

Armenians in Georgia: Positive Examples of Coexistence and Development

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Abstract

In the Matenadaran archive - Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan (archive Alexander Yeritsyan- famous Armenian historian (1841-1902), one of member of the Caucasus Archaeographic Commission, as a result of which the 12-volume work «Acts of the Archaeographic Commission of the Caucasus (ACAC), there is a separate folder of documents No. 162, which are in Georgian. These documents have not been studied in either Armenian or Georgian historians. The documents illuminate and clarify various aspects of cooperation between the Armenians and Georgians. Hence, the current focus of the study on the history of the Armenian-Georgian cooperation is mainly devoted to the problems of the Armenian-Georgian internal life, economic and civil issues that were not politically motivated, which at the same time define and characterize the atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance between the Armenian and Georgian population.

Keywords: *Armenian Community in Georgia, Matenadaran -Institute of Ancient Manuscripts Archive, Georgian Sources, Social-Economic and Financial Cooperation, Confessional Issues, Mixed Marriages, Discussions.*

Introduction

In the light of various historical, cultural, and religious factors, a range of commonalities emerged between the Armenians and Georgians, fostering favorable conditions for the establishment and enhancement of Armenian-Georgian relations. Historically, friendly ties between Georgians and Armenians were established. Both of these ancient nations adopted Christianity in the IV century. In the V century, Armenians and Georgians fought together against Sassanid Persia (The history of Armenia, et al., 2018). Amidst the global dynamics within the Christian church, encompassing church divisions that significantly impacted the fate of these two nations, interest in mutual cultural achievements only intensified. In the IX-X centuries, hagiographic and exegetical works translated from Georgian into Armenian and vice versa. Armenian-Georgian relations further strengthened in the joint struggle against Seljuk domination in the South Caucasus in the XI-XIII centuries (The history of Armenia, et al., 2014). The XII century Armenian historian Matthew of Edessa notes: «King David was a blessed, virtuous man, adorned with all piety and good judgment. In addition, he showed himself as one who took in and loved the Armenian people. The remaining troops of the [eastern] Armenians assembled near him. He constructed a city for the Armenians in the land of the Georgians and established many churches and monasteries. He named that city Go'r'a [Gori], and received the Armenians with great joy and delight» (Matthew of Edessa's Chronicle. et al., 2017).

The liberation of northern Armenia and the rise of the princely Mkhargrdzeli dynasty are precisely linked with this period (Melikset –Bek M. et al., 1955).

During the XVIII-XIX centuries. many Armenians crossed into the borders of the Georgian kingdom, finding refuge and protection under the rule of Georgian kings. Many of them were bestowed letters of commendation and accolades from the Georgian kings (Acts of the Archaeographic Commission of the Caucasus, et al.,1866).

Year by year Armenian population in Georgia expanded, with many of them ~~had~~ attaining the highest positions within Georgian society, enjoying (earning) the esteem and amicability (goodwill) of the local

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authorities. According to the testimony of Patriarch Macarius (XVII century), Armenian merchants and artisans were granted certain privileges in Georgia playing a significant role in the economic and political life of the Tiflis. (Meshia Sh. ,et al.,1959) In the XIX century, the population of Tiflis increased due to a new influx of Armenians becoming a major economic, cultural, and educational center of the Armenian population (community). During the period of Russian rule, in 1844-52, Armenians held the position of governor (mayor) in Tiflis, notably Khatisiyants, Ter-Grigoryants, Shadinyants, Fridonyants. An Armenian printing house was founded in the city, which published 10 Armenian periodicals and daily newspapers. (Karapetyan S. et al., 2003).

In Tiflis, neighborhoods (districts) with a predominantly Armenian population were formed, such as Avlabari, and later, Sololaki. In addition to all this, the Armenians contributed to the economic development of Georgia. Multiculturalism and mutual cooperation prosperous. From the XVIII to early XX centuries Georgia became a major political and cultural center in the South Caucasus.

Methodology and Methods

The objective of the study is to analyze the main areas of cooperation between the Armenian and Georgian populations in Georgia based on historical documents stored in the archives of the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts – Matenadaran. Furthermore, this research aims to determine the sequence and specifics of those historical processes that have become decisive in the life of the Armenian people in the neighboring country. The empirical sources encompass Georgian sources of the XIX century, along with works of Georgian and Armenian authors of the XIII- XIX centuries. These sources contain valuable information and materials on the problems of the economic and cultural life of the Armenian population in Georgia, as well as insights of the tolerant atmosphere in the center of Transcaucasia.

