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## The Church of Georgia in War

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**Abstract:** *In Western Europe the Church as an institution was integrated into the military system and was obliged to serve the monarchy. Apart from performing vassal duties, the Latin clergy frequently participated in military actions. Although the Church laws forbade clergymen to shed blood, there were many examples of the violation of this rule. The attitude of the Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire concerning the possible participation of the clergy in war differed significantly from that of Latin Europe. The Byzantine priesthood did not become involved in military actions. The Greek Church possessed neither military units nor vassal commitment to the Empire. Despite a very close relationship with the Byzantine Church the attitude of the Georgian Church to the issue differs from that of Byzantium and is closer to the Western practice. The feudal organization of Georgia conditioned the social structure of the Georgian Church and its obligations before the monarchy. Despite the fact that the Georgian Church enjoyed many advantages, it had to take part in military campaigns. The upper circles of Georgian Church dignitaries were accustomed to both conducting military campaigns or taking part in the combat. In regard to military activities of clergy, Georgian law was much more lenient than Byzantine, and in the case of necessity, it even modified Greek legal norms. The conflict with the Christian canons was decided in favor of military necessity, and it was reflected in the legislation.*

**Key words:** Latin Church, Byzantine Church, Georgian Church, Church Law, Warrior Bishops

### Military activities of the Latin Church

In the last period of the Roman Empire, when the central government was very weak, the obligation to keep cities and their inhabitants safe and secure often assigned to bishops<sup>1</sup>. During the second wave of invasions in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Europe was attacked by the Vikings, Arabs and Maguars, the necessity of protecting their parishes still required the bishops' military activities<sup>2</sup>.

The wealth and lands accumulated by the Church created its military commitment within the feudal system of the period. The high priesthood originated from the aristocratic circle, the bishops owned important castles and the churches and monasteries had extensive plots of land. Due to this, they were therefore obliged to

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<sup>1</sup> BÜHRER-THIERRY 2018: 25; DUGGAN 2018: 504.

<sup>2</sup> HOUGHTON 2018: 276-277.

serve military<sup>3</sup>. In Western Europe the Church as an institution was integrated into the military system and was obliged to serve the monarchy.

Charles Martel, Pepin and Charlemagne demanded military service both from their secular and ecclesiastical vassals<sup>4</sup>. In ‘the great army law’ of 673 Wamba, King of the Visigoths (672-80) threatened with exile all his subjects, including bishops, who would not obey his summons. Despite the resistance of the Church, his successor Erwig renewed the law in 681 without any exceptions<sup>5</sup>. These traditions continued in the following centuries. In 865 Pope Nicholas I reprimanded Charles the Bald that the King employed bishops as soldiers and that they should fight with prayers and not with arms<sup>6</sup>. During the rule of Otto the Great (936-73) all the bishops of Germany were liable to military service<sup>7</sup>.

Apart from performing vassal duties, the Latin clergy frequently participated in military actions and did not avoid taking part in bloodshed. Although the Church laws forbade clergymen to shed blood, there were many examples of the violation of this rule<sup>8</sup>. The clergy, especially high-ranking officials, ignored the laws that prohibited military activities. The Carolingian and Ottonian bishops maintained that these prohibitions were not specifically related to them but were limited only to the low-ranking priesthood<sup>9</sup>.

Certainly a relatively small part of the clergy did participate in military activities, although their number was enough to create the cultural phenomenon. Moreover, they were major bishops and well-known statesmen<sup>10</sup>.

We do not have to look far for such examples. An anonymous biographer praises St Arnulf (580-655), Bishop of Metz for his courageous performance in fights against enemy peoples<sup>11</sup>. In 742 St Boniface, missionary and martyr, complained to Pope Zacharias that the Frankish bishops were idle and drunkards. As well as this, they hunted, fought alongside soldiers and indiscriminately shed the blood of Christians and pagans with their own hands<sup>12</sup>.

In 1066 the fully equipped Bishop Odo of Bayeux participated in the Battle of Hastings and played a significant role in the victory of the Normans<sup>13</sup>. He also attended the council of Clermont and took part in the First Crusade, but died in Italy,

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<sup>3</sup> STRICKLAND 1996: 73.

<sup>4</sup> NICHOLSON 2004: 64; DUGGAN 2013: 20-21.

<sup>5</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 21.

<sup>6</sup> Nicolai I, 309-310.

<sup>7</sup> ARNOLD 1989: 163.

<sup>8</sup> JENSEN 2018: 404.

<sup>9</sup> BRUNDAGE 2003: 149.

<sup>10</sup> NAKASHIAN 2016: 13.

<sup>11</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 61.

<sup>12</sup> *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae*, 300.

<sup>13</sup> NICHOLSON 2004: 64; GERRARD 2017: 35-38; NAKASHIAN 2016: 129-135.

on his way to the Holy Land<sup>14</sup>. As claimed by Chris Dennis, the heavily armed Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances also fought in the Battle of Hastings<sup>15</sup>.

