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## FATHER PETRE TATALASHVILI – THE LAST PRIOR OF THE GEORGIAN MONASTERY IN ISTANBUL

İSTANBUL GÜRCÜ KİLİSESİNİN SON RUHANİ LİDERİ PAPAZ PETRE TATALAŞVİLİ

ОТЕЦ ПЕТРЕ ТАТАЛАШВИЛИ – ПОСЛЕДНИЙ НАСТОЯТЕЛЬ ГРУЗИНСКОГО МОНАСТЫРЯ В СТАМБУЛЕ

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### ABSTRACT

The residence of the Georgian Catholics in Istanbul, the Monastery of the Virgin Mary (turkish: Gürcü Katolik Kilisesi), with its schools, printing house and rich library used to fulfill a great Georgian cultural, educational and scientific function outside of Georgia for more than a century.

The temple was built in 1861 by Father Petre Kharischirashvili in one of the most beautiful districts of Istanbul, Ferikoy (the village of Angels). It is noteworthy, that the most of the fathers serving in the Georgian Monastery of Istanbul were from Samtskhe-Javakheti by origin. Father Petre Tatalashvili was from Samtskhe as well.

During the hundred years (1861-1961) of its existence, Georgian Catholic Monastery of Istanbul acted as a spiritual, cultural, educational and scientific center where many national, educational or scientific activities were performed. Establishment of religious educational institution, Georgian-French schools, printing-houses, the literacy dissemination society among Georgians living in Turkey, library called after Akaki Tsereteli are good examples of cultural and educational activities of the Monastery. The Monastery was the educational center giving Georgian young people the opportunity to get education first in Istanbul and then to Europe. It supported many Georgian scientists and public figures, like Ivane Gvaramadze, Mikheil Tamarashvili, Shalva Vardidze, etc.

**The goal of the article** is to describe the work of the father Petre Tatalashvili, one of the valuable figures, a secretary of a monastery and the responsible person for the educational processes, later on the last Prior of the Georgian monastery in Istanbul. Accordingly, it aims to introduce him to a broader society based on the preserved notes kept in family and other

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funds or archives, which have not been used by the scientists widely. We consider, that he deserves to be known by the Georgian society due to his deeds, as he faithfully served to education and cultural advancement of Georgian people for entire his life, under the foreign sky, in the foreign country. He was the defender, the patron, the spiritual confessor of Georgian Catholics.

**The research methodology:** The research is based on the historical research method: description, comparative-historical method, empirical, causal-historical analysis based on the epistolary and memoir materials preserved in the archive fund of Istanbul Georgian Catholic Monastery

**Keywords:** Petre Tatalashvili, Georgian Monastery in Istanbul, Georgian Catholics, Ferikoy

### ÖZ

İstanbul Meryem Ana adına Gürcü Katolik Kilisesi, Gürcistan dışındaki Gürcü manastırları arasında seçkin dini ve kültürel-egitim ve Kartveloloji araştırmalarının merkezlerinden birini temsil etmektedir.

Tapınak, 1861 yılında Peder Petre Kharisçirapaşvili tarafından İstanbul'un en güzel semtlerinden biri olan Periköyünde inşa edilmiştir. İstanbul'un Gürcü Katolik Kilisesi'nde faaliyet gösteren din adamlarının çoğunluğunun Samtskhe-Cavakheti'den olduğunu da belirtmek gerekir. Papaz Petre Tatalaşvili de Samtskhe'lidir. Yüz yıllık varlığı boyunca (1861-1961), kilise bir dizi ulusal, eğitimsel ve bilimsel etkinliğin gerçekleştirildiği bir dini, kültürel, eğitimsel ve bilim merkeziydi.

İlahiyat okulu, Gürcü-Fransız okulları, matbaa, Osmanlı vatandaşı olan Gürcüler arasında okuma-yazmayı yayma cemiyeti ve Akaki Tsereteli adına kütüphane kurulması, söz konusu kilisenin kültür ve eğitim faaliyetinin kanıtıdır. O dönemde Gürcü Katoliklerin eğitim merkezi haline gelen kilise, genç Gürcülerin önce İstanbul'da sonra da Avrupa'da eğitim almalarının önünü açmıştır.

**Amaç:** İstanbul'daki Gürcü Kilisesi'nin değerli simalarından, manastırın yazı işleri müdürü ve eğitim süreçlerinden sorumlu kişi ve son başrahip olan Papaz Petre Tatalaşvili'nin şimdiye kadar bilim camiası tarafından bilinmeyen faaliyetlerini, ailesinde ve çeşitli vakıf ve arşivlerde muhafaza edilen belgelere göre değerlendirmektir.

