontation between them became critical. In the end, Greek Church won this “battle”. Throughout the 19th century, both sides were trying to gain control over “Ivion” using different methods [Pavliashvili, 2008:710].

Immediately after gaining domination over Georgia, Russia was trying to acquire an international image of the “protector” of Georgian churches and monasteries, including “Ivion”; however, due to the ongoing tension in the Caucasus and the Middle East in 1960s-

1960s (the struggle of the Caucasian mountaineers against Russian domination, under the leadership of Shamil) it had no time for “Ivion”, and this opportunity was being seized by Greek monks, who were trying their best to gain domination over Georgian cloister. Initially, they demoted clerical ranks of Georgian clergy and changed the typicon of the monastery; next, Georgian monks have been completely expelled from the monastery, with only the Church named after the Mother of God left to them. After this event, Georgians actually lost their authority over the monastery, but legally they were still considered the owners of “Ivion”, and Greeks were fighting to deprive Georgians from this right as well. The exiled Ivionians found refuge in the cell of St. Elia; They were left with the right to a small part of the monastery's income and to conduct religious services in the church of Portaitissa. In 60s of the 19th century, Georgian monks came up with the idea of establishing a new monastery, which brought the Georgian-Greek conflict into a new phase and gave it the most acute character. Russia immediately joined this battle. Greek Church was well aware of Russia's religious policy towards Georgian Church, its interest in Georgian monasteries abroad and on domination of Eastern Christian world in general. It was from this time that the struggle between Greek and Russian churches began, what was revealed in the conflict of 50s of XIX century, when number of Russian monks in “Rusik” (the Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon on Athos) increased significantly. Russian monastery was ideologically and financially being supported by influential state officials and businessmen. It should be noted that Russian monks from Athos were trying to get support from the exiled Georgian nuns, deepening religious-political cooperation with them. Georgian monk Hilarion, the archimandrite of St. George monastery, who had a connection with a superior of “Rusik” - Father Hieronymus, was particularly active in this regard [Pavliashvili, 2008:375-378; Natroev, 1913:120-124].

Russian politics on Athos is divided in two periods: the first period covers 70s of the 19th century, characterized by difficult internal and external events for the Russian Empire. The results of Russian-Turkish war (1877-1878) also affected the religious realm, what developed into the so-called “Greek-Russian Panteleimon Trial”. This struggle moved to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and was being actively discussed in the church councils of Constantinople. Russian orientation of “Ivion” was of great importance in ending this process in favor of Russia, for which the Russian bishops of Athos not spared themselves. In 1875, the superior of “Rusik”, Hieronymus, was informing a monk Macarius, sent to Constantinople to attend the “Panteleimon Trial”, that “Iverians” were on their (Russians) side. For Georgians, who were needy on Athos, financial assistance was given in exchange for Russian orientation. In addition, it was “Rusik” that provided financial assistance to Georgians in the construction of a new monastery on Mount Athos [Velikaia, 2002:7800-792].

From 80s of 19th century, Russia's policy towards “Ivion” has changed. The completion of “Panteleimon Trial” in favor of Russia cleared the way for Russia for the possession of “Ivion”. Simultaneously, Russia is starting to build a new Athos Lavra on the site of the Simon the Canaanite Monastery in order to put down roots in Abkhazia and to defend itself from a new aggression of Greeks on Mount Athos. The new monastery was supposed to function as a branch of Athos “Rusik” in the Caucasus; That is why it was called “New Athos” [Kaliga, 1897:161-168; Kostomorov, 1992:342-347; Sbornik, 1847:237-240].

Despite the difficult political circumstances, Georgian clergy of “Ivion” did not stop fighting for returning the legal right over the monastery. Georgian society was also actively involved in this struggle, among which the great figures of the second half of 19th century have been distinguished by their special activity - father Benedict (Barkalaya), the superior of the Lavra named after John the Theologian and priest Mikheil Sabinin [Pavliashvili, 2008:123-127].