Research methods utilized in this study include comparative analysis [7], content analysis [8], description, interpretation, generalization, classification, cluster method. During the content analysis, the conceptual category of the analysis was the category of words «Georgia», «Armenian community of Georgia», «parallels and results of the joint life of the Armenian and Georgian population», presented in various semantic variants. The accounting unit was publications of the monographic level, indexed in bibliographic sources, including archival documents.

A folder of documents in Georgian in the archives of the Yerevan Matenadaran: what are they talking about

As the first evidence of the Armenian-Georgian cooperation, we must state the establishment of friendly relations between the Georgian authorities and the «pastors of the Armenian Apostolic Church». In a number of cases, the Georgian authorities sent letters of recommendation to the diocesan primates of the Armenian Church requesting their support for one or another Armenian priest seeking to enter service in Georgia. Document number 72 (folder 162) represents the petition by Tovmas Andronikashvili, dated February 23, 1819, and addressed to primate of the Armenian diocese in Georgia Archbishop Nerses Ashataraketsi (later, Catholicos of all Armenians (1843-1857) requesting the ordination of Arutin Galustov to the priesthood (Matenadaran, et al., 72). In a letter from 1813, Georgi Amilakhvari expresses his gratitude to His Holiness the Patriarch of the Armenians for sending Yerevan wine (Matenadaran, et al., 29).

The cooperation between the Armenian and Georgian communities is also evidenced by the fact that, despite religious differences, Georgian officials turned to Armenian religious leaders for help on issues related to the Armenian Church. It is evident that such issues were purely intra-religious, intra-communal in nature. So, one of the archival documents titled «Appeal of Dm. Orbeliani to the enlightened diocesan chief Astvatsatur» testified that «the clergyman Ter-Baghdasar collects three rubles from each priest to restore the Armenian church in Telavi and that the Armenian priests protest and ask for justice» 1814 (Matenadaran, et al., 32).

A plaintive report with similar content, by Prince Otar Amilakhvari was addressed to the diocesan primate: «A letter from Otari Amilakhvari to Archbishop Nerses with a report of the obscene acts of the

Gori priest Ter-Stephan, who collects 15 tax fogs from the inhabitants instead of 8. He appropriated a horse and money. He asks for justice», May 1, 1827 (Matenadaran, et al.,173).

The following noteworthy fact testifies to the enduring Armenian-Georgian friendly relations: In 1815, Lieutenant Colonel Miranoz Eristavi was combating a locust infestations that were damaging the fields in Georgia. On May 25, he sent a request to the Armenian Catholicos Ephraim to «send holy water» (Matenadaran, et al., 47).

Friendly relations were also established between Holy Etchmiadzin and the Georgian court. This is evidenced by an archival document stored in the archive of Al. Yeritsyan (Matenadaran, et al., 48). Letter is dated November 23, 1815. The author of the letter is Mariam, the queen of the Kartli-Kakheti kingdom, the widow of King George XII. In her correspondence with Archbishop Nerses, she conveys in detail her position after her forced resettlement in Russia: «To His Holiness and Blessed Catholicos of All Armenians. ... The sun went dark and my day became night, and happiness was replaced by darkness, which was drawn into the dungeon of sorrow... », - she wrote (Matenadaran, et al., 49). In the letter, she speaks rather badly about Commander-in-Chief Pavel Tsitsianov (Tsitsishvili (1754-1806), Georgian commander-in-chief of the Russian armies in Transcaucasia. Led the Russian troops in the first war with the Persians in 1804-1806. Was killed near the walls of the Baku fortress in 8 February 1806. Alexander Mikaberidze, et al., 2005), noting that her daughter almost died and instead of cashiering him, but on the contrary, he is still in full honor. Her situation improved slightly after she was transferred from the convent to the palace in Moscow, where she was waiting to meet her children. But suddenly her son Gabriel died. After that, the queen herself became seriously ill. The queen talks about her deplorable financial condition. The queen asks the archbishop to help her get goods from Baghdad that were sent by Shamir Agha from India: « Out of need, I dared to ask you for help, which I ask you not to tell anyone as if I didn't ask you ... After the arrival of Aga-Magomed Khan, the desired king, the father of (my) children, goods were sent by Shamir Agoy from India. Part of it reached, but most of it remained in Baghdad because of the disorder. You are able to inquire and transfer (goods) and be a virtue and accept, perhaps intercede for orphans» (Matenadaran, et al., 49). The letter ends with the following words: «The Grieving unfortunate Queen of Georgia Mariam» (Matenadaran, et al., 63).