Tüm hayatı boyunca yabancı bir ülkede Gürcü halkının eğitimine ve kültürel gelişimine sadakatle hizmet eden Papaz Petre Tatalaşvili'nin katkılarının Gürcü toplumu tarafından bilinmesini hak ettiğini düşünüyoruz. Kendisi Gürcistan sınırları dışında, Gürcü Katoliklerinin ruhani babası ve Gürcü Katolikliğinin savunucusu ve destekçisiydi.

**Araştırma metodolojisi:** Araştırma, İstanbul'daki Gürcü Katolik Manastırının arşivinde muhafaza edilen mektup ve anı materyallerini kullanarak betimleme, karşılaştırmalı-tarihsel yöntem, ampirik, nedensel-tarihsel analize ve ağırlıklı olarak tarihsel araştırma yöntemine dayanmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Petre Tatalaşvili, Petre Kharisçirapaşvili, İstanbul Gürcü Kilisesi, Gürcü Katolikleri, Periköy.

### АННОТАЦИЯ

На протяжении всего века Грузинский католический монастырь имени Святой Богородицы Марии в Стамбуле, со своими школами, типографией и богатой библиотекой выполнял культурно-просветительскую и научную функцию за пределами Грузии и служил великому грузинскому делу.

Храм при монастыре был построен в 1861 году отцом Петре Харисчирашвили в одном из красивейших районов Стамбула Ферикой (Деревня Ангелов). Следует также

отметить, что большинство отцов, служащих в грузинском монастыре Стамбула, были родом из Самцхе-Джаваheti. Отец Петре Таталашвили тоже был из Самцхе.

Грузинский католический монастырь Стамбула за сто лет своего существования (1861-1961) был религиозным, культурным, просветительским и научным центром, где проводился ряд национальных, просветительских и научных мероприятий. Основание духовной школы, грузинско-французских школ, типографии, общества распространения грамотности среди османских грузин, библиотеки имени Акакия Церетели свидетельствует о культурно-просветительской деятельности монастыря. Именно монастырь стал в то время центром образования грузинских католиков, что открыло путь грузинской молодежи к получению образования сначала в Стамбуле, а затем и в Европе. Именно благодаря монастырю здесь были воспитаны выдающиеся грузинские учёные и общественные деятели, как Иване Гварамдзе, Михаил Тамарашвили, Михаил Тархнишвили, Шалва Вардизе и другие.

**Цель статьи:** описать деятельность одного из достойных деятелей грузинского монастыря Стамбула, его секретаря и ответственного за воспитательные процессы. А в последствии и последнего настоятеля - отца Петре Таталашвили, и соответственно, представить его широкой публике по семейным записям, сохранившимся у его потомков и в различных фондах и архивах, не нашедших широкого распространения в научной среде до сих пор. Мы считаем, что отец Петре Таталашвили своим вкладом заслуживает признания грузинского общества. Потому что всю свою жизнь под чужим небом, в чужой стране он верно служил родине, просвещению и культурному прогрессу грузинского народа. За пределами Грузии он был защитником и сторонником грузинского католицизма, его духовным учителем.

**Методология исследования:** Исследование в основном основано на историческом методе исследования: описание, сравнительно-исторический метод, эмпирический, причинно-исторический анализ с использованием эпистолярных и мемуарных материалов, хранящихся в архивном фонде Грузинского католического монастыря в Стамбуле.

**Ключевые слова:** Петре Таталашвили, грузинский монастырь Стамбула, грузинские католики, Ферикой.

## INTRODUCTION

Until 90s of the XX century, only little part of the society was informed about Monastery, though in Meskhети, the descendants of Monastery leaders were well aware about it. Due to soviet censorship, Istanbul Georgian Monastery was tabooed. The residents of Meskhети also used to avoid talking about it. The first scientist who reported about it was Shota Lomsadze. He described certain period of the history of the monastery in “The Chronicles of Akhaltsikhe” (Lomsadze, 1979\_66-94). After 90s, when Georgia became independent many researchers became interested by the history of the Monastery and by the material preserved there.

There were many centers of Georgian culture and education abroad, though majority of them has been lost. It is impossible not to agree with Ms. Shushana Putkaradze who says in one of her articles: “Only the Georgian cultural center in Istanbul is preserved safely and reliably. There is the treasure, which was maintained by Turkish people, the Republic of Turkey, what is especially valuable and is the symbol of delicate attitude of Turkish people towards Georgian cultural heritage” (Putkaradze, 2007:10).

