



**“Repressions on Religious Grounds in Soviet Georgia”  
(According to the data of the MIA archive)**

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**Abstract**

The subject of our research is a review of the project of 2022 State Scientific Grant Competition for Fundamental Research (NFR-22-21090) - "Repressions on Religious Grounds in Soviet Georgia (according to the data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs archive)" funded by the "Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia", which is carried out at the initiative of the State Agency for Religious Issues in cooperation with the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia.

The fate of the repressed persons shows the tragic consequences of the Soviet Union's imperial decisions for ordinary people. The issue of Soviet repression is one of the unexplored areas not only in Georgian, but also in the scientific literature of post-Soviet countries. In this regard, the cases of thousands of repressed clerics, preserved in various archives, are particularly interesting. The theme provides coverage of the research carried out by a group of researchers on religious repressions and repressed clerics in Georgia during the Soviet period (1921-1991). After the annexation of Georgia (1921), the "Red

Terror" and pursuing an atheistic religious policy against all denominations operating at that time began actively: hundreds of cult buildings, religious schools were closed, persecution of clerics of Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian-Apostolic, Christian-Protestant, other Christian confessions, as well as Jewish and Islamic communities on religious motives began with special cruelty. Anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary agitation-propaganda and other kinds of accusations were used as the basis for the persecution of clerics. The information about the clerics who were punished by three categories of punishment - shot, imprisoned and exiled - was processed.

A group of researchers participates in the current Project: Zviad Tkabladze (Head of the Project), Giorgi Patashuri (Project Coordinator), Zaza Vashakmadze, Sergo Farulava, Abesalom Aslanidze, Marine Mazmishvili, Davit Davitashvili, Badri Cherkezishvili, Lali Ekhvaia.

**Keywords:** religions; repressions; clergy; Soviet Georgia; archive.

## **Introduction**

This paper is an overview of the project of 2022 for Fundamental Research State Grant (NFR-22-21090) - "Repressions on Religious Grounds in Soviet Georgia (according to the data of the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs)" funded by the "Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia", which is carried out at the initiative of the State Agency for Religious Issues in cooperation with the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia.

The goal of the grant project is to objectively consider such an acute and painful issue. Since fragmentary materials on the problems of Soviet repressions are periodically published in scientific literature and media, the society is faced with an urgent need to investigate the important data stored in the archives about the victims of repressions, which were closed to outside eyes for a long period of time. The

descendants of the repressed, in many cases, still do not know for what reason their ancestor was imprisoned or shot.

Human life is priceless, killing of innocent people is unjustified. Hundreds of thousands of people were shot by the Bolsheviks in one year alone. Anyone could be declared as an enemy of the people: by trumped-up charges, anonymous snitching, or defamation. Therefore, it is our duty to show the stark reality of the Soviet past, the scale of the massive repressions carried out and the moral assessment of these terrible events.

The fate of the repressed shows the tragic consequences of the imperial decisions of the Soviet Union for ordinary people. The issue of Soviet repression is one of the unexplored areas not only in the scientific literature of Georgia, but of post-Soviet countries as well. In this regard, the cases of thousands of repressed clerics, preserved in various archives, are particularly interesting.

### **Method**

The scientific work is based on the theoretical methodology: analysis, synthesis, comparison of the cause-and-effect relationship, searching and processing of various documents in the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (resolutions, data on repressed persons, questionnaires). The research includes the religious affiliation of the person, his/her role in the religious life of that period, the charges brought against him/her, establishing a connection between the accusation and reality based on the interrogation reports, the dates of arrest, trial and punishment, and interesting moments of the life of the repressed clergy. The research of the materials, interrogation protocols, acts, various records in the archive was carried out, the religious affiliation of the object (person) of the Soviet legal persecution and the validity of their religious status were established. By comparing and checking the indictment and other documents, religious motives were revealed in the charges brought against the detained clerics during their arrest, and whether or not the mentioned persons were repressed due to religious charges.

