

# ORTHODOXY AS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF MODERN GREEK IDENTITY IN THE 1860S – 1910S (AN EXAMPLE OF THE GREEK CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS IN BATUM)<sup>1</sup>

Eka Tchkoïdze

DOI: 10.17846/CL.2022.15.1.97-108

**Abstract:** TCHKOIDZE, Eka. *Orthodoxy as an Important Element of Modern Greek Identity in the 1860s – 1910s (An Example of the Greek Church of St. Nicholas in Batum)*. A Georgian littoral city Batum, situated on the South-Eastern shores of the Black Sea, has had an interesting history in many respects. It was included in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. In 1878 Batum was reintegrated with Georgia (a part of the Russian Empire at that period). In the 1880s – 1910s it served as an industrially important city in the whole Russian Empire. At the same time, it was very colourful nationally and religiously. Greeks in Batum, one of its largest and oldest minorities, settled there in the 1850 and beyond. Batum's Greeks were actively involved in all spheres of city life, especially in entrepreneurship, politics, culture and education. The Church of St. Nicholas was built in 1865 – 1871 by the local Greek flock. It is the first stone building and the first Christian monument which has survived up to now in Batum. The aim of the article is to present all aspects concerning the process of the building, from acquiring its permission to its completion. It is also underlined that the Church had mobilized and unified, on the one hand, the local Greeks and, on the other hand, the local Greeks with Greeks of Pontus and especially, of Trabzon. In the article a special emphasis is given to present the church as a centre of the Greek community. The article reveals that all successful Greeks of Batum were involved in activities initiated or organized by the church of St. Nicholas. It is evident that the church is the space that helps the Greeks of the diaspora to maintain such an important marker of identity as language. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (i. e. before the sovietization of Georgia) it was the Church that united the Greeks living in the non-Greek space and strengthened their perception of their national identity and desire to preserve it. All this was happening in harmony and there are no cases of confrontation with local church circles or structures. The church was the factor that spiritually united the population of Batum and the Pontus region within the framework of two different empires.

**Keywords:** *Greek identity, Orthodoxy, Batum, Church of St. Nicholas, Georgia, Russian Empire*

---

<sup>1</sup> This study was financially supported by *Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (FR-19-1759, "Ethnic groups and their periodical editions in Georgia from 1819 to 1921")*. I would like to sincerely thank the Rustaveli Foundation, whose funding allowed me to work on this project.

«Όπου δύο Γραικοί ἐκεῖ καὶ μία Ἐκκλησία».  
 “Where there are two Greeks, you will find one church too.”  
 (Kalphoglou 1908, 137)

## Introduction

A Georgian littoral city Batum (modern spelling Batumi), a centre of the Adjara region (nowadays, Adjara Autonomous Republic), situated on the South-Eastern shores of the Black Sea, has had an interesting history in many respects. Together with the wider area of Adjara and other provinces of South Georgia it was included in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. In the 19th c. it became a very important harbour from geopolitical point of view. First the British in the 1840s and then the Russians after the Crimean war in 1853 gave a special attention to it. Being a very undeveloped Ottoman village it was reintegrated with Georgia in 1878, which was a part of the Russian Empire at that period. This happened due to the victory of the Russians in the last Russo-Turkish war in 1877 – 1878. It marked a new era for the whole region. In a few years Batum became a very promising town and since 1888 it was an extraordinary, charming, industrially significant and cosmopolitan city. It kept a position of the most important port-city on the eastern shores of the Black Sea until the First World War. In 1914 – 1921 there were some perspectives to regain its importance until the sovietization of Georgia (1921). After 1921, as a part of the Soviet Union, Batum lost its international significance.

The main factor of the development of Batum Sea Port from the beginning was oil, as it served as the only sea transporter of Caspian petroleum to the global markets. Thus, due to a very convenient location and a naturally deep harbour of Batum, oil became, after cereals and timber, the third largest Russian export and a major source of income for the Russian Government. By the turn of the 20th century, Baku was producing 50 per cent of the world's oil (Tchkoidze 2020, 492). The network of Baku-Batum opened up perspective of access for Baku petroleum to global markets. The railway helped Batum to become the chief Russian oil port in the Black Sea. As a result, the city expanded to an extraordinary extent and the population increased very rapidly (Tchkoidze 2020, 498).

Batum was not only an industrially important city in the whole Russian Empire. It was very colorful nationally and religiously. Greeks were one of the oldest and largest ethnic groups settled there. Even Batum's name has Greek roots. An ancient Greek colony Βαθύς or Βαθύν Λιμένα was named because of its extremely deep harbor. Here Greeks began to appear in approx. 1850 (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou 1993, 127). A well-known Greek historian Ioannis Kalphoglou who moved from the Pontus region to Batum, mentions that in 1846 and onwards the Greeks came to Batum; while in the surrounding 5 villages they settled in 1884 (Kalphoglou 1908, 105-106).

The major number of Pontic Greeks, settled in Adjara, is from the territory of Asia Minor, particularly Santa (nowadays Dumanli), as well as the city of Trabzon and the provinces of Rize, Patsa, Ordu, Giresun and Samsun (Kharatsidis 2006, 205; Giorgadze 2017, 43).