It can be safely said that Georgian catholic monastery exists due to Meskhетian public figures. It was established by Father Petre Kharischirashvili, though maintenance of

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the Monastery in the current form is the merit of the monastery leaders or the fathers who served in Istanbul, as well as Pavle Zazadze and his family living in Istanbul.

As it is known, the monastery was established because of certain political reasons. In the second half of XIX century, the condition of Georgian Catholics was worsened in Georgia and especially, in Samtskhe-Javakheti due to Russia's politics against Catholicism. "Prohibition of entrance of Catholic Missionaries from Europe to Georgia made the situation hard in Akhaltsikhe most of all, Where Russian government supported to establishment of Armenian typikon and Armenian language in the churches serving to Georgian Catholics on Latin Rite. Armenian Catholic Church conducted a wide-range of propaganda about absence of Georgian Catholicism historically. It did not mean that Meskheti returned to its motherland would obey easily and the leaders for struggle became Georgian Catholics (Papashvili, 1995:314-315).

Petre Kharischirashvili became the leader of the struggle, though he was not able to bring it to the end due to many reasons. In 1857, he left the native land and moved to Turkey. In 1859, he received a local service in the nun's Monastery with the help of Archbishop Bruno, the representative of Pope Pius IX. The same year he received the permission for Georgian practice of consecration of clergy and purchased the land plot in the suburbs of Istanbul, Ferikoy with financial support of famous patron, Iakob Zubalashvili. Father Petre built the Monastery of Virgin Mary. The monastery of nun's was added to it soon. Father Petre led the monastery until 1892. After his death elected leaders Stephane Giorgidze, Alfonse Khitarishvili, Benedicte Vardidze, Pio Balidze, Shio Batmanashvili and Petre Tatalashvili led the monastery, the latest was the last leader of the monastery (Kruashvili, 2012:8-9).

At the edge of XIX-XX centuries during active Russification and Armenization of Georgians "Istanbul Georgian monastery was the only religious institution, where monks by practical steps, by crosses, pens or weapon struggled for sovereignty, what became fatal for them (Catholics and Catholicism in Georgia in XIX-XX cc, 2022:124).

An Italian Diplomat Eugène Dallegio d'Alessio (1888-1983) wrote about Istanbul Georgian Catholic Monastery "... Monastery is not only a spiritual establishment, but it also has a political value... The catholic clergymen of the monastery... were not afraid of the threat for existence of their society and with the great belief of wonderful future served to freedom of Georgia... The Clergymen of Ferikoy are famous in entire Turkey and Greece, that it is so prominent church in Ottoman Empire that the people with different origin and religion used to visit it" (Dallegio d'Alessio, 1921:33).

### **DISCUSSION**

Many famous writers, public figures and clergymen were grown in Istanbul Georgian Monastery; Petre Tatalashvili was one of the most prominent and respected one. He was born on November 29, 1888 in one of the villages of Samtskhe, called Arali in the family of Stephane and Keke having many children. He received a primary education in his native country, in his own villages and he was around 8-9 years old when he was sent to Istanbul by his parents to get spiritual education. His family had four sons and three daughters, the eldest son was Ivane (Vano), then Pavle, Mikheil (Mikha) and Elias. The Daughters were Sophio (Sopho), Ezo and Tere.

According to the family data, the family of Tatalashvili used to be considered as rich. Giorgi, the grand-grandfather of Petre Tatalashvili (who was called as Gio in the village) acted as "Narodny Sudya" of the Mazra it means that he was an assistant to the public judge (the source: Temur Tatalashvili, the grandson of Ilia (Elia), the brother of Petre. It is clear from the family status, that they valued education. Stephane, the father asked to

Benedicte Vardidze, the spiritual figure, who was from his village by origin and visited his family, to take 8 years-old Petre to Istanbul Georgian Monastery for study. There is the letter preserved in the archive of the Istanbul Georgian Monastery, where Stephane Tatalashvili thanks to the leaders of Georgian Monastery of Istanbul, Benedicte Chilingarov (Vardidze) and Padre Alfonse (Khitariashvili) for taking care on her son and asks to admit the grandchildren of his villager to the school of women (The letters from Istanbul Georgian Monastery, I, 2017:687).

From the family notices “Petre, my uncle is in the list of those Meskhetian educators, who served in Istanbul. He was a patriot, great lover of his native land and region; he knew French, Latin, German and Italian languages very well, as well as philosophy and theology, he studied in France, Italy and Austria as well,” – this is how his niece used to talk about Petre Tatalashvili (The source: Tamar Janashvili, the daughter of his brother, Ilia Tatalashvili).