The existence of mutual trust and cooperation between Armenians and Georgians is substantiated by the fact that Armenians often took part in the ceremony of laying the foundation of trading houses of the Georgian community for a certain fee: «1813, January. Movses Shikinashvili receipt that the Armenian Ter-Sahak is laying a shop for Moses in exchange for 20 tumans (Georgian money) he borrowed from Movses» (Matenadaran, et al.,64). In archival documents there are many positive references to priest Ter-Sahak from the Armenian community of Gor, as one of the best in the construction business in Georgia: «January 13, 1819. Letter from the Gori Mokalak. Mokalak is Privileged layer of citizens in Tiflis and Gori. Of particular interest is the fact that the title of «mokalaks» in Tbilisi in the XVII-XIX centuries: could be worn not only by state and church merchants, but also by artisans, as well as various persons from the lower strata, performing various duties at the royal court (Meskhia Sh., et al., 1959). The traditional stratum of inhabitants for Tbilisi were «Mokalaki». Georgians have always been tavads - knights, Armenians - mokalak, merchants, and their role in saving the fatherland in days of difficult trials has always been reduced to large and generous donations (Yu. Anchabadze, et al.,1990). Georgians have always been tavads - knights, Armenians - mokalak, merchants, and their role in saving the fatherland in days of difficult trials has always been reduced to large and generous donations to Archbishop Nerses with gratitude for the appointment of priest Ter-Sahak Sahakov» (Matenadaran, et al., 73).

From the perspective of mutual understanding between these two nations, the letter from Telavi citizens to Archbishop Nerses in 1819 is also noteworthy. They reported that there used to be a small church in Telavi where Georgian priest Filipe Kaitmazishvili served. Later, the Armenian archpriest (vardapet - arm) Ter Petros Avtandilov decided to renovate the church. To accomplish this, they began collecting money and property as donations. They laid the foundation and began building the church. The unfinished church was consecrated by Armenian Bishop Sargis. However, due to the stance taken by the Telavi commandant,

they were unable to complete the construction of the church. The letter contains the names of the authors of the collective letter - 15 persons (Matenadaran, et al., 82).

The Georgian sources in the Yerevan Matenadaran highlight the facts of rather close relations between the local Armenian nobility and the Georgian court. It is widely known that the Georgian kings granted entire villages to the Armenian nobility and Armenian meliks. Thus, the Yeritsyan archive contains a letter from Armenian Hovhannes Amatuni to the Georgian diocesan primate Nerses, in which he reports that the king of Georgia, Heraclius II, bestowed them the village of Chugureti (now one of the districts of the capital Tbilisi - authors) with a charter, 1820, November (Matenadaran, et al., 105). Since we were talking about the Amatuni family, it should be noted that they had rather close relations with the Georgian population and in some cases conducted joint business activities. Thus, the presentable archival document (April 30, 1822), confirms that a contract was signed between the Armenian Rafael Amatuni and the Georgian Elizbar Tsitsishvili on the construction of the Mtskheta Bridge by common forces. According to the agreement, they had to share the income from entrepreneurship equally (Matenadaran, et al., 124). At the same time, it is noteworthy that the presented episodes of the Armenian-Georgian cooperation mainly relate to the period before the Reunification of Eastern Armenia with Russia in 1828, when Persian domination existed in Armenia itself.

