

# THE MANIFESTATION OF BIBLICAL TRUTH FROM THE HISTORY OF KOBULETI

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**Abstract:** Based on the works of Zakaria Chichinadze, Dimitri Bakradze, Sergo Vardosanidze, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, and the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute, the state of Christianity during the Ottoman occupation and the post-Ottoman period has been studied in the administrative unit of Kobuleti. The research revealed that despite severe pressure and hardships, Christianity did not disappear. Christian beliefs, though dimmed, continued to exist among the local population like smoldering embers. Their revival was greatly supported by the dedicated efforts and active actions of patriotic individuals.

**Key words:** Christianity; Kobuleti; Ottoman occupation

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The spiritual development of Adjara in the very first century is linked to the missionary activity of Christ's disciples – Andrew the Apostle, Matthias, Simon the Canaanite, and others – who spread Christianity in Upper Adjara (Didi Adjara). Naturally, this process must also have extended to the territory of the present-day Kobuleti Municipality, where remnants of early-Christian monuments (Tsikhisdziri-Bobokvati) and burial sites have been discovered (Inaishvili, 1993:43; Chichinadze, 2004:114). During the long period of Ottoman rule, these monuments, like other Georgian cultural and educational centers, were being destroyed. In their place, Muslim religious shrines and schools were established, serving as powerful tools for the Turkification of the local population and the firm implantation of Islam (Sakhokia, 1985:234; Babilodze, 1958:29; Kazbegi, 1960:88). Despite this, the residents of Kobuleti preserved Georgian national consciousness, identity, the Georgian language, and the „Dedabruli“ writing style (Bakradze, 1987:47; Sakhokia, 1985:125; Chelebadze, 2012:12; Khakhutaishvili, 2017:15).

During Ottoman rule in Adjara, numerous clergymen averted the danger of Islamization, the surviving portion of church property was transferred to neighboring districts (Bakradze, 1987:112–125). Even amid the growing power of Islam and later during the period of anti-religious struggle, the population retained memory and respect for Christian monuments and managed, on the basis of centuries-old biblical traditions, to preserve them in folk versions.

The issue of fighting for the Christian faith was especially acute in Kobuleti, as in all of Adjara. As is known, from 1723 the Ottomans occupied the coastal territories of Kobuleti. The local population did not lose its fighting spirit and tirelessly sought liberation from the Ottoman yoke. Darejan Tavdgiridze led this struggle. In 1737, Patriarch Domenti – who was visiting Kobuleti and was the brother of Vakhtang

VI – met Darejan Tavdgiridze with whom he appointed the King of Imereti, Alexander V, as commander in the battle to free Kobuleti from the Ottomans (Sdsin, 2009:257). Unfortunately, this plan failed, and in 1772, when Russian troops left Georgian territory, the Ottomans managed to occupy Kobuleti. At that time, the bishop of the Khino Eparchy was Ioane Tsutsunava, who had been left with no choice apart from fleeing Kobuleti (Sin, 1973:659).

As for the ruling dynasty of Kobuleti, Mamuka Tavdgiridze moved to Aketi. His son Maksime, already Islamized and renamed Suleiman, was appointed bey of Kobuleti. Despite the difficulties of the 1770s, the residents of Kobuleti did not lose their fighting spirit, placing their hope in a connection with Solomon I, King of Imereti. The mentioned spirit was echoed in the 1784 Battle of Nachiskrevi. In March of the same year, Solomon I marched toward Kobuleti and, with the help of local patriots, succeeded in taking Kobuleti, recapturing Chakvi and villages around Batumi. However, on the return march, on 9 March, the enemy – treacherously lying in ambush near Tsikhisdziri – defeated the patriot king. As a result of this defeat, the local people of Kobuleti entered the 19th century under Ottoman possession (Chkhatarashvili, 1964:129).

To illustrate the situation of that time, the notes of Gifford Palgrave, British consul in Trebizond, who walked the entire Lazistan region between 1862 and 1872, are of interest:

“Churuk-su, a village that bears the name of the district and serves as its administrative center... In Churuk-su there are 145 shops and 75 houses. Other than that, there is: a mosque, an old barracks for 400 soldiers... The district contains 17 villages: houses – or more accurately, households (families) – number 1,445; the total population of both sexes (including children) equals 7,378. They are Georgian by origin and Muslim by faith; their conversion occurred at the beginning of the past century. They all speak only Georgian...” (Palgrave, 2012:50–55).