The deeds of German bishops at the battlefields were particularly famous. It is suffice to say that in 886-908 ten German Bishops fell in battles<sup>16</sup>. In 1223 Caesarius of Heisterbach refers to the opinion of student in Paris, who claimed he could believe anything except the salvation of the German bishops. The author himself tries to justify the bishops who, holding spiritual and physical swords, were forced to think more of their soldiers than the souls of their parish<sup>17</sup>.

Warrior bishops were not only a German phenomenon but, not to mention France, they were found in England, Spain and everywhere in Western Europe<sup>18</sup>.

Roman Popes also fought in wars. Both John X (914-28) and John XII (955-63) personally took part in fighting. In 1145, Pope Lucius II died while establishing the order in Rome when he himself led the army<sup>19</sup>. Pope Pius II (1458-64) named three bombards after his parents and himself and died before embarking against the Turks personally leading the Crusade<sup>20</sup>.

Although Church councils of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the laws of reformers were persistent in banning bloodshed, they were still unable to prevent the participation of the clergy in wars<sup>21</sup>. The warrior priest did not disappear in the 13<sup>th</sup> century either, and in the 14<sup>th</sup> century he became even more noticeable<sup>22</sup>.

### **The Clergy and War in the Latin Church Law: *pro et contra***

Despite the abundance of the clergy taking part in military activities in Western Europe, the Latin Church condemned participation of the churchmen in military activities for centuries.

As early as 325, the council of Nicaea stated that Christian service reveals priority over military ambition. Canon XII imposes a sentence on those who resume military service after becoming a Christian. Canon VIII of the first council of Toledo (400-401), banned those who served in army after baptism from promoting to the honour of deacon. Council of Chalcedon in 451 threatens with anathema anyone who deviates from the path of ecclesiastical service. In a letter to bishop of Narbonne

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<sup>14</sup> GERRARD 2017: 52.

<sup>15</sup> DENNIS 2018: 88-110.

<sup>16</sup> JOHNSON 1932: 30-31.

<sup>17</sup> REUTER 1992: 79; DUGGAN 2013: 69-70.

<sup>18</sup> NAKASHIAN 2016: 14; for 12<sup>th</sup> century Spain, see MARTÍNEZ 2018: 207-226; RAMÍREZ 2018: 233-265; for 15<sup>th</sup> century Sweden, see WAŠKO 2018: 489-492.

<sup>19</sup> TYERMAN 1995: 558.

<sup>20</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 29.

<sup>21</sup> NICHOLSON 2004: 64.

<sup>22</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 24, 29.

written in 458/9, Pope Leo the Great (440-61) prohibits the monks from participating in battles and serving in the army<sup>23</sup>.

In 524 the council of Lérida prohibited the clergy from using arms and participating in bloodshed<sup>24</sup>. In 633, Canon XLV of the fourth council of Toledo stated that a clergyman would lose his grade and would be sent to the monastery to repent his sins if he took up arms<sup>25</sup>. In 663-75 the Bordeaux council threatened all the clergy with punishment if they carried arms or lances<sup>26</sup>.

In Anglo-Saxon England, according to a compilation of Canons by archbishop Egbert of York (735-66), the priest who died in war was buried according to Christian rites, but it was forbidden to pray for his soul<sup>27</sup>.

Bearing arms were also prohibited in the Frankish lands, although the sentence was much lighter. In 583, the council of Mâcon introduced the punishment of bread and water for the clergy wearing arms; in 663/75, the council of Bordeaux threatened canonical punishment for the priests wearing arms; in 673/5, the council at Losne forbade the clergy to carry arms but without stating the punishment<sup>28</sup>.

The regulations adopted at the councils of Meaux (845), Paris (846), Ticino (876) and Metz (888) prohibited the clergy from carrying and using arms<sup>29</sup>. These prohibitions were included in the laws of Burchard of Worms, Ivo of Chartres and Gratian<sup>30</sup>. The council of Tribur (895) even prohibited prayers for the priests killed in battle<sup>31</sup>.

In 1006 Ælfric the Grammarian wrote that the priest should not carry weapons and that the hands stained with blood cannot be used for blessing. The priest killed in battle did not deserve mass<sup>32</sup>. Both *Excerptiones Pseudo-Ecgberhti* written in the 10<sup>th</sup> century England and canons of the Wulfstan prohibited bishops from using any weapon, except for the spiritual, as sincere prayers are more powerful than the swords and spears<sup>33</sup>. According to the King Æthelred's law of 1014, a priest who wishes to truly serve God should not participate in wars<sup>34</sup>.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the increase of the Pope's authority and the appearance of reformers, such as Gregory VII, strengthened the peace-loving tendencies in the Roman Church. Twelve significant councils of the Catholic Church held

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<sup>23</sup> GERRARD 2017: 10-12.

<sup>24</sup> CANARD 1936: 622, n. 1.

<sup>25</sup> GERRARD 2017: 10; DUGGAN 2013: 95.

<sup>26</sup> DUGGAN 2018: 503.

<sup>27</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 95.