Father Benedict (Vakhtang (Vakha) Barkalaya) became acquainted with Georgian monks of Athos in 50s of 19th century, while participating in the expedition of Russian army there. He was ordained by Gabriel (Kikodze), the bishop of Imereti. Father Benedict set the same goal of restoring the monastery of John the Theologian on Mount Athos, what was supported by Georgian community. In 1869, with the donations (3,000 rubles) collected in Western Georgia, Father Benedict together with 12 Georgian monks from Athos started the hardest fight for the permission to build a new Lavra. The activation of Georgians on Athos was followed by harassment from the side of Greek monks. According to historical sources, in 80s, only three monks out of 40 monks remained in “Ivion”: 80-year-old schema monk Bessarion (Kikodze), 65-year-old Christopher (Akhvlediani), brother of Gaenati monastery archimandrite and 65-year-old schema monk Grigol (Ratiani). Donations issued for their help had been appropriated by Greek monks. When Greeks claimed the newly built monastery, Georgian monks became even more active. Benedict, the superior of the monastery, appealed to Russian ambassador in Constantinople and to Georgian community for help. On May 22, 1879, the assembly of nobles of Kutaisi province decided to appeal to Russian government to return “Ivion” to Georgian brotherhood. A similar decision was made by the meeting of Tbilisi nobility. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Empire did not satisfy the request of Georgian nobility, referring to the fact that it could no longer provide official patronage for monks and citizens of the Empire working abroad [newspaper Droeba, 1882, 1884, 1886, 1891, 1896, 1902, 1904]. Ambassador of Constantinople Novikov called Georgian monks to cooperate with Greeks and to give part of the donations made for the construction of the monastery of John the Theologian to Russian monastery of the same name. In fact, Novikov believed that in order Georgian monks to obey

Russian Church, it was necessary to stop the donations from the empire to “Ivion” [newspaper Peterburgskia, 1885:#191; Gaz.Novoe, 1884:#2892]. Novikov's project was approved by the government, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Lobanov-Rostovsky was instructed not to satisfy the request of the Georgians [Sbornik, 1874:212].

From 80s of 19th century, the priest Mikheil Sabinin was involved in the fight for “Ivion”, as can be seen in his letters to Father Benedict. In 1881, Sabinin met the emperor and asked for help [archive of manuscripts]. In this case, the emperor granted Sabinin the status of a legal entity for negotiations with the imperial authorities, but his negotiations did not lead to any results, only temporarily alleviated the situation of Georgians on the holy mount; in particular, it was several financial assistance to the monks, thus extended their work on Athos for a while. Frustrated by the empire's government, Sabinin thought that the only way to return “Ivion” to Georgians was to increase the number of Georgian monks on Mount Athos [newspaper Mtskemi, 1884:1884,1886,1892,1895]. Therefore, he advised father Benedict to open a theological school near the small monastery, where a new generation of Iverians would have been educated. Due to the difficult situation of Georgia, it became increasingly impossible to send a new generation of monks to Mount Athos, and the establishment of schools was impossible due to aggression from Greek monks [archive of Kutaisi]. Thus, in the second half of 19th century, the struggle of the fathers of “Ivion” for the restoration of the rights over Georgian monastery on Mount Athos took place against the background of the political-religious aggression of the Russian Empire, what was really a struggle between the churches of Greece and Russia. Its first stage ended with the victory of Russia; Russia took away “Ivion” from Greeks. With the above, Russia has solved two problems simultaneously: 1. “sheltered” Georgian monks, persecuted by Greeks and enrolled them in “Rusik” brotherhood; 2. established the so-called “New Athos” In Abkhazia, thereby strengthening its positions in the Caucasus. At the beginning of 20th century, the situation changed radically due to Russian February Revolution; the Menshevik government of Georgia did not have enough strength to return “Ivion”; And, if before, Greek clergy was not able to fully master “Ivion”, the current unrest in Russia gave them the opportunity to gain full domination over the monastery, what they did without wasting time as soon as the last Georgian monk of “Ivion” died.

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ათონის „ივირონი“-რუსულ-ბერძნული ეკლესიების
კონფლიქტის ობიექტი და ქართველთა ბრძოლა „ივირონის“
შენარჩუნებისათვის (XIX ს)

ქეთევან პავლიაშვილი ისტორიის მეცნიერებათა დოქტორი, ცხუმ-
აფხაზეთის მეცნიერებათა აკადემიის აკადემიკოსი,
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ნეობის ინსტიტუტმა*

აბსტრაქტი. უკანასკნელი ათწლეულის მანძილზე, „სადაო ეკლესიების“
საკითხმა უაღრესად აქტუალური ხასიათი შეიძინა და მართლმადიდებლურ
სამყაროში ეკლესიათშორის ურთიერთობას დამაბულობა შემატა; ამჟამად
გამოიკვეთა სქიზმის საშიშროება, რაც განპირობებულია საეკლესიო საზღვრების
ხელახალი გადანაწილებით.