## Result

As a result of working on the research topic, clerics of different denominations repressed in different years under the Soviet rule were revealed, thus once again confirming the colossal scale of repression. The results of the research will be interesting not only from a scientific point of view, but also for raising public awareness of the Soviet repressions. It will also be useful for people interested in Georgian history, religion, or state policy studies. The material to be published as a book, upon completion of the project, will be very difficult to understand emotionally - how people were exiled and shot because they believed in God.

## Discussion

Along with the beginning of the national movement in Georgia, searching and publication of information on repressed persons begins. In recent decades, a number of books about repressed persons have been published in Georgia, although the matter was complicated by the fact that one part of the security archive of Georgia, where these types of materials were mainly kept, was burned during the civil war of 1991-92, the other part was taken to Russia, and the rest of the files are scattered in different archives.

Data on repressed clerics are scattered in this painful, large number of materials, although there are some fundamental studies on famous historical figures.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Junge M., Tushurashvili O., Bonvech B.: *Bolshevik Order in Georgia: Great Terror in a Small Republic of the Caucasus*, Volume I and Volume II, Tbilisi, 2015

Bendeliani M.: *Orthodox Church of Georgia: 30-40s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*. Sukhumi branch of TSU, Tbilisi, 2002

Kartvelishvili M.: *Soviet Religious Policy and Peculiarities of its Reflection in Georgia in 1953-1964*, Tbilisi, 2022

Vardosanidze S.: *Orthodox Apostolic Church of Georgia in 1917-1952*, Tbilisi, 2011

Shervashidze I.: *Soviet Repressions in Adjara in the Context of Political and Cultural Memory*. Doctoral dissertation, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi 2021

Simashvili T.: *Soviet Repressions in Telavi in 1921-1924*; Tbilisi, 2020

Some important works published by the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs:

Monograph "Goodbye Brothers, we're being Shot down Tonight", (published with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung). Tbilisi, 2016

Since the declaration of independence, researchers of religious history of Georgia of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have devoted a lot of work to the theme of Soviet repressions, and for the most part these studies include: a) a general overview of the period of repressions without mentioning religious component; b) the history of any specific religious organization (in most cases, the Georgian Orthodox Church) and researches about outstanding figures (Catholic-Patriarchs - Ambrose, Kyrion and others, as well as other persecuted clergy and laymen); c) any specific period of Soviet repressions (for example: uprising of 1924, the repressions of the 1930s, etc.); d) the history of Soviet repressions in a particular part or city of Georgia and others.

It is interesting to note the merits of the public-political newspaper "Completely Unconcealed" which under the editorship of G. Sanadiradze was published in Tbilisi in 1996-2005 and as soon as the opportunity arose, information about hundreds of repressed people had been published over several years. Later, based on the materials of this newspaper, which were related to Adjara, the book was issued.<sup>36</sup>

Otar Turmanidze dedicated his fundamental work to the issue of the repressed, although, even here, information about the repressed clergy is presented in one section of his monograph, and that too only according to the Adjara region.<sup>37</sup>

"Georgian Association of Forensic Anthropology" and other organizations cooperate with the families of repressed persons and provide invaluable assistance within the scope of their competence.<sup>38</sup> In 2014, the first electronic search-engine database on the repressed was created, including biographical data of more than 3,600 people.<sup>39</sup>

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Various editions of magazine "Archival News", where ecclesiastical topics are presented.