When the Russian army entered Batum in 1878, Greeks were the largest local community after Georgians (Derzhavin 1906, 23). According to the Russian Empire census of 1897, the number of Greeks of Batum was 2,764 (from totally 28,508 inhabitants); in 1917 – 4,008 (from 35,048); in 1918 – 4,878 (from 35,375); in 1920 – 8,598 (from 45,446).<sup>2</sup> Usually they were on the 4th place

<sup>2</sup> Such a large number of the Greeks in Batum has not been recorded any more. According to the data of the last census survey of the Soviet Union (1989), in the City of Batum resided 7,396 Greeks. In the 1990s, because of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic disaster of the following period, the

after Russians, Georgians and Armenians.<sup>3</sup> A large number of Greeks, recorded in Batum in 1920, was also caused by the influx of refugees from the Pontus region and Asia Minor, which continued for several following years. In 1922– 1923 the last wave of immigration of the Greek arrived from Turkey to Batum. The majority of them sought to get through it to the historical homeland – Greece. However, tension between Greece and Turkey stopped a part of the population and forced to settle on the territory of the North Caucasus and Georgia (mainly in Abkhazia and Adjara) (Bespalova – Gubarev 2018, 41-42).

## Modern Greek Architectural Monuments in Georgia: General Observations

The 19th century Pontic Greek ecclesiastical art in Georgia is an important part of modern Greek culture. Its uniqueness is conditioned by the fact that it is, on the one hand, a continuation of Byzantine and post-Byzantine cultural traditions, and on the other hand, a bearer of elements of folk art. The ecclesiastical art of the Pontic Greeks in Georgia covers the years from about 1840s to 1910s. Although these monuments are found in different regions of Georgia, the architectural forms, structure and decor bear common typological features (Chichinadze 2011, 750). Without a doubt, Greek settlers enriched not only Georgia but the whole Black Sea region with elements of their national culture - above all, in the field of temple architecture (Parastatov 2019, 32).

The Pontic Greeks laid the foundation of a new, post-Ottoman period of ecclesiastical monumental architecture in Adjara. For Southwestern Georgia it was a qualitatively new style of church architecture. It is noteworthy that a temple, as a symbol and as a building, was so important to the Greek population that in every village were built at least one, sometimes even several temples. They are still referred to as Greek temples, even though the Greeks themselves no longer live in these villages (Giorgadze 2017, 102). Correspondingly, till today these monuments are marked by their ethnic and not religious character. According to the folk tales spread in Georgia, when a Greek settles somewhere, he first builds a church and then a school (Giorgadze 2017, 104); the latter, as a rule, functioned on the territory of the church under the guidance and direct supervision of the clergy.

The church of St. Nicholas of Batum differs from other Greek temples in Georgia by many factors. It belongs to those of the rare temples in Adjara that survived the demolition during the Soviet rule and, consequently, its dome has reached us in its original form (Giorgadze 2017, 103).

## Greeks of Batum and the church as their ethnic symbol

The study of St. Nicholas church in Batum is important for better understanding of what were the markers that led to the formation of a modern Greek identity after the fall of Byzantium. It must be emphasized at the outset that the church became a centre of national mobilization of Batum's Greeks. It is regarded the first stone building and the first Christian monument of the city. The church has rich and well-documented history.

The Greek community of Batum was like other communities in Austro-Hungarian and Russian economic centres in the 18th-19th centuries. Religion was central to the cohesion of the group, as it offered social philanthropy to the weaker members (Chatziioannou 2005, 377). In

---

Greeks of Georgia returned to Greece. According to the data of 2014, in Batum resided only 396 Greeks (Giorgadze 2017, 27).

<sup>3</sup> This data is taken from archival material which was published in "Growth of Batumi Population according to the Ethnic Composition", *Archeion* 2 (2011), 114-115; see also, Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou 1993, 170.

almost each study, the subject of which is the Greek diaspora, the first issue to be addressed is the church and the schools (see, for example, Panagiotidou 1919, 10). The word, thought, or advice of the highest ecclesiastical hierarch (bishop) had the greatest burden and authority for Greek immigrants (Panagiotidou 1919, 28). An expression “Where there are two Greeks, you will find one church” («Όπου δύο Γραικοί εκεί και μία Έκκλησία») – confirms this (Kalphoglou 1908, 137), and probably most accurately describes the main needs of the Greeks living in non-Greek space after Byzantium.

The Greeks, who originally settled in Batum, had one room of a house arranged as a secret chapel. After the Crimean War the number of Greeks in the city significantly increased. In one district, in an already existing building they arranged a wooden church and registered it as Nicholas’ house (Turkish: nickola’nın evi, Greek: οίκος Νικολάου) in the Government archives (Kalphoglou 1908, 13). The Greeks usually gathered there at night and prayed. Also, a private house was arranged as a kind of primary school for 15-20 students (Kalphoglou 1918, 15).

