



Repressions of Clergy in Georgia During the Soviet Period (According to the Data of Central and Local Archives)

Abesalom Aslanidze

Ph.D., State Agency for Religious Issues
7' Ingorokva St., Tbilisi, 0105, Georgia
+995 577 999 860; a.aslanidze@bsu.edu.ge
ORCID: 0009-0005-8925-6129

Zviad Tkabladze

Ph.D., State Agency for Religious Issues
7' Ingorokva St., Tbilisi, 0105, Georgia
+995 551 010 808; ztqabladze@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0009-4347-6299

Giorgi Patashuri

Art Historian, Master's graduate,
State Agency for Religious Issues
7' Ingorokva St., Tbilisi, 0105, Georgia
+995 577 936 567; giopatashuri84@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0007-8579-4792

Sergo Parulava

Theologian, Doctoral candidate,
State Agency for Religious Issues
7' Ingorokva St., Tbilisi, 0105, Georgia
+995 577 278 095; parulava.sergo@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0003-8524-1718

Abstract

The issue of repression of clergy is one of the unexplored areas not only in the scientific literature of Georgia, but also of post-Soviet countries. After the annexation of Georgia (1921), as in the entire Soviet Union, the “Red Terror” and atheistic religious policy against all religious institutions operating at that time began to be actively implemented here: hundreds of religious buildings and religious schools were closed. Anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary agitation-propaganda and other accusations were used as the basis for the persecution of clergy. As a result of anonymous eavesdropping, fabricated accusations, and slander, they were arrested, shot, or exiled to concentration camps, etc.

In order to cover this issue, a group of researchers from the State Agency for Religious Issues implemented the project of the 2022 State Scientific Grant Competition for Fundamental Research - NFR-22-21090 funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, “Repressions on Religious Grounds in Soviet Georgia (According to the Data of the MIA Archive), as a result of which the publication was issued (“Religious Repressions in Soviet Georgia”, State Agency for Religious Issues, Tbilisi, 2025:752).

In addition to arrest, execution, or exile, the Soviet government used other methods to repress clergy - deprivation of the right to vote - not only for clergy, but also for their family members, intimidation, coercion (refusal of religious vows), humiliation, fines for religious activities, confiscation of personal property, harassment of family members, etc.

Taking these circumstances into account, research has continued, and at the initiative of the State Agency for Religious Issues, a new, second project is already underway - FR-23-13674, "Repressions

of Clergy in Georgia During the Soviet Period (According to the Data of Central and Local Archives)", which is also funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, within the framework of the 2024 State Scientific Grant Competition for Fundamental Research.

In this regard, the coverage of the research based on data from the central and local archives of Georgia conducted by a group of researchers on religious repressions and repressed clergy in Soviet Georgia (1921-1991) is particularly interesting. At this stage, the Kutaisi Central Archive, the Adjara Archival Department, the regional archives of Kakheti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Guria, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo, and the local archives of Gori, Khashuri, Kaspi, Zestaponi, and Poti have been fully processed. Research work is underway at the Tbilisi Central Archive of the National Archives of Georgia. The obtained materials already allow establishing a general picture and drawing certain conclusions of the repressions against clergy in Soviet Georgia.

The following group of researchers participate in the current project: Abesalom Aslanidze (Principal Investigator), Giorgi Patashuri (Project Coordinator), Zviad Tkabladze, Zaza Vashakmadze, Sergo Parulava, Davit Davitashvili, and invited researcher Merab Kezevadze.

Keywords: religions, repressions, clergy, Soviet Georgia, archive.

Introduction

The repressions carried out during the Soviet totalitarian regime, including those on religious grounds, remain one of the unstudied areas to this day, due to several reasons: information about

the repressed was kept secret for decades and virtually unavailable to researchers and the public; in the 1990s, along with the well-known events that took place in Tbilisi, the archive of the Soviet Georgian Security Service was burned, consuming thousands of the most important documents; some of them were taken to the Russian Federation.

Information about the repressed is mainly kept in Tbilisi, in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the Central Archive of Georgia, and is also scattered in various regional archives of Georgia. Due to the lack of relevant specific studies on this issue, the data is unavailable not only for the descendants of the repressed, but also for those interested in the issue of repression in general, which refers to the intimidation, imprisonment, exile, execution, etc. of thousands of people in the background of the absence of any crime.

In order to eliminate the mentioned shortcoming, a group of researchers of the LEPL State Agency for Religious Issues began working several years ago and developed a project funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia. The project (NFR-22-21090 - "Repressions on Religious Grounds in Soviet Georgia (According to the Data of the MIA Archive) included the collection and publication of the unified data on those repressed on religious grounds based on materials preserved in the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the project has already been completed and the book "Religious Repressions in Soviet Georgia", has been published, State Agency for Religious Issues, Tbilisi, 2025:752).

