

STUDIES: HISTORY OF GEORGIA

კვლევები: საქართველოს ისტორია

**Georgian Educational and Cultural Center in Montauban
(The latest materials)**

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In spite of the fact that the most important moments relating to this foreign centre of Georgian culture, located in the Southern part of Paris and in the administrative centres of the Departments of Tarn-et-Garonne, the place where Georgian Fathers lived in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, have already been revealed based on the written primary sources of French archives, there still remain many obscure facts that need to be clarified.

In an attempt to fill in the above mentioned lacuna, along with several Georgian researchers interested in the history of the Montauban Georgian Centre (Z. Chichinadze, Sh. Lomsadze, I. Tabaghua, S. Grigalashvili, M. Javakhishvili)[2], I have also put all my efforts into the search for new information regarding the issue. With the active help of Avtandil Khurtsidze, a specialist of the French language and a staff member of Akaki Tsereteli State University, Department of International Relations, in November 2008, I appealed to the Mayor's Office of Montauban to help me to obtain specific information regarding the materials stored in The Archives of Ancient Materials in relation to the issues we were interested in.

On December 23, 2008 the Director of Municipal Archives Pascal Leroy sent us a letter listing the documents found in their archives that were directly related to the subject of my interest along with his own five-page study concerning The Centre of Georgian Fathers in Montauban.

In order to emphasize the importance with which Paskal Leroy treated my letter and to make his narration even more convincing, he enclosed his work with archive sources and a bibliography of the literature used by him while writing it. In addition, the letter was also accompanied by a list of Georgian books printed in the Georgian Printing House in Montauban and kept in the municipal library of the city. To avoid mistakes when writing the titles of the books, printed in a foreign language, Paskal Lerua conferred with a famous Kartvelologist, Bernard Utie and performing the work with his help, correctly transliterated the titles of the books in Latin. The two-page list of Montauban books is important, not only for specifying the exact editions discussed above, but also for indicating the fact that the books are still kept in the Montauban Municipal Library. For absolute accuracy the list of the specific books the French scholar has found in the library see in Georgian version of the article.

As already mentioned above, Pascal Leroy's research has been written based upon specific, materials as yet unknown to us, about the Montauban Centre which are kept in the French archives. The author emphasizes that the materials concerning Montauban Georgian Cultural Religious Centre

were found in Tarn-et-Garonne archives after Professor Ilia Tabagua's research conducted in the 70s of the previous century. As the author notes, he tries to represent the information on Georgian Fathers residing in Montauban based on some additional materials kept in the archive. Unfortunately the surnames of the Georgian Fathers are transposed in such a way that most of them are unidentifiable.

Moreover, some issues concerning the history of the Montauban Georgian Centre represented in the study have been incorrectly interpreted due to unavailability of specific Georgian scholarly works. Despite the above mentioned facts, P. Leroy's study, providing information about Montauban Fathers, will definitely help us to explore the history of the Centre. In order to clarify all the above mentioned facts, I will provide some extracts from Leroy's study.

According to P. Leroy, in the 60s of the 19th century, in Montauban, on the street of a catholic cemetery, (now Street of Equality) Peter Kharischirashvili founded a congregation named "Sisters of Immaculate Conception". According to Leroy, the event dates back to 1863. As is known, Kharischirashvili had already founded a Georgian catholic church known as a Georgian Centre in Istanbul where Georgian priests were actively involved in educational activities. Even though the French society misspelt Kharischirashvili's surname as Karisschiarant, Leroy claims the person to be Georgian and his surname to be Kharischirashvili. According to the researcher, the above mentioned fact was confirmed by Magister Maravich, (the same as Lui Father Peidesusas) as well as by a brother Alouis Bail (San Luis Church, Istanbul).

Above all, the author also notes that "another congregation had also been established by Father Kharischirashvili. This was a Tri-ritual (Latin, Armenian and Georgian rituals) congregation, which aimed at eliminating confrontation among the three rituals". Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine, from Leroy's work, whether the congregation represented a union of the Georgian Fathers or not. The study does not clearly verify the fact whether the above mentioned tri-ritual congregation had anything to do with Georgian Father's Priory, established by P. Kharischirashvili in 1872 (or in 1873). Notwithstanding the abovementioned facts, the research should definitely be considered to be a significant step forward by which the author enriches the biography of Kharischirashvili and other Georgian Fathers of Montauban with facts hitherto unknown to us.

