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Catholic Churches in Georgia: Builders and Benefactors

(The 19th and Early 20th Centuries)

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The history of Catholicism in Georgia started with the arrival of Dominican and Franciscan friars in Georgia during the reign of Queen Rusudan (1223-40).¹ In 1328, by order of Pope John XXII, a Latin diocese was established in Tbilisi and the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist was built. The diocese existed until 1507. In 1661, the Holy See entrusted missionary work among Georgians to Capuchin priests. They worked vigorously in semi-independent kingdoms and principalities in east and west Georgia and usually received a friendly welcome from the local population and rulers.

By the early 19th century when the Russian Empire had annexed Georgia, Catholic communities existed in several regions of the country. With the exception of Akhaltsikhe, they mainly followed the Latin rite in urban centres. The ethnic structures of these communities differed from city to city. In Tbilisi, it was a multi-ethnic community composed of Georgians, Armenians, Poles, Frenchmen, Italians, etc. In Kutaisi, the Catholic community was predominantly ethnic Georgian, while in Gori and Batumi they were comprised of both Georgians and Armenians.

The situation was different in the provinces of Samtskhe and Javakheti in south Georgia and their main urban centre Akhaltsikhe. The Russian Empire took this region from the Ottoman Empire as a result of the Russo-Turkish

1 Regarding the history of Catholicism in Georgia see: Lomsadze 1979; Papashvili 1995; Ivelashvili 2009. In European languages, see Tamarati 1910, which remains the most comprehensive work on the subject, devoting whole chapters to various aspects of the formation and development of Catholic communities in Georgia; Modern Western authors mainly focus on the history of the Soviet period. See, for instance: Lorenz 1990:79-80; Zuggler 2001, 55-57, 130-131, 213-224; See also: Doborjginidze 2012; Natsvlishvili 2015b.

wars in 1828 and 1878. Under Ottoman rule, local Catholic Georgians were ministered to by the Unifying Friars of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the Armenian branch of the Dominican Order that had adopted the Armenian rite and language in church worship. Owing to their activity, a strong Armenian tradition had been formed among the Catholics of the region of both Georgian and Armenian origin that was zealously upheld by the local clergy. Only in the 1730s, did the Capuchins manage to establish their mission in Akhaltsikhe. In the 19th century, Catholics were living both in Akhaltsikhe and villages of the region. The majority of them followed the Armenian rite. Only a part of ethnic Georgian Catholics belonged to the Latin rite.

Catholics played a significant role in the economic and cultural life of Georgia in the 19th century. Among them there were high-ranking officials, merchants, entrepreneurs, doctors, lawyers, journalists, scholars, musicians, etc. Georgian Catholic intellectuals like Peter Kharischirashvili and Michael Tamarashvili shared the ideas and aspirations of Georgian nationalism, being concerned with national identity and cultural survival.

Catholicism was a minority religion within the Russian Empire. Through the 19th century, Catholics of both Latin, Greek, and Armenian rites suffered several waves of persecutions, especially during the reign of Emperor Nicholas I (1825-55). Their situation became more tolerable only after the 1870s and significantly improved in 1905 when Emperor Nicholas II granted more freedom to Catholics in the Empire. Despite restrictions and lengthy bureaucratic procedures, Catholic communities usually managed to get permission for the construction of churches in all parts of the Russian Empire. More than twenty Catholic churches and chapels of both the Latin and the Armenian rite were built or reconstructed in Georgia during the 19th and early 20th centuries, mainly between 1860 and 1910.²

Churches were central to the lives of Catholic communities. Their members not only made donations to the construction, but also volunteered their own time and labour.³ As a rule, the financial means and methods of fundraising were the same all throughout Georgia. The money to pay for church build-

2 Some of these were the Church of St Joseph, Arali (1860); the Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God, Vale (1862); the Church of the Virgin, Kutaisi (1862); the Church of SS Peter and Paul, Tbilisi (1870-77); the Church of the Holy Cross, Akhaltsikhe (1881); the Church of the Saviour, Tskaltbila (1883); the Church of the Dormition, Tbilisi (1884 and 1902-03); the Church of the Virgin, Skhvilisi (1895); the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, Khizabavra (1898-1900); the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Batumi (1898-1903); the Church of the Assumption, Kartikami (1900-08); the Church of the Virgin, Ude (1901-09); the Church of St Stephen, Khulgumo (1903), etc.