Before the Greeks began to take care of the construction of the church, they thought of converting one of the existing great halls into a church. This idea was soon ignored, because they also wanted to build a school near the church, and these two would hardly be housed in the same existing building (Kalphoglou 1918, 13). Shortly after the end of the Crimean War, in 1856, the Greeks of Batum shared the idea of building of a school and a church together with the Metropolitan of Trabzon Constantios (Κωνσταντίος; Metropolitan in 1830 – 1879), who promised to help them (Kalphoglou 1918, 14). The oldest document concerning the Batum church of St. Nicholas is the text of an address to Metropolitan Constantios, which was included in a collection of documents known as the Special Register Book, dated to 1862. It consisted of 356 pages. The historian Ioannis Kalphoglou used it and published a number of important documents in 1918 (on the details, concerning this Register Book, see Kalphoglou 1918, 15; on text of the address to Constantios and his reply to the Greeks of Batum, dated 9.02.1862 – see Kalphoglou 1918, 16-17).

A few years later a group of local Greeks comprised of Ilias Karakasis Ephraimidis, Panikas Kapasakalis and others applied to the Turkish authorities to grant an official permission for building a stone church. They had moral support from the local Bey Hussein Bazhan Oghli (a Muslim Georgian). The Russian consul<sup>4</sup> Peter Djudichi (in Russian: Петр Джудичи/Джудичи) also supported this initiative (Akhvlediani 1944, 172). The support of Hussein Bey/Beg Bezhan Oghli (Bezhanidze) was special, which is repeatedly emphasized in the relevant literature (Kalphoglou 1918, 19). The Russian Consul, along with moral support, donated 1,000 piastres for building of the church, an impressive sum of money at that time and the largest monetary contribution the church had ever received from the faithful (Kalphoglou 1918, 20).

The district where the Greek church of St. Nicholas was built was called “Urum’s District” in the 1850s – 1860s, because its residents were Greeks (Giorgadze 2017, 45). After 1878 it was called Greek Street (in Russian: Греческая улица/Grecheskaya ulitsa, in Georgian: ბერძნის ქუჩა / berdznis qucha<sup>5</sup>). Nowadays it bears the name of King Parnavaz.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Russian consulate opened in Batum in 1856 as non-regular. It became regular in 1858. P. Djudichi was the first Russian consul appointed in Batum. See a relevant document АКТЫ 12 (1904), 565. All volumes are available at <http://www.runivers.ru/lib/book3029>.

<sup>5</sup> The Russian version of the name in the official documents is evidenced from 1890 (Giorgadze 2017, 105).

<sup>6</sup> It was very common to name the streets in this way in the Russian Empire. The same happened in Tiflis, where also was a Greek street (Angelidis 2003, 22). It still bears the same name.

## An Ottoman permission for the Orthodox Church

Sultan's firman,<sup>7</sup> where the permission for building of the stone temple of St. Nicholas was presented, is dated to September 1863 (see a few text fragments Kalphoglou 1918, 18). After obtaining the relevant permission, Ilias Ephremidis received from Constantinople a drawing of the church to be built. Part of the land allotted to the church was his property and he handed it over to the Greek community free of charge in 1865. The architect of the church was Dimitrios Kalphas (Δημήτριος Κάλφας), constructors were Evstathios Sarantidis Varenotis (Ευστάθιος Σαραντίδης Βαρενώτης<sup>8</sup>) and Theodoros Chrysos (Θεόδωρος Χρυσός). The latter renovated the St. Gregory Cathedral of Trabzon as well (Kalphoglou 1918, 24). There is also a nominal list of money donors, who offered the amount from 1000 (offered by the Russian Consul) to 50 piasters. The donors of 10 to 50 piasters are not mentioned by name. Acceptance of donations continued also in the following years (see the list Kalphoglou 1918, 20).

Construction of St. Nicholas church started in 1865, and was completed in 1871. This is confirmed by a Greek inscription on a relief tile embedded in the outer wall of the church itself. In the Adjara Autonomous Republic State Archive there is an important document in Russian (Fund I-54, Inventory 1, File 25, leaf 12), a Parish Register, which consisted of 26 points/paragraphs and is dated to 1914. This is official information concerning the church, its property, personnel and other issues. It was published in 2010 with its original copy and the translation into Georgian (Surguladze – Putkaradze – Megrelishvili 2010, 87-91). The first paragraph mentions that the church was built in 1865 by the flock (Surguladze – Putkaradze – Megrelishvili 2010, 87). The same dates of the start of the construction and its completion (1865 – 1871) are clearly mentioned in the monograph, written on the Greeks of Batum (Kalphoglou 1918, 18-23).

In 1871, i. e. after the completion of main works, Metropolitan Constantios of Trabzon arrived in Batum to dedicate the church, but for some reason, this had not been then possible, and he had arrived a second time, on June 7, 1873, together with three clergymen. This time the Metropolitan of Trabzon dedicated the new church, stayed in Batum for 10 days and left for Trabzon on June 17. In Batum he was hosted by the above-mentioned Ilias Ephremidis (Kalphoglou 1918, 24).