Palgrave's records show that the majority of Kobuleti's population had already been Islamized. In this regard, the information provided by Dimitri Bakradze in his famous work „Archaeological Journey through Guria and Adjara“ is significant. The historian traveled in Kobuleti in 1873, when the town was still under the Ottoman yoke. The author describes the crisis of Christianity after the bishop's departure from Khino and the consequences of the spread of Islam in Kobuleti almost a century later:

“Churuk-su is completely Islamized, though traces of Christianity still remain: on the way they showed me several Christian churches, specifically in Sameba, Varjanuli, Khutsubani, and Gvara. The Gvara temple is known as Tetrosani and is especially famous in Churuk-su and all of Guria. The temples of Churuk-su have turned into ruins, yet the local inhabitants – though I cannot say they respect them – simply fear them: they often attribute illness, every kind of misfortune, the loss of livestock in the family to the wrath of the abandoned temples and their icons. For this reason, from time to time they sacrifice sheep, chickens and other animals. The icon of the Mother of God at Tetrosani especially attracts many worshipers.” (Bakradze, 1987:18–20)

D. Bakradze notes that at that time 9,592 Georgian Muslims lived in Kobuleti, comprising more than 90% of the population (Bakradze, 1987:18–20). It is clear that the population had to abandon their own faith at the cost of great sacrifice. As 120-year-old Kamjaridze from Achkvistavi told Zakaria Chichinadze, as a result of Ottoman domination the majority of Kobuleti's population had resettled in Guria. Ultimately, the Ottomans, with false promises that they would not interfere with Christianity, returned the people who had fled to Guria and Kutaisi. Indeed, at first church services were restored, and the Ottomans were satisfied with only the payment of tribute. But a short time later, when the Ottomans saw that the depopulated area had refilled, they immediately began putting them under duress. They stationed a large detachment at Choloki, closed the border with Guria, and quartered the remaining soldiers in Kobuleti villages. After military mobilization, they gathered all male residents of Kobuleti together and demanded that everyone convert to Islam. The locals' first response was firm and unyielding: „We cannot; we will not become Muslims – we will die first rather than do that.“ The Ottomans forced Islamized inhabitants of Kobuleti to exert psychological pressure on the locals, but achieved nothing. In the village of Chakhati they built gallows with ship's rope and hanged a great many people (local people

from Kobuleti) there. Everyone who refused to renounce Christianity was executed. „For several days they hanged them from trees with ropes; great chaos ensued, great bloodshed. The Ottomans neither let the Christians stay, nor let them go elsewhere; our people still would not convert, so day and night there was slaughter of people, crying of women and children, and great misery.“ The fact was that no help appeared from anywhere. Despite Simon Gurieli's attempts, the mass killing of Kobuleti residents continued. Ultimately, this had its results. A large part of the population was destroyed, and those who survived alive were morally broken and converted to Islam. Despite changing their faith, the locals still honored the churches and icons and secretly prayed in the churches. When the Ottomans figured this out, they turned to demolishing churches and converting them into mosques. This is how the Church of the Archangel in the village of Achkva was destroyed. Unable to save the temple, the population removed icons, crosses, books, and other items from it and hid them in a specially dug pit. The Ottomans convinced the youth that Christians were born to work and serve as slaves, while Muslims were born to worship, to pray; According to the Ottomans, the main thing was to pray five times a day and take one's livelihood from the labor of a Christian. Go, steal it, or take it away; God will not hold you accountable for it“ they said. They constantly nagged the Islamized that if one befriends a Christian or drinks wine with them, after death a snake will crawl into their mouth and poke its head out of their waist.

Despite all this massacre, physical and psychological violence, Christianity could still not be eradicated in Kobuleti. It is revealed from the narrative of the elder Mzhavanadze to Z. Chichinadze that Christianity was still secretly preserved in Kobuleti. In the Khalvashi and Goradze families, they had a hidden priest who had removed his clerical robe and wore secular clothing. As is known, the Guria region was not Islamized, and at the cost of their lives, the residents of Kobuleti would sneak into neighboring villages on Christian holidays to pray. Specifically, on Easter they crossed into the church of Kakuti, which was part of Guria. Not to mention holidays, the locals even tried to bury their dead according to Christian rites. Sometimes they secretly took the deceased to Guria, and sometimes, conversely, brought a priest from Guria. There were cases when, during the secret transfer of the deceased to Guria, the Ottomans would take the body from the mourners and leave it on the road to be scavenged by animals (Chichinadze, 1915:104–113).