However, during working on the above-mentioned project, it was revealed that the materials preserved in the MIA archive were mainly about those persons against whom criminal cases had been initiated, who had been arrested, executed or exiled to concentration camps. But, at that time, there were many other forms of repression,

such as: deprivation of the right to vote - not only for clergymen, but also for their family members, intimidation, coercion (refusal of religious vows), humiliation, fines for religious activities, confiscation of personal property, harassment of family members, etc.

For this very purpose, the research group of the Agency has developed a new project (FR-23-13674 - “Repressions of Clergy in Georgia during the Soviet Period (According to Data from Central and Local Archives)”, which is also funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia.

The research conducted in various archives across Georgia clearly showed that information on those repressed on religious grounds, about whom there was no data in the MIA archive, information was available in the central, regional, and local archives of the National Archives of Georgia, and accordingly the research work should be continued.

The research team has already conducted research in the Kutaisi Central Archive, the Adjara Archival Department, the regional archives of Kakheti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Guria, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo, and the local archives of Gori, Khashuri, Kaspi, Zestaponi, and Poti. Research work is underway in the Tbilisi Central Archive. The obtained materials already allow for establishing a general picture and drawing certain conclusions of repressions against clergy in Soviet Georgia.

Method

The scientific work is based on theoretical methodology: analysis of cause-and-effect relationships, synthesis, comparison, searching and processing of documents in various archives of Georgia (resolutions, data on repressed persons, questionnaires, acts of deprivation of voting rights and property, etc.). The research includes the religious affiliation of religious figures serving in different regions of Georgia,

like their role in the religious life of that period, the details and dates of their direct or indirect repression, which refers to various types of pressure on clergymen, when they and their families were often deprived of their real and personal property, as well as their right to vote, they were included in the so-called "black list" and thus were excluded from the society, they were forced to renounce their clerical rank, and their religious buildings were closed, destroyed, etc.

Result

As a result of working on the research topic, the clergy of various denominations repressed in different years under the Soviet regime are being revealed, which once again confirms 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 awareness in the society about the cruelty of Soviet repressions and the variety of persecution. It will also be useful for those interested in the history of Georgia, religion, or state policy research. The material, which will be published as a book upon completion of the project, will show how clergy and their families were persecuted, exiled, and left without any means of support, simply because they believed in God.

Discussion

The Soviet government, from the very first years of its existence, tried to impose⁴¹ the strictest censorship and control over the clergy and religions in general. For this purpose, decrees were

⁴¹ It should also be said that from the very beginning the authorities avoided direct repressions against individual religious organizations. E.g. the meeting of the Presidium of the Adjara Committee of the Georgian Communist Party (protocol No. 13, 22.04.1925), which established: the three days of Bayram should be declared as days off for Muslims, proposing institutions to exempt Muslims from work during these three days - and one day out of these three days should be declared a general holiday, since the holidays mentioned in general are not at all clear, a petition should be filed before the Central Committee of Georgia to clarify the holidays of Muslims in the future (style preserved) [CDAA, F. P-1, Inscription 1, Case. 372, p. 30].

adopted on April 15, 1921 and July 17, 1923, as well as a resolution of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, which obliged all religions to submit to the uezd (administrative division) a list of servants, cult buildings and responsible persons in two copies. Later, these lists were, of course, used for the repressions against the clergy and religious lay people.

The Soviet government required religious organizations to register in accordance with all the rules, which religious organizations complied with and submitted applications for registration to the relevant agencies in full compliance with the statute. However, the government's decision was not always positive. The main focus of these applications was information about the clergy and their supporters who served the cult building.

For example, we will focus on the content of one document, according to which on February 29, 1924, an application was submitted to the Kutaisi Regional Executive Committee regarding the registration of the Church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of Terjola and the Church in the village of Lashi, which contained a list of priests and other elected officials, describing the address of the clergyman, social status, public and official status, what rank he held before the revolution, financial status, and when he joined this religious cult (KCA⁴², p. 296, Inscription. 1, Case. 522).

The Soviet government convinced people that the closure of churches and the repression of clergy were not its policy, but time had brought it about and churches were closing on their own. In this regard, information about the events in Georgia at that time, signed by Kakhiani, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party (October 1924), is interesting, citing: "In the field of anti-religious propaganda, we had to take other measures than in

⁴² KCA – Kutaisi Central Archive

Russia, taking into account the peculiarities that are present here. Religion and the church in Georgia had long since, as early as 1905, lost their importance and authority in the eyes of the peasantry. Churches in rural areas were being closed at that time, and it was not surprising that at the beginning of the land reform, the revolution affected both the church and the peasantry, and especially the younger generation made decisions to close⁴³ churches.” (CDAA⁴⁴ F. P-1, Inscription. 1, Case 225:2-48).