If all is true, ten years before opening the Centre of Georgian Fathers, Kharischirashvili had already established the Congregation of Sisters in 1863. As for the Congregation of Fathers in Montauban, the suggested approximate date for its foundation, according to Leroy, is 1872 (1874) which is in agreement with the dates known in Georgian scholarly works related to the subject. As already known, most Georgian researchers name 1874 and 1875 as dates for establishing The Montauban Centre.

Leroy maintains that he does not possess exact information regarding the primary reason for establishing the Centre for Fathers and he mentions a letter, sent in 1880 by Father Kishtot to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In the letter Kishtot explains that "the climate in the city was very much similar to the climate in his country".

Although the French researcher considers this explanation unreliable, he accepts the opinion the finding of any new document proving otherwise.

In his letter to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Father Kishtot gave the main reason why he wanted to found the congregation: the Georgian congregation of Constantinople did not pursue high standards in teaching the French language. The bishop of Montauban gave a promise to the Georgian

Fathers that he would direct Georgian children, sent by the Georgian Fathers to “big and small seminaries”.

Unfortunately, neither the letter referred to by Leroy nor its author Kishtot are indicated in the resources I have to hand at the moment. Father Kishtot, as mentioned by the French scholar, who addressed the Ministry of Internal Affairs (presumably in France), must have been quite a respected person for being entitled to speak on behalf of the Georgian monks residing in Montauban.

The fact that this person was not Peter Kharischirashvili himself can be understood relying on the information provided by the author, for in 1880 Kishtot was 30 years old, while Peter Kharischirashvili, born in 1818 must have been at a very advanced age at the time.

The most important role Kishtot played in the lives of Georgian fathers can also be stated by the fact that according to Leroy, the flat the Georgian Fathers resided in belonged to Kishtot himself. Although the author was not able to find materials depicting the Fathers' everyday life, based on the information provided by a prefect of Tarn-et-Garonne dating back to 1880, he states that the Congregation consisted of 8 Fathers, “they conducted religious ceremonies, mostly lived on charity and were not favored by the society”.

The author also highlights important information depicting a new feature from the life of the Georgian Fathers, based on Diera (the Diary of Catholic Fathers) of the leader of a small seminary in Toulouse, which preserved the facts about Georgian Fathers travelling in different holy places in Toulouse, specifically in the Doroda temple of The Virgin, July, 1877.

In addition, the archive documentation discovered by Leroy is very important, for the French scholar provides us with information about the environment in which the Georgian Fathers lived. According to the materials, depicting the closure of the Centre in 1880 under the order of the government “the abode of the Fathers was very humble...there was a kitchen and a printing house at the entrance of the dwelling while the rooms of the monks were arranged on the first floor. There was also a small chapel near the dwelling”.

According to Leroy, the lack of the materials depicting the life of the Fathers was due to the fact that they were not integrated into the life of Montauban. The only genuine supplementary material is a study dating back to 1876. According to this document, only novices of the female congregation were entitled to receive Charity Sisters from Moissac (a city in France”).

Due to the fact that the given information does not clarify whether this congregation included Georgian nuns or not and to get more details about the issue I decided to contact Mr. Leroy. The response I got from him was the following: The Congregation of Georgian Sisters was not located in Montauban but in Moissac, 30 km to the west side of Montauban, which was renowned for its monastery. One of the Sisters, already having achieved an advanced age at the moment recalls that her monastery welcomed religious sisters from Georgia, clad in a different uniform. She also remembers seeing the photos of those nuns at the time. Leroy mentions that she will conduct a small-scale study into the topic and share the results with him (as an exciting proof of the epoch). “Unfortunately, I was not able to find any other materials related to the Congregation of Sisters”, Leroy adds.

Mr. Leroy also maintains that in order to comprehend the above mentioned events profoundly “He is still in the process of studying” and is going to obtain and analyze the materials kept in the archive of the French Embassy in Constantinople and intends to share the finding with me.

Based on the above mentioned information, I truly believe that in France, in the city of Moissac, there existed a congregation of Georgian Sisters, along with the congregation of Georgian Fathers. This is a significant novelty. Unfortunately there is no other information in the scholarly literature related to the Sister's congregation in Moissac and special research is to be conducted with a view to study the issue profoundly.

