Reasons for the Simplicity of the Burial Sites of Notable Figures (Kings, Saints) in Georgia

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Abstract. Throughout its development, humanity has created various types of burial places, and Georgia, with its long historical experience, is no exception. Archaeological excavations in our country have uncovered diverse burial practices, including tombstones, stone cists, burials in clay vessels, burial mounds, and more.

The spread of Christianity brought changes to burial customs. In the Greco-Roman world, we find several forms of Christian burials, such as catacombs, sarcophagi, and crypts. The tombs of kings, dignitaries, and saints were often notably grand.

Although Christianity has been present in Georgia since the 1st century, introduced in much the same way as in the Greco-Roman world, the graves of Christian kings and saints in our country were not marked by elaborate decoration. Instead, these burial sites were strikingly simple. This simplicity was intentional and influenced by specific reasons. In this article, we aim to explore and define those reasons.

Keywords: assyrian fathers; burial sites; christian traditions.

Introduction

Throughout its development, humanity has created various types of burial places, and Georgia, with its long historical experience, is no exception. Archaeological excavations in our country have uncovered diverse burial practices, including tombstones, stone cists, burials in clay vessels, burial mounds, and more.

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Main Part

Since the spread of Christianity, Georgia has undergone several stages of Christianization. The foundation of Christianity in Georgia was established by the local Jewish community, the apostles, Roman legions, St. Nino, and the thirteen Assyrian Fathers. These figures introduced and solidified the Christian worldview, culture, and lifestyle in Georgia. Consequently, various processes—whether doctrinal, ecclesiological, or liturgical—were reflected in the rhythm of church life in Georgia, echoing the broader establishment and development of Christianity.

For instance, the Jerusalem practice of divine service, which was observed in Mtskheta until the 9th century, was rooted in the Aramaic-Syrian tradition. Later, the Constantinopolitan mainstream was adopted by the churches of the East, including Georgia. Before this shift, a transitional period witnessed attempts to mediate between older and newer approaches. The life of St. Grigol Khandzteli serves as a prime example of this transition, as he harmonized the typicon (liturgical rule) of his monastery with those of Sabatsminda and Constantinople.

The final phase of Christianization in Georgia is associated with the arrival of the thirteen Assyrian Fathers. Considerable research has been conducted to determine their religious orientation, origin, and the location of their earlier activities. One key conclusion is that their work in Georgia occurred during a time of significant anti-Chalcedonian influence. This period was marked by resistance to the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon across much of the East. The efforts of the Assyrian Fathers, however, transformed the situation in Georgia, securing acceptance of the Chalcedonian dogma for an extended period.

This study attempts to trace the tangible worldview influences of the Assyrian Fathers in the Georgian Church, specifically as reflected in church practices. Notably, the Assyrian Fathers left no epistolary or theological writings. The only sources of information about them are their late-recorded hagiographies and the monasteries located in the areas where they worked. Therefore, discovering traces of their influence is challenging.

The traces of the Assyrian Fathers' legacy in Georgia should first be sought in their distinctive worldview, which likely differed from other Christian thought in certain respects. Theological views on the state of the soul after death in the Syrian-Eastern Church are particularly noteworthy. Although Christianity lacks a uniform doctrine on the state of the soul, as it is a revealed faith, early Christians discussed the issue based on revelation and the personal views of prominent figures.

In the Christian world, different approaches to the state of the soul emerged. In the Greco-Roman sphere, it was believed that the soul remained active before the Last Judgment, while Western Christianity later added the concept of purgatory. In contrast, Aramaic-Syrian Christianity offered a fundamentally different understanding of the soul's state after death. Despite these divergent opinions, all views remained legitimate, as none were banned or condemned until the Western Church made a formal decision.

The 4th-6th centuries are of particular interest regarding Syrian theological thought on the state of the soul, as the Assyrian Fathers originated from this region. Their consciousness was likely shaped by this doctrine, which may have influenced Georgian Christianity.

The fate of the soul is a crucial concern for every Christian believer, as it directly impacts the practice of praying to saints and for the deceased. It is thus relevant to examine the teachings of early Syrian Church figures, as the Syrian Church was long isolated from Greco-Roman influences and was rooted in Aramaic Judeo-Christianity.

From the earliest centuries of Christian history, great Christian thinkers debated the fate of the soul. Several primary views can be distinguished. The first posits that upon death, the soul enters a dormant state until the Last Judgment and resurrection, at which time it will reunite with the body and live eternally. In academic theology, this view is referred to as psychopannychism (from

Greek, meaning "sleep of the soul"). A second position holds that the soul dies with the body and is resurrected with it on the Day of Judgment, a belief traditionally known as thnetopsychism. In the 20th century, academic theology grouped these views under the term "Christian mortalism."