Hundreds of clergymen came under this pressure simply because they devoted themselves to religious service. It is especially noteworthy that after the 1924 uprising, double repression affected those clergymen who supported the general uprising against the Soviet invaders. For example, according to documents found in the Samegrelo Regional Archive: “To confiscate the property of the following citizens mentioned below in whole or in part, as the organizers and leaders of the Menshevik adventure, who, by their social status, such as rural nobles, gentry, merchants-speculators and priests, represent socially dangerous elements for the Soviet system ...

• *Iosava Kondrate - ex. priest – a horse. The house remains. He has a family, wife and children*

• *Kartskhia Elizbar son of David - ex. priest – a horse. The house remains. He has a family, a wife and children*

• *Parulava Besarion son of Dimitri - ex. nobleman and priest - with a weapon in his hand. The house has four rooms, the house was destroyed during the suppression of the riots and was moved to*

⁴³ This information, of course, was not true, did not reflect the situation in Georgia, and was a completely biased assessment voiced with the aim of closing down religious buildings.

⁴⁴ CDAA - Central Division Archive of Adjara

another place. One kitchen with two roomes and other equipment remains. The family consists of five people (Sra⁴⁵, f. 2, Sak. 32:23-28).

One of the earliest forms of repression was the equating of clergy with kulaks and the deprivation of their right to vote. From the first Soviet Constitution of 1918 until the mid-1930s, in the RSFSR (and after the occupation in Georgia as well) there was a category of "disenfranchised," that is, those who were deprived of the right to vote⁴⁶.

Depriving a citizen of the right to vote during the Soviet regime automatically led to their being banned from participating in all spheres of social and public life, including work (except for illegal labor, which, for example, from today's perspective is equivalent to depriving a citizen of an identity card). Such people turned into outcasts, or second-class citizens. Often, the deprivation of the right to vote became the basis for further repressive methods.

The above-mentioned Constitution of the RSFSR (Section IV, Chapter 13, Article 65) defined 7 categories of the population whose

⁴⁵ SRA – Samegrelo Regional Archieve

⁴⁶ Disenfranchised - is a person who has been deprived of the right to vote - the unofficial name of a citizen of the RSFSR, the USSR, who was deprived of property, electoral and other rights in 1918-1936 in accordance with the Constitutions of the RSFSR of 1918 and 1925. The restriction of rights was officially explained by measures of social segregation in order to ensure the leading role of the working class and the former "exploited strata of the population" in the created socialist society. According to official Soviet data, according to the results of the 1926 All-Union Census, the population of the USSR was 147,027,915 people. 1,040,894 people (1.63% of the total number of voters) were deprived of the right to vote in the country. Out of these, 43.3% were merchants and middlemen. Next came clergy and monks - 15.2%; those living on non-labour income - 13.8%; officers of the former tsarist regime and representatives of other ranks - 9%. The right to vote was also deprived Adult (over 18 years old) members of the families of disenfranchised people were also deprived of the right to vote. Their number was 6.4%. for more information: Fedorova, N. A. (2007), The Disenfranchised of the 1920s: The excluded class of the Soviet Union, Journal of Social Policy Research, Vol. 5, no. 4.

right to vote was limited: a) persons engaged in hired labor; b) persons living on undeserved income...; c) private merchants and commercial intermediaries; d) religious cult servants and clergy; e) former officials and servants of the police, gendarmerie and other penal bodies; f) mentally ill and insane; g) persons convicted of venal and shameful crimes.

An important feature of the categories of "disenfranchised" was that their number did not remain static and grew day by day, the circle was expanding as a result of the inclusion of wider segments of the population. This measure of the Soviet state, as part of social policy, was aimed at economic, administrative, social and psychological pressure on certain segments of the population, including representatives of various religions and clergy.

For example, a document found in the Kakheti Regional Archive contains a 1931 list of persons deprived of the right to vote in the Soviet Union, which includes clergymen of the Orthodox Church and their family members (Telavi Regional Executive Committee, according to the numbers assigned to the list):

6. Albutashvili Mate son of Omia
195. Dekanozishvili Petre son of Ilia
214. Ezikiani Khachatura son of Martia
328. Maisuradze Vaso
346. Maghradze Kato daughter of Grigora
347. Maghradze Vano
375. Marikiani Ghevandia son of Markara
594. Tsutsunashvili Ketevan daughter of Zakaria
595. Tsutsunashvili Ioseb
627. Jaoshvili Epiphane son of Maxima
628. Jaoshvuli Valeriana daughter of George
684. Ghviniashvili Levana son of Ilia

685. Ghviniashvili Natalia daughter of Ivane

All of the above-mentioned persons were deprived of their right to vote - in accordance with Article 4, § "d" of the Election Instructions, the definition of which is described in the document as follows: "Religious ministers of all faiths and cults - priests, deacons and their dependents" (Kra⁴⁷, F. 3, Inscription. 1, Case. 25).