<sup>28</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 96.

<sup>29</sup> GERRARD 2017: 12; DUGGAN 2018: 506.

<sup>30</sup> NAKASHIAN 2016: 38; DUGGAN 2018: 506.

<sup>31</sup> GERRARD 2017: 13.

<sup>32</sup> NAKASHIAN 2016: 48; GERRARD 2017: 154-155.

<sup>33</sup> KOTECKI 2016: 345-346.

<sup>34</sup> GERRARD 2017: 157.

in 1049-78 explicitly banned the use of arms by the clergy. The same happened at the councils of Clermont (1095) and Reims (1119)<sup>35</sup>.

A collection of canonical laws from the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, *Decretum Gratiani* allows the presence of bishops in the battlefield and grants permission to pray and encourage others although prohibits them from using weapons<sup>36</sup>. Another text of the 12<sup>th</sup> century *Epistola de episcopis ad bella procedentibus* also criticizes bishops who participate in battle<sup>37</sup>. Even in Germany, where bishops frequently participated in military activities, they were sometimes opposed. In 1133, Sigeboto of Paulinzella ascribed the death of Werner II, bishop of Strasbourg, who preferred wearing hauberk instead of church garments, to God's punishment<sup>38</sup>. In 1234, Gregory IX issued the first official papal collection of canon law, the *Decretales*, in which the clerics were excommunicated for carrying arms<sup>39</sup>.

Despite the fact that the reformers prohibited the participation of the clergy in military activities in the regulations of the Church councils and laws, they were not able to turn this desire into the universal ban shared by the public. Despite the prohibitions, the warrior bishops were rewarded by the kings and praised by the chronicles<sup>40</sup>.

Indeed, in Europe, at different times and in different texts opinions that justify and even praise the military deeds of the clergy can also be found. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Bernard of Angers argued that in certain circumstances the priest not only could but was obliged to take up weapons and defend himself, neighbours and the faith: 'If God's avenging omnipotence should employ the hand of any of His own servants to strike down and slaughter one of these Antichrists, no one could call it a crime.'<sup>41</sup> Gerbert d'Aurillac, a distinguished scholar and the Pope in 999-1003 (under the name of Sylvester II), did not consider the desire of the clergy to take part in military campaigns and lead soldiers in battle to be any violation of the canonical law<sup>42</sup>.

In 1103, in a letter to Pope Paschal II, Sigebert of Gembloux seeks justification for the participation of clergy in wars because the priests could also use weapons to protect the cities and churches in the fight against the enemies of the Lord<sup>43</sup>.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century John of Mantua created an ideological basis for military actions against the heretics, and Anselm, bishop of Lucca (1071-86) argued that such action was not only acceptable, but was even the obligation of the Church<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 99; DUGGAN 2018: 507.

<sup>36</sup> KOTECKI 2016: 346-347; GERRARD 2017: 166-167.

<sup>37</sup> KOTECKI 2016: 348.

<sup>38</sup> KOTECKI 2018: 305.

<sup>39</sup> DUGGAN 2018: 507.

<sup>40</sup> NAKASHIAN 2016: 75-76.

<sup>41</sup> NAKASHIAN 2016: 51-55.

<sup>42</sup> NAKASHIAN 2016: 64-65.

<sup>43</sup> Sigebert of Gembloux, 454.

<sup>44</sup> HOUGHTON 2018: 276.

Raoul Glaber (985-1047) defended the monks who fought armed for the right reason and not of fame<sup>45</sup>.

Saxo Grammaticus wrote that in 1158, in the fight against the Baltic pagans, Absalon, the bishop of Roskilde served not with prayer but with a weapon and asks immediately: 'is there something more pleasing which can be offered to God the Almighty than the death of the wicked?'<sup>46</sup>

Revolutionary changes in the Church law began in the Holy Land, where a small group of Franks had to fight for their survival. In 1119 the Crusaders found themselves in particularly hard conditions after the death of the ruler of Antioch, Roger, on the Field of Blood and the constant lack of warriors. This pushed them to reach unprecedented decisions. As stated at the council of Nablus in 1120 by the Church dignitaries and secular nobles of Jerusalem, the clergy had the right to defend themselves by arms, if necessary<sup>47</sup>.

The Crusades, introduction of military religious orders and the articulation of the Just War theory contributed to the legitimisation of violence in the High Middle Ages<sup>48</sup>. As claimed in various letters by Pope Alexander III (1159-81) the clergy could defend and repel force with force. This regulation was included in various lawbooks<sup>49</sup>. Starting from Alexander III, the popes recognized the right of the clergy to defend themselves<sup>50</sup>. According to Pope Innocent IV (1243-54), the bishop who was endowed with secular power could also carry out wars<sup>51</sup>. In one of the letters to a French Church dignitary, the Pope mentions that, according to all laws, the clergy is entitled to oppose the force by force<sup>52</sup>.

At the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the laws of the Catholic Church gradually changed and they recognized both the right of the pope and the prelates to declare just wars and the right of the clergy to defend themselves by arms in case of need<sup>53</sup>.