In 1876, it was precisely the murder of a priest who had come from Guria to conduct the funeral rites for a deceased resident of Kobuleti that led to an uprising of the locals under the leadership of Nail-Beg Khajishvili. In 1876, the countries of the Balkan Peninsula declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Since the Ottoman Empire was dominant in Kobuleti at that time, the Ottomans also drafted the inhabitants of Kobuleti into the war. Two months later, four men from Kobuleti escaped from the front and brought news to their homeland about how brutally the Ottomans treated Georgians in the war. This was compounded by another significant event – namely, the murder of the priest. The matter was that priests from Guria, which was within the borders of the Russian Empire, often crossed into Kobuleti to perform services and secretly baptized the local Georgians. However, since war was ongoing at the time, the situation at the border was extremely tense, and the Ottoman soldiers killed the Gurian priest who had come to Kobuleti for the burial. In response, the residents of Kobuleti killed seven Ottoman soldiers (Albanians). The Ottomans did not delay requesting reinforcements from Istanbul. The locals did not sit idle either. In the village of Mukhaestate in Kobuleti, a man named Khasan killed four Turkish soldiers. Soon people gathered from other villages as well, and they chose the local Nail Beg Khajishvili as their leader. Nail Khajishvili divided the rebels into two groups. One group was to attack the Kobuleti fortress from the south, which the Ottomans controlled, the second from the north. The leader also sent men to purchase cannons and contacted ethnic Georgian askers (soldiers) conscripted into the Ottoman army who were trapped in the fortress. Ultimately, the people from Kobuleti captured the fortress. Nail Beg also requested help from Gurian residents and prepared for a counter-battle. The Georgians expected an Ottoman attack from the sea, but the Ottomans unexpectedly struck from the Chakvi side as well. Despite the Ottomans' numerical superiority, they were forced to concede their positions. Meanwhile, people from Guria appeared in the form of people's militia, which the Ottomans interpreted as the arrival of the

Russian army, frightening them into beginning a retreat. After repelling this land attack, the Ottomans also appeared from the sea. Here Nail Beg Khajishvili was cunning and did not order the Ottoman flag to be removed from the fortress, so that the Ottomans would think they were their own. Indeed, the Ottoman ships peacefully approached the Kobuleti coast and dropped anchor in the sea. Nail Beg seized the moment and ordered the cannon to be fired. The Ottomans had only two ships, one of which was damaged. Despite Kobuleti residents' correct tactical moves, the Ottomans' numerical superiority prevailed. The battle ended at nine o'clock in the evening, and the majority of the rebels of Kobuleti fell heroically on the battlefield. Nail Beg Khajishvili himself was so gravely wounded that when the enemy entered the fortress, they thought he was dead and threw him straight into the sea along with the other corpses. Two warriors survived with Nail Beg, who managed to reach Russian territorial waters, where they were found by Gurian fishermen. Even more interestingly, Nail Beg Khajishvili fought in the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War as a captain of the Gurian people's detachment (Labadze, 2019).

Thus, despite the Ottomans' prolonged and brutal rule, one part of Kobuleti's population managed secretly to preserve the Christian faith. Moreover, there were cases where the embittered population did not shy away from rebellion and bloodshed. The population's preservation of Christianity was expressed at the level of oral traditions and beliefs. For example, if any misfortune occurred, the population blamed it on the abandonment of the old shrines, about which the journalist of the time, Aleksandre Frenkeli, writes clearly: „Christian traditions live powerfully in the memory of the Kobuleti people; when they are afflicted by some misfortune or illness, they attribute it to the wrath of the temple (shrine) abandoned by their ancestors... They bring a chicken, a sheep, and other offerings. There are still secret Christians in the country“ (Frenkel, 2012:120).

