



Alaverdi Eparchy

(XVII Century)

From the second half of the 16th century to the beginning of the 17th century Alaverdi, the main spiritual centre of the Kingdom of Kakheti, flourished. The situation changed drastically at the turn of the 17th century, when the life of the Alaverdi eparchy was defined completely by the political developments occurring in the country.

At the end of the 16th century King Aleksandre II of Kakheti (1574-1605) restored the Alaverdi church and built the chapel of the Mother of God. Presumably, it was also in his reign that the nunnery was established at Alaverdi. Among the persons who took the veil were members of the royal family as well. At the same time Alaverdi was the patrimonial ossuary of the Kakhetian kings, which facilitated considerably its material well-being.

On the basis of the documents that have come down to us, it may be said that at the end of the 16th century the property of the Alaverdi seigneurial estate included churches and monasteries with their income, scores of peasants in different villages, separate villages, large vineyards, wine cellars, cattle. Some of the Alaverdi serfs and estates were near it territorially, and some others were quite far away. The improvement of the economic state of the Alaverdi seigneurial estate was mostly in the care of the royal court. The economic growth of Alaverdi continued to the beginning of the 17th century.

The first half of the 17th century proved extremely hard for the Kingdom of Kakheti, which had been before that time more or less peaceful and advanced. The campaigns of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629) did irreparable damage to Kakheti. Over this entire period the history of the Alaverdi monastery, similar to the situation in the Kingdom of Kakheti, was difficult and variable. Along with the Georgian sources, this found reflection in eastern and western sources as well.

Unlike the 16th century, proceeding from the existing situation, for the 17th century we have no documentary material to enable us to study the economic and social state of the Alaverdi eparchy.

In this period there are only few facts of donation, of which mention should be made of the generous donation of Teimuraz I in 1612 for the repose of his wife¹ offered before the invasion of Abbas I. The above-mentioned is easy to explain if we recall that in 1614-1626, 1633-1634 Alaverdi as a spiritual centre was abolished, the territory in the ownership of the eparchy was devastated, and the property was robbed.

In the first half of the 17th century as a result of the Iranian invasions to the Kingdom of Kakheti, the Alaverdi see as a Christian spiritual centre was mostly inactive, returning to normal only for short intervals. From time to time Alaverdi turned into a site of strategic importance for the invaders as well as the local patriotic forces. The expansion of the Iranians caused severe damage to the entire seigneurial estate. As regards the Archbishop of Alaverdi, he was for the most part isolated from his eparchy and together with the king mainly fled to safety to western Georgia, nor it was alien to him to be in captivity or to participate in a war and a rebellion either. Due to the fact that foreign policy was of high priority for the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti at that time, the Archbishop of Alaverdi, even when he returned to the eparchy was mainly engaged in diplomatic activity. The social and economic state of Kakhetian eparchies was extremely difficult. Respectively, their spiritual life could not have been full-fledged either.

The very first five years of the 17th century witnessed dramatic developments at the royal court of Kakheti. In this period the struggle for the crown was mostly between the members of the

royal family. Proceeding from the devotion or influentiality, the Archbishop of Alaverdi of that time, Philippe Michabadze ² (1590-1611), an active participant of the spiritual as well as internal and foreign political life of his contemporary Kingdom of Kakheti, was nolens volens involved in this struggle.

By 1606, after the enthronement of Teimuraz I, Alaverdi continued to exist peacefully. In the reign of Teimuraz the Archbishop of Alaverdi changed. (perhaps by Iovane Avalishvili).

