

LIFE OF ST. NINO

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PREFACE.

THE text used for this translation is *Sakart'kvelos Samol'kkhe* (edited by Gebron (Mikhail) Sabinin, S. Pbg., 1882), the standard collection of Lives of Georgian Saints; passages have also been appended from Rufinus, Moses of Chorene, and a MS. entitled *Moktzevai Kart'hlisai* (i. e. the Conversion of Georgia).

Sabinin's text has the merit of giving a connected narrative, but its slipshod style and lack of punctuation frequently render it obscure and misleading.

The New Variant. The best text, as far as it goes, is that printed in *Akhali Varianti Tsm. Ninos Tzkhovrevisa, au meore uatsili Kart'hlis Moktzevisa* (edited by E. T'haqaishvili, Tiflis, 1891). Wherever this differs materially from Sabinin's text its words (marked A. V.) are inserted in the notes.

The existing MS. of this New Variant forms a part of the 'Shatberdi Collection,' a book of miscellaneous parchments which formerly belonged to the monastery of Shatberdi, on Chorokh Pass, in the district of Clarjet'hi, and appears to have been written in the ninth or tenth century. With it are bound up three Historical Chronicles and the short MS. called *Moktzevai Kart'hlisai*, all of which are now published. The most notable peculiarity of A. V. is that the narrators speak in the first person; there seems little doubt of its being the oldest existing MS., and it is evidently a

copy of a very much older (perhaps contemporary) original. Unfortunately it is incomplete. The order of the incidents differs from that in other versions, and some things are omitted altogether.

Other versions. Among other MSS. may be mentioned:

1. A copy of the Lives of the Georgian Saints, written by the Catholicos Arsen in the tenth century (preserved in the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences). Arsen tells us he used oral as well as written material.

2. The Shio Mghvime monastery's MS., written in 1733.

3. The Nat'hlistzemeli (Baptist) monastery's MS., 1713. These two last named are evidently taken from the same source, but the one is not copied from the other.

4. Queen Mariam's MS. (written 1636-1646) of Kart'hlis Tzkhovreba (the Georgian Chronicle), which was not among those edited by Vakhtang VI.

5. Kart'hlis Tzkhovreba, the great Georgian Chronicle, edited by King Vakhtang VI (early eighteenth century), but collected long before his time. The text and French translation published by M. F. Brosset, St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences.

The MS. Conversion of Georgia. The MS. Mektzevai Kart'hlisai (*infra*, pp. 61-64) gives the legend of St. Nino in a dry, brief manner, and carries the history down to the ninth century; but the oldest part does not seem to be later than the seventh century. It cannot be looked upon as the root from which other versions have sprung, but only as part of a compilation of annals from pre-existing material.

Agreement of the Versions. It will be found that the different versions, through about a thousand years, show no essential disagreement, and they are supported by the independent authority of Rufinus, whose work seems to have been first known in Georgia through Ephrem the Younger's translation of Theodoretus in the eleventh century. It is probably from Rufinus that the story of the healing of the youth (p. 31) is inserted; the use of the word *cilici*, and the

omission of the incident in A. V., seem to suggest such an origin.

Chronology. Various dates are given for the Conversion of Georgia: Vakhusht 317, Baronius 327, Brosset 328, Kart'hlis-Tzkhovreba 338. The first and last of these are manifestly wrong. The year given in *Moktzevai Kart'hlisai*, 332, if we read 'birth' for 'ascension,' is apparently correct, and is confirmed by the *Chronique Arménienne* (i. e. a Georgian Chronicle which only exists in an Armenian translation of the twelfth century, published in French by Brosset in *Additions et éclaircissements*, Pgb. 1851). We may thus fix the following dates: Nino's arrival in Georgia 324, baptism of King Mirian 332, Nino's death 338.

The Georgian Church Autocephalous. It has been asserted, not without authority, that the first Bishop of Georgia was only called John (Ioane, Iovane) because he was 'the Baptist,' and that he was in reality that Eustatius who was patriarch of Antioch from 325 till 331, when he was expelled by heretics. In 1051 we find the clergy of Antioch claiming the patriarchate over Georgia, and about the same time Ephrem the Younger refers to Eustatius of Antioch as the first Georgian bishop. In any case it is certain that until the reign of Vakhtang Gorgaslan (end of fifth century) the Georgian Church was subject to Antioch; Vakhtang made it a national Church, and it was solemnly declared autocephalous by the Sixth General Council. Practically, it is now swallowed up in the Russian Church, and the tomb of St. Nino, in the monastery of Bodbe, has been surrounded by hideous modern buildings, and given into the care of Russian nuns ignorant of the language and history of the country.

Miscellaneous remarks. It is perhaps unnecessary to draw attention to the importance of Jews and women in the introduction of Christianity in Georgia, as in other places. The Jewish colonies (p. 27) seem to have been ancient, numerous, and prosperous; and the influence of the rabbi Abiat'har, who is represented as calling himself complacently

'the new Paul,' plays a large part in the story. Queen Nana reminds us of Helena in Byzantium, Clothilde in France, and other royal protectresses of Christianity.

The information given about the pre-existing faiths, the imported Persian gods Armaz and Zaden, the hostile Chaldean It'hrujan, the Book of Nimrod, and, more especially, Gatzi and Gaim, or Ga, the 'gods of the Georgian people,' is well worthy of attention. So too are such scraps of folklore as we find on pp. 23 and 45. From the linguistic point of view the fragments of 'Branjian' and old Persian on pp. 20 and 21 may be recommended to the notice of philologists. A mere translation such as is here presented leaves the field open to students fitted to explain the numerous obscure points in the legend.