## Batum's Greek Church during the entry of the Russian Army in 1878

In the 19th century, many travellers, who visited Batum and its environs, left their records. The information, provided by them, is considered to be an invaluable resource for studying Batum along with many other materials. From these records, the most important for us is the information of the travellers, who tell us about the Greeks of Batum and its Greek Church.

British Officer Gregory Green visited Batum in 1877 (during the war). Among other things he mentions Batum's Greek Orthodox Church. According to him, the Ottoman soldiers did not allow Greeks and Armenian Catholics to enter their churches. The local authorities regarded them as spies of Russia. In 1876 and January-February of 1877 10 Armenians and 6 Greeks were killed by the Turk robbers, who were similarly ruthless with the Muslims. During his visit only two schools

<sup>7</sup> As we do not have the complete text of the firman, there is no reference to the Sultan who issued it. Without a doubt he should be Abdulaziz (1861 – 1876).

<sup>8</sup> Evstathios Sarantidis' donated all the remuneration received for his service and had had a desire to be buried in the churchyard. His desire had not been realized as in that time a pandemic broke out and the government did not issue a permission for burying him there (Kalphoglou 1918, 24). It is unknown where Evstathios Sarantidis, one of the main constructors of the Batum's Greek church, is buried.

functioned: one Turkish, financed from Istanbul and one Greek, which was housed in a nicely equipped building (Gogolishvili 2009, 32-33).

Biologist E. G. Weidenbaum (in Russian: Е. Г. Вейденбаумъ) visited Batum in 1878. Among other things he mentions: “There are several mosques in the city and one quite large, stone church. According to its priest, construction began 15 years ago (= 1863) and was completed 8 years ago (= 1870). However, certain work still needs to be done. The work was started with the special permission (фирманъ firman) of the Sultan” (Weidenbaum 1901, 101).

Russians’ entry to Batum is described by the journalist A. Frenkel as well. According to him, on 25 August 1878 the bells in the Greek church were ringing constantly and were calling the faithful to pray (Frenkel 1879, 52).

In 1906 in Batum was published a bulky volume dedicated to the 25th anniversary of Batum’s integration with the Russian Empire entitled “Batumi ego okrestnosti / Батум и его окрестности”. In one of the articles of this volume N. S. Derzhavin points out that “when our army appeared, the Greeks hung the bell and started the service. This was not allowed during the Turkish rule” (Derzhavin 1906, 25). Despite this record, there is other data confirming that the bell in this church had been ringing before the Russian army entered Adjara and the Turkish government did not prohibit it (Giorgadze, 2017, 46).

According to the same Derzhavin, the Muslims of the city stopped the construction of the church twice, because they rebuked the Greeks that they were building not the church, but the fortress (Derzhavin 1906, 25). That is why Ilias Ephremidis was forced to obtain a second firman to build the church, which dates back to March 1867. This firman emphasized that no one had the right to interfere with the construction works. It also gave the permission to build a school (Kalphoglou 1918, 21).

According to Derzhavin, the school also functions with the church. In total, about 200 Greek families live in the city, and the church was built with their donations. For that period the debt, borrowed by the Greeks for the construction of the church, was equal to about 700 Turkish liras and the annual interest was equal to 15%, which was considered a favourable condition at that time. After the entry of the Russians, the income of the church almost doubled (Derzhavin 1906, 25).

## St. Nicholas Church of Batum since its Foundation till 1918

According to the Parish Register mentioned above, the description of the property of the Batum’s Greek church began from 1897 (paragraph 17), and keeping of copies of birth certificates – from 1884 (paragraph 19); since 1884 confessions were recorded as well (paragraph 21; Surguladze – Putkaradze – Megrelishvili 2010, 88). The church has one Archpriest (K. Tsantekov), one Priest (his name is impossible to read<sup>9</sup>) and one Psalmist (neither his name is possible to read<sup>10</sup>). In the Russian Empire, the structure of clerical ranks consisted of an Archpriest (protoierei) and a Priest

<sup>9</sup> This should be Matthaios Manos (Ματθαῖος Μάνος), who is on this position from 1899 and till at least 1918 (see his biography Kalphoglou 1918, 35-36). He was not Pontic like others. He originated from Macedonia region and was born in one of the villages of Albania. When he was a schoolboy, he became close to the Metropolitan of Belgrad, Anthimos Alexoudis (Ἀνθίμος Αλεξούδης). When Anthimos moved to Pontus, to the Diocese of Amaseia, Matthaios Manos followed him. In 1899 the Batum’s Greeks specially invited him as the second priest of the St. Nicholas church. Father Matthaios was intensely involved in all activities, particularly in helping the poor. He was also concerned about the prisoners. The historian Ioanis Kalphoglou highly appreciates his work and underlines that “He was working by all means and always for the good of the nation”.

<sup>10</sup> Supposedly, this should be Gregory Kharivoulos (Γρηγόριος Χαρίβουλος) (Kalphoglou 1918, 38).



(ierei; sviashchennik). About half of the parishes also had a Deacon (Freeze 1983, 53). Deacon is never mentioned or confirmed in the case of the Greek Church in Batum from the materials available to us.