As follows: "Religious servants of all faiths and cults - priests, deacons and those dependent on them" (Kra, f. 3, Inscription.1, Case. 25).

In the same archive materials, which concern the Executive Committee of the Gurjaani Regional Council, directives from the Central Committee regarding the elections are kept. For clarity, we will examine a short excerpt from the brochure: USSR Instruction on Elections to Councils and Soviet Congresses. SSR. Publication of the Organizational Department of the Central Committee, Tbilisi 1934

According to the instructions

Chapter II

Definition of voters and persons deprived of the right to vote

18. They cannot elect and cannot be elected, even if they belong to one of the categories of citizens listed in Article 15:

... d) Clergymen of all faiths and religious cults, both former and current;

20. The following categories of persons shall not be deprived of the right to vote, unless they are deprived of this right on other grounds:

... k) a person who, by hiring or by election of a religious community, performs administrative, economic and technical duties in the implementation of religious rules and maintenance of a religious cult building, such as, for example: a chanter, organist, watchman,

⁴⁷ KRA – Kakheti Regional Archive

janitor, bell ringer, etc., as well as a member of the church-parochial council;

Chapter III

Rules for the Restoration of Citizens' Electoral Rights

21. Persons who are deprived of the right to vote, such as representatives of the exploiting class (landlords, bourgeoisie, religious cult servants), as well as the police ... may have their right to vote restored if they have been engaged in productive and socially useful labor for at least five years and have proven their loyalty to the Soviet government ...

Chapter IV

Compiling lists of voters and persons deprived of the right to vote

30. The permanent registration of persons deprived of the right to vote shall be the responsibility of rural and city (in Tbilisi - city district) councils.

31. The bodies mentioned in Article 30 shall be obliged to collect documentary information about those persons who are to be deprived of the right to vote, such references are:

... d) former police officers and agents, religious cult servants and all other persons listed in Article 19 of these Instructions (other groups of citizens who are deprived of the right to vote - farmers, cattle breeders, kulaks, merchants, etc., ed.) - reports from administrative bodies, urban and rural councils or bodies of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (KRA, P. 1, Inscription. 1, Case. 10:56-66).

According to protocol No. 1 of the meeting of the Commission for the Restoration of Electoral Rights of the Kutaisi City Council of March 11, 1936, Lomidze Parmen son of Pavle is included in the list of those deprived of the right to vote as a religious servant, and an

investigation has been conducted into his recent activities, According to which he allegedly left the priesthood and is engaged in honest work, but the verbal informayion contradicts the collected informati-on (KCA, P. 149, Inscripti-on. 1 Case. 535:8).

It is noteworthy that in terms of depriving people of the right to vote, the government did not do this directly, but again “at the request of the population”, on their behalf. The communist atheist government often had its supporters voice what they wanted and did this on behalf of the people. This had been happening since the beginning of the repressions, but it became particularly acute in 1937-38. For example, in 1937, during the discussion of the new constitution in the Kutaisi region, a proposal was submitted by the population: “...priests, as liars, should not be given the right to vote” (KCA, P. 149, Inscripti-on. 1, Case. 677: 10). Churches were also closed at the request of the populartion: “The Ozurgeti Regional Executive Committee wrote to the People's Commissariat of Justice of Georgia that about 200 churches in Guria were closed, all on the basis of resolutions of mass assemblies...” (GRA⁴⁸, P. 1, Inscripti-on. 1, Case. 3,:23).

The mass repressions were preceded by the collection of the most detailed information possible on the clergy. For example, in archival materials, statistical data from August 1927 are found, which states that “Muslim clergy have always played an important role in the public and political life of the Turks⁴⁹ of Transcaucasia, as well as in the life of the Adjarians. The importance of this role became especially clear this year during some manifestations of the counter-revolution in Azerbaijan. It turned out that the clergy are an impo-

⁴⁸ GRA – Guria Regional Archieve

⁴⁹ This, of course, refers to Muslims living in the Caucasus, not ethnic Turks. It is generally known that the Russians called Muslims of all nationalities Tatars or Turks.

rtant channel through which the feudal element influences the peasantry. Therefore, it is very important to study Muslim clergy widely..." (style preserved) (CDAА, F. P-1, Inscription. 1, Case. 939:3]. There are many inaccuracies in these data, however, the main thing is what the objectives were set when compiling these statistical data. Namely:

1. What qualifications do clergy⁵⁰ have in the Transcaucasus?
2. What is the age of the clergy and what proportion of them were born abroad?
3. What is the length of service of clergy living in the Caucasus?
4. Are the clergy's ties with foreign countries getting stronger or weaker?
5. To what extent and specifically to which countries (Turkey, Persia) does the clergy travel?
6. What do the clergy do besides their religious functions and what income do they have besides religious donations, etc.?
7. In general, what material means of livelihood do the clergy have in general and how much does their material situation differ between the Soviet period and now?
8. What is the property situation of the clergy? (livestock, land)
9. To what extent has the property situation of the clergy improved or worsened since the Soviet era?
10. How often do Muslim clergy visit certain regions?