### **The Byzantine Church in War**

The attitude of the Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire concerning the possible participation of the clergy in war differed significantly from that of Latin Europe. The theory and practice of the Greek Church regarding this issue did not differ and therefore, prohibitions by the canon law were fully pursued in everyday life.

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<sup>45</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 117.

<sup>46</sup> JENSEN 2018: 405.

<sup>47</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 102-103; DUGGAN 2018: 508. Benjamin Kedar refers to the article which opposes prevailing canonical laws as 'one of the most original, and boldest, enactments of the Council of Nablus'; KEDAR 1999: 324.

<sup>48</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 117.

<sup>49</sup> DUGGAN 2018: 510.

<sup>50</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 137.

<sup>51</sup> MACIEJEWSKI 2018: 349.

<sup>52</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 140.

<sup>53</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 142.

Although the Byzantine clergy accompanied the Imperial forces in military operations, they could only pray and perform other religious rituals. The priesthood did not become involved in military actions. The Greek Church possessed neither military units nor vassal commitment to the Empire.

The Apostolic Canon 83 and the seventh canon of the council of Chalcedon (451) prohibited the participation of the clergy in military actions. In addition, soldiers were not allowed to become clerics. These prohibitions were in force until the end of the Byzantine Empire<sup>54</sup>.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-59), a Cappadocian priest was punished because he had killed Muslim offenders attacking the church<sup>55</sup>. The Muslims broke into the church when the priest was conducting a mass. The courageous priest opposed the adversaries and killed or wounded several of them. Marius Canard notes that such courage would be highly praised in the West whereas in Byzantium the priest was punished by the bishop. It should not be surprising that the disappointed priest, who had no hope of forgiveness, fled to the Muslims and denied Christianity<sup>56</sup>.

At the time of Nikephoros II Phokas (963-69), several priests and bishops were accused of participating in the fighting and killing the enemy. By the decision of the Synod they were all defrocked<sup>57</sup>. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Greek bishop Demetrios Chomatianos ruled that a priest who killed adversaries while protecting his city, must be deprived of ecclesiastical status<sup>58</sup>.

The Byzantines ruthlessly criticized the Latin clergy for participating in fights. In 1054 the Greek Patriarch Michael Keroularios complained that Latin bishops participated in battles and thus they ‘stain their hands with blood, killing and being killed.’<sup>59</sup>

Ana Comnena wrote, surprised, about the priests participating in military activities of the First Crusade<sup>60</sup>. Comnena describes a clash between the Byzantines and the Crusaders, when the Latin priest first shoot arrows at his opponent and then, despite multiple wounds continued to fight with what he had in his hands<sup>61</sup>. While telling this episode, Anna points out the difference between the Byzantines and Western Europeans:

‘The Latin customs with regard to priests differ from ours. We are bidden by canon law and the teaching of the Gospel, “Touch not, grumble not, attack not – for thou art consecrated.” But the barbarian Latin will at the same time

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<sup>54</sup> KOLBABA 1998: 215.

<sup>55</sup> MOROZ 1999: 46, n. 7.

<sup>56</sup> CANARD 1936: 622.

<sup>57</sup> VISCUSO 1995: 38-39; STOYANOV 2009: 172.

<sup>58</sup> KOLBABA 1998: 215, n. 62.

<sup>59</sup> KOLBABA 1998: 214.

<sup>60</sup> NICHOLSON 2004: 64.

<sup>61</sup> Anna Komnene, 283-284.

handle sacred objects, fasten a shield to his left arm and grasp a spear in his right. He will communicate the sacred Body and Blood while at the same time gazing on bloodshed and become himself a man of blood as it says in the Psalm of David. Thus this barbarian race is no less devoted to religion than to war. This priest, then, more man of action than holy man, wore priestly garb and at the same time handled an oar and ready for naval action or war on land, fought sea and men alike.<sup>62</sup>

The Metropolitan of Ephesus Nicholas Mesarites wrote in outrage about the Latin clergy participating in the sack of Constantinople in 1204: ‘What name could you give them? Bishop-soldiers or warrior-bishops?’<sup>63</sup> The Greek bishop of Cyzicus Constantine Stilbes in a text written as in opposition to the Latins, strictly criticises western clergy for their participation in war: ‘The high-ranking priests participate in warfare and fight and are killed or become the killers of men, the very ones that are pupils of the nonviolent Christ and use the same hands to sanctify the secret body and blood.’<sup>64</sup> In 1250 the Byzantine Emperor John III Vatatzes (1222-54) told Frederick II Hohenstaufen that participation of armed Latin priests in battles was shameful<sup>65</sup>.

In this case the position of the Greek Church was shared by its daughter churches. The Latin clergy were blamed for participating in wars by the anti-Catholic treatise written in Kievan Rus for Iziaslav II (1146-54)<sup>66</sup>.