The obligations of an Archpriest were clearly determined in the whole Russian Empire. Constituting fewer than one-third of the white clergy, priests bore primary responsibility in the parish for administering sacraments, performing private prayer services, overseeing subordinate clergy, and filing varied documents with their superiors in the Church (Freeze 1983, 53). The historian Kalphoglou published the names of the priests of the Greek church from the period of the beginning of its functioning (i.e. from 1871) till 1918 (priests in the 1870s Kalphoglou 1918, 25; in the next decades pp. 30-36). From 1887 the church was directed already by the Ecclesiastical Committee, which was elected for different terms in different times; sometimes for two, sometimes for three and sometimes even for four years. The Head of this Ecclesiastical Committee, as a rule, always was the Archpriest of the church. The number of its members was neither the same: e. g., in 1887 it was made of 9 persons and in 1897 – 12 (Kalphoglou 1918, 26). All the members of the Committee without exception were always the ethnic Greeks. The only exception was the priest Michael Chkhikvadze (in Georgian: მიქაელ ჩხიკვაძე), who was the member of the Committee for several times and also served as a (second) priest in 1895 – 1898. He had Greek mother (Kalphoglou 1918, 34).

As for the Psalmist, it was established in Russia in 1869 (Freeze 1983, 475). The Archpriest, the Priest and the Psalmist were officially hired by the Church of St. Nicholas; although the Priest had no salary, while the Archpriest had 300 rubles and the Psalmist – 100 (paragraph 5-6). Church's annual income by 1914 was 800 rubles (paragraph 7; Surguladze – Putkaradze – Megrelishvili 2010, 87).

In the Parish Register there is a reference to a sexton (in Russian *Ponomar*, in Georgian მზათგ / *mnate*, in Greek *Νεωκόρος* (or *κантиλανάφτης*). *Ponomar* was the sacristan rank like the Psalmist, lower than deacon and without the right to wear a surplice (Freeze 1983, 475). The Sexton of the St. Nicholas church, Achilles of Dimitrios Dimitriadis (paragraph 25), was officially hired on May 19, 1914. One of his responsibilities was to deal with Church's incomes and to keep its official stamp (paragraph 23; Surguladze – Putkaradze – Megrelishvili 2010, 88). Psalmists' and Sextons' list is provided by Ioannis Kalphoglou (Kalphoglou 1918, 38).

It is worthy to mention that the first renovation works of the church were conducted in 1894 – 1899. They built a bell tower, the yard and the adjacent territory become the Church property, where were opened the high schools for girls and for boys. According to the data of 1912, the real estate of the church included 5 buildings and the whole property was assessed in 18,320 Russian Rubles (Giorgadze 2017, 109). An all-girl Sunday school was one-year and all-boy school was public with two-classes. The all-boy school was housed in a public building for free. For those two schools the State Treasury gave 720 rubles; additionally, 200 rubles were given by Batum official authorities and 400 by the Church. In 1914 140 girls studied there. The number of boys is not indicated in the Parish Register (paragraph 24).

In 1902 the Polish soldiers donated a bell. The bell has a Latin inscription, which is easily readable (“VOCO VIVOS PLANCO MORTUOS” / “I CALL THE LIVING, MOURN FOR THE DEAD, AD 1902”). The name of the bell-casting factory, where the Polish ordered and made it, was Ludwisarski (Giorgadze 2017, 110).

In the church yard there are several graves, belonging to both laity as well as to clergy; Greeks and non-Greeks. Among them should be distinguished the name of Ilias Ephremidis. Perhaps it is

---

Kalphoglou does not specify the years of his being the psalmist, but as he mentions him at the end, he is that person, who should be considered as the psalmist of that time.

not accidental that his name till today is so respected by the local Greeks (Giorgadze 2017, 155). There is buried also Doctor Timoleon Triantafyllidis (1858 – 1908), whose merit and role in terms of improving medical services in Batum, as well as in supporting Greek schools, is immeasurable. Among the clergy buried in the churchyard, we should mention Archimandrite Simon (1907 – 1990) (Giorgadze 2017, 110).

The above mentioned Archpriest Constantinos Tsantekov / Tsandekov (Κωνσταντίνος Τσαντέκωφ) held this position from 1896 till 1918 (see the details below). It is confirmed also by the Batum Reference Book for 1902. Nikolaos Konstantinidis is mentioned as the second priest; chanter-priest Matthaios Manos<sup>11</sup>, sexton – Achilles Dimitriadis<sup>12</sup> (Всеобщий Адресъ города Батума на 1902 годъ, 79).

In the 1930s (the Soviet period), the Greek church was closed like thousands of other churches in Georgia, though it was reopened in 1948. It is connected with the relations of Kalistrate Tsintsadze (the Patriarch of Georgia in 1932 – 1952) with Joseph Stalin. The church started to function again as a result of Patriarch Kalistrate's and Batumian Greek ladies' great efforts. It is functioning till today (Giorgadze 2017, 111).

According to the actual data, the dimensions of the church are as follows: length – 25,20, width – 11,60, height – 8,70, total area (the yard included) – 450 sq. m. By the data we have, it is difficult to determine its precise initial dimensions (Giorgadze 2017, 108).