"The Great Terror in Abkhazia (Abkhaz ASSR, 1937-38) three-volume edition (prepared within the framework of the Georgian-Abkhazian joint project), Tbilisi, 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Adjara, the echo of a bitter whirlwind. Tbilisi, 2001

<sup>37</sup> Soviet Regime and Mass Repressions in Adjara (1921-1952). Batumi, 2019, p. 403-418

<sup>38</sup> "Georgian Recovery, Documentation and Identification Project" (GRDIP). "Georgian Association of Forensic Anthropology", 2024. Accessed [17.06.2024]: <http://www.gafa.edu.ge>

This database „Stalin’s lists from Georgia" is about the victims of the "Great Terror" of 1937-1938. The "Institute for Development of Freedom of Information" (IDFI) is currently working on expanding this database and in 2023 created the website of "Stalin’s Lists".<sup>40</sup>

There are, of course, many scientific articles or studies that cover individual episodes and often refer to certain layers of society, regions, only a specific denomination or historical person, etc.

It is known that one of the main directions of bloody terror was religion and the repression of clergy. In fact, all denominations in Georgia, major or minor ones, suffered repressions as a result of which thousands of innocent clerics were shot, sent to prisons and concentration camps.

The main difference between our research and the other works listed above is that the materials presented in it are of an interreligious nature and comprehensively refer to all confessions and religious denominations represented in Georgia. In the various publications we verified, the issue of repression of the representatives of different denominations is not presented together anywhere.

Therefore, the State Agency for Religious Issues came up with the idea, in cooperation with the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, to thoroughly study and analyze the information about the repressions against clergymen of different confessions in Georgia during the Soviet period, and based on the archival materials preserved in the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (at the end of the project), to publish a large-scale work.

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<sup>39</sup> The project "Stalin’s Lists from Georgia" was implemented in 2011-2013 by the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) in cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the International Society "Memorial" and with the financial support of the South Caucasus Regional Bureau of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung and the Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia. See. Accessed [17.06.2024]: <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/gwdict/index.php?a=index&d=26>

<sup>40</sup> "Stalin’s Lists". Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), 2024; Accessed [17.06.2024]:<https://stalin.historyproject.ge/about>

It should be said that the materials about repressed persons are mainly collected in this archive. Moreover, the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs has been working for years on the decoding, digital processing and sorting of the materials at its disposal.

The project envisages the study of the facts of religious repression in Georgia during the Soviet period (1921-1991) and the identification of repressed clergymen. After the annexation of Georgia (1921), the "Red Terror" and the atheistic religious policy against all denominations operating at that time began to be actively carried out: hundreds of cult buildings, religious schools were closed, persecution of clerics of Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian-Apostolic, Christian-Protestant, other Christian confessions, as well as Jewish and Islamic communities, on religious motives began with special cruelty. Anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary agitation-propaganda and other kinds of accusations were used as the basis for the persecution of clerics.

While working on the paper, the information about the clerics who were punished by three categories of punishment - shot, sentenced to imprisonment and exiled - was processed.

It should be said from the beginning that working on archival materials about repressed persons is an enviable task, at the same time it requires the greatest responsibility and is the most difficult in its essence. The fact is that archival materials rarely contain information about a person's conviction for religious activities.

Below there are the articles of the Criminal Code of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia that deal with religious issues and the articles according to which the clergy were tried.

Clergymen were tried mainly under the Article 58-10 (propaganda or agitation, which calls for the overthrow, weakening or undermining of the Soviet government, or for committing this or that counter-revolutionary crime (Art. 58-2 of this Code), as well as the production, storage or distribution of literature of the same content will lead to imprisonment for a term not less than six months. The same act, if

committed in times of mass unrest, or by taking advantage of the religious superstitions and national prejudices of the people, or in war conditions, or in a place where military rules are declared, will result in social protection measure mentioned in Article 58-2 of this Code [which means shooting, or declaring workers as enemies, expulsion from USSR, etc.], or according to the Article 58-11 (any organizational action aimed at preparing or committing the crimes provided for in this chapter, as well as participation in such an organization that was organized for the preparation or commission of one of the above-mentioned crimes, causes the social protection measures mentioned in the appropriate articles of this Code (at least the same punishment) for the preparation and conduct of the crime) (The Criminal Code of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, 1928: 51).