All of these data are presented in statistical reports separately for Sunnis and Shiites. It should be noted that such data was collected for all religious organizations.

As is clear from archival materials, local government representatives often showed "zeal" in their fight against religion and fought

⁵⁰ The document says - Мусульманское духовенство, but given that there is no institution of priesthood in Islam, as, for example, in Christianity, we write here a clergyman.

against religion without considering any local situation, which was often followed by conflicts between the government and the clergy, and believers in general. It seems that these stories sometimes reached Moscow.

In the archival materials, one can find a letter from the Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) V. Molotov (top secret, 05.09.1924) *to all regional and national committees, which states that “the ill-considered anti-religious campaign has led to the spread of fanaticism in some places... Therefore, it is necessary that the fight against religion has an explanatory character... Under no circumstances should we allow such anti-religious propaganda that insults believers,”* etc. (CDAA, F. P-1, Inscription. 1, Case. 337:18).

The implementation of repressive measures was mainly based on the information that the Soviet authorities obtained through various means about religious organizations. They knew exactly who was the spiritual leader of a particular religious organization was, who was an active believer, and in general, how many believers a particular church had. For example, by 1930, the following religious communities in Batumi were recorded by the Batumi Executive Committee:

- Armenian-Gregorian Brotherhood - 194 members
- Armenian Catholic Church - 541 members
- Greek Orthodox Christians of the village of Akhalsheni - 404 members
- Christian Baptists - 45 members
- Batumi Evangelical-Christian Community - 27 members
- Catholic Church of Believers - 114 members
- Russian-Pokrov Community - 448 members
- Jewish Community (Russians) - 171 members

- Georgian-Jewish Community - 81 members
 - Trinity Church in the Cemetery - 80 members
 - Georgian Religious Community - 782 members (Georgian Orthodox, aut.)
 - Citizens voluntarily united in the Russian-Orthodox Pokrov Community - 153 members
 - Greek Religious Community - 1253 members
 - Lutheran Community - 52 members
- (CDAA, F. R-91, Inscription. 1, Case. 28: 4).

As evidence of the difficult, unbearable conditions of the clergy, we can cite the letters of 17 priests found in the local archive of Gori, who were deprived of all their property (houses, lands) simply because they were priests. Of course, not everyone could withstand such pressure and wrote letters about giving up the priesthood in order to preserve a small piece of land to save themselves.

The executive committees of all communities /from the circular/

In accordance with the letter of the Gori district party committee, from January 15 of this year, the local government instructed to take all measures to ensure that during the revolutionary implementation of the land reform, no land quotas be given to persons who were currently engaged in church service (priests, elders, deacons, etc.). The land quotas should be granted only if the aforementioned persons permanently abandon church service and begin to cultivate the land by their own labor.

January 18, 1923. N 346

Head of the Department of Internal Affairs (GLA⁵¹, p. 3, Inscription. 1, Case. 5: 9). The following several letters from the 17 priests mentioned above are a fulfillment of such decision.

⁵¹ GLA - Gori Local Archive

To the Land Committees of the Village of Arashenda
the resident of the village of Arashenda
Priest Giorgi Kopadze son of Ivane

S t a t e m e n t

I have arable land in the village of Arashenda. The land committees informed me that the government had issued a decree that priests should not be given land, for which they announced to me that if I did not resign from my service, I would not be given the land. Therefore, on the 1st of February of this year, I took off my clergy apparel, became handsome, and spat on the false priesthood forever.

Former Proest Giorgi Kopadze

February 1, 1923 (Note: The former was written by someone else, this is another calligraphy, author) (GLA, f. 3, Inscription. 1, Case. 38:27).

*To the Chairman of the Shindisi District Executive Committee
Priest Gabriel Simonishvili of Variani*

S t a t e m e n t

Since I no longer wish to serve in the clergy and become a citizen, please give me land, i.e. land quota. Our family consists of eight people.

Priest Gabriel Simonishvili

28/02- 23

On the back there is an inscription: Shindisi, to the Land Committee.

In case a priest is without clergy apparel, then give him a land quota within the framework of the law.

Chairman N. Sabashvili

3/03 23 (GLA, f. 3, Inscription. 1, Case 38: 30).

