

One Early 17th Century French Report on the Georgian Church of St. George of the Trebizond Castle

Abstract: The article concerns the report from the Relation of the French author Julien Bordier from the beginning of the 17th century, according to which the Church of St. George of Georgians is shown in the Middle City of Trebizond. The reference is given both in the narrative part of the author and on the city plan made by him. The issue of studying the functioning of the Georgian Church in Trebizond has not been raised in scientific circles so far. The present study is a kind of first step in this direction.

Keywords: Trebizond, Middle Castle, Saint George, Georgian Church

It is hard to find very few cities in the eastern part of Anatolia, about which is written so much, as it is about Trebizond. The city located in the eastern part of Turkish Black Sea Coast, in the middle part of the historical Chaneti, the same as Lazeti. Actually, it became one of the connecting points for Asia and Europe, due to its convenient geographical location and strategic importance. During its history of several century, the city and tis neighboring became the object for struggle between many states. The political, economic, cultural or religious life always was vibrant and fierce here.

The route of the big merchants, ambassadors moving from the west to the east, or vice versa, those sent on open or secret missions rarely passed by Trabzon. The surveys conducted by them during different period and for different reasons, their reports, relations, are valuable for study of the city or the region life; many important moments of Georgian-Trebizond relationship are found in such sources and it is very important and interesting to study them in details.

The article reads the notes of one of the foreign, namely, French authors. In this specific case, the article is focused on the notes about the work of the Georgian churches in Trebizond.

Surprisingly, there had not been studied the activities of Georgian monasteries or the issue of ownership of monasteries by Georgians in the Trebizond and its surroundings by the scientists. Even though the records about existence of Georgian churches in Trebizond are available in the historical sources since X century (Kaukhchishvili, 1963: 43). It is unclear the reason of such a negligence. Moreover, the study of churches outside of Georgia, in other historical parts is a special long-term and necessary traditional direction of the field. In many cases, the similar researches are conducted for study of one and the same target regions or specific monument, which gives an expression of certain kind of obsession.

As mentioned above, the article intends presentation and brief overview of the notes found in the French sources. It belongs to Julien Bordier, who was an accompanying person to the French Ambassador, Jean de Gontaut sent to the Sultan Ahmed the I of Ottoman Turkey (ruling 1603-1617) by the King of France, Henry IV, (1589–1610). He visited Trebizond together with many different places during his traveling to the East, in 1609. His manuscript, ref. Français 18076, “Relation d'un voyage en Orient, par Julien BORDIER, écuyer de Jean de Gontaut, Baron de Salagnac¹, ambassadeur à Constantinople. (1604–1612)” preserved in Paris, the department of the manuscripts of the National Library of France. The study applies the extract from the manuscript related to Trebizond, together with the original copy, which was published by the Metropolitan of Trebizond, and later Chrysanthus, the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece published in 1934, in the #6, the journal *Αρχαίον Πόντου* № (p. 86–158).

J. Bordier described in details the history, population, urban life, constructions of the Trebizond. The City plan developed by the author is also attached to that long description, what is very important (Fig. 1) between the p 264v and p 265 r of the manuscript. It is known as the oldest among the city plans had been known so far.

Many interesting records are given about Trebizond and its Georgian-Trebizond relationship. The narrative part, where the author tells about the churches of the city and the plan mentioned above are especially interesting for me. There is the extract given below from the manuscript p.339v in the original language by Georgian translation.

¹ In the Manuscript Salignac.

"Throughout the city there were many churches and chapels of Greeks, Catholics and Armenians, which were used by the Turks as mosques, while others destroyed them according to their own needs. However, some have remained intact, such as St. George, marked with the letter G and which is owned by Georgians, after abandoning its founder from Catholics."

J. Bordier means his plan while referring the marking. He applies Latin "g" for referring Georgian (Géorgien) while marking different objects marked by different letters within the city Castle on the plan. Such marking is made on the quite a big object, which can be named as a complex. This object includes six parts, including Basilicas church, two-Story bell tower (with the crosses installed on both of them), two-Storey and quite a wide tower standing separately, three one-Story construction standing separately and one construction comparatively little in size. (fig. 2). This important note of the French traveler has not studies yet by the scientists. Accordingly, nobody identifies the church so far. Only above-referred metropolitan Chrysanthus writes in his edition as a comment "The church which is unknown by other sources, has not been built in our times (Bordier 1934: 133, build. 1). Antony Bryer and David Winfield refer this note quite briefly in their well-known monography "The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos". In the overview of the churches in Trebizond, the authors refer as 81, the church, which "is marked in the Bordier's confusing plan, the place where can be a citadel and middle Castle. In 1609 Bordier declared, that the construction included as Basilicas with the upper row windows and tower, was the Catholic church before, but now it belongs to Georgians. St. George and the Georgian church are not verified, as it cannot be Georgian (or in general, as orthodox) during the Trebizond period within the Fence of the city, as well as during the period of Ottomans". (Bryer, Winfield 1985: 225).