From 1614 hard times began for the Kingdom of Kakheti as well as the Alaverdi eparchy. The Shah occupied the capital of the Kingdom, Gremi, and the principal ecclesiastical centre, Alaverdi. Shah Abbas I, whose main purpose was to annihilate the Georgians physically, was well aware of the importance of the major spiritual centre of the Kakhetians. His historian Iskander Munshi relates that the Shah attached special importance to this “great place of worship and church of the Christians”.³ The Shah’s attention to Alaverdi was manifested in its destroying and plundering, taking prisoner the Archbishop of Alaverdi, destroying the icons and Christian theological literature and chiefly in the change of the function of Alaverdi. From this period to 1626 Alaverdi functioned as a fortress. The garrison of the Iranians was stationed within its rampart. The hard state of Alaverdi is described well in the charter of King Teimuraz sent to Moscow⁴, in which it is noted that the Alaverdi monastery and the church of St. George the Wonderworker was robbed completely, the Shah ordered his tent to be placed in the church where he lived during a month and did every kind of iniquity, in order to profane the church of God. It goes without saying that the social-economic foundations of this rich eparchy would have been completely ruined in this period.

On September 15, 1615, on the festival of the Alaverdi church, a rebellion of the Kakhetians against the Iranians broke out at Alaverdi.⁵ Due to the rebellion Teimuraz returned to Kakheti. The Shah sent a 15 thousand strong army to Georgia. The rebellion ended in the victory of the Georgians, but the Alaverdi church, having turned into a fortress and the battlefield, was damaged greatly. This time the successful return of the King of Kakheti proved very short-lived. In early spring 1616 Shah Abbas moved to Georgia, Teimuraz preferred to move to Imereti. This

campaign of Shah Abbas absolutely ruined Kakheti. ⁶In 1614-1617 Abbas I invaded Kakheti four times. In this period the Kingdom of Kakheti suffered severe damage. Two thirds of its population perished. It is not difficult to imagine in what a grave state not only Alaverdi, but all eparchies of entire Kakheti were. In the letter sent to the Ottoman Sultan, Shah Abbas emphasizes that as a result of this holy war, he turned numerous churches and prayer houses of the Christians into mosques. ⁷It may be said with confidence that in 1614-1626 Alaverdi was abolished as a spiritual centre and it functioned as a fortress. As regards the archbishop of Alaverdi, he was in Western Georgia together with King Teimuraz. After the heroic epos of Martqopi and Marabda in 1625, when Teimuraz I ascended the throne of unified Georgia, a new stage began in the life of Alaverdi. The eparchy of Alaverdi, abolished from 1614, must have started to function again from 1626, functioning until 1633. By 1626 Teimuraz sent an envoy to Rome and Spain asking for assistance - it was the priest of the royal court of Kakheti, Nikoloz Omanis-dze Choloqashvili-Irubakidze, known as Nikiphor Irbakh in monkhood (Nikiphor Irbakh participated in setting up the Georgian printing-house in Rome. By his participation the first Georgian printed books - a Georgian-Italian dictionary and Georgian prayers - were also prepared for publication and printed in 1629.) ⁸ The hard state of Georgian churches and monasteries is obvious from the official correspondence of Teimuraz I and Catholicos Patriarch of eastern Georgia Zakharia Jorjadze with Rome. In the letter of Teimuraz I to Pope Urban VIII, dated January 5, 1629, against the background of the difficult situation in the country, special attention is devoted to the state of churches. ⁹Teimuraz notes that the enemy took away from churches not only valuable sacred vessels but icons, sacerdotal vestments and decorations as well.

In spring 1628 Catholicos Zakharia Jorjadze, Archbishop Mitrophan of Alaverdi and other clergymen, together with the Augustine monks, placed the holy relics of St. Queen Ketevan at the Alaverdi church.¹⁰ By 1632 Rostom Khan assumed possession of Kartli, whereas Qizilbash Selim-Khan was appointed ruler of Kakheti. The King Teimuraz of Kartli and Kakheti with his retinue again fled to safety to Imereti, as regards the Archbishop of Alaverdi, he also moved to western Georgia and from autumn 1633 was in the Principality of Samegrelo with Levan Dadiani (1611-1657). There is no evidence in this period about the Alaverdi eparchy,

presumably, during these two years (1633-1634) Alaverdi as a spiritual centre remained abolished.

Teimuraz I continued to struggle for Kartli and Kakheti. He was defeated in the struggle for Kartli. He moved to Kakheti, drove out Selim Khan and occupied Kakheti in 1634.¹¹ At the same time, Teimuraz succeeded to make terms with Rostom, approaching Kakheti to punish him.¹² On the basis of Rostom's mediation, the Shah again recognized officially Christian Teimuraz as the king of Kakheti. Temporary peaceful relations were established between Teimuraz and Rostom. However, Teimuraz could not give up Kartli and continued to act against Rostom in order to occupy the throne of Kartli. The rebellions of Teimuraz (1636, 1638, 1642) ended in a failure. There are no direct reports on Alaverdi at that period, nevertheless, proceeding from the existing situation as well as the result about which we have sufficient information,¹³ it would be natural to assume that at that time Alaverdi must have been robbed and damaged, and serfs and estates of the eparchy – ruined. The King of the depopulated Kingdom of Kakheti, engaged in constant struggle, could not show concern for the restoration of Alaverdi. The Archbishop of Alaverdi again remained in western Georgia, at the court of Dadiani, and no other archbishop is visible at the see of Alaverdi until 1636.

In 1635 Teimuraz sent envoys to Russia asking for military assistance.¹⁴ On the basis of the reports of Russian envoys Volkonski and Khvatov, being at the court of Teimuraz during the return visit in 1637-1640, it becomes clear that in 1636 Archbishop Ioane Avalishvili of Kartli consecrated a new Archbishop, Zebede (surname is unknown), to the Alaverdi see. Their reports have preserved a detailed description of the hard state of their contemporary eparchy of Alaverdi as well. It is also obvious from this evidence that the Archbishop of Alaverdi attended and participated in the audiences of the envoys with the king, envoys were often accepted at the Alaverdi monastery where they were hosted by Archbishop Zebede of Alaverdi.

The struggle of Teimuraz for the unification of Kartli and Kakheti finally ended in a failure. In 1648 he again had to flee to safety to the Kingdom of Imereti. Shah Abbas II of Iran (1642-1666) granted Kakheti too to Rostom.

The latter (1632-1658) ruled Kakheti in 1648-1656. Peace established for a while in the Kingdom of Kakheti, exhausted with the war and rebellions.¹⁵

As soon as King Rostom took possession of Kakheti, he traveled around the region together with Queen Mariam. During this trip the king and the queen visited Alaverdi too. The process of the restoration of Alaverdi and regulation of its serfs and estates began. According to the Paris chronicle, Rostom renewed the Alaverdi church ruined in the reign of Teimuraz. ¹⁶The same information is related by Parsadan Gorgijanidze too¹⁷, who notes that due to unrest, Teimuraz found no time for the restoration of Alaverdi, which was realized by Rostom. Queen Mariam offered donation for the commemoration of the kings buried in the royal ossuary of Alaverdi, mourned for each of them separately and during her stay in Kakheti regularly ordered for them the celebration of the divine service. ¹⁸At that period the Archbishop of Alaverdi was Arsen (Avalishvili) (1648-[1660]). During his service, Queen Mariam officially confirmed to Alaverdi the charter of immunity of its estates granted by King Teimuraz. ¹⁹King Rostom exempted the serfs of the Alaverdi church from state taxes by one half, left the half of the income to the church of St. George and the other half to the state. ²⁰Such was the situation of the Alaverdi eparchy on the basis of the available reports in the first half of the 17th century against the background of the difficult political history of the Kingdom of Kakheti.

In the second half of the 17th century the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti was still ruled by Rostom. As he had no heir, Vakhtang, a representative of the Mukhranbatoni family, an offshoot of the Bagrationi family, was chosen to be his heir and sent to Iran in 1654 to adopt Islam and then be appointed as the ruler of Kartli Kingdom. ²¹

By the order of the Shah of Iran Abbas II (1642-1666), up to 80 000 Turks were settled to Kakheti. Nomadic Turks were mostly occupying the best agricultural lands, including Alaverdi estates. For protection of the settled Turks, Iranians turned the fence of Alaverdi into a fortress and put a garrison there. According to *Kartlis Tskhovreba* ("Kartli Chronicles"), "Tatars kept Alaverdi Monastery as a fortress." ²² Lezghin raids intensified in Kakheti. Cultivated lands of Kakheti, as well as the whole population of both mountains and plain faced serious problems. Kakheti confronted the risk of assimilation by Tatars.

Therefore, reconstruction works conducted by King Rostom in Alaverdi in 1648-1656 and the efforts by Arsen Avalishvili to rehabilitate and organize the estates of Alaverdi turned out to be vain. Their works were ruined by nomadic settlement well organized by Shah Abbas II. In 1657 Alaverdi became a fortress and a garrison of Qizilbashes, while the eparchy estates were seized by the Turks who had settled in Kakheti.

In 1659 the population of Kakheti rebelled. It is noteworthy that the Archbishop of Alaverdi, Arsen Avalishvili was one of the organizers of the rebellion.²³

The Georgian rebels gained a victory and Kakheti was rescued from annihilation. The Shah had to make certain concessions, though the organizers of the rebellion were severely punished. Unlike the other leaders, no historical materials bear any information on the fate of one of the initiators and organizers of the rebellion, Abba of Alaverdi Arsen Avalishvili. Presumably, even if he avoided execution, he must have been at least deprived of the status of a Head Priest.

In spite of the rebels' victory, the damage inflicted by the Turks was rather significant. Just like the whole Kakheti Kingdom, Alaverdi Cathedral and Eparchy must have been in deplorable conditions. Alaverdi that had been turned by Qizilbashs into fortress and suffered heavy battles, must have undergone heavy damage. Despite the success of the rebellion, Iranian garrisons still remain in the fortresses they had occupied. Because of no available first-hand data, it is unknown whether Alaverdi is still in their possession. Though, seemingly, one of the compromises made by the Iranians must have been the concession of the main church of Kakheti Kingdom, Alaverdi.

After the decease of King Rostom in 1658, the royal throne of Kartli Kingdom is occupied by Vakhtang V Shahnavaz (1658-1675) who had been nominated as an heir. Vakhtang V proved to be a talented politician. Owing to his wise state policy, despite the political dominance of Iran, Kartli is intensively developing economically and politically. Vakhtang Mukhranbatoni is a member of Teimuraz I's opposition and an active participant of his exile from Kakheti. The accession of Vakhtang gave rise to the reign in Kartli of an offshoot of the Bagrationi family – the Mukhranbatonis. The internal policy of Vakhtang V Shahnavaz was aimed at centralization and cultural development of the country, while his foreign policy was moderate and rational. He recognized Kartli and Kakheti as vassals of Iran and was smoothly trying to unite them in one kingdom.

The Muslim religion of Vakhtang V bore only formal character. He was caring for strengthening Christianity that had experienced a decline during the rule of Rostom, and greatly supporting the Georgian Christian Church.²⁴ In 1660 Vakhtang appointed his cousin, Domenty Mukhranbatoni, “a man worth of the throne”, on the post of a Catholicos. Domenty III (1660-1676) was Vakhtang's associate and an active implementer of his policy. He is noteworthy for his construction activities, struggle to extirpate Muslim traditions and care for rehabilitation of the property of the Catholicos' residence.²⁵

The state and diplomatic thinking of Vakhtang V is vividly demonstrated by his participation in the solemn burial ceremony of Teimuraz I, who had died in captivity in Iran in 1663, in the

family graveyard of the Kakhetian Kings. The King of Kakhetians Teimuraz I, Vakhtang's rival whose exile took place with active participation of Vakhtang himself, was buried with honors in Alaverdi on Vakhtang's initiative and with his active participation. The due attention and generosity demonstrated by Vakhtang towards the burial of the King of Kakheti must have been caused by the prospective of