As is known, the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War ended with Russia's victory. This war brought great victory and joy to the Georgians, especially to the large part of Georgia under the Ottoman yoke, including Adjara. The post-war processes and measures carried out by the Russian authorities naturally affected Kobuleti as well. The attitude of Kobuleti's inhabitants toward this fact is fully conveyed by



Nail Beg Khajishvili

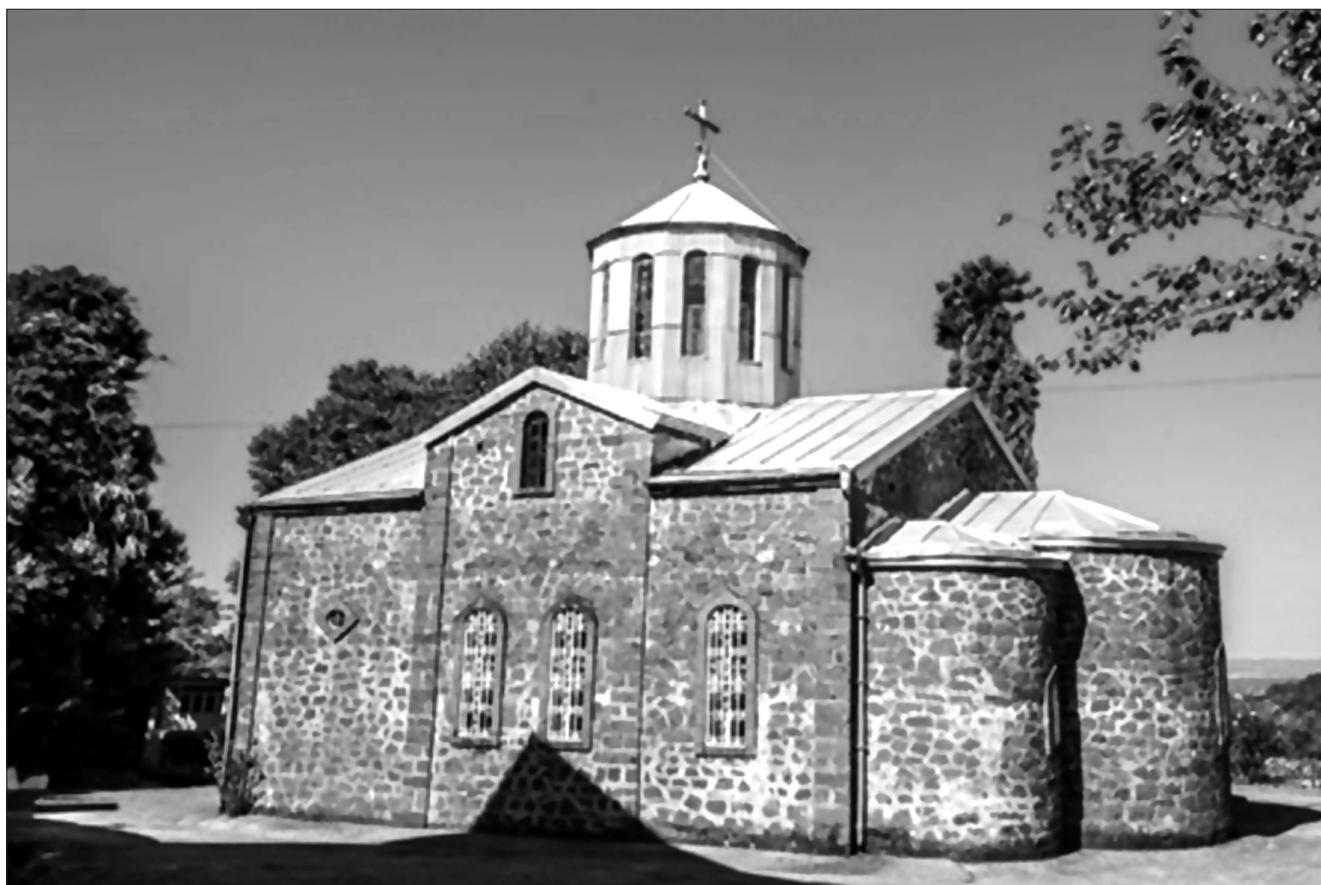
the following words of Gulo Agha Kaikatsishvili, who, together with his detachment, was dressed in Georgian national clothes: „Our Georgians, our brothers, our relatives, our cousins, my dear – my eyes have seen you today, our brothers in Kobuleti. I thank God and honor His providence that our and your longing has been fulfilled; God has united us.“