The handwriting of the elderly dean Ioane Kapanadze from Tskhinvali is particularly tragic:

On March 10, 1923, I, the Archpriest of Tskhinvali, Ioane Kapanadze son of Anton, give this handwritten document to the Land Committee of the village of Kvemo Nikozi, stating that if I am not asked to take off a clergy apparel and trim beard, which is equal to my death as an elderly archpriest, I have resigned from the position of priest, I would never return to it, I settled in my plot of land and I am content with it, which I have today and I do not ask the quata to be added, which I agree and sign

The Archpriest of Tskhinvali, Ioane Kapanadze (GLA, f. 3, Inscription. 1, Case. 38:39).

Often, the authorities accused priests of various crimes using fabricated cases based on hearsay, which in turn was sufficient grounds for banning such individuals from clerical activities. For example, according to the minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of the Ozurgeti Regional Executive Committee (N 17/65, 08.02.1926):

We heard: *about the priestly activity at the Shemokmedi Monastery.*

We have determined: *to prohibit the priestly activity at the Shekhomedi Monastery, in accordance with the regulations, to expel the priest-nun Melenti Topuria from the monastery as convicted of theft and to deprive him of the mandate received from the Department of Antiquities, Art and Natural Monuments Protection of the People's Commissariat of Education; to entrust the monitoring, both for the protection of antiquities and in other respects, to the Executive Committee of the Shekhomedi Community (style preserved) (GLA, f. 1, Inscriptio. 1, Case 6, :11-12).*

In the fight against religion, the government was particularly strict towards those party members who performed religious rituals.

In Keda, Gurgeneidze Osman son of Salikh - a member of the party since 1926, born in 1898, a collective farming peasant - was

expelled from the party for performing religious rituals at the meeting of the Presidium of the Keda district committee of workers and peasants (January 27, 1933) (CDAA, F. P-8, Inscription. 1, Case 42: 4).

Kakabadze Adem son of Khusein - a collective farming peasant was expelled from the party because the investigation confirmed: Kakabadze Adem son of Khusein is indeed a religious believer / prays, observes Ramadan (Ramadan, i.e. the month of fasting, author) and others / except for the above, he did not fulfill party tasks... (style preserved) (CDAA, F. P-8, Inscription. 1, Case 17-a. : 1).

Moreover, a person could be punished for being the child, wife, or other close relative of a clergyman. In the minutes of the Khulo District Committee Bureau (N 55, November 18, 1935) we read: ...due to the fact that Osman Jakeli lives in the building where his father's former mullah and voice were confiscated, although in a separate apartment, thereby giving an excuse for being in contact with his father – he must be given a severe reprimand with a warning and removed from the duties of the chairman of Spiritual Council (CDAA, F. P-12, Inscription. 26, Case 2158:2).

A similar picture was seen throughout the country, but how massive this event was is clearly seen from the list of those with restricted voting rights prepared in the Abastumani community of the Zugdidi district, where the wives of all cult servants are also included:

1. *Kvaratskhelia Alex, 75 years old, priest*
2. *Kvaratskhelia Natalia, 60 years old, priest's wife*
3. *Kodua Zosime, 78 years old, psalm-chanter*
4. *Kodua Martha, 70 years old, psalm-chanter's wife*
5. *Kodua Seoni, 36 years old, psalm-chanter*
6. *Chikhladze Solomon, 55 years old, priest*
7. *Chikhladze Tebro, 45 years old, priest's wife*
8. *Davitia Islam, 65 years old, Servant of the Church*

9. *Mikava Dariko, 60 years old, chief reader of religious cult*
10. *Chikhladze Dariko, 60 years old, chief reader of religious cult.*

11. *Gersamia Vasili, 55 years old, priest*

12. *Todua Mamanti, 30 years old, psalm-chanter*

13. *Apshilava Porfile, 40 years old, Servant of the Church*

14. *Beraia Maria, 45 years old, nun*

15. *Kitia Andro, 53 years old psalm-chanter*

16. *Kitia Aneta, 40 years old, wife of psalm-chanter*

17. *Tvaltvadze Vasili, 55 years old, priest*

18. *Tvaltvadze Tsatsu, 40 years old, wife of a priest (SRA, f. 2,*

Inscription. 1, Case 275: 2).

The list of names compiled in Poti on November 5, 1934 shows⁵² that their right to vote is limited:

- *Bobokhidze Ivane son of Davit* – religious cult servant
- *Bobokhidze Kionia daughter of Luka* – dependent family member
- *Zhvania (Babilua) Paraskeva* - religious cult servant (on p. 154 there is a statement of Paraskeva Timothe Babilua to the Central Execution Committee of USSR (21.09.1935), Where it is written that my neighbor has a property dispute with me and with the help of relatives, he included me as a servant of a religious cult and that is why I was deprived of my vote. And the fake document, as if I were a psalm-chanter was issued by my enemy, the late Archpriest Nestor Sasania... (Emphasis ours, author) In 1929, my 15-year-old daughter died and I often went to the cemetery, where the liturgy was

⁵² The case is not completely numbered, so we cannot indicate all pages.

held, and my enemies took advantage of this...) (PLA,⁵³ F. 37, Inscription 1, Case 819).