Teachers of the Syrian-Eastern Church emphasized that a person is a complete being only when body, soul, and spirit are united. Ephrem the Syrian and later Catholic Timothy I compared the state of a soul without a body to that of a fetus in the womb, devoid of sensations and bodily functions. Timothy I affirmed this teaching at the Council of 786-787. Most Syrian theologians, including Ephrem, believed the soul's state after death resembled sleep. Thus, it can be asserted that psychopannychism, or "the sleep of the soul," was the dominant belief in the ancient Church of the East.

In contrast, the Syriac-Eastern Church's practice of venerating saints and their relics was of lesser importance than in the Byzantine Empire. While miracles were believed to occur through the relics of saints, it was thought that the saints themselves, being in heaven, were unaware of these miracles. The primary purpose of the cult was to reward believers for their merits. Timothy I maintained that prayers and offerings for the dead were not in vain, although their results would be revealed only at the general resurrection.

The Western Church's break with the Syriac-Eastern worldview occurred relatively late. Pope John XXII inadvertently sparked controversy in 1331-34 when he suggested that the saved did not attain the beatific vision until the Day of Judgment. His successor, Pope Benedict XII, issued a papal bull in 1536 declaring that the souls of the righteous immediately enter heaven after death, refuting the concept of a delayed beatific vision.

Meanwhile, the Greek Orthodox Church has yet to establish a definitive ecclesiastical stance on the fate of the soul. Figures such as Tatian of Syria, Aphrahat, Ephrem the Syrian, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Isaac of Nineveh influenced the development of Syriac-Eastern teachings on this matter. They generally agreed that the soul's fate depends on how much grace of the Holy Spirit a person received during their earthly life.

This teaching of body, soul, and spirit can be traced to the Scriptures, particularly to St. Paul's epistle: "May the God of peace sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

Compared to other branches of Christianity, the Syrian-Eastern Church was less influenced by Greek philosophy, basing its interpretations primarily on biblical teachings. Therefore, studying the views of its teachers regarding the soul's fate is crucial for reconstructing the early Christian worldview.

Conclusion

In conclusion, until the 7th century, the Syriac-Eastern Church held a distinct perspective on the soul's state, one that may have been introduced to Georgia by the Assyrian Fathers. The practice of venerating saints and their relics, though present in Georgia, was less pronounced than in the Byzantine Empire. This restraint in honoring graves and relics, particularly before Georgia's incorporation into the Russian Church, may reflect the enduring influence of the Assyrian Fathers on the Georgian Orthodox Church's worldview.

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ანოტაცია. კაცობრიობა განვითარების სხვადასხვა ეტაპზე დაკრძალვის განსხვავებულ ადგილებს აწყობდა. საქართველო თავისი ხანგრძლივი ისტორიული გამოცდილებით არ იყო გამონაკლისი. არქეოლოგიურმა გათხრებმა ჩვენს ქვეყანაში დაკრძალვის სხვადასხვაგვარი ფორმა წარმოაჩინა: აკლდამები, ქვაყუთები, თიხის ჭურჭელში დაკრძალვა, ყორღანული სამარხები და სხვ. ქრისტიანობის გავრცელებამ თავისი კორექტივები შეიტანა დაკრძალვის ფორმებში. ბერძნულ-რომაულ არეალში ქრისტიანთა სამარხების სხვადასხვა ფორმას ვხვდებით: კატაკომბური. სარკოფაგები, კრიპტები და სხვ. განსაკუთრებით გამოირჩეოდა მეფეების, დიდებულებისა და წმინდანების საფლავები. მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ საქართველოში ქრისტიანობა I საუკუნიდან ვრცელდება, რომელიც ბერძნულ-რომაული სივრცის მსგავსი იდენტური პრინციპებით ინერგებოდა, ჩვენს ქვეყანაში ქრისტიანი მეფეებისა და წმინდანების საფლავები არ გამოირჩეოდა დიდებული შემკობილობით. ეს დასაკრძალი ადგილები მკვეთრად ორდინარული საფლავები იყო. თვალში საცემი უბრალოება რაღაც მიზეზით იყო განპირობებული. წინამდებარე სტატიაში შევეცადეთ სწორედ ამ მიზეზების წარმოჩენას და ახსნას.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ასურელი მამები; დასაკრძალი ადგილები; ქრისტიანული ტრადიციები.