3 This was a common practice in the 19th century. See for instance: Grimes 2009.

ing expenses came from wealthy Catholic merchants and entrepreneurs as well as from parishes themselves.

In 19th and early 20th-century Georgia, it was common to start church construction without having a clear idea what the costs would be and where the money was to come from or how long the construction of a church would take. Even a small initial budget encouraged the representatives of the church to begin building activities. The ambitions of the clergy usually exceeded their financial potential; their plans to finish the church properly were threatened to be ruined at almost every stage of the construction. Each priest wanted to build something exceptional that usually led to the depletion of available resources and the incurment of debts. Rome did not welcome such initiatives and reprimanded the responsible person even if he had managed to complete the church. As early as 1749, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Propaganda Fide*) dismissed Nicola da Girgenti from the position of vicar because he had sold houses and stores owned by the Capuchin mission in order to finish the construction of a large church in Tbilisi [Tamarashvili 1995:681; Khoshtaria 2009:160].

In 1804, Capuchins began to build a new church in Tbilisi. Two years later the head of the mission, Franco Antonio da Padova wrote to the Sacred Congregation that they had spent all 6,000 rubles received from the Russian government through the assistance of Count Pavel Tsitsianov⁴ and now needed to sell a garden, a house, and two uninhabited plots of land in order to complete the church. In the response letter, the Sacred Congregation accused him of carelessness: “it seems you have not taken measures and who knows, perhaps you intend to build something huge” [Tamarashvili 1902/2011:496-7]. Apart from 6,000 rubles, the Capuchins received 200 scudi and 720 Ottoman piasters from the Sacred Congregation and a donation from the court of Vienna, but the parish still got into debt. They borrowed 1,000 rubles with interest from the government. The Church of the Dormition was completed in 1808. Father Franco Antonio admitted that the expenditures had exceeded the fortune, but he seemed to be very proud when describing the procession entering the new church:

The procession was accompanied by the Russian army from different sides and was led by military and civil officers of the Russian government. Georgians, Armenians, and the whole country were watching. Local Georgian Catholics and their metropolitan bishop wished to enter. The Armenians’ first

4 Pavel Tsitsianov had been an Imperial Russian military commander and infantry general since 1804. He assisted Catholics in Georgia. He helped Capuchins in obtaining money from the government to build the church and even drew the plan of the monastery for them. See: Tamarashvili 1902/ 2011: 497.

bishop also entered. We paid our respects to them and had them seat themselves [Tamarashvili 1902/2011:496-7].

In the early 19th century, the government of the Russian Empire could yet be approached for a donation that happened very rarely in the following years. In 1900, the Ministry of Internal Affairs permitted the parishioners of the village Kartikam (Javakheti region) to build a new Armenian Catholic church on the condition that they would agree to cover all expenses related to the construction.⁵ Six years later, when the parish ran out of money, the only assistance the government rendered for the parish was to allow them to obtain a donation in the amount of 4,000 rubles on the territory of the Roman Catholic diocese of Tiraspol. Permission was granted in 1906 and renewed in 1908.⁶

The construction of churches was usually started with limited funds and the parishioners would supply a significant part of it. They funded, fully or partly, the construction or reconstruction of almost all the Catholic churches in the villages of Akhaltsikhe and the Akhalkalaki districts. Most of the parishioners were very poor and they had to put money aside for years. When the Armenian Catholic church in the village of Toria was damaged by an earthquake in 1899, the parish became financially able to reconstruct it only in 1905 [Karapetian 2011:207].

Father Simon Chilashvili, the priest in Ude, had only 1,500 rubles in cash when he decided to build a church. He employed promissory notes for 11,000 rubles, while the parish provided building materials such as sand, stone, lime for mortar, and timber without asking for payment. Father Simon ran out of money four years after the start of construction in 1905. He had spent 12,000 rubles and the edifice was still not completed.⁷ The same thing happened to Father Michael Vardzelashvili in 1897, who had started construction in the village of Khizabavra with locally collected money in Kutaisi and even in Russia, but had to stop when the new church had been built up to seven arshins (about five meters).⁸ In order to continue the building work it was necessary to do some fundraising. There were frequent attempts to collect money abroad or within the Empire and sometimes even with great success. A priest responsible for the construction needed to get permission in order to begin collecting donations. The government granted approval if he intended to find contributors inside the Empire, while an official letter issued by the Vatican was required for those abroad.