The era of fighting against religion did not end with Stalin's rule alone. It lasted until the last years of Soviet rule, and one of the most common forms of repression was the ideological struggle against ancient traditions (which were often connected to religion) and religious rituals.

On November 24, 1975, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia adopted a resolution “On measures to strengthen the fight against harmful traditions and customs”, which was subsequently discussed in all subordinate party organizations and appropriate decisions were made. For example, by the decision of the Executive Committee of the Kutaisi City Council of Workers' Deputies (N 15/4-377, 13.07.1977), a plan of measures for the practical implementation of the issues arising from the resolution was developed (KCA, Fund 149, Inscription 1, Case 4904 : 48). As we read in the case, in about 1.5 years since the issuance of the resolution, about 200 talks, more than 100 lectures, about 50 thematic evenings, more than 100 outdoor concerts had been held in cultural and educational institutions... (ibid.). A special attention was paid to the work aimed at introducing new customs and rituals to combat outdated traditions (ibid., :49) A continuation of this anti-religious work was also the resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the USSR on April 26, 1979 “On the further improvement of ideological and political educational work”, which was also followed by its discussion and intensification of the ideological struggle. By the decision of the Bureau of the Kutaisi City Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia and the City Executive Committee (21.03.1986, N7.36.244), it was determined to hold the Memorial Day of Relatives and Friends in

⁵³ PLA – Poti Local Archive

Kutaisi on April 26 and 27, 1986. To carry out these events, government commissions were created in the city's leading bodies and responsible persons were appointed... (KCA, p. 149, Inscription 1, Case 6569: 102). Of course, these events were also held with the aim of replacing old traditions.

While working on the project, we could not ignore the issue of repression of religious minorities. We found a lot of interesting material in Georgian archives, which made a significant contribution to the formation of an overall picture of religious persecution.

Information was found in the Kvemo-Kartli Regional Archive about a German priest (Lutheran pastor) - Schili Karl son of Karl, who was deprived of his voice since 1927 (place of residence Waldheim, here are also his family members who were deprived of their right to vote - Schili Matilda, Schili Nikolaz son of Karli - the priest's son, Schili Karl son of Karl - the priest's son (KKRA⁵⁴, f. 174, Inscription 1, Case 16: 3a).

Another interesting document from the Kvemo-Kartli Regional Archive:

Rosenberg Village Council Minutes #24, January 13, 1929

They heard: Comrade Pozov's report that several people from collective farming of Rosenberg had already come to him and told him that citizens from other neighboring German villages and also from Azerbaijan were coming to collective farming of Rosenberg and were organizing religious gatherings at homes, which they did not want in collective farming of Rosenberg, and they said that this was a request from the Rosenberg community.

They determined: We determined by a majority of votes to forbid arriving citizens from holding religious gatherings in their homes and coming to the community farming of Rosengärg at all.

⁵⁴ KKRA - Kvemo-Karti Regional Archive

Otherwise, they would be threatened with arrest if they resist. Since they are deceiving the population and engaging in various propaganda, which hinders Soviet construction (style preserved) (KKRA, f. 282, Inscription 1, Case. 4: 4).

After the occupation and annexation of Georgia in 1921, the persecution of the representatives of the Catholic Church also began. According to the materials of the Gori archive, the Soviet government focused on the activity of Catholic priests and their activities:

Completely confidential

Urgent

People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs

According to your circular decree #473/1011, I would like to inform you that there are two Catholic churches in Gori district, in the city of Gori and in the village of Skra. There are Catholic priests at both churches. There is one priest, Konstantine Saparashvili, in the Gori Catholic Church, and Ter-Stanislav Kachkachiani is in the Catholic Church of the village of Skra. There is a parish council at the Gori Catholic Church with the following composition:

1. Nikoloz Chulakhov son of Nikoloz (or Julakhov? Author) - teacher
2. Gabriel Chitashvili son of Alex - farmer
3. Aleksandre Zubalashvili son of Anton - small farmer
4. Mikhaka Korgoshvili? son of Aleksandre - baker
5. There is no Catholic organizational center in the district.
6. Konstantine Saparashvili is considered to be the most active priest in the district, who firmly adheres to his religious rules. As for political matters, he was not noticed ... (style preserved) (GRA, f. 3, Inscription 1, Case 63: 63).