Pascal Leroy's study once again highlights the date and reasons for the closure of the Centre on the basis of a decree, passed by the France government on 29th March 1880, according to which only the congregations which obtained special permission based on the relevant documents were allowed to function within the territory of the state. Either because the Georgian Fathers did not possess the required documentation, or they did not take the decree seriously, the congregation was suspended. A new fact that facilitates the understanding of that period of the history well-known to Georgian scholars (I. Tabaghua, S. Grigalashvili, M. Javakhishvili) is that Leroy revealed the attitude of newspapers towards the issue when covering the subject related with the closure of the congregations. For a better insight into the decree dating back to 29th March, 1880, I will highlight the background prompting the passage of the decree.

Under the order, signed by the president of the country, [Jules Grévy](#), by the Minister of Internal Affairs and Culture as well as by the Minister of Justice on 29th March 1880, every congregation or a religious group functioning in the territory of France without an official permission was given a deadline of 3 months to make an official request to the Prefect of their Department in order to obtain legal documents allowing them to work in the territory. Any delayed submission of the documents by any congregation would lead to their immediate closure[3, p. 164].

The decree, passed by the Government, divided the society into two parts: Republicans, siding with the government and Conservatives, supporting the Monarchy. The majority of the society, siding with Republicans and supporting the passage of the decree, demanded the closure of all illegally existing congregations considering them to be reactionary and conservative clerics.

By not submitting the required documents (deliberately or unintentionally) that would ensure their legal existence in Montauban, the Georgian fathers provoked anger from the society supporting the Republicans as well as the government which must have led to the closure of their congregation. The exact date for the termination of the congregation is unknown to the scholarly literature although there are various versions suggested by different scholars.

Leroy's study is interesting due to the fact that relying on the materials he discovered, the author was able to clarify the details concerning the closure date of the congregation. Upon his assertion, the congregation was closed 6 months after the passage of the decree, November 5, instead of the 3 month term, established by the government.

Leroy's study specifies and verifies several details concerning the closure of the congregation. The most important novelty for the scholarly circles, presented by the author, are the articles closely related to the closure of the congregation, (1880) published in the newspapers supporting conservative and monarchist views. According to Leroy, these are "almost identical" to the reports already known to the Georgian scholars sent by the Mayor of Montauban on 13th of August, 1885 to the prefect of Tarn-et-Garonne concerning the above mentioned issue. However, 5 years after the closure of the congregation, the authority became interested in the issue due to the letter sent by the founder of the Istanbul Centre, Peter Kharisichirashvili, to the Minister of External affairs Marquis De Noya on May 8, 1885. In this letter the Georgian Catholic priest, a founder of the Montauban Centre, asked to restore the status of the congregation (see the letter by I. Tabaghua). One important

fact emerging from the letter, distinguishing it from the above mentioned reports made by the Mayor of the city, is that the latter emphasizes that the behavior of the Fathers, while being evicted forcibly from the Centre, was impeccable". The authenticity of the information was also supported by the fact that the newspapers, supporting the Republicans, who were sworn enemies of the congregation, also mentioned the Fathers' discreet behavior.

As already mentioned, the eviction of the Georgian fathers by the police took place on November 5, 1880. The representatives of the Clerical parties and conservatives, opposing the Republican government took advantage of the situation and tried to hinder the eviction process by blocking the police's way. Based on the information provided by the newspapers of the period Leroy concludes that the Georgian Fathers were not fully aware of the situation concerning the decree of 1880 and the Clerical party took advantage of the situation to express its protest against the government.

The above mentioned issue is presented in the newspaper articles provided by the French author in a somewhat innovative way. More specifically, unlike the report made by the Mayor of Montauban 5 years after the eviction, in which the Georgian Monks were accused of organizing the protest actions against the government, the newspaper "Le Républicain", although less positively disposed towards the Georgian monks, could not conceal the fact that "the behavior of the Georgian monks was impeccable".

Leroy also describes the life of the monks after the closure of the centre. According to the author, after the 20th of December, 1880, having been granted an official permission from the government only Kishtot still remained in Montauban to take care of one of the severely ill monks. Kishtot must have obtained the permission only after declaring to the government that in Montauban "the Georgian Centre was no longer a congregation".