5 Кавказ, 1900, no. 206, 3.

6 Кавказ, 1908, no. 99, 2.

7 National Centre of Manuscripts, M. Tamarashvili personal archive, Box no. 3666.

8 *ibid*, Box no. 1609.

In 1897, Father Anselm Mghebrishvili started construction of the church in Batumi. He wanted to seek funds in Europe and was advised by a French priest to obtain official consent as:

There are a lot of swindlers in Europe raising money and today [people] do not have confidence in anybody and give nothing; when you have a paper from Rome then you will not have any difficulties and even bishops will help you to obtain money. After that I recommend you to leave for America because they are very rich and you will obtain a lot of money.⁹

In 1905, Father Simon Chilashvili was permitted by the government to collect 15, 000 rubles, but he worried about disorder in the Empire¹⁰ and looked forward to having an opportunity to travel in Europe and find contributors. He wrote to Father Michael Tamarashvili:

We are thinking about obtaining a recommendation letter from the bishop and going abroad to do fundraising for the completion of our church. We were advised that it would be possible to go to France and Belgium or to Rome and collect money from free donors. I address you as you are a kind and responsive person, so please let us know if it is possible to collect money or not.¹¹

There is no evidence that Simon Chilashvili had set off on a round-the-world trip. Information provided by the inscription on the south façade of the church in Ude confirms that it was completed in 1909 by means of local people: “There are 2,120 Catholics in Ude, the builders of this church, and 520 Muslims, both Georgians by race”. The Catholic community of the village was very proud of the result of their efforts, as they “have constructed a new church, the largest and the most beautiful in the entire Caucasus”.¹² The content of the inscription also admits the generosity of the Muslims who had presumably supplied some amount of money for constructing a place of worship not for their own use.

Father Michael Vardzelashvili was the other priest who had asked Michael Tamarashvili to be an intermediary between him and the Vatican. After describing in his letter a lamentable financial situation that had threatened to halt his building activities, he continued:

9 *ibid*, Box no. 2640.

10 There was a wave of mass political and social unrest in the early 20th century in the Russian Empire that led to the revolution of 1905.

11 National Centre of Manuscripts, M. Tamarashvili personal archive, Box no. 3666.

12 *ibid*, Box no. 2381.

I have to address you and ask you to somehow beseech the Pope or someone in the Vatican to give us a license so that I could go to Italy and France and collect money in order to complete the church.¹³

The art of fundraising was a hard and long-term activity requiring strong spiritual and physical endurance. It was not easy for priests to remain resolute after wandering for several months in vain. Father Michael Vardzelashvili had collected only 2,500 rubles after five months spent in Ukraine and he still needed an additional 5,000 rubles.¹⁴ In 1898, he left for Istanbul, where he visited the Georgian Catholic monastery at Feriköy with the hope of obtaining some financial support, but grew disappointed when he found out that the monastery was or pretended to be very poor and nobody was willing to make donations.¹⁵ Father Michael then applied to the papal delegate Monsignor Bonetti, in Istanbul [Frazee 1984] and the Armenian Patriarch of Cilicia Stephan Azarian. The former refused to help him and the latter reimbursed only the expense of a road trip. Desperate, Father Michael wrote to Tamarashvili:

If I have no recourse to any hope or assistance, all the sacrifices and struggles that have ruined my life will be in vain. If no one is able to cover the building with a roof, you know that the building will certainly fall to pieces... There is no other way out than to go to Rome with your hope; you should somehow help me for God's sake, not mine. Father, it has been two years now that I wander here or there, I have abandoned all my gains and family ... to help these poor and miserable people.¹⁶

Father Michael managed to complete the church in 1898. According to the inscription carved on the west façade of its bell-tower, the money was collected at both the local, regional (Kutaisi governorate) and imperial levels. Contemporaries considered the church as one of the best religious buildings in the entire region. The Georgian newspaper *Iveria* wrote: “today the village Khizabavra is proud of its huge church”,¹⁷ while Zacharia Chichinadze regarded the building “the best one among all Catholic churches in the region” [Chichinadze 1906:78].