Father Petre received the first education in French and Latin languages by the supervision of the father (Benedicte Vardidze) serving at Istanbul Monastery of Virgin of Lourdes. Since September 3, 1900, he continued his study in St. Luis Seminary and finished with excellence in 1906. At the end of August, 1908 he went to the College of the Benedictine Fathers of St. Anselmo, which he completed with excellence in 1911 in the field of philosophy and theology. When he continued his study in Austria. Young Peter was ordained to priesthood in 1912. After completion of St. Anselmo College (1908-1911), he returned to Istanbul and became a responsible person for educational processes as a monastery secretary.

In 1956, he was elected as a monastery prior. He served the office until his death perfectly...

Father Petre Tatalashvili died of a serious illness in 1961, far from his homeland, in Istanbul. He is buried in the Georgian fathers brotherhood cemetery in the Latin Catholic cemetery in Sisli district in Istanbul. He spent the rest of his life in the Georgian Monastery of Istanbul. Since then, due to the unfortunate historical reality, the Monastery had not a leader any more.

Eugène Dallegio d'Alessio remembers the conversation with Father Petre, which is included in his book “Georgians in Constantinople” and it refers to the graveyard of Georgians and Georgian scripts “The major part of new districts of Constantinople was always resided by Meskhetian. All of them were followers of Catholic Church; it means the lived in Istanbul, either in downtowns, the old part of the city or uptowns around the Galata. It seemed that Georgians used to write on their gravestones in Georgian. There is one manuscript in the archive of Georgian Catholics, which includes the list of some scripts on the graveyard. Father Petre Tatalashvili showed me the Charters of the Monastery. However, I could not find anything except the mentioned list, which is re-written from the original copies in 1866, that is all I could find (Dallegio d'Alessio 1921:20-21).

In the letters from Istanbul Monastery, the memories of childhood of Petre Tatalashvili are published by the name of Petre Tatalati. The stories “An adventure”, “On the day of the Immaculate Conception”, “A Resurrection”, “The laugh is followed by cry”, “Unintentionally bathing” shall be highlighted. Father Petre Tatalashvili recalled his childhood being far from his native land and collected his adventure in the form of short stories.

Missing his family, parents and close people, he mentioned them with a special warmness and love, though he has extraordinary emotions towards his mother. They celebrated the day of Immaculate Conception of Virgin Mary in the monastery (December 13, 1905). It is symbolic his emotional attitude about his mother in his story.

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As mentioned, Father Petre Tatalashvili has finished the St. Anselmo Collage of Benedictine Fathers in 1911, the department of Greek Typikon and like majority of the students of Ferikoy, he decided firmly to obtain the degree in philosophy and theology. Therefore, he had to go to Austria. According to the available documents (Communication with Mikheil Tamarashvili, the Archive materials (The Fund of M. Tamarashvili # 3414). It demonstrates how he was looking forward to approval of Father Benedict, the leader of Georgian Monastery in Istanbul, which should be given personally to Padre Mikheil Tamarashvili and Father Petre Tatalashvili.

After reception of an approval, Father Petre sends a letter of gratitude to father Benedict, which reads

„Mister, I am looking forward to your response. Telling the truth, I could not read or pray, as I could not understand the reason for delay of the answer. Now I returned to life and I will start to become a doctor of philosophy in twenty days, I needed this joy to study thoroughly.

I was sure that when I come back you will not regret that you let me go to Austria” (Archive of the Georgian Catholic Monastery of Istanbul (AGCMI, letter from Rome to the head of the monastery).

Serving of Father Petre Tatalashvili in the Monastery was linked to both religious and educational activities. The archive material shows how he addresses to the head of Georgia’s Democratic Republic, Noe Zhordania and an ambassador of Georgia in Constantinople, Grigol Tskhriladze with the request to support Georgian students in Constantinople who returned from Germany to Georgia and would like to continue their study in Istanbul Georgian Monastery. There are photo material of Petre together with his students. He was also engaged in teaching Georgian to Georgians arrived from Georgia, he taught not only Georgian, but also theology and philosophy. On October 25, 1919 on the session of the main board of the Society of Spreading Georgian Literacy among Georgians discussed the request of the Secretary of Georgian Catholic Monastery in Istanbul, Priest Petre Tatalashvili for the books for the library of the Monastery. The board decided to grant the books worth of 1,500 rubles. (<https://protopography.iliauni.edu.ge/persons/12063-petre-tatalashvili>).