As Lawrence Duggan notes, ‘the Eastern Church maintained the position of the Apostolic Canons all through its history and consistently punished with suspension or deposition those clerics who violated it.’<sup>67</sup>

### **War and the Church in Medieval Georgia**

Despite a very close relationship with the Byzantine Church, reflected in shared Orthodox beliefs and canon laws translated from Greek, the attitude of the Georgian Church to the issue differs from that of Byzantium and is closer to the Western practice.

Vakhushti Batonishvili (1696-1757) was the first who tried to explain the circumstances that conditioned the military activities of the Georgian clergy. The author pointed out that Bishops, being the King’s vassals, were responsible for providing military units<sup>68</sup>. Vakhushti added another factor to the above-said: the weakening of Georgia in the period and Muslim coercion forced the clergy to take

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<sup>62</sup> Anna Komnene, 283.

<sup>63</sup> ANGOLD 2016: 301.

<sup>64</sup> KOLBABA 1998: 217; STOURAITIS 2011: 49-50.

<sup>65</sup> DENNIS 2001: 33, n. 11.

<sup>66</sup> KOTECKI 2018: 307.

<sup>67</sup> DUGGAN 2013: 94.

<sup>68</sup> Vakhushti Batonishvili, 37-38.



up arms in order to defend the Christian faith and encourage the parish with the personal example: ‘Do not be afraid and fight against the adversary, and do not give up the religion, faith and customs and we will lead you in the war.’<sup>69</sup>

The feudal organization of Georgia conditioned the social structure of the Georgian Church and its obligations before the monarchy. From the very start, the Georgian Church was the owner of great property, lands and estates. The powerful church and monastic seigneuries had their own structures and staff of civil servants; they represented the political and economic units of society. The Church was a big feudal organisation: at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century it included 35 bishoprics whereas in the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries it comprised fifty dioceses and many big monasteries<sup>70</sup>.

Obviously, the institution of such wealth could not have been left beyond the system of the military organization. Despite the fact that the Georgian Church enjoyed many advantages and was exempt from taxes and also, was immune to the court trial in certain cases, it had to take part in military campaigns<sup>71</sup>.

### **With cross and sword**

The upper circles of Georgian Church dignitaries, likewise in Europe, developed from the aristocratic layer of society and had a close relationship with the military activities. They were accustomed to both conducting military campaigns or taking part in the combat.

The participation of the clergy in wars in Georgia was first confirmed during the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali. In 502 the Catholicos of Kartli Peter accompanied King in the fight against the Sasanians<sup>72</sup>.

Basil Zarzveli mentions that in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Giorgi Matskvereli (bishop of Atskuri) neutralized the unrest between the successors of feudal lord Chorchaneli in Samtskhe, which had been in progress for more than three years<sup>73</sup>. Interference in the secular affairs by Matskvereli was largely possible by employing a military force under his subordination<sup>74</sup>.

In 979 Tornike Eristavi, a Georgian monk living at the monastery on Mount Athos under the name of monk Ioane, by the request of the Byzantine royal court led 12 000 warriors sent by David of Tao, to neutralize the rebellion under the leadership of Bardas Skleros<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Vakhushti Batonishvili, 38.

<sup>70</sup> KLIMIASHVILI 1961: 95-96.

<sup>71</sup> KLIMIASHVILI 1961: 97.

<sup>72</sup> Juansheri, 201; ANCHABADZE 2010: 53.

<sup>73</sup> VACHNADZE 1975: 177.

<sup>74</sup> KLIMIASHVILI 1961: 98.

<sup>75</sup> Giorgi Mtatsmindeli, 45-48.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the bishop of Tbeti, Saba fought against the Byzantine Empire. He revealed an exemplary military flair, built a fortress in a strategic location and managed to retain Shavsheti province, together with the Ezra, bishop of Anchi<sup>76</sup>.

During the reign of David IV (1089-1125) the highest post created by means of merging of the secular (*Mtsignobartukhutsesi*, i.e. chancellor) and church (*Chkondideli*, i.e. bishop of Chkondidi) positions was granted to the Church dignitary. Together with other duties, the competence required for the job included the ability to be involved in military activities. The first person to occupy the post of *Mtsignobartukhutses-Chkondideli* was Giorgi, bishop of Chkondidi, who participated in military campaigns and planned and successfully performed various operations. In 1110 he took Samshvilde and in 1115 – Rustavi<sup>77</sup>.

In 1161 during the battle for Ani, King George III was accompanied by the monks, *Mtsignobartukhutses-Chkondideli Iovane* and *Svimon (Sumbat Orbeli)*, who, besides the armament, were ‘equipped with the knowledge of warfare.’<sup>78</sup>

In 1195 Anton *Mtsignobartukhutsesi*, equiped with arms, took part in the battle of Shamkor. Although he did not shed blood (‘due to being a monk he did not unsheathe a sword’), but became involved in looting (‘he was full of wealth and property... and acquired 300 mules and camels’)<sup>79</sup>.