Naturally, builders of small chapels faced less difficulty. These small structures were usually erected at the cemeteries and family members of the deceased could easily finance them. The chapel built at the grave of the pharmacist Wilhelm Schmitz in the 1900s in Kukia Cemetery in Tbilisi was fully

13 *ibid*, Box no. 1609.

14 *ibid*, Box no. 1610.

15 Regarding the monastery at Feriköy, see: Natsvlishvili 2015b.

16 National Centre of Manuscripts, M. Tamarshvili personal archive, Box no. 1611.

17 *Iveria*, 1898, No 253 (in Georgian).

funded by his widow, Doctor Sophia Schmitz. It was meant to be public, for common liturgical use [Natsvlishvili 2015a:110-111].

In the Catholic world, it was common to exhort the parish to make a donation through a sermon. The charity sermons took place in Georgia as well. A sermon text written presumably in the 1840's refers to the construction of the Catholic church in Kutaisi. An anonymous priest addressing the parish stated that Father Francesco was in need of financial support and called the people "with a great desire to donate" to support him.¹⁸ It is not known whether this appeal helped or not. The only known name related to the financing of the construction in Kutaisi is Ivane Kauhchishvili, who funded the church's richly decorated west porch in 1892 [Bulia ...2006a:113].

Another 19th-century document gives information about how parishioners were obliged to help the priest during the church construction both with food and building materials. It mentions the Catholics of the Armenian city of Alexandropol (today's Gyumri) and their necessity for having a church in order to perform their Christian duties. The author of the document is not known, but an imperative tone, an authority to assign priests and to charge people for the building implies his high ecclesiastical status. In all probability, he should have been the bishop or archbishop of the Armenian Catholics.

According to this document, Father Florencio was selected for the duty of supervisor and the villages were charged with providing bread, one liter of boiled butter, one liter of cheese, two chickens, and one lamb for each year he would live in Alexandropol. In order to make sure that no one would avoid the responsibility, Father Petros was appointed as his assistant. He had to collect goods and deliver them to Father Florencio. His duties also included instructing inhabitants of the villages to bring building materials such as stone, sand, and lime. He promised the parish:

I will give my paternal blessing to everyone who takes care of the church construction and will ask God to enrich their families insofar as they have cared for God's house.¹⁹

Sometimes contributors demanded some favours in return for their donations. For example, the entrepreneur from Kutaisi, Joseph Kauhchishvili promised to donate 400 rubles for arranging the sanctuary and 150 rubles for the St. Nino Institute to the Catholic church in his native city. In return, the abbot would allow him to bury his brother Stephane within the church enclosure. In the 19th century, the law forbade the interment of the deceased near the

18 National Archives of Georgia, Central Historical Archive, Fund no. 1644, Box no. 1.

19 *ibid.*

church outside the cemetery, though in case of the consent of the abbot and the parishioners, an exception could be made. The parish resisted and Kaukhchishvili's offer was declined.²⁰

Building a church was an expensive endeavour. The construction of a large structure like the churches in Khizabavra and Ude cost approximately 30,000 rubles, while 240,000 rubles were spent on the church in Batumi, which is one of the most striking Catholic buildings in Georgia. Naturally, nothing could be done without the support of wealthy donors. Members of the Zubalashvili family, rich Georgian Catholic merchants who played a decisive role in the building of Catholic churches throughout the country were the most well-known among them. Constantine Zubalashvili (1828-1901) and his four sons Levan (1853-1914), Stephane (1860-1904), Peter (1862-1903), and Jacob (1876-1941) were prominent representatives of the Catholic upper class who used their large fortune for public charity. They made significant contributions to their church and community. The majority of Roman Catholic churches and religious schools in Georgia were entirely or partially financed by them.

The name of Constantine Zubalashvili is associated with the construction of the Catholic Church of SS Peter and Paul in Tbilisi. It was erected between 1870 and 1877 according to the design of architect Albert Salzman through the initiative of the Visitor of the Caucasus and the abbot of the Catholic Church of the Dormition Maximilian Orlovsky [Bulia ...2006b:155]. Members of the congregation were mainly Poles exiled to Tbilisi after the Polish revolt of 1863. The Catholic Church of the Dormition provided the site in the Kukia district.²¹ The building committee, of which Constantine Zubalashvili was a member, appealed to the Catholic community to contribute to the new building in 1868. From 1868 to 1877 money in the amount of 26,968.47 rubles had been willed from both Georgian and Polish families, but it still was not enough for the completion of a large Neo-Baroque building. It had been standing without a dome until 1893. The furnishing of the building lasted for several years [Furier 1992:225-227]. The family of Ivane Jimsherov made a donation in the amount of 5,000 rubles in the memory of their father, which was used for fencing the church yard in 1891.