## The Church's involvement in different activities

The most eminent figure among the Archpriests was Constantinos Tsantekov. He served at the church the longest time of all (from 1896 till at least 1918<sup>13</sup>). Nobody can be compared with him in the multitude, area and diversity of his activities, he was either practically guiding or was actively observing. Also interesting is the fact that he was not native of Batum. He was born in the well-known village Alaverdi (Eastern Georgia) in 1868 in a priest's family. His parents were from the famous village of Santa in Pontus. He had acquired religious education in Tbilisi Seminary, after graduating from which in 1888 he was consecrated a Deacon in his native village of Alaverdi, in St. George Cathedral (dated to the 11th century; one of the best Georgian medieval architectural monuments). Soon after that he was ordained as a Priest. He stayed in Alaverdi till 1894. In 1894 – 1896 he was an Archpriest of Vladikavkaz St. Constantine and Helen Cathedral. In 1896 he was transferred to Batum, where he stayed for more than 22 years as the Archpriest. He engaged Greeks' hearts greatly. I. Kalphoglou highly appreciates his merit: "tirelessly labouring for national and the diaspora needs, who actively participates in the work of all councils and all national causes" (Kalphoglou 1918, 34-5). Together with educational activity, he coordinated publication of Greek books in Batum. It was Father Constantinos and a special committee (members: Michael Michailidis (Μιχαήλ Μιχαηλίδης), Panagiotis Kalaidioglou (Παναγιώτης Β. Καλαϊδιόγλου), Joakim Laginopoulos (Ιωακείμ Λαγηνόπουλος), who approved for publication Kalphoglou's

<sup>11</sup> Three Greek priests of Batum's church are mentioned in the list provided by Artemis Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou 1993, 167).

<sup>12</sup> It is worth mentioning that Achilles Dimitridis, a very active person in Batum's political life, was the father of the well-known music conductor Odysseas Dimitridis (1908 – 2005), who was born in Batum (Giorgadze 2012, 130).

<sup>13</sup> The book of Ioannis Kalphoglou, which is used as the main source here, was published in Batum in 1918. After this there has not been published any monographic work, containing such details about the Greeks of Batum and of Georgia in general. That's why it is impossible to date the events which happened after 1918.



book “Greeks in the Caucasus” («Οι Έλληνες εν Καυκάσω»), which was published in Athens in 1908 (Kalphoglou 1918, 3).

Support of Achilles Dimitriadis, a famous Batumian, who has been already mentioned several times, for the Greek church of Batum, should be noted as well. After Ilias Ephremidis, he was the most important person whose contribution to the development and support of the church was immeasurable. Regardless the fact that he was the father of the most famous Greek, born and grown up in Georgia in the 1890s – 1910s, he was the most eminent person in the Batum’s Greek community. He was a church Commissary for the longest time (1897 – 1908). In general, the commissaries were elected for three years only. The fact that he was elected three times, was an unprecedented exception, which the church had admitted only in his case (Kalphoglou 1918, 37). After the 9-year service on this position he was re-elected in 1914 – 1917.<sup>14</sup> Achilles was the only Greek who was elected in Batum City Council for more than 4 times. He was also an editor of the newspaper “Argonautis” (published from 1913 to 1918<sup>15</sup>). A. Dimitriadis was involved in educational affairs of the Greek community as well. He is mentioned among 4 members of the special Committee which gave permission to publish Greek books in Batum (Kalphoglou 1918, 2). Achilles was a member of the Ecclesiastical Committee in 1897 – 1899, 1899 – 1903 and in 1903 – 1905 (Kalphoglou 1918, 26-27). There was also the Society for Supporting the Poor of Batum (Εν Βατούμ Φιλότητος Αδελφότης). In 1907 Achilles Dimitriadis was one of its supervisors together with Ioannis Kalphoglou (Kalphoglou 1918, 52).

For this article Achilles Dimitriadis has been chosen from a great group of the supporters of the Batum’s Greek church in order to show how the church was related with all activities of the Greek community, and in turn, how important was moral and practical support of the church for the most successful Greeks of the city by active participation in its administrative governance and support of all its initiatives.

From the facts provided above it is obvious that together with their religious identity, the Greeks brought educational culture, which was very characteristic to the Greeks settled in other parts of the Russian Empire as well (Parastatov 2019, 32). The Batum case shows clearly that church and school were the most important aspects of Greek diaspora’s activities in Georgia. It is also worth mentioning that among different waves of the Greeks settled in Georgia in different periods and regions, the Greeks of Batum and the wider area of Adjara kept most of all the Greek language and traditions. They were also most educated and on a very high level culturally (Garakanidze 1990, 67).