For example, there was also the Article 58-21 - to incite national or religious enmity (propaganda or agitation to incite national or religious enmity or division, as well as the production, storage or distribution of literature of the same content, will result in imprisonment for up to two years. The same action in the conditions of war or mass unrest - imprisonment for at least two years, with the confiscation of the whole property or a part of it, and in particularly aggravating circumstances, the measure of social security extends to the highest measure – shooting, confiscation of property. [1930 April 6; Sec. II (Law, Publication of 1930. N 10, Art. 122)] (style preserved).

Until 1939, according to the Criminal Law Code of 1928, Article 58-19 provided for exemption from military service due to religious beliefs and enrolment of this person in the rear army during the wartime, however, in 1939, the Soviet authorities cancelled the mentioned article and left only 58-18, in which the religious belief as a reason for dismissal from military service provides for 5 years of imprisonment (The Criminal Code of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, 1928: 59-61). Special mention should be made of Chapter IV of the Criminal Code (violation of the rules of separation of the church from the state), which includes the articles of religious offenses: 128,



129, 130, 131, 132, 133 (The Criminal Code of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, 1928: 121-122).

Despite the fact that the Soviet government had openly declared its fight against religion and adopted dozens of special resolutions for this purpose, it rarely used the articles related to religious activities of the above-mentioned Chapter IV of the Criminal Code against the arrested person, which provided for a fairly light punishment and were therefore unsuitable for carrying out full-scale terror. Therefore, the arrested clerics were tried for treason, sabotage, espionage, speculation, corruption or other anti-state activities.

The government mainly used the aforementioned Articles 58-10 and 58-11 of the Criminal Code against religious persons, which envisaged much harsher punishments - shooting, exile, etc. It should be noted that in the following years, the Code underwent several revisions.

Due to this circumstance, while working on the archival materials, we actually have to study all the persons who may have been imprisoned for their religious activities. Thousands of cases have already been processed by the working group, and the persons repressed on the basis of religion are currently being identified and clarified.

Court decisions will also be presented in the book. We are working in three directions. First, it is access to the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, searching for relevant materials. Second, these are archival materials of security, and the third, the party archive of the Communist Party of Georgia - "Tseka" (Central Committee).

In general, it should be said that the communists announced the fight against religion immediately after coming to power, when they confiscated religious buildings and turned most of them into cultural and educational institutions. Despite the fact that there were many opponents of this government policy they still tried to implement the party's resolutions.

In the materials obtained and studied by us, there are many cases related to the repression of prominent clerics of the Georgian

Orthodox Church, Catholicos-Patriarchs - Ambrose Khelaia, Kalistrate Tsintsadze, Metropolitan Nazari Lezhava and others. Such cases are kept in the so-called "Cheka Fund".<sup>41</sup> They were charged with common accusation: "Membership of the Catholic Council; counter-revolutionary activities; hiding church treasures; disobeying the government's decree; use of treasures and property of the church for personal gain" (style preserved). The case was transferred to the Supreme Revolutionary Tribunal (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund Cheka, 1923: 319).

Apart from these kinds of accusations, priests were arrested and sentenced to the highest punishment based on snitching and fabricated reasons. If in the 1920s, shooting was replaced by many years of exile, during the repressions of 1937 this kind of "relief" did not occur either.

The case of the priest - Kakhaber Davit son of Grigol, turned out to be interesting, from which it became clear that the clergyman with many children was sentenced to the highest punishment – he was shot with confiscation of his personal property for slandering him of anti-Soviet agitation, because a member of the party accused him of saying to him "When will you go extinct?" (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 6, 1924: 27-29).

Many clergy died in the rebellion of 1924, most of them are without a case and we only have a list of them that they were shot during the suppression of the rebellion. According to such lists, priests, deacons, and monks are among those who were shot in Uezds (county) according to the division of Georgia at that time.