As there is no any comment or analysis related to the Bordier's note in the scientific literature except identification of the church, I have to review the opinions provided within the notes and the discourse will be structured accordingly.

The fact that the plan of the Bordier is confusing as it mentioned by A. Bryer and D. Winfield, looks quite fair. Though we have to consider that it refers to 1600s and the non-qualified person, who was the first time in the city, developed the plan. Therefore, there can be many mistakes in terms of orientation. On other hands, it is obvious that J. Bordier tells the details thoroughly during the telling of the story. He had enough time for that. As for the confusion made by plan, it is caused because of

the orientation of the large city Castle² located between two valleys and elongated from the north towards the south. Actually it is given in the horizontal way against the sea coast instead of vertical. Though it also depended from which part of the city the author observed the object.

The referred scientists mentioned that the place of marking Georgian church can be the citadel or middle Castle. Even by superficial study of Bordier's map shows that there is nothing unclear in that part, a Castle citadel or upper Castle (Turkish.: İçkale the same Yukarı Hisar; the map of Brayer-Winfield №41, the Citadel), with the Pasha's residence (b), its garrison (o), the mosque (p), and the famous towers and gates of the citadel, stands separately from the rest of the castle on the left on the plan of the Castle itself. The door church of the Citadel is known differently (See. Janin 1975: 258-259) and, it is impossible to imagine that there was the functioning church during the Ottoman period.

There are other parts of the citadel, like middle Castle (Orta Hisar; Middle City) and lower Castle (Aşağı Hisar; Lower City), which are not separated by the partition wall. Middle part of the walled city is signed by "a". Georgian church is marked in this middle part, as it was mentioned above marked by the letter "g". The reference of other facilities are also included in the plan for orientation and it is possible to identify. Though I think, all mentioned is enough to say, that Georgian church according to the marking is in the mid-Castle and not in citadel. No other objects between the walls of the Castle from both sides and the church (it's more complex), marked on the plan. It also gives an additional ground for assuming that there was no any other object, or any object worth to be marked between those two sides and complex.

According to Bordie's plan, when trying to identify the two-story tower church in the middle of the city, right next to the walls on two sides or in the vicinity, it is impossible, that the researcher not to remember one very interesting building preserved in the extreme southwestern part of the middle of the city, the tower. (Fig. 3) It is within the schoolyard of the people with disabilities now. There are several issues to be noted 1) the tower is well known, that it was two-Storey. Currently only the remainders of the first floor is preserved; 2) the most important thing is that there was a chapel inside in the tower and it is described quite well in the reports of the Russian expedition led by the famous

² The castle with three parts is one of the main sightseeing of the city. It got the final form during period of Comneni and then Ottomans, if we do not take into account the often unjustified interventions of our time

Russian scientist, Theodor Uspensky in 1916-1917 (Цыпкина 2021: 104-128. See the rich archive photo materials attached to the publication)³. At that time the second floor of the tower was still preserved. 3) During conversation with Trebizond researcher Zafer Duran, an incomparable expert on the historical and modern development of the city, he made an assumption, that there should be the church together with a tower before. 4) Later the Turkish Mekteb-i Rüşdi was built near the tower; which currently operates by the status of the school for disabled people. If we consider the certain tradition of opening Ottoman Mosques at the place of the former Orthodox churches and educational constructions, our assumption seems grounded, that the former church which had not been preserved should be at the place of the modern Turkish school. It was the clear tough ideological manifestation building of the Mosques or religious schools on the place of the former church or monastery, it was the demonstration of the victory of the Islam on Christianity. It had purely practical reason as well, as the material from the destroyed buildings were used for the new constructions. I think it does not worth to bother a reader with more examples. It is also necessary to add that there are no data preserved about changing of the church into Mosque at this place, or opening of the mosque, neither by the documents nor orally. It pushes the scientists to develop the opinion about destroying of the possible church, of course, after it became abandoned and left without function. In addition, it was not necessary, that the tower obtained the function of the church. According to the materials of the Russian expedition, that there was preserved some frescos of ceterors that time (Цыпкина 2021: 21, 39б. 48; 105, 113). It confirms the active use of tower as a chapel together with the church. Like an example of Trebizond, use of St. Sophia's (Ayasofya) tower as a chapel was a famous case⁴.

The reason why A. Brayer and D. Winfield could have the doubt in the accuracy of the notes of J. Bordier, is lack of another kind of proof for being the church of St. Georgie, or in general, Georgian church in Trabzon. Operating of the Georgian monastery in Trebizond as mentioned in the introduction is verified even in the X century. In addition, we have the important notes from the regulation of the Georgian monastery of Atos. In particular, the paragraphs 162 and 164 read the story of assignement of the Meskheta Principal, Kvarkvare the II Jakeli (Govern.: 1451-1498), his sons, next principals, Kaikhosro (1498-1500) and Mzechabuki (1500-1516) and his brother, Baadur (Metreveli 1998: 184-

³ In Russian literature, it was called "Palace church"

⁴ D Talbot Rice refers the tower left without function during the Comnenus period. This time in citadel, where the chapel was made later because it had lost its function. (Talbot Rice 1932: 50-52).