Urgent

Confidential

Commissariat of Justice (Department of the Prosecutor's Office)

To the Executive Committee of Gori District

The Prosecutor's Office forwarded a petition of believers regarding the opening of the Gori Catholic Church, to which the Executive Committee informed us in its correspondence that the majority of Catholics do not want the church to be opened and the Padre himself, as an irreconcilable counter-revolutionary person, had been expelled from the district. Due to the need and since this letter of yours was not found in the department, the Prosecutor's Office Department asks you to urgently send us a copy of your letter (style reserved) (GLA, F. 3, Inscription 1, Case. 63:118).

As for the clergy of the Armenian Church, interesting materials were found in the regional archive of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region.

For example, Tepoyan Nazaret and Khachaturian Simeon were deprived from their right to vote as worshipers in 1927 (Armenian: Tiratsu, author). According to Tepoyan Nazaret, he had not served since 1926 and therefore requested the restoration of his right to vote (SJRA⁵⁵, f. 1, Inscription 1, Case. 18,: 51-70).

Information is also being sought about the clergy of the Jewish community, which is scattered in the archival materials of various cities. As an example, we will again cite the material recently obtained from the local archive of Poti. This refers to the list of names of those who were canonized, compiled on November 5, 1934, which we discussed above. According to this document, there are several Jewish clergy canonized persons on the list:

- *Elashvili Micheil son of Manuakh* – religious cult servant
- *Elashvili Simkha daughter of Abraam* – dependent family member

⁵⁵ SJRA - Samtskhe-Javakheti Regional Archive

- *Krikheli Abraam son of Moshe* - religious cult servant (In the same case, on p. 104, there is a description of the members of the election commission about Krikheli, which shows that since 1922 he had been deprived of his rights and as a servant of an active religious cult must be remained on the list of those who had been deprived of the rights...) (PLA, :37, Inscription 1, Case. 819).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the Soviet government from the very beginning could not accept the existence of another ideology, in this case a religious one, alongside the Bolshevik ideology, and fought against it with all methods. Thousands of clergymen and ordinary lay believers were punished simply because they believed in the existence of God. The documents depicting these events and key figures are still unknown to the general public, and our goal is to introduce the public to these unknown pages of tragic history.

References:

- Archive of the Central Administration of Adjara (1924), Fund P-1, Inscription 1, Case 225.
- Archive of the Central Administration of Adjara (1924), Fund P-1, Inscription 1, Case 337.
- Archive of the Central Administration of Adjara (1925), Fund P-1, Inscription 1, Case 372.
- Archive of the Central Administration of Adjara (1927), Fund P-1, Inscription 1, Case 939.
- Archive of the Central Administration of Adjara (1930), Fund R-91, Inscription 1, Case 28.

- Archive of the Central Administration of Adjara (1933), Fund P-8, Inscription 1, Case 42.
- Archive of the Central Administration of Adjara (1933), Fund P-8, Inscription 1, Case 17-a.
- Archive of the Central Administration of Adjara (1935), Fund P-12, Inscription 26, Case 2158.
- Gori Local Archive (1923), Fund 3, Inscription 1, Case 5.
- Gori Local Archive (1923), Fund 3, Inscription 1, Case 38.
- Gori Local Archive (1924), Fund 3, Inscription 1, Case 63.
- Gori Local Archive (1926), Fund 1, Inscription 1, Case 6.
- Guria Regional Archive (1924), Fund 1, Inscription 1, Case 3.
- Kakheti Regional Archive (1931), Fund 3, Inscription 1, Case 25.
- Kakheti Regional Archive (1934), Fund 1, Inscription 1, Case 10.
- Samegrelo Regional Archive (1924), Fund 2, Case 32.
- Samegrelo Regional Archive (1927), Fund 2, Inscription 1, Case 275.
- Samtskhe-Javakheti Regional Archive (1934), Fund 1, Inscription 1, Case 18.
- Poti Local Archive (1934), Fund 37, Inscription 1, Case 819.
- Kutaisi Central Archive (1924), Fund 296, Inscription 1, Case 522.
- Kutaisi Central Archive (1936), Fund 149, Inscription 1 Case 535.
- Kutaisi Central Archive (1937), Fund 149, Inscription 1, Case 677.
- Kutaisi Central Archive (1977), Fund 149, Inscription 1 Case 4904.
- Kutaisi Central Archive (1986), Fund 149, Inscription 1, Case 6569.
- Kvemo-Kartli Regional Archive (1929), Fund 282, Inscription 1, Case 4.
- Kvemo-Kartli Regional Archive (1933), Fund 174, Inscription 1, Case 16.
- Fedorova, N. A. (2007), The Disenfranchised of the 1920s: The excluded class of the Soviet Union, *Journal of Social Policy Research*, Vol. 5, no. 4.