Also, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs archive Fund No. 12-1, 23 clerics were shot in Gori Uezd alone. However, the cases of several shot persons have also been survived, in which they were accused of supporting the 1924 rebellion. Such is the case, for example, of Ivane Tushmalishvili, son of Mikheil, who was shot because of

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<sup>41</sup> Cheka (Russian: Чрезвычайная комиссия (ЧК); Extraordinary Commission) - the first Soviet state security service. It was founded on December 20, 1917, by Lenin's decree. In 1922, it was reorganized

"engaging in A/S<sup>42</sup> agitation, which he especially intensified before the August uprising ... he sympathized with and supported the leaders and participants of the uprising..." (style preserved).

In 1924, a priest - Giorgi Inashvili son of Joseph was shot on similar charges. In the same case, quite interesting documents are kept, in particular, a letter from his daughter, where she described the harassment because of their father in 1956 (in Russian). In this letter, his daughter wrote that "this is an unjustified persecution, my father was a priest who was shot for no reason in 1924." In the same case, an official response letter admitted that "the sentence was too harsh" but "there is no point in easing it up now" (style preserved) (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 6, 1924: 80-84).

The repressions of 1937 were much more severe and brutal. The deacon of Sioni Cathedral, Akhobadze Ambrose, son of Ivane, was sentenced to 10 years because he preached to the youth. The charge was as follows: "Because he served as a deacon of the Sioni Church, engaged in religious activities among young people, ... he was engaged in c/r<sup>43</sup> agitation in the church, was hostile towards the Soviet government" (style preserved) (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 8, 1937: 23).

In Manglisi, the priest Ermile Gogolishvili, son of Khosro, was shot on the charge that he disrupted the meeting of the communal farming and preached to young people to go to church. The accusation was as follows: "Because, he was engaged in a/S and a/C<sup>44</sup> agitation in the village of Ivanovka and nearby villages of Agbulakh-Manglisi district. He was engaged in intensified agitation among the youth, urging them to attend the church. He deliberately disrupted the assembly of communal farmers. He urged the communal farmers not to go to work on church holidays and to go to church" (style pres-

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<sup>42</sup> a/S – anti-Soviet

<sup>43</sup> c/r - counter-revolutionary

<sup>44</sup> a/C – anti-Communist

erved) (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 8, 1937: 29).

Among the reasons for the shooting, could be the performance of religious rituals, for example, the baptism of children. Clergyman Pavle Dashniani, son of Samuel (the same Archimandrite Pimen) was shot because "he was actively involved in the a/S agitation among the population, urging everyone to baptize their children. During the year of 1936, he was actively baptizing people in different villages" (style preserved). (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 8, 1937: 6).

It should be noted that a lot of important documents were found in the materials preserved in the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, among them, the icon of the Great Martyr St. Panteleimon the Healer in the case of one of the repressed nuns was found to be interesting, which was printed in 1896 in a topographical manner. As it is clear from the letter, in 1924, the leader of one of the churches presented this icon to his spiritual son, a nun. It should be noted that both of them, the monk and the nun, along with others, became the victims of repression in 1929 (State Agency for Religious Issues, 2022).

Religious repressions were not carried out only in the 1920s and 30s. It was carried out with less intensity and perhaps with less severity before the collapse of the Soviet Union, an example of which is the monk of the Zedazeni Church, Giorgi Moseshvili son of Pavle, arrested in 1950, who was accused of preaching, baptizing young people, a/S agitation and others. In the monk's file, there was a patriotic poem by Kaikhosro Avalishvili, dedicated to the freedom of Georgia, which he kept and which ended like this: "Encouraged by King Tamar, glorious and powerful, enslaved by the Russians, deceived, hungry" (style preserved) (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 6, 1950: 19, 67, 159).