TEXT.

*The Conversion of King Mirian, and of all Georgia
with him, by our holy and blessed Mother the
Apostle Nino.*

Her festival is held on the fourteenth of January.

LET us tell the story of our holy and blessed Mother, the enlightener of all Georgia, the apostle Nino, as she herself, at the time of her death, related it to the believer Salome of Ujarma, daughter-in-law of King Mirian, who wrote it down.

Now in those days when Saint George the Cappadocian¹ bore witness for Christ, there was in a city of Cappadocia a certain ruler, pleasing unto God, called Zabulon, who set out for Rome to serve before King Maximian² and to carry gifts to him. In those same days there was in Colastra³ a man who had two children: a son named Iobenal and a daughter, Sosana; and he and his wife died, leaving the brother and sister orphans. The children arose and set out for the holy city Jerusalem, trusting in the hope of all Christians, the holy Resurrection. There they tarried; Sosana's brother, Iobenal, obtained the office of steward⁴, while she served the Niamphori Sarra⁵ of Bethlehem.

Now the Cappadocian youth Zabulon, whom we have

¹ We learn from an old chronicle that St. Nino was the archmartyr St. George's cousin.

² A.V. omits the name Maximian.

³ A.V. 'Colasta.'

⁴ Devtaları. In Queen Mariam's MS. devk&aları, but in all others devtaları.

⁵ A.V. 'niaphori Sara.'

already mentioned, arrived before the king when the Branji¹ had revolted against the Romans on the field of Patalani². The Lord gave power invincible to Zabulon, who went forth with countless hosts against the Branji and put them to flight, capturing their king and all his chiefs. Then he led them before the king (of the Romans) who decreed that they should all be put to death. The Branji began to weep, and entreated Zabulon, saying: 'First let us be partakers in your religion, and let us be led into the temple of your God; then may we meet death, for we have been taken captive by thee. Do thus unto us, and thou shalt be guiltless of our blood, O hero!' Now when Zabulon heard this, he went hastily and secretly to the patriarch³, and told him what they had said. They were baptized by Zabulon; they were led into the temple of God, where they partook of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, and the glory of the holy apostles was declared unto them.

On the morning when they were to meet their doom, the Branji rose very early, and, being clothed in the garments of death, were led away unto the place of execution, praying and praising God for His baptism and sacrament which they had received, saying: 'In this our death we are immortal, for God has esteemed us worthy to see His glory, and to receive the inexhaustible provision for the journey, to wit, the body and blood of the immortal God Christ, who is higher than all heights and deeper than all abysses and depths, who is blessed through eternity. But, alas for our kinsfolk, born in bitterness, inheritors of darkness!' They then handed themselves over to the executioner. Now when Zabulon saw this, he was much moved, and wept bitterly, for they were as sheep led to the slaughter, and for their children they mourned grievously, as for lambs. Seized with pity for them all, Zabulon went in to the king and entreated

¹ Branji = Frangi (Franks). Cp. Lebeau, *Hist. du Bas-Empire*, i. 42-3.

² A.V. 'Pikhalani.' In other variants Pitalani.

³ A.V. 'he told the king and the patriarch.'

him that he would pardon them. The king granted them their liberty.

The Branji begged Zabulon to go with them to their land and teach the gospel of Christ, baptizing with water all the people. He hearkened to their prayer, and asked the patriarch for a priest. Then he obtained leave from the king, and they went away joyfully. When they were within a day's journey of the land of the Branji, the news that their king was coming in safety, with all his chiefs, travelled before them, and there came forth to meet them ten *erist'havs*¹: Khozamai, Khozaba, Zakai and Khenebagi, Timgaragi Dazakai², Gazai, Zargai, Zarda, Zamrai and T'hmonigoni³, and all the kingdom with them, and they met at a great deep river⁴. The king divided the people, and placed half of them on each side of the river, and the priest blessed the water. Then all the people went down into the river and were washed, and rose together, and the priest⁵ laid his hands upon them all. Ten days tarried they there by the river, and they pitched tents. The priest offered up the bloodless sacrifice, and the people partook of the sacrament of Christ. Priests instructed them in all the doctrines of Christianity. When Zabulon had said farewell he left them in peace, and went away with great gifts to Rome.

Baptism
of the
Branji.

He resolved to go to Jerusalem, and when he arrived there he divided his gains among the poor, according to the commandment of God. He saw the steward Iobenal, who had

Zabulon
visits
Jerusalem

¹ *eris-t'havi* (lit. head of the people) is a governor of a province.

² Thus in Sabuin, but it may be *da* (and) Zakai, as in A.V.

³ In A.V. the names are given as follows: Kholanai, Khozabai Khladchai, Khenebagi, Timgaragi, Zakai, Gzai Zargai, Zardai, Zarmai and T'hmonigoni of royal race. There are thus eleven names in all, but it is difficult to decide which of them is a double name. Queen Marian's MS. gets over the difficulty by omitting Zarmai. The MS. in the church of St. John the Baptist (Nat'hlis mtzemeli monastery, in Karayaz Steppe) agrees with A.V. The list in Kart'hlis Tzkhovreba is: Khozamai, Khozai, Gaakhlajai (var. Gar-lajai), Khonemagai, Khingiragai (var. Khinidhragai), Zajai, Zagai, Zardai, Zamrai, T'hmoni.

⁴ Queen Marian's MS. and the Nat'hlis mtzemeli MS. have not *ghemasa* (deep); the former reads *ghadamasa*, the latter *ghadamarasa* (? geographical names, names for the river).

⁵ A.V. 'Zabulon.'