187; 265). According to those regulations, the court of Samtskhe Principality, donated great charity to Georgian monasteries from the Trebizond to Constantinople and St. Mount (Atos)⁵. Unfortunately, the names of the monasteries are not listed and even chronological and factual conditions give possibility for identify the church mentioned by Bordier. Though the notes about ownership of religious (church) centers in Trabzon and its adjacent areas, are still referred in the sources, what means that there few maintained in some places.

The name of the famous gate known as named after Limnians' St. Georgia in about 70-80 meters from the possible Georgian St. George church requires attention, it links the citadel and middle part of the castle. The referred authors, like Rimond Ganen, think, that the gates' name comes from the church/chapel (Bryer, Winfield 1985: 225; Janin 1975: 261). Those authors did not refer to the possible connection of the church (or complex) from the Bordier's note. It is impossible to prove something without conducting special works and again due to lack of sources. Though this version is important for further elaboration.

On other hands, just not referring by the name of St. George church, marked by Bordier by certain sources is not a strong argument for denying existence of the church there some time before.

The conclusion of the mentioned scientist that the church was owned by the Roman Catholics during Trapezuntine period is not acceptable and unclear. Under the Trapezuntine period, they mean 1204-1461, when the city was ruled by the family of Comnenos. It was the capital of the empire established by Tbilisi Royal Court. Though there are no acceptable note for such conclusion. Even they consider the opinion of the French author as false written by them to the Bordier, that as they say "There was inherently unlikely a Roman Catholic church within the walled city in Trapezuntine times". Though Julien Bordier did not give them the ground for such a conclusion. On my side, I add, that establishment of the Roman Catholics in the St. George church is logically possible after fall of Comnenos Trebizond, after transmitting of the city to the Ottoman. If they take the earliest possibility, since 1461 till the visit of J. Bordier, in early 1600s, there is quite a long period for entrance of Roman Catholics to that church.

⁵ The authors of later period (XVIII-beginning of the XX c) describing the operation of Georgian monasteries. It will be referred later with more details.

The next ground, why the scientist exclude the idea of existence of Georgian church (in general, Orthodox) in the walled part of the city is the ownership of the city by Ottomans. It is considered that Ottomans had forbidden to Christian population to live inside the town since 1461. Though on the contrary, based on the Ottomans registries, it was found that Middle part of the Castle (Mahalle-i Meso Kastro / Kastori; from Greek Meso “Middle” Kastro “Castle”) was the only Christian (Orthodox) district in the city (Bostan 2002: 151; Lowry 2009: 47; 56). The first records about 88 households are found in the registry of 1486. (Bostan 2002: 151). There are 225 orthodox residents registered in 1523 here (Lowry 2009: 69). Regardless there is no sign of residence in 1553, it could be the result of their resettlement (the same: 116). The fact of existence orthodox parish within the middle fortress sounds more grounded by J. Bordier, that the assumptions of A. Brayer and D. Winfield articulated 4 century later.

In case of availability of the church and ownership by Georgia, the question is who was the parish of the church? Were there any Georgian Christians in the city? The answer can be found in the notes of Bordier, who was the witness of it. He mentions Georgians (Géorgiens and Mangreliens), among the population of the city while mentioning the Georgian church after St. George (Bordier 1934: 133). The opposite question can be raised in such case, why Georgian community (Gürcü Cemaat) is not mentioned by the Turkish sources. The answer can be found in the Ottoman politics, so called, Millet policy. According to it all the Orthodox Christians despite its origin belongs to the Millet-i Rûm” “Roman People” and accordingly, they were registered this way in the Ottoman documents

One more conditions also requires attention, that since II half of the XVII century Ottoman’s administration finally exiled the head of Trabzon, the same as Offa and [and Alania) Georgian Cathedra, Metropole Germane (Adriadze 2012: 73-93; Gogokhia 2017: 129), and by this fact Georgian church was officially left Chaneti. The Greek Clergy subject to the Constantinople Patriarchy finally substituted Georgians, which was actively operating until 1923, until so called “Pontian Tragedy”.

After all said, it can be summarized that according to J. Bordier’s notes, Georgians owned the church after St. George in the middle castle of Trebizond for 1609. It is unknown when it was transmitted to Georgia, when this monastery was transmitted to Georgian, though it should happen after 1461. The Ottomans occupied the city that year and abolished the Trabzon Empire. First Roman Catholics took the church. At the beginning of 1600s the monastery is ruled by Georgians and they did

it for a quite a long time before. Definitely, it is not possible to identify when Georgians occupied the church and when it stopped operation only based of the records of Bordier, but it should take place before 1750s. Archbishop Timothe (Gabashvili; 1703-1764), who was in Trabzon at that time, did not mention about being Georgians here in his records.

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