საბჭოთა იმპერიის დაშლას მოჰყვა ერთა თვითგამორკვევის პროცესში
გაღვივებული სეპარატიზმი და საეკლესიო საზღვრების ხელახალი გადანაწილების
ამბიცი, რაც გამოვლინდა ცალკეული ეპარქიების ავტოკეფალიის მოპოვების
სურვილსა და ამ მიმართულებით მეცადინეობაში. საქართველოს მაგალითზე,
აღნიშნულმა თავი იჩინა სოხუმისა და ცხინვალის ეპარქიებში.

აფხაზეთის სამღვდელოებაში ჩამოყალიბდა საეკლესიო დამოუკიდებლობის
ურთიერთგანსხვავებული ფორმის მოთხოვნა: პრობერძნული დაჯგუფება
(არქიმანდრიტი დოროთე დბარი) ითხოვს საეკლესიო ავტოკეფალიას
კონსტანტინოპოლის პატრიარქისაგან და სხვა გზას არაკანონიკურად მიიჩნევს,
ხოლო „აფხაზეთის მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესია“ (არქიმანდრიტი ბესარიონ

აპლია) ითხოვდა ავტონომიის სტატუსს მოსკოვის საპატრიარქოსგან. ავტონომიის სტატუსი აპლიას აზრით საფუძველი გახდება მომავალი ავტოკეფალიისათვის, ე.ი. ფაქტობრივად ითხოვს სოხუმ-ბიჭვინთის ეპარქიის ავტონომიური უფლებით რუსეთის ეკლესიაზე დაქვემდებარებას.

აფხაზეთის ეკლესიაზე მოპოვებული „უფლების“ შენარჩუნებისათვის, მოსკოვის საპატრიარქომ მთელი ძალისხმევა წარმართა მართლმადიდებლურ სამყაროში ისეთი ეკლესიის ძიებისაკენ, რომელიც დაეხმარებოდა აფხაზეთის ეკლესიის პრობლემის მოგვარებაში, ანუ აღიარებდა მის თვითმოწესებებს საეკლესიო წყაროების გათვალისწინებით და ისტორიული გამოცდილებით. ასეთ ეკლესიად მოსკოვის საპატრიარქომ ანტიოქიის ეკლესია შეარჩია.

საქართველოს საპატრიარქო მუდმივ მეთვალყურეობაშია მართლმადიდებელ სამყაროში მიმდინარე მოვლენებზე, მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესიების აფხაზეთის საკითხთან მიდგომაზე. ამ მიმართულებით განვითარებულ მოვლენასა თუ ფაქტს საქართველოს ეკლესია დიდი სიფრთხილით ეკიდება. საქართველოს ეკლესიისათვის ნათელია, რომ აღნიშნული შეხვედრა მართლმადიდებლური სამყაროსათვის რთულ პერიოდში მოხდა, როდესაც უკრაინის ეკლესიის ავტოკეფალიის ცნობამ, სათავე დაუდო საეკლესიო განხეთქილებას; მართლმადიდებლური სამყარო პირობითად გაიყო ორ-რუსულ და ბერძნულ ბანაკებად. ანტიოქიის ეკლესია აღმოჩნდა ე.წ. რუსულ ბანაკში, ქართველ ანალიტიკოსთა ნაწილი ანტიოქიისა და აფხაზეთის პრეზიდენტის შეხვედრას ნეგატიურ შეფასებას აძლევს და მიიჩნევენ, რომ საქართველოს ეკლესიამ ანტიოქიის ეკლესიასთან ევქარისტული კავშირი უნდა გაწყვიტოს; გააკეთოს საჯარო განცხადებები და დაგმოს ანტიოქიის საპატრიარქოს შეჭრის მცდელობები საქართველოს ეკლესიის შიდა საქმეებში: გაკეთდეს საგანგებო მიმართვები მსოფლიო პატრიარქის და სხვა პატრიარქებისადმი ანტიოქიის საპატრიარქოს არამეგობრული და უღირს ქმედებებზე.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: „ივირონი“, მონასტერი, რუსეთი, ათონის წმინდა მთა, „რუსიკი“.