The priests of the Catholic Church of different nationalities were not left "unaffected". Representatives of the Catholic Church were often convicted of espionage (Article 58-6 of the Criminal Code

of Georgia), since they had close relations with the Vatican and the embassies of European countries. Akop Bagratyan son of Danil, Apostolic administrator of the Armenian Catholics of the Soviet Union, was charged with espionage. It was mentioned in the indictment that Akop Bagratyan had been engaged in c/r activities through the Italian consulate since 1927. He delivered diplomatic mail to the Vatican. He was spreading slanderous information about the persecution of the Catholic Church in the USSR. He worked to disrupt collectivization and other important events of the Soviet government. He illegally sent young people to theological academies in Italy and was connected to the Vatican, from which he received large amounts of money. Bagratyan was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment.

Representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church were also affected by the repressions. It should be noted that in the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the case of the priest Dursun (Grigol) Ter-Poghosov son of Grigol, from Shaumiani township, was found, who was accused of "conducting religious rituals, engaging in anti-communal farming and anti-Soviet agitation among the peasants when he arrived in the villages." He pleaded guilty in part" (style preserved). He was sentenced to 10 years in a corrective-labour camp (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 8, 1937: 102).

In the Ministry of Internal Affairs archive Fund No. 8, the protocols of the session of Cheka, GPU<sup>45</sup> and NKVD<sup>46</sup> about 35 Armenian clerics are also presented.

Among the searched materials related to Jewish religious worshippers, the case of Ioseb Mirilashvili son of Filkhaz, from the

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<sup>45</sup> GPU (Russian: Государственное политическое управление (ГПУ); State Political Department, SPD) – first the State Security Agency of the RSFSR and then the USSR. It was founded on February 6, 1922.

<sup>46</sup> People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, (Russian: Народный комиссариат внутренних дел (НКВД); - the central body of the state administration of the USSR in the fight against crime and protection of public order in 1917-1946. Later it was called the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

village of Kulashi (Fund No. 6, archive N 372695), who was arrested in 1937 on the charge of spreading and agitating the Jewish religion among the Jews (Article 58-10) and was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment, turned out to be interesting.

Together with the clergy and separately, lay people were also under repression on religious grounds. For example, in 1953, a case was filed against a group of Jews, who were accused of holding a/S gatherings since 1948 in various places of Batumi and of agitating among the Jews living in the city, with the aim of emigrating to Palestine: "They used synagogues for hostile purposes, where, under the cover of prayer, they sang such songs that awakened the national spirit among the Jews" (style preserved) (Fund No. 6; archive No. 5559).

As for the minor religious denominations, there were many of them in Georgia from the very first years of the Soviet period. Already from the 1920s, Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Adventists, Sabbatarians and others appeared. Molokans and Dukhobors lived much earlier.

Members of all these denominations, as can be seen from the archive materials, were the representatives of various national groups who came to Georgia - mainly Russians and Ukrainians. As for the Baptists, in the materials of the archive we came across to three Georgians in Kakheti and a relatively large group of them in Saguramo.

We'd also like to point out that it is quite difficult to identify a clergyman in these denominations according to criminal law cases, since they do not identify themselves as a leader or a pastor, however, by getting to know the cases well, it becomes clear who was the leader of this or that denomination. In some cases, denomination is not identified at all, because the investigators refer to them as a "religious sect", and in the interrogation protocols, the defendants repeat this word and do not specify the confession.

As the study of criminal cases showed, in the early days these minor religious denominations lived relatively compactly - for exa-

mple, there was a large group of Pentecostals in Tbilisi (in the dormitories of different factories) and in Chakvi. There were also several groups in Rustavi, Ozurgeti and Sukhumi.

Thus, the "fight" against them took place in different ways – either they would let an agent into this group, or they would win someone over from them. They especially oppressed those who, due to their religious views, could not work on the Sabbath or serve in the Red Army.

Repressions against Muslim clerics were widespread. It was interesting to process the information about the demonstrations of 1928 in Adjara, which were caused by the government's policy of removing head coverings (chador, hijab) for female Muslims and closing madrassas.