Constantine Zubalashvili's son Stephane was an even more enthusiastic benefactor than his father. He became the main donor of the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Batumi, the most ambitious project of Georgian Catholics. On February 26, 1898, Father Anselm Mghebrishvili, the initiator of the construction, wrote to Michael Tamarashvili, telling him he needed 80,000

20 *ibid*, fund no. 8, Box no. 4100.

21 National Centre of Manuscripts, M. Tamarshvili personal archive, Box no. 1382.

rubles for construction.²² The initial capital was collected locally, but it was far from being enough to continue the construction. Only owing to the generous donation from Stephane Zubalashvili did Father Anselm manage to complete the building and even furnish it with costly icons, statues, and liturgical vestments ordered from Italy and France. Moreover, he intended to invite painters and sculptors from Rome.²³ The large Neo-Gothic church was consecrated in 1902. Contemporaries described it as “the church having no equal in the entire Caucasus”.²⁴ However, not everybody was enraptured by it. Zakaria Chichinadze considered it to be a low-grade building in a style alien to Georgia and rebuked its builders for spending 240,000 rubles that seemed to him like an exorbitant luxury [Chichinadze 1904:82].

Stephane Zubalashvili was a supporter of Catholic charities and church-building projects. He donated 10,000 rubles to the Church of the Dormition in Tbilisi. Pavle Kalajiov, the administrator of the church, wrote to M. Tamashvili:

We have completely renovated and enlarged it. Stephane Zubalov alone spent 1,000 tumans – that is 10,000 rubles – on its renovation and reconstruction work and now we have spent more than 1,000 rubles on decorations from money contributed by both the fathers of the church and the parish. Herewith about 3,600 Rubles were spent on a pipe organ ordered from Germany ... now everybody likes this church very much and says that it looks like a real, beautiful Roman Catholic church.²⁵

Stephane Zubalashvili also donated 1,000 rubles for constructing a school of needlework for Catholic girls in the village of Khizabavra.²⁶ He was a generous contributor to the church fund by the means of subsidies. After Stephane’s death in 1904, Pavle Kalajiov asked Yulia Tumanishvili, the daughter of Constantine Zubalashvili, to try convincing her brothers to proceed with giving some money.

The elder son of Constantine Zubalashvili, Levan financed the restoration of the Catholic Church of the Holy Family in Gori. In 1914 the newspaper *Akhali Kartli* wrote with bitter lamentation in regard to his death:

Who does not know that the late Levan was an indefatigable worker, well-wisher, true Christian, and a person compassionate for everyone without distinction, for every child of Georgia? ... He will forever be alive

22 *ibid*, Box no. 2642.

23 *ibid*, Box no. 2654.

24 *ibid*, Box no. 2662.

25 *ibid*, Box no. 1897.

26 Tsnobis purtseli, 1903, no. 2165, 3; no. 2288, 3 (in Georgian).

especially in the hearts of the Catholics of Gori because he rendered them an invaluable, unforgettable service. Great is his merit, this merit is spoken and certified by the walls of this holy church, which was renovated and adorned by him. The late Levan did not forget about his ancestors' place of worship and once he heard that the Catholic church of Gori was in dire straits due to its poverty, he started to adorn it ... He immediately sent engineers, technicians, and master craftsmen and this Catholic church was renovated.²⁷

Another important source of funding were bequests left by the parishioners. Nikoloz Zubalashvili, Constantine's cousin who died in 1898, left a considerable sum to different Catholic organizations. He bequeathed 19,000 rubles to the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary, 2,000 rubles for the decoration of the Church of the Dormition, 1,000 Rubles to the Church of SS Peter and Paul, and 1,000 rubles to the Church of the Holy Family in Gori.²⁸ He also left 2,000 rubles for the education of Catholic students.²⁹ The Church of the Dormition also received 2,000 rubles through a will made by Maria Karaeva. Another Catholic woman Yulia Shcherbinina, the widow of the Actual Privy Councilor Mikhail Shcherbinin, bequeathed 1,000 rubles to the same church in 1906.³⁰

The register book of income and expenditure of SS Peter and Paul Church in Tbilisi mentions various sources of money and gives a general idea of their relative importance.³¹ 12,455.21 rubles were collected from 1869 to 1872. The money came from donations (18.9%), an interest-paying current account (2.2%), legacy (47.9%), debenture with fixed interest (2.5%), and church collections (28.7%). Of course, this percentage is not common to all the churches, but it is important for understanding the general character of the financing of Catholic churches in 19th-century Georgia.