Depending on the news, Father Kishtot stayed in Montauban until 1882. Based on the information submitted to the government Leroy concludes that "Kishtot lives there all alone. This is the last news we have about him".

Leroy also highlights that in 1887, 1888, 1890 none of the monks were in the city and that their abode and the chapel were turned into "facilities of Industry". However, according to Leroy, Georgian monks made a second attempt to re-establish themselves in this place in 1896. At the end of the year they secretly opened their chapel. However on the 29th of June, 1897 it was closed down under the pretext of "interruption".

Only after a great effort made by a catholic priest, Andria Tsinamdzgrishvili (referred to as Andre Tsinamdgvarov by Leroy), on the 15th of July, 1897 the Minister of Internal Affairs gave an official approval of reopening the chapel on condition that "only Georgian priests and their apprentices would be welcomed there". Unfortunately the recovered Montauban centre did not exist for a long time. The reason for the termination was partially determined by the fact that since 1899 the publication of books had finally stopped and the existing printing house was moved to the Georgian Centre located in Istanbul.

According to Leroy's conclusion, this final termination of the Montauban congregation must have taken place in 1903 – 1906, as a result of the distribution of functions between the Government and Church. Since then, the religious conglomeration of the Georgian Fathers ceased existence in Montauban.

This opinion of the French author coincides with the idea already expressed in the scholarly literature. For instance, based on the materials found in Montauban, Javakhishvili notes that "by 1901

the Montauban Centre of Georgian monks had already ceased existing. The only person residing there was a custodian of the centre Egnate Giorgidze”[4, p. 39].

Grigalashvili suggested 1904 as an approximate date for the closure of the centre, explaining that in 1901 when the Radical Socialists and Radicals merged, forming a Republic Party and became the government of the country; they aimed at fighting against clericalism. In accordance with the decree, released in 1902, 125 schools founded by the congregations were closed down.

In July 7, 1904 they passed a law prohibiting a congregational teaching throughout the territory of the country and drafted a law about the separation of the church from the Government. Considering all the information mentioned above, it is not difficult to deduce that “the fate of the congregation had already been decided... therefore, soon enough after the passage of the law in 1904, (if not earlier) the Montauban Centre of Georgian Monks ceased to exist”[1, pp. 125 -126].

The interest towards the works of Pascal Leroy is also enhanced by the fact that there the Georgian Fathers of the congregation were identified. However, the transformation of their names and surnames makes it difficult to identify them effectively. Based on the Report, sent by the prefect of Tarn-et-Garonne to the government, in September, 1880, Leroy mentions the surnames of the Fathers residing in the centre at the time:

Jaque Kishtoti, 30 years old, born in Akhalkalaki

Ciril Laldazanki, 24, born in Kutaisi;

Luke Kristant, 38, born in Akhalkalaki;

Jan Simont, 21, born in Akhalkalaki;

Gabriel Oslant, 18, born in Kutaisi.

According to the author, the first two people were definitely priests though we learn that they were also the students of a seminary. Thus, there rises a question regarding whether these two people (Kishtot and Laldazanki) were priests and students of a seminary at the same time or were they only students? Unfortunately due to a lack of the relevant materials, and following the way the names of the Georgian priests and students are transposed into Georgian, it is still difficult to state their identity. Concerning this fact, I was notified by Leroy on July 5, 2009 that “the names of the monks I have provided you with are the ones mentioned in the French materials stored in the archives. However, as the public servants knew nothing about Georgians, I am unable to add any more substantial information to them”.

Based on the materials available to me, for the time being the list of the Georgian catholic priests serving in Montauban, at different stages runs as follows: Peter Kharischirashvili, Atanase Naskhidashvili, Andria Tsinamdghvrishvili, Stepane Giorgadze, Alpons Khatarishvili, Dominike Mughashashvili, Avgustine Kiknadze, Ioseb Tsaldadze...The names and the ages of people in the given list differ from the names provided by Leroy to such extent that it is quite difficult to see any similarity between them.

In conclusion, I believe that all the above mentioned details are sufficient for us to suppose that the materials obtained by Leroy, the director of Municipal Archive of Montauban, enrich the history of the Georgian Catholic Fathers with details previously unknown to us.

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