After the collapse of the United Kingdom of Georgia, Giorgi VIII became king of Kakheti (1466-76). Following his reforms, the bishops were appointed as commanders-in-chief of the counties<sup>80</sup>. Their obligation was to organize and manage the soldiers, and the army going into battle was led by the Mouravis. However, the bishops often participated in battles as well<sup>81</sup>. Obviously, the transition of military duties to the Church dignitaries would have been impossible without the clergy having the relevant experience and practice.

In 1533, along with the rulers of Megrelia and Guria, the bishops of Guria also participated in the military campaign to Jiketi. In this unsuccessful campaign they were taken as prisoners of war: ‘Gurieli and three of his brothers and his bishops and their armies were captured. Catholicos Malachia liberated them and bought out the dead bodies.’<sup>82</sup>

In 1556, in the battle of Garisi, bishops and elderly people were part of King Luarsab’s entourage. When the Kizilbashs attacked them, the clergy took part in the fight: ‘Then the bishops and the elderly men who were with him gathered together, and as if they were thirty years old, they attacked the Kizilbashs, and took

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<sup>76</sup> *Matiane Kartlisa*, 292.

<sup>77</sup> King David’s *Chronicler*, 331, 333.

<sup>78</sup> *The Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns*, 7.

<sup>79</sup> *The Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns*, 72.

<sup>80</sup> Vakhushti *Batonishvili*, 568.

<sup>81</sup> KLIMIASHVILI 1964: 124, 126.

<sup>82</sup> *The Chronicles and Other Materials about Georgian History*, 378-379.

part into the fierce battle. And the camp of the Sultan Mahhmad was destroyed and many were killed.<sup>83</sup>

Vakhushti Batonishvili told the story of the Marabda war of 1625. Prior to the decisive battle with the Iranians, it became obvious that Domenti Avalishvili, the bishop of Ruisi, was going to participate in the battle: ‘Avalishvili was told: If you are going to take up arms and fight today, order someone else to give communion to us, and if you not, it would be better if you did.’<sup>84</sup> It seems that the army was somewhat hesitant to take communion from the man who intended to kill the enemy. Nevertheless, the bishop was did not give up his intention and replied: ‘Today there is a fight against faith and Christ, not only against us; because of this, I’m going to shed the blood with my sword before you do so.’<sup>85</sup> Besides him, many other clergymen participated in the battle of Marabda. The bishop of Kharchashna and other clergymen also were killed during the battle<sup>86</sup>.

In a letter sent to Rome in 1633, Theatine missionary Justo Prato noted that the Catholicos of Georgia Eudemos Diasamidze ‘was more like a soldier than a priest. He cared very little for God’s service. Last year this man accompanied King Teimuraz in the Battle of Ganja and killed several Moors with his own hand to rob them of the jewelry they wore.’<sup>87</sup>

Like Western-European warrior bishops, Georgian bishops also participated in internecine wars. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the bishop of Atskuri sometimes fought on the side of Bagrat IV, whereas in other battles he seems to be siding with Liparit Baghvash<sup>88</sup>. Such cases were especially frequent after the collapse of the unified monarchy. The bishop of Tsageri defended Kutaisi Fortress during the civil war in Imereti in 1661<sup>89</sup>. In 1625, bishop Malachia played a decisive role in the fight between Dadiani and Gurieli. Moreover, according to the information by Castelli, he contributed to the final outcome of the war by bringing a huge army to support Dadiani<sup>90</sup>. From the writings of the Shemokmedi Monastery we learn that in 1706 the bishop of Jumati Maxime III Sharvashidze defeated the Abkhazian-Megrelian army<sup>91</sup>. Another warrior bishop of Jumati, Sesiashvili is mentioned in the book of donations by Kaikhosro Gurieli, written in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century: bishop

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<sup>83</sup> Beri Egnatashvili, 366.

<sup>84</sup> Vakhushti Batonishvili, 38.

<sup>85</sup> Vakhushti Batonishvili, 38. Behavior and words by Domenti Avalishvili resemble an episode from the history of the European Church. The bishop of Durham Antony Bek headed a division of army in the battle of Falkirk in 1298. One of the knights pointed out that there was no place for him on the battlefield, and it was better if he performed mass. To this Bek replied: ‘Go, if you want to celebrate Mass, for today we are all soldiers’; NAKASHIAN 2016: 255.

<sup>86</sup> Archili, 75; ANCHABADZE 2010: 58; BUBULASHVILI 2004: 26.

<sup>87</sup> TABAGHUA 1987: 250.

<sup>88</sup> *Matiane Kartlisa*, 300.

<sup>89</sup> KLIMIASHVILI 1961: 101.

<sup>90</sup> Don Christophoro de Castelli, 48.

<sup>91</sup> *Small Chronicles*, 75.

was in charge of other Gurian ‘honourable men’, fought on the side of Dadiani and was captured by the victorious Gurieli<sup>92</sup>.