It is true that, Although the restoration and spread of Christianity was also profitable for Russia after Adjara's return to the motherland, this process was slowly gaining momentum, but it was severely affected by the heavy consequences of „muhajirism“ (migration). According to Article 21 of the San Stefano Treaty signed on March 3, 1878, a portion of the population under Russian administration had the right to free migration for three years. Although this document was officially signed in 1878, the muhajirism as a process began earlier, from 1877, and continued after 1881. Clearly, the Ottomans' long rule left its mark on the consciousness of Kobuleti's local population as well. It was understood by that part of the local proportion – whose representative, Khasan Beg Bezhanidze from Kobuleti, explained it as follows



– that time would be needed for the formation of religious views and a return to the Christian faith: „If the local population had remained in Kobuleti, over time they would naturally abandon Islam and accept Christianity, which was unacceptable to them“. Notably, Kobuleti inhabitants explained the reason for resettlement as follows: „We cannot get close to the Russians and Georgians; their customs and rules are against our faith. They will enter our families and destroy all that is ours.“ These words clearly show the damage to the consciousness of Kobuleti’s population, which was systematically carried out by active Ottoman propaganda with the complicity of venal local leaders. In addition, facts of forced resettlement of the population are attested. The number of muhajirs is reflected in the statistics compiled by Z. Chichinadze as follows: Kakuti – 30 households, Leghva – 25 households, Tskavroka – 50 households, Kokhi – 40 households, Chekhedana – 30 households, Achkvistavi – 30 households, Zeniti – 40 households, Alambari – 100 households, Gvara – 30 households, Khutsubani – 50 households, the village of Kobuleti – 40 households, Kondidi – 20 households, Kvirike – 137 households, Dagva – 30 households, Sameba – 20 households, Chakhati – 10 households, Kechieti – 20 households, Varjanuli – 15 households, Tkemakaravi – 10 households, Tskheumani – 10 households, Kobalauri – 40 households, and others. According to these data, 1,200 households resettled from Kobuleti, though, as Z. Chichinadze notes, this number is far less than the locally reported information about the resettlement of 2,000 households from Kobuleti, which the author explains by the fact that he did not describe the small villages (Chichinadze, 2013:51–65).

As a result of all this, the demographic situation in Kobuleti deteriorated severely (Frenkeli, 2012:197), but the spread of Christianity was accelerated by another factor as well. Christian Greeks began to be resettled from Turkey, significantly altering the religious situation in Kobuleti. For example, in the village of Dagva in Kobuleti, 21 Greek families settled in 1881, and by 1907 their number had reached 602 people. The Greeks created great grounds in Kobuleti, at the time under Christian Russia, and this yielded results – several Greek churches were built in Kobuleti (Badashvili, 2023:27). For example, the Greeks who settled in the village of Kvirike in Kobuleti built the Church of Saints Helena and Constantine between 1898 and 1910.



In the village of Dagva, the settled Greeks built the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God



In the village of Achkva, the settled Greeks built the Churches of Saints Peter and Paul, Saint Theodore Tyron, and Saint George



Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Achkva

The first church built in the town of Kobuleti in the post-Ottoman period is linked to the name of a Russian general. According to a tradition widespread among the population, the construction of this church is also connected to a miracle of Saint Nicholas, who saved sailors from a storm and washed ashore at the site of this church (Shakarishvili, Diary №1). During the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman

War, General Sheremetev died on the Kobuleti front; He was first buried in the brothers' cemetery, and about two years later he was reburied separately from the soldiers in the yard of the present theological gymnasium, and the Church of Saint Nicholas was built for the repose of his soul. After the Ottoman rule, numerous clergymen engaged in missionary activity in Kobuleti. First and foremost, we must name Leonide Okropiridze, who accurately defined the way to approach the Islamized Adjarians and gain their trust: „Well, if we want to approach the Muslim Georgians nationally and culturally and become inseparably blood-related to them, we must take the morsel from our mouths, take off our shirts, and cover Adjara-Kobuleti with Georgian literacy“ (Tsuladze, 1991:137-138). The fact that Leonide Okropiridze became acquainted with Kobuleti early on and took up the cross of missionary work is clearly seen from a letter to his uncle, Bishop Aleksandre Okropiridze. This assumption is strengthened by the circumstance that in 1888, appointed as school inspector, the restorer of Christianity Leonide Okropiridze worked specifically in Kobuleti as well. This circumstance is addressed in correspondence dated 1888 from Bishop Aleksandre Okropiridze to Leonide: „They prophesy missionary work for you in Saingilo, Kobuleti-Adjara, and the Black Sea coast, and what do you say to that?“ In response, Hieromonk Leonide replied: „I was educated in the seminary at the expense of the Society for the Restoration of Christianity, and therefore, my moral obligation not to fail that society – missionary work – was a memorial to me by God's providence even in childhood. Later, the same providence of God showed me the very place for my labor. Who would not realize that it was God's providence and not a mere coincidence that I was with you in Kobuleti, spoke about this subject, and saw the ruins of the old Tetrosani church with you! That time is, and will be unforgettable for me. I fell in love with Kobuleti at that time; I immediately felt the closeness of the people of Kobuleti, and I swear to God that my heart and soul have remained here ever since“ (Vardosanidze, 2014:12-13).

As the letter reveals, Aleksandre Okropiridze, who was Bishop of Guria in 1882–1885, had traveled in Kobuleti. The path was opened for Georgians and Christians in general from 1878, and missionary work began from that time. If Leonide Okropiridze recalls being in Kobuleti with his uncle and discussing missionary work, then they must have been there in the early 1880s, more precisely before 1884, since from that period until 1888 Leonide Okropiridze studied at the Kiev Theological Academy. Moreover, the fact that until 1887 a priest was brought from Batumi to the Smekalovka church in the Kobuleti area to perform baptisms and other Christian sacraments is also confirmed by the notes of doctor Pantiukhov (Pantiukhov, 1900:45). Thus, the hieromonk Leonide Okropiridze worked in Kobuleti from 1889, and from 1891 the priestly mission was continued by Benjamin Ghlonti. This fact is specified in Leonide Okropiridze's 1915 note, where it is recorded that a missionary priest has already been active in Kobuleti for 24 years. As Bishop Leonide Okropiridze himself characterized him, Benjamin Ghlonti was not distinguished by empty phrases or demonstrative speeches. Yet the locals respected him so much that they often called him even to the mosque to seek advice. No wedding in Kobuleti passed without asking Benjamin Ghlonti to bless them. Also visits to his family were frequent. If Dimitri Bakradze writes that one could not see women from Kobuleti outside, now Leonide Okropiridze emphatically notes the candid conversations of local Muslim women with this dedicated cleric. In the same period, a parish school was also opened in Kobuleti, as a result of which many locals were converted to Christianity, and his name even reached neighboring Muslims (In the church-parish school... children up to 12 years old are taught (Pantiukhov, 1900:42). For example, Imam living in Khulo addressed Leonide with the following words: „We, the Muslim Georgians of Khulo, have heard that you show mercy the Muslim Georgians of Kobuleti, spread Georgian literacy in Kobuleti, facilitate the opening of schools, and help our brothers there with the education of their children. We are also brothers and neighbors of the people of Kobuleti, we follow their religion and speak their language, we thought that you would also come to Adjara, bring your fraternal word to the people of Adjara, and lead us in the education of our children. We are tired of looking towards your road for so long, and now I have personally come to you to ask you to come to Khulo and bring us closer, like the people of Kobuleti.“ These words clearly display what the situation must have been like in Kobuleti at that time. As we know, Christianity is a religion of literacy,





The photo was taken in Kobuleti in 1913, on the day of the opening of the first library. In the front row sitting: from the left, second – Skender Efendi Tsivadze, fourth – Bishop of Guria-Samegrelo Leonide Okropiridze; standing behind him is the writer Davit Kldiashvili. Standing: from the left, first – priest Benjamin Ghlonti, and third – Gulo Agha Kaikatsishvili.



The second photo was also taken in Kobuleti. In the center sits priest Benjamin Ghlonti, surrounded by local youth

the spread of Christian literature is of great importance for its dissemination and better understanding. Kobuleti was no exception. In 1912, Kobuleti people themselves requested Leonide Okropiridze to supply Christian literature and establish a Georgian reading room. This letter was very moving for the bishop, and he even wept tears of joy. One year after the letter was written, in 1913, The wish of the residents of Kobuleti was fulfilled – the first Georgian library was opened in the town (Alibegashvili, 2019:5-6).