The next notable aspect of the Armenian-Georgian cooperation is frequent cases of borrowing money from each other. In the Armenian-Georgian environment, it was customary to give and receive debts, which, of course, testifies to the mutual trust and respect between the Georgian and Armenian populations. «1816, April. Contract of the resident of Gori. Armenian Ter-Grigor and Georgian David Abazadze: Abazadze sued Ter-Grigor for 6 tumans and Ter-Grigor must pay Abazadze 15 kopeck per month,»,- says the document in the Yeritsyan archive Yerevan Matenadaran (Matenadaran, et al., 52). In other words, national affiliation and religious difference did not play a role in the regulation of financial issues and did not become an obstacle. For example, the archival document below confirms the agreement signed between «follower of the Armenian Apostolic Church - Shushan and Georgian Grigol Tamazashvili», according to which the Armenian woman borrowed «money from the Georgian Grigol Tamazashvili for 8 tumans and mortgaged her house», - said in the document, March 20, 1825 (Matenadaran, et al., 146). Sometimes Georgians asked for financial help personally from the primate of the Armenian Georgian diocese: As proof of this is the letter of Kekely Tskhovrebova to archbishop Nerses - with a request for material support,- as it is stated in the archival document. April 1, 1846 (Matenadaran, et al., 203).

As mentioned, some of the letters are addressed to Nerses Ashtaraketsi, and this is not a coincidence. The primate of the Armenian diocese in Georgia played an indisputable role in deepening the Armenian-Georgian cooperation. During his leadership, he emphasized on maintaining close relations were with the Georgian court, the Georgian authorities, as well as the general populace. Therefore, in the archive of Al. Yeritsyan quite often there are documents related to the activities of the diocesan primate Nerses. In this regard, the words of high appraisal from Georgian figures regarding the activities of Nerses Ashtaraketsi are indicative. For example, this document was sent from the famous Eristavi family in Georgia: praise from Shanshe Eristavi to Archbishop Nerses, March, 1826 (Matenadaran, et al., 163). The following letter of gratitude on March 23, 1827 from Levan Dadiani for the kindness shown to him during the arrival of the noble prince in Tbilisi: «Your Eminence, Merciful Shepherd. During my arrival in Tiflis, meeting with your Eminence, you revealed the most merciful and benevolent respect to me ... and as long as I live, I will never forget your favor ... Now I humbly ask you to make me happy and consider me your friend ... Your Eminence's Obedient Servant Levan Dadiani», - as indicated in the document (Matenadaran, et al., 174).

It should also be noted that the words of gratitude addressed to Archbishop Nerses were not limited to the presented episodes. The passage quoted below is taken from a letter by the sovereign prince of Mengrelia, David Dadiani, and conveyed through the Bishop of Mengrelia, Father Anthony. 1847 (Matenadaran, et al., 213). In fact, the relationship between the governor of Mengrelia and Nerses V Ashtaraketsi, who had already become the Catholicos of all Armenians, were so close that in a response letter the Armenian Patriarch regretted that he was late with the answer due to the cholera raging in Tiflis, in the fight against which the Armenian Church also took part: «To Most Serene Highness Prince of Mingrelia David Levan

Dadiani. We are the servants of Jesus Christ - Nerses - the Catholicos of all Armenians and the Supreme Patriarch of the Apostolic Church of Christ and Holy Etchmiadzin. We send our pastoral blessing to your Grace, your wife Ekaterina Alexandrova and your heir Nikolai Davidov Dadiani and ask the Lord to show God's prosperity and patronage to your home ... At the same time, I inform you that we forever affirm the diligence and mercy of your princely house towards of the Etchmiadzin Church ... therefore, do not doubt our respect for your house, which is famous for its faithful bestead before our God. Holiness Bishop Anthony, who came to Tiflis, was with us in June... He was with us only once, and if you have the opportunity, let me know about your health and your home. Your wife's illness made us very sad, thank God the illness left her... We fervently raise prayers before the Almighty to protect the integrity of your home»,- said in the letter of the Catholicos of all Armenians. October 18, 1847 (Matenadaran, et al., 214). By the way, David Dadiani turned to Nerses Ashtarakets with a request investigate whether a famous person living in Constantinople with surname Dadiani «doesn't he come from our ancestors». The Armenian patriarch took on the task to compile a detailed history of that person's origin and pledged to forward the comprehensive account to David Dadiani. January 27, 1853 (Matenadaran, et al., 244). Soon, the Armenian patriarch replied to the Prince of Mengrelia that he had cleared up this issue, although in September, Bishop Zakaria of Mengrelia sadly informed Nerses Ashtaraketsi about the death of David Dadiani (Matenadaran, et al., 249).