The letter written in 1721 by Ioane, bishop of Manglisi, dedicated to the reasons for his resigning from the post, seems quite significant. Ioane enumerates the secular obligations that every Georgian bishop was obliged to perform, and due to which he was forced to resign from this high rank. Besides disputes for the neighboring lands (‘a lot of rivalry and hatred’), Ioane found it difficult to perform the military obligations (‘participation in military campaigns and hunting’) mandatory for the bishop (‘nobody would become a bishop in Kartli without performing them’)<sup>93</sup>.

These examples taken from different epochs indicate that in the case of necessity the Georgian clergy were involved in military operations and personally participated in them.

Foreign travelers and missionaries frequently emphasized the daring nature of the Georgian clergy.

Jean-Baptist Tavernier (1605-89), who traveled in Eastern countries five times, pointed out that in war the rulers of Western Georgia were accompanied by church servants: ‘These three Kings of *Basha-Shiouk*, *Mengrelia* and *Guriel*, are Christians also. And when they go to war, all the ecclesiastical persons attend them; arch-bishops and bishops, priests and monks: not so much to fight as to encourage the souldiers.’<sup>94</sup>

Giuseppe Giudice from Milan, a member of the order of Theatines lived in Georgia in 1631-43. He wrote that in Megrelia ‘no one can be released from war, neither bishops, nor monks, nor priests, nor secular people. If a man tries to avoid military service, he is severely punished and is bound to lose his property, cattle, and serfs.’<sup>95</sup>

Jean Chardin, who traveled to Georgia in 1672-73, noted that despite the clerical rank, the bishops of Megrelia were obliged to perform their principal feudal duty – to support their lord by participating in military activities: ‘At their Prince’s demand, they mount their horses, as they are considered to be commanders of their subordinates who are expected to be armed.’<sup>96</sup>

Dominican missionary Giovanni Giuliani da Lucca, who visited the Odishi Principality in 1630 and 1633, also pointed out that ‘their bishops are used to fight, and accompany the prince armed with a helmet and scimitar and iron mace, and in good mail armour they fight with the Abbazza, and sometimes also with the same Georgians.’<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> KARTVELISHVILI 2006: 35; *Monuments of Georgian Law*, v. 6: 667.

<sup>93</sup> SHAORSHADZE 2008: 191.

<sup>94</sup> *The Six Voyages of John Baptista Tavernier*, 125.

<sup>95</sup> Don Giuseppe Giudice Milanese, 92.

<sup>96</sup> *Travels of Jean Chardin in Persia and Other Oriental Countries (Information about Georgia)*, 140.

<sup>97</sup> *Bibliografia critica delle antiche reciproche corrispondenze*, 61.

## Warrior clergymen and the Georgian law

The Georgian legislation recognized the prohibitions practiced by the legal systems of the Christian East. Decisions of the World Church Councils were translated into Georgian and the Greek religious canones functioned as acting legislation in medieval Georgia<sup>98</sup>. The canonical collections were as follows: the *Small lawbook* translated by Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli (955-1028) and the *Big lawbook*, translated *nomocanon* by Arsen Ikaltoeli (1050-1130), which largely follows the *Greek law*<sup>99</sup>. The former source does not refer to the military activities by the clergymen although it is discussed in another canonical essay *Regulations for the World Priests* translated by Ekvtime Mtatsmideli (St. Euthymius the Hagiorite) from Greek in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> cc. Based on the Greek canons, the Georgian scholar bans the priesthood from becoming involved in the fight, as well as from participating in the division of the loot: ‘Do not enter the war and never take loot.’<sup>100</sup>

Despite this, the existing reality led to the relaxation of these norms. In regard to military activities of clergy, Georgian law was much more lenient than Byzantine, and in the case of necessity, it even modified Greek legal norms.

According to the *Samtavisi lawbook* (1459), the use of weapons by the priest and participating in battles was not punished severely. Although the priest was threatened by anathematizing, in the case of repentance he had to pay only three cows: ‘If a priest or clergy steals something or takes up arms, he should be anathematized; and if he repents, he should pay 3 cows.’<sup>101</sup> Obviously, despite the prohibitions, such facts happened and therefore, there was a need for this penalty to be imposed upon the trespassers.

Moreover, the priests, like secular men, sometimes even acted like brigands. In the period between 1470-74, the *Commandment of Faith* imposes a fierce punishment against such clergy: ‘A brigand-priest must be hanged.’<sup>102</sup>

In a document written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (*The order of the faith and commandment for Gergeti congregation*), the bishop is forced to apply certain punishment measures against the priests who wish to participate in wars and imposes a fine on them: ‘If the priest takes up arms, anyone who sees this, should take the arms away by force and make him pay the fine in favor of the country.’<sup>103</sup> Compared to the norms of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there is no mention of anathematization and this transgression is punishable only by a fine.

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<sup>98</sup> JAVAKHISVILI 1982: 38.

<sup>99</sup> ZAOZERSKIY, KHAKHANOV 1902: 1-96; *The Small Lawbook*, 1-154; *The Big Lawbook*, 1-627.

<sup>100</sup> JOJUA 2016-2017: 650.

<sup>101</sup> *Monuments of Georgian Law*, v. 3: 208.