Here we also wish to present interesting photographs from the photo archives of Luarsab Togonidze, which were provided to us by Deacon Gabriel (Zhghenti) and historian Ucha Okropiridze, for which we thank them very much.

True, in the mentioned period the number of that literate in Georgian in Kobuleti was extremely small, as Zakaria Chichinadze noted, but among the population the old form of script, „Dedabruli“ handwriting, was preserved. The local population became acquainted daily with Georgian literature and Christian texts with the help of priest Benjamin Ghlonti and his excellent chanter, as we learn from Leonide Okropiridze's letter. Thanks to the missionary labor of the clergy, the number of literate people grew, a parish was formed consisting of 30 households, which means at least 90 people (Alibegashvili, 2019:8). Probably a larger congregation is indicated by the information of doctor Pantiukhov, according to which in 1887, 1889, and 1890, 230 Orthodox Christians were born in Churuk-su, and 102 people died (Pantiukhov, 1900:46). The information from Dr. Pantiukhov likely hints at a greater number of parishioners, according to which 230 Orthodox Christians were born and 102 people died in Churuk-su in 1887, 1889, and 1890 (Pantiukhov, 1900:46).

Of course, the efforts of the religious figures were closely linked to the national liberation movement in Georgia. It is precisely from this period that an increase in the interest of the progressive Georgian society towards Adjara is noticeable. Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, Vazha Pshavela, Sergey Meskhi, Iakob Gogebashvili, Zakaria Chichinadze, Grigol Gurieli, Ioseb Imedashvili, and others sympathized with the pain caused by the tragedy of muhajirism like true mourners. Through their close connection with the Mother Church, the support of the indigenous population of Kobuleti, and despite a three-century separation from the Motherland, the prospect of cultural development and spiritual revival re-emerged.

In the 1880s of the 19 th century, as is known, the residents of Kobuleti actively connected with the „Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians“ in Tbilisi, which was founded in 1879. At the turn of the 1870s and 1880s through the efforts of this society, fertile ground was created for the opening of Georgian public schools. Several patriotic individuals served this cause in Kobuleti. These were: Kurshum Chkonია, Memed Chkonია, Rejeb and Dede-Agha Nizharadze, Skender Tsivadze, Khusein Bezhanidze, Gulo-Agha Kaikatsishvili, and others. Already from the 1870s there were two low-level schools in Adjara – Greek and Turkish (SDSIN, 2009:531). Under the existing conditions, the population of Kobuleti demanded the opening of schools and the compulsory teaching of Georgian in them. For this purpose, Iona Meunargia in 1890 and Evtikhi Maminashvili in 1896 raised the issue of spreading education before the Society for the Restoration of Christianity, but their request for the opening of schools was satisfied only later (Tsivadze, 1970:10; Komakhidze, II, 2006:8; On them..., 2010:172; Chelebadze, 2019:282-306;). Unfortunately, due to the First World War in the 1910s, the work that started with momentum ended with the closure of schools in some places (SDSIN, 2009:532;535).

As we can see, the situation in the Kobuleti region was progressive at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, and everything was going well, but other problems also hindered the work. Priest Benjamin Ghvlonti, in addition to Christianity, was actively engaged in awakening the national spirit among the local population, which was opposed by the servants of the empire that shared the same religion, and they actively began to take measures. They demanded the recall of Priest Benjamin Ghlonti from Kobuleti, who allegedly could not properly conduct services due to insufficient knowledge of the Russian language, and therefore demanded the introduction of a Russian priest. Fortunately, their demand was not met, but it is clearly visible that there would have been frequent artificially provoked hindering circumstances, and besides the resistance of the Muslims, Benjamin Ghlonti must have also faced the resistance of the co-religionist Russians (Alibegashvili, 2019:8).

Thus, the population of Kobuleti, through the dedicated labor of the Georgian clergy and the support of Georgian patriots, managed to prepare the ground for the Orthodox faith, thereby finally restoring

services in Kobuleti. Thus, the history of the Christian faith in Kobuleti is another example of the truth of the Lord's words: „And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it“ (Matthew 16:18) – which shows that the church will be in constant struggle with evil and sin, but even the forces of hell will not be able to harm it.

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