It is noteworthy that the spiritual leader Nerses, in turn, willingly took part in the foundation of Georgian educational centers, just as the Georgian authorities participated in the establishment of Armenian schools in Georgia (the formation of the Nersesyan Seminary in Tiflis is proof of this). In general, cultural and educational initiatives are the result of the painstaking work of the leaders from both communities and represent a significant outcome of the Armenian-Georgian cooperation: «Deed of gift from Otar and Elisabed Amilakhvari to Archbishop Nerses on donation to the Tiflis Seminary in Soganlug. The document speaks of patronage of Nerses, where 300 children studied». July, 1826 (Matenadaran, et al., 168). Moreover, the relationship between Nerses and the Georgian governors was so profound that some of them requested to employ their sons in the service of Nerses. This letter is again from Otar Amilakhvari: «A letter of gratitude from General-Major Otar Amilakhvari to Archbishop Nerses with a request to allow his son, Georgi, to accompany and serve him, 1827 (Matenadaran, et al., 179). In turn, the Georgian governors have repeatedly provided the necessary assistance to Armenian schools. This is substantiated by the letter from Archbishop Sargis Hasan-Jalalyan, the primate of the Armenian diocese in Georgia addressed to the well-known Maecenas Al. Tahirov March 3, 1862 (Matenadaran, et al., 190).

Archival documents found in the Matenadaran - Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Armenia, are clear about some dispute between the Armenian and Georgian clergy on the issue of marriages between Armenians and Georgians, but the historical fact is that these marriages were ultimately resolved in favor of the newly formed Armenian-Georgian family: «Report of the Sochkhen priest David Khakhanov to Ter-Stepan Stepanov that he has no objection to the marriage of the Tskhinvali inhabitant Soso Karapetovich with the Sochkhen inhabitant Natalia Bakradze ». February 2, 1848 (Matenadaran, et al., 215). Soon the Georgian clergymens also issued a certificate of consent, and thus the differences between the two churches were considered closed 1848, April (Matenadaran, et al., 217).

It is noteworthy that the Armenian-Georgian mixed marriages did not meet any special obstacles from the Georgian and Armenian governors either; in such situations, the questions found positive solution. The archives of the Matenadaran preserved Bagration Mukhransky's statement to the Armenian priest Ter-Avetisov that he didn't have any objections to the marriage of the Armenian woman Shushan with the Georgian Zurab Poladashvili. January 9, 1849 (Matenadaran, et al., 223). It should be noted that these cases were not unique (Matenadaran, et al., 224, 225, 226, 227, 230 ets.): «We will conclude the topic with the presentation of a letter by the famous Armenian family of the Bebutov in Tiflis. Letter of Nonia Ter-Markozova-Bebutova to the priest of Garedzhi Hovanes Ter-Minasov about consent to the marriage of Daredzhan Goriglazhashvili in November 3, 1849 (Matenadaran, et al., 229). Moreover, the presence of Georgian prayer books in the Armenian churches of Georgia and vice versa also testifies to the tolerant relations between the two different churches. Thus, the pastor of the Armenian Church in Lanchkhuti, Ter-

Grigor, in 1826 reported that objects and books, including Georgian prayer books, had been stolen from the church. (Matenadaran, et al., 292).

Conclusions

- At the Yerevan Institute of Ancient Manuscripts - Matenadaran, a separate folder of documents in Georgian, covers and clarifies various aspects of the Armenian-Georgian internal life, economic and civil issues. These documents help to define and characterize the atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance between Armenians and Georgians.
- The friendly relations between Georgians and Armenians ensured the economic well-being of the Armenian community in Georgia and contributed to the cultural development of both nations. In turn, the Armenian community, through its creative work, contributed to the economic and cultural development of Georgia. Both the Armenians living in Georgia and the local Georgian population benefited from this cooperation.
- An important result of the Armenian-Georgian cooperation should be considered religious tolerance, which created various concessions among believers. The existence of more than ten Armenian churches in the capital of Georgia is a vivid proof of what has been stated.
- The role of the Georgian Patriarchate and the Georgian diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church was undoubtedly great in strengthening the Armenian-Georgian cooperation. Their close collaboration and mutual respect contributed greatly to the preservation of tolerance and the peaceful existence of the two nations.
- The Armenian-Georgian cooperation in the context of intra-communal relations and financial spheres should also be noted. Quite frequent examples of joint marriages between Armenians and Georgians, borrowing money from each other, of course, testify to the atmosphere of mutual trust and respect between the Georgian and Armenian populations.

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