## Conclusion

From the documentary materials presented in the article it is unambiguously evident that Batum’s St. Nicholas church was curated and completely administrated by the local Greek community. They also decided who would be the priest and elected them either from the local contingent or invited from the Pontus region. Exactly this is another important aspect with regard to the Batum Greek church; it had close relation with the Pontus region ecclesiastic Dioceses with the centre in Trabzon which coordinated, especially in ecclesiastic issues, the Batumian Greeks. Nothing is surprising in this till 1878, i. e. before Batum became a part of the Russian Empire,

<sup>14</sup> Dimitris Dimitriadis, father of Achilles Dimitriadis, was also actively involved in the affair of opening of the church. He is mentioned as one of the members of 7-person National Committee (Kalphoglou 1918, 24).

<sup>15</sup> For the details about this and other Greek newspapers, published in Batum, see Agtzidis 2001, 75. Newspapers and book publishing, as well as educational activities of the Batumian Greeks deserve special research and we plan it in the nearest future.

but it is undoubtedly impressive, when the Greeks of these two regions became the inhabitants of two religiously, and not only religiously, different - Russian and Ottoman Empires' – territories. This enormous change did not affect spiritual unity of Batum and Pontus in any way. It should be also noted that even during the Ottoman years in Batum, the Greeks had really no problem with religious self-affirmation (except of small incidents). Through the mediation of Trabzon Metropolitan, the locals easily settled all formalities. The relations of Batum's Greeks with the local Georgians were also impressive, given that the Georgian population by this time was Muslim. The local Georgian governor supported the construction of the Greek Orthodox church morally as well as practically.

It is obvious that the Batum's Greek church belonged to the local Diocese of Guria (Western Georgia) from the administrative point of view. In the materials we have examined, there has been found no confirmation of the fact that the Guria Episcopate had ever interfered in internal affairs of the church. It approved the priests, chosen and presented by the Greek community, even when they were invited from the Pontus region (i. e. from the Ottoman Empire). In the ecclesiastic affairs the Greek community had maximum autonomy, which was possible under the conditions provided by the administrative governing of the church. This unequivocally indicates that there was tolerant environment for the Greeks in this period in Georgia. In the given case this is clearly seen by means of an example of the ecclesiastic issues.<sup>16</sup>

In the Greek church administrative governing, as well as in all activities guided by it, the most successful and the most educated local Greeks were involved. It is evident that the church was exactly the space which helped the Greeks of the diaspora to keep such an important marker of the identity, as is the language. This was revealed in the combined initiative of opening of the schools and book publishing. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century (i. e. before the sovietization of Georgia), it is the church, which unified the Greeks living in non-Greek environment and strengthened their perception of their own national identity and desire of keeping it. All of this happened harmoniously and no case of opposition against the local religious circles or structures has been found so far in the available documents. The church was the factor, which, during the period under consideration, spiritually unified the Batum and Pontus region population even within the framework of two different empires.

## REFERENCES

- Agtzidis, Vlasis. 2001.* Παρευξείνιος Διασπορά, Οι ελληνικές εγκαταστάσεις στις βορειοανατολικές περιοχές του Ευξείνου Πόντου [Black Sea Diaspora; Hellenic settlements on the North-Eastern shores of the Black Sea]. Thessaloniki.
- Akhvlediani, Khariton. 1944.* ნარკვევი აჭარის ისტორიიდან (მე-16-19 საუკუნეები) [Essays from History of Adjara (16th-19th centuries)]. Batumi.
- Angelidis, Sokrates. 2003.* Ο Ελληνισμός της Τιφλίδας [Hellenism of Tiflis]. Thessaloniki.
- Bespalova, Anna – Gubarev, Ivan. 2018.* Greeks' Ethno-Cultural Impact to the Development of the South of Russia Region: Historical Retrospective and Modern Diaspora State, *Caucasian Science Bridge* (Southern Federal University, Russia), 1 (2), 38-46.
- Chatziioannou, Maria Christina. 2005.* Greek Merchant Networks in the Age of Empires (1770 – 1870). In *Baghdiantz McCabe, Ina – Harlaftis, Gelina – Pepelasis Minoglou, Ioanna* (eds.).

<sup>16</sup> We plan to publish an article about participation of the Greeks in Batum's political and economic life. From the materials presented there, this tolerant environment is obviously seen also in these fields of the public life.

- Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks: Four Centuries of History. Oxford and New York, 371-382.
- Chichinadze, Nino.* 2011. პოსტბიზანტიური მხატვრული ტრადიცია და პონტოელ ბერძენთა მე-19 საუკუნის საეკლესიო ხელოვნება [Post-Byzantine Painting Traditions in 19th Century Church Art of Pontic Greeks]. In Makharadze, Neli – Sulava, Nestan (eds.). ბიზანტილოგია საქართველოში 3 (კონფერენციის მასალები) [Byzantine Studies in Georgia 3 (Proceedings of the Conference)]. Tbilisi, 750-756.
- Derzhavin, N. C.* 1906. Историко-географический очерк Батумского края [Historical-Geographical Essay about Batumi's district]. In Батум и его окрестности [Batumi and its Vicinities]. A volume dedicated to the 25th anniversary of Batumi's Integration with the Russian Empire. Batumi, 1-33.
- Freeze, Gregory L.* 1983. The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia. Princeton.
- Frenkel, A.* 1879. Очерки Чурук-Су и Батума [Essays on Churuk-Su and Batumi]. Tbilisi.
- Garakanidze, Irine.* 1990. საქართველოში ბერძენთა გადმოსახლების ისტორია (მე-18 – 20 სს.) [History of Greeks' Relocation to Georgia (18th – 20th centuries)]. In Gordeziani, Rismag (ed). ბერძენები საქართველოში [Greeks in Georgia]. Tbilisi, 28-70.
- Giorgadze, M. – Mgeladze, N. – Tunadze, T. – Dzeladze, N. – Loria, M.* 2017. პონტოელ ბერძენთა მეურნეობა, მატერიალური კულტურა და საზოგადოებრივი ყოფა [Pontic Greeks' Economy, Material Culture and Social Life]. In პონტოელი ბერძენები აჭარაში: წარსული და თანამედროვეობა [Pontic Greeks in Adjara: Past and Modern Times]. Batumi. 65-193.
- Giorgadze, Marine.* 2012. პონტოელი ბერძენების დასახლების ისტორია ბათუმში [History of Greeks Settlement in Batumi]. In ბათუმი – წარსული და თანამედროვეობა 2 [Batumi – Past and Modern Times 2]. Proceedings of a Scientific Conference, Batumi 30-31 October, 2010. Batumi, 124-133.
- Giorgadze, Marine.* 2017. Batumi Pontic Greeks in Ajara-Photo Histories. In: Proceeding of the 8th International Scientific Conference in Semiotics. Semiotics Scientific Journal, 17. Tbilisi, 40-49.
- Gogolishvili, Otar.* 2009. სამხრეთ-დასავლეთ საქართველო უცხოელ მოგზაურთა ჩანაწერებში [South-Western Georgia in Writings of Foreign Travelers]. Tbilisi.
- Kalghoglou, Ioannis.* 1908. Οι Έλληνες εν Καυκάσω (Ιστορικόν Δοκίμιον) [Greeks of the Caucasus (Historical Essay)]. Athens.
- Kalghoglou, Ioannis.* 1918. Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ ελληνικής κοινότητας [History of Greek Community in Batumi]. Batumi.
- Kharatsides, Eleftherios.* 2006. Υπερκαυκασία [Transcaucasia]. Ed. Chasiotis, Ioannis K. – Katsiardi-Hering, Olga – Abatzi, Evrydiki. Οι Έλληνες στη Διασπορά 15ος – 21ος αι. [Greeks of Diaspora 15th – 21th centuries]. Athens (Hellenic Parliament), 203-209.
- Panagiotidou, Theologou.* 1919. Ο εν Ρωσσία Ελληνισμός [Hellenism in Russia]. Athens.
- Parastatov, Stavris.* 2019. Cultural Exchange in the Black Sea Region: Greek Migration to the Russian Empire in the 19th century. In Michailidis, Iakovos D. – Antoniou, Giorgos (eds). Institution Building and Research under Foreign Domination. Europe and the Black Sea Region (early 19th – early 20th centuries). Thessaloniki, 26-34.
- Surguladze, Kakhaber – Potkaradze, Tamaz – Megrelishvili, Merab.* 2010. რელიგიური დაწესებულებები აჭარაში (დოკუმენტების კრებული) [Religious Institutions of Adjara (Collections of Documents)]. Batumi.
- Tilikidou, Gr. P.* 1921. Οι Καυκάσιοι Έλληνες [Caucasian Greeks]. Athens.
- Tchkoidze, Eka.* 2020. Oil and Soil: the role of Batumi's economic development in shaping of geopolitical significance of the Caucasus. Ed. Harlaftis, Gelina – Konstantinova, Viktoria – Lyman, Igor – Sydorenko, Anna – and Tchkoidze, Eka. Between Grain and Oil from the Azov

to the Caucasus: The port-cities of the eastern coast of the Black Sea, late 18th – early 20th centuries. Rethymnon, Crete.

*Weidenbaum, G. E.* 1901. Кавказские Этюды [Caucasian Essays]. Tiflis.

*Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, Artemis.* 1993. Μεταναστεύσεις των Ελλήνων στον Καύκασο κατά τον 19ο αιώνα [Greek Emigrations to the Caucasus]. In Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών [Bulletin of Asia Minor Studies] 10, 91-172.

### **Books and Volumes without Authors:**

*Акты.* 1904. Акты собранные Кавказской Археογραφической комиссией [Documents Collected by the Caucasian Archaeographic Committee]. 12 Volumes. Tiflis.

“ზათუმის მოსახლეობის ზრდა ეროვნული შემადგენლობის მიხედვით” [“Growth of Batumi Population according to the Ethnic Composition”] 2011. In *Archeion* (Journal of the Sub-department of Ajara Autonomous Republic Government – Archives Administration) 2, 114-115.

Всеобщий Адресъ города Багума на 1902 годъ [Reference book for the year 1902]. 1902. Batum.

Assoc. prof. Eka Tchkoidze (MA& PhD)

Ilia State University

School of Arts and Sciences

3/5, Kakutsa Cholokashvili Ave.

0162 Tbilisi

Georgia

eka\_tchkoidze@iliauni.edu.ge