It is clear from the materials of the case that the representatives of the local government put pressure on the population by all means - by intimidation, arrest, exile. They arrested peasants and clergymen in order to carry out a repressive policy and to please the representatives of the higher authorities. All this caused the indignation and demonstrations of the population, mainly in Khulo and Keda Uezds. The commission investigating the causes of the rebellion concludes that these uprisings were religious, existential and not economic, caused mainly by misdemeanours on the part of the representatives of the local government of Khulo and Adjara.

It turns out that the repressions against the clergy in Adjara started in 1928-1929, because the government tried to implement its policy through the local clergymen, and against those clergy who were not distinguished by open support of the government, secret cases were created, like snitching and arresting. Already later, when mass repressions began, it can be seen in the case of many clerics that they participated in the demonstrations of 1928-1929, which were certainly considered as anti-state actions ... (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 14, 1928-29).

In one of the cases, completely without grounds, citizens: Hussein Beridze, Shai Iremadze, Osman Iremadze, Sefer Iremadze, Tashateg Iremadze, Artmeladze and Vanadze, according to the accusation were enrolled in the "Islamist Organization of Adjara" and "engaged in agitation against the Soviet government, calling for an armed uprising" (style preserved) (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 6, 1930: 2-6).

It should also be noted that during the repressions in Adjara, the article of the Criminal Code on smuggling was mainly used against the clergy. The fact is that during this period the state border with the Republic of Turkey was not yet closed, and the border population of Adjara used to go to Turkey to buy necessary products. In the off-road conditions of that time, it was more convenient for them, that's why it was the easiest and most "convincing" to try the clergy under the smuggling charge.

Repressions also took place throughout Georgia against non-Georgian Muslims of other nationalities. Azerbaijani mullah Ali Ismail Ogli, a resident of the village of Mamishlo, Bashkicheti (currently Dmanisi) district, was accused of carrying out intensified counter-revolutionary and anti-communal farming activities as a Molla<sup>47</sup> in the form of religious rituals. The interrogation report cites that "... he arrived in the village of Amamlo in order to pay respect to the late Ibrahim Khalil-Oghli Soyun and during the prayer mullah Ali said that according to the Qur'an, in the near future the Soviet government will be overthrown and replaced by another government, the government of the capitalists, and then the condition of the peasants would improve, the communal farming would be dissolved, and therefore we Muslims did not need to enter the communal farming, anyone who was a member of a communal farming was considered an enemy of

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<sup>47</sup> Molla, correct form is "Mullah" (Arabic: مُلّا, from Arabic master, lord, reverend) - a religious servant of Islam, a scholar of the Qur'an and religious customs among Muslims.



Magomed's<sup>48</sup> people." He was sentenced to be shot with confiscation of personal property (Art. 58-10; Art. 58-12) (style preserved) (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 3, 1938: 5, 23).

From the case of citizen Mashad Mamed Agha Kishi-Oghli, who was sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment (Art. 58-10), from the village of Pakhralo in the district of Luxemburg (currently Bolnisi), was a communal farmer, an "anti-Soviet element" closely related to the Muslim clergy.

It can be seen from the testimony of February 6, 1931, of one of the witnesses in his case, 23-year-old Ali Ashraf Rasul Zadeh, that the Mullah Qurban Haji Hasan Oghli was engaged in anti-Soviet activities. The witness noted that in the village of Parkhalo, the Mullah organized a meeting twice, where Mashad Ali Kishi-Oghli and other persons were present. The document states that:

"At the mentioned meeting, Mullah Qurban Haji Hasan Oghli said that a crusade must be declared against the Soviet government, because it oppresses our religion, they are teaching with a new alphabet, the Koran is written in the old Arabic language, that the young generation will not have the ability to understand the faith and the Koran, that the religion will die and it is necessary to fight against this government that destroys religion - that this government takes everything from the people, they liquidated private trade and property, that they enrolled their people, party members and Komsomol (All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) members, in cooperatives, that they do not give us anything, and that they supply their own people ... that collective farming will be arranged in such a way that the son will not recognise his mother and brother will not recognise his sister...