<sup>102</sup> *Monuments of Georgian Law*, v. 3: 225.

<sup>103</sup> *Monuments of Georgian Law*, v. 3: 351.

In 1748 the laws of Church council held by Erekle II and Anton Catholicos indicate that the clergy and arms are incompatible, but the execution of this norm is less categorical and is limited to the warning. Only in case of repetitive recalcitrance can drastic measures, such as dismissal be applied: ‘if in towns, or in villages, or in the places where there are many people, priests are found wearing weapons, they will be warned and if they are found wearing arms again, they will be dismissed from the priesthood.’<sup>104</sup>

In 1705-1708, based on the efforts of Vakhtang VI, a collection of law books was composed, which, apart from the Georgian laws, included the main legal systems working in Eastern Christian countries, such as Mose’s Law, Syrian-Roman, Byzantine and Armenian laws. These laws, which were tailored to the demands of the Georgian society, had been practiced in Georgia before. The editor of the lawbook Isidore Dolidze notes that ‘the above-mentioned laws were presented in such format which leads me to believe that they can be considered as a Georgian version of the respective monuments.’<sup>105</sup> A proof of this is the article of the law which refers to the murder committed by a clergyman and, compared with the original Greek variant, is modified according to the local reality.

As stated by V. Sokolsky, the source of Article 330 of the law by Vakhtang VI is the seventh chapter of the lambda litera of *Syntagma alphabeticum* by Matthew Blastares<sup>106</sup>, in which Blastares, based on the law of Basil the Great, states that despite the specific circumstances and also the fact that the attacker was a Muslim, the cleric person who killed the adversary, must be anathemised from the Church, because ‘for all who will take up the sword, will die by the sword’ (Matthew 26:52)<sup>107</sup>.

This legal norm by Blastares was substantially altered in the lawbook by Vakhtang VI (*Greek Law*, Article 330): ‘If a high priest or a priest kills a Hagarian or other unbeliever in war, or if someone attacks with a sword and the priest defends himself and kills the attacker, as he is a proven enemy, what would happen? Nonetheless, the priest would not have the right to conduct the service whereas his dignity and the right to conduct church services will not be eliminated.’<sup>108</sup> The priest in the military campaign is a regular phenomenon for Georgian law, therefore no special attention is drawn to it. Moreover, being in the army or in self-defence, a church figure is free to kill an unbeliever adversary! This norm of the law is even explained rhetorically: ‘what would happen?’ The priest will not be punished for such an act (‘his dignity and rights will not be eliminated’), the right to practice only seems to be suspended, presumably temporarily, as the church dignity is still maintained.

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<sup>104</sup> *Monuments of Georgian Law*, v. 3: 800.

<sup>105</sup> *Monuments of Georgian Law*, v. 1: 5.

<sup>106</sup> SOKOL'SKIY 1897: 74.

<sup>107</sup> *Patrologia Graeca*, v. 144, col. 1398-1399.

<sup>108</sup> *Monuments of Georgian Law*, v. 1: 204.

The part of the lawbook by Vakhtang, based on the Armenian judiciary (*Armenian Law*, Chapter 320) discusses the cases about clerical figures who sheds blood<sup>109</sup>. This article, set out in the question-and-answer format, discusses cases when the priest is attacked. Although it is generally noted that the priest is forbidden to kill a human being ('it is not correct for him'), then the law calls on the act of saving the neighbour ('if this act is performed to save his comrades') and the religion of the opponent ('If the men are unbelievers'). In this case, the priest's behavior is declared to be right: 'to kill is good' (!). Then high ranking officials should consider whether it is advisable for such a person to remain a priest. However, it is easy to predict the verdict, as the law practically praises such acts.

This section of the lawbook is based on article 170 of the *Mkhitar Gosh Law*<sup>110</sup>. It is noteworthy that in the original version by Gosh the priest's guilt is more explicitly pronounced. In contrast to the Georgian version, where it is only stated that the priest's behavior is not right, the Armenian author maintains that the killer cannot remain a priest and that the clergiman cannot even kill an animal in self-defence. Although the *Georgian law* considers it to be a norm to help and save the neighbour, the *Mkhitar Gosh Law* mentions that he 'has heard' about the correctness of such action. In the Georgian version the focus is placed on the religion of the attackers whereas Gosh mentions only the foreign (*aylazgi*) attacker and not an unbeliever (*anhawat*)<sup>111</sup>.

As can be seen, medieval Georgian law books reflect the reality of the feudal country concerning the use of weapons by the clergy. The conflict with the Christian canons was decided in favor of military necessity, and it was reflected in the legislation in a certain form.

For centuries the Georgian Church was part of the feudal military system, performing vassal obligations for the monarchy whilst Georgian clergy served the country with the cross and the sword.

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<sup>109</sup> *Monuments of Georgian Law*, v. 1: 339.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. *The Lawcode [Datastanagirk'] of Mxit'ar Goš*, 223.

<sup>111</sup> THOMSON 2005: 39.

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