Apparently, it was not common for Georgian and Armenian Catholics to finance the construction of each other's churches. Presumably, a mixed contribution had taken place in Khizabavra that led to misunderstanding and tension involving the clergy and parishioners of both communities. Some dissatisfaction was caused by the church inscription saying: "This Roman Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was built through the efforts of the priest

27 Akhali kartli, 1914, no. 17, 2 (in Georgian).

28 Aslanovich, the priest of the Catholic church in Gori, spent that money on purchasing the pump organ and arranging the floor of the church. See: National Centre of Manuscripts, M. Tamarshvili personal archive, Box no. 1617.

29 Iveria, 1898, no. 30, 1-2 (in Georgian).

30 National Archives of Georgia, Central Historical Archive, fund No 1645, Box no. 92 and 105.

31 *ibid*, fund no. 1645, Box no. 21.

Vardzelashvili and the support of the Catholics of Khizabavra, Russia, and the Caucasus in 1898³². The inscription had only been made in Georgian and Latin. This fact provoked the Armenians since according to the contemporary Armenian press, Armenian Catholics from the village of Alastan had contributed 500 rubles to the construction of the church in Khizabavra, donated an icon costing 800 rubles, and provided lime free of charge [Karapetian 2011:236]. Therefore, they expected that their small contribution would be particularly mentioned.

Besides the building activities, Catholic parishes also sought money for social purposes. For instance, the Church of the Dormition held a charity raffle in order to provide local parish school pupils with clothing and footwear.³² A gathering of second-hand clothes for needy people was organized by the board of the charity society at the SS Peter and Paul Church.³³ The society also raised money from membership dues and donation.

A member of the Catholic parish, Doctor Iovane Karaev, sponsored one of the first voluntary hospitals for the poor and strangers in 1839. Working there, Karaev offered his skills without asking for payment. He also endowed the hospital with 1/6 of his income from some property in Kojori (a vacation village near Tbilisi), which should have been spent only on patient care. His family donated money as well. In return they received prayers for their souls twice a year.³⁴

The study shows that a priest was the initiator of Catholic church construction in 19th-century Georgia, as a rule. He was also responsible for seeking money in the villages, while fundraising committees were established in the cities. Parishioners participated in the construction of Catholic churches as far as they could by donating money, providing building materials, or volunteering their own time and labour.³⁵ Their church was their pride, something

32 *ibid*, fund No 1645, Box no. 224.

33 *Кавказ*, 1895, no. 131, 1.

34 National Archives of Georgia, Central Historical Archive, fund no. 1645, Box no. 137.

35 Fundraising methods were similar in other religious groups as well in Georgia during the 19th and 20th centuries. When the Assyrian church of St. Thomas was being built in Tbilisi during the 1880s, members of the parish – workmen, craftsmen, water carriers, and carters – worked on the construction gratis. They also provided the church with bricks. Other building materials such as sand and stone were obtained locally [Droeba, 1883, no. 84, 1 (in Georgian)]. The Orthodox churches of St. Eustace and of St. Theodosius in Tbilisi were erected in the 1900s through donations collected in Russia [Lilushvili 2015: 52, 66]. The situation was slightly different with German Lutherans who lived both in Tbilisi and villages in east Georgia. Being responsible for granting them religious freedom, the government lent material support for religious buildings by endowing them with construction sites and a sum of 27,859.55 rubles in 1830 [National Archives of Georgia, Central Historical Archive, Fund no. 1727 Box no. 29]. After experiencing economic prosperity

more than just a building for religious services. It contributed to the parish's sense of dignity and made parishioners feel like valued members of a broader Catholic community.

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in the 1890s, the Germans were able to construct one of the biggest churches in Tbilisi at their own expense. A sum of 56,933.90 rubles was collected among Lutherans alone [Bericht 1898].

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