Sheikh Qurban Khalil Oghli addressed the gathering, who repeated the above mentioned words and added that he would organize a crusade with the Muslim people to defend Islam from the infidel

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<sup>48</sup> It refers to the Arab religious-political figure, the founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad (570-632)

Bolsheviks..." (style preserved) (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund No. 6, 1931: 15-16).

Ethnic minorities living in Georgia left a special mark in the history of the last century. From the materials preserved in the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the story of a German pastor serving in Georgia was of great interest. On July 5, 1924, the Secret Service Officer of the special commission, Ivane Zhukov, considered the case of 36-year-old Woldemar Bauer son of Karl, of German origin, a pastor of the Evangelical Church in Assureti, born in the colony of Marienfeld, Tiflis Governorate. He was accused of opening a school in his own house and illegally teaching the divine law to up to three hundred students, baptizing children without registration, disobedience to the local government and anti-Soviet agitation, as a result "with his long illegal work, he has a great influence on the villagers, he damages the prestige of the government and especially the "name" of the communists so much that the Germans regard every communist as their sworn enemy" (style preserved).

The reason for his arrest was the disruption of the funeral rally held in Assureti on February 27, 1924, for the death of Lenin. The local authorities asked the pastor to reschedule the worship until the next day, but Bauer did not agree to this, although he promised to finish the service earlier. He did not keep his promise and ordered the church bells to be rung at the appointed time. In addition, the village orchestra was also involved in the case. The militsiya officer Chachkhiani stopped the bells from ringing, but the pastor continued. The chief of militsiya himself got involved in the case.

Finally, a funeral rally was held, but without the German colonists. They stayed in the church and listened to the pastor's sermon about Lenin. The next day, at 8 o'clock in the morning, Bauer was summoned to the militsiya for an explanation, but he did not appear because 8 o'clock was not working time. After that, Bauer was arrested. According to the extract of the Presidium of the Extraord-

inary Commission of July 19, 1924, Voldemar Bauer was sentenced to expulsion from the USSR.

The pastor enjoyed great respect among the local population. The Evangelical-Lutheran Society in Assureti appealed to the Transcaucasian Extraordinary Commission to change its decision and grant Bauer permission to stay in Georgia, which was categorically refused on October 15, 1925 (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 2022).

After Sovietization, the main task of the Bolsheviks was to remove the believers from the church. A whole system of anti-religious propaganda-agitation was developed. In 1922, in order to fight against religion and establish an atheistic society, the newspaper "Godless" was published. On August 27, 1924, it was decided to create an anti-religious organization at the assembly of the editorial office. The charter was adopted and the central council was elected. This is how the "League of the Militant Godless" was founded.

The need to establish the "League of the Militant Godless" was highlighted even in Georgia with its ancient Orthodox traditions. The "League of the Militants Godless of Georgia" was successfully involved in the anti-religious campaign. In 1930, the University of Anti-Religious Workers was opened in Tbilisi, the magazine "Godless of Georgia" was created, the cover of the first issue of which can be found in this link (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 2016).

On December 5, 1928, a special resolution on socially harmful elements was adopted. And on August 15, 1937, a special resolution - arresting "family members of traitors to the motherland". Such an immature and rigid policy was accompanied by mass protests, which resulted in the government's decision to ban religion and customs related to it.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we note that a unique publication will be issued, which will be emotionally very hard to understand, since the materials

collected in it refer to how people were imprisoned, exiled and executed because of their beliefs.

It should be noted that the idea of the project was supported by the Interreligious Council under the State Agency for Religious Issues, in which almost all religious associations are represented, including the Georgian Orthodox Church, historical religions and other minority religions. Based on this, this project will contribute to the strengthening of healthy dialogue and tolerant environment among different religions, as well as between the religions and society in Georgia.

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