German oriental scientist and Kartvelologist, Professor of Munich University, Julius Asfalg wrote in the obituary to Mikheil Tamarashvili, published in the paper “Bedi Kartlisa” (The Fate of Kartli), about Mikheil and mentioned the fact that Father Tarkhnishvili studied in the Capuchin Seminary, completed in 1923. Then he attended 1-year course of Philosophy in Georgian Monastery and in October 1924 together with 3 other students, he visited Austria (Papuashvili, 2012:536).

In order to understand the personality of Petre Tatalashvili, as a public figure, it is important to demonstrate his attitude towards Mikheil Tamarashvili, what is well described in the letters addressed to him. Despite the age difference, as Tamarashvili was much elder than he, it did not prevent their relationship. Tens of letters are found in the National Fund of Manuscripts named after Korneli Kekelidze, which were sent to Tamarashvili from Petre Tatalashvili, which demonstrate a great awe and respect (NCM, M. Tamarashvili Fund, №3414, 3415, 3416). The letters show Tamarashvili patronage to a young person who was sent to Italy from Istanbul Georgian Monastery for getting education. It is very often that he asks for “overnight accommodation” for the students on weekends or during the holiday to Tamarashvili living in Rome. He also often tells the story of the educational institutions very often. (NCM, M. Tamarashvili Fund, №3412, 3414).

In the letter dated by October 1910, M. Tamarashvili writes that Vartaped Nersesyan is going to print something against Tamarashvili in the Armenian Newspaper “P.

Emanuel from Vienna is writing that he was at the Mkhitarists. They talked about your book “very angrily and Vartaped Nersesyan is going to write against you in the Armenian newspaper: it is a fame for you and not an abuse, it means that you have stepped a tail of Armenians” (NCM, M. Tamarashvili Fund, №3414).

Similar to all the leaders of Monastery, Petre was fighting against Armenization of Meskhети during entire period of his service; he used to struggle for Georgian nationality, for returning Georgian language and Georgian rites to Meskhети. Georgian Catholics of Istanbul, who gained Georgian Typikon by a great struggle by the 20s of XX century, tried to help to the Catholics lived in Georgia in gaining possibility to conduct service in Georgian. Based on the letters kept in Monastery archive, it is shown that Petre was actively involved and supported to fighting of Georgian Catholics in Meskhети and removing Armenians from ruling of Georgian Catholics.

Father Petre accompanies the delegate of Pope of Rome, Antoine Delfouche during his visit to Akhhaltsikhe. He sent the letter to his native Meskhეთian before this visit. In the archive materials of the Monastery, the letter is found, where Father Petre appeals to his Meskhეთian peers” “Father Emanuel visited us and informed us about the situation there. We are very surprised about the requirement of your Catholics about Georgian Typikon; quite different thinking is in your place. The Rome, the local bishop and an ambassador, has promised Georgian Typikon for your people for many times. It is time to come together and do for our society something; otherwise, we are losing our future. I have not heard positive things from the visitors; it seems he is armed and is angry on Armenians. Host him properly”, this is the appeal to his peers in Akhhaltsikhe from Father Petre (Istanbul, August 17, 1991).

The situation became harder after the World War II in the monastery. The service was terminated for the Georgians living in Turkey. Due to “Iron Curtain” Georgian young people could not be taken for study. The most of the members of monastery were died because of age. The situation was critical, at the beginning of 60s only Petre Tatalashvili, the acting leader of the monastery and monastery servant, Pavle Akobashvili, were alive (Catholics and Catholicism in Georgia, XIX-XX cc, 2022:124).

It is easy to imaging the hardship Father Petre Tatalashvili during being a leader of the monastery. Actually, he faced alone all the difficulties unlike previous leaders. However, he was a faithful guardian of the monastery until the end of his life. After his death, the monastery has no leader.

During the Soviet period, the monastery was considered as a counter-terrorist organization and everything was done to degrade and tarnish its name (Catholics and Catholicism in Georgia, XIX-XX cc, 2022:124).

## **RESULTS**

The article presents the contribution of Georgian Catholics to the religion and nation, struggle of the leaders of Istanbul Ferikoy monastery for breeding national self-consciousness, maintenance of Georgian nationality and Georgian language. Making the common Georgian things, support to Georgian culture and education was the main mission of the monastery, fulfilled by the monks for their nation and country. Father Petre Tatalashvili activities are the part of the great goal and mission, which they inherited according to the Will of the founder of the Monastery, Father Peter Kharischirashvili and fulfilled it with a great honor.

Certain information about the biography of Father Petre Tatalashvili is given only from his descendants. Unfortunately, such information is very limited preserved in the family and it is often is not accurate. Some data are provided from the archive of Istanbul Georgian

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Monastery and from National fund of manuscripts, etc. However, such data can support to further study of Petre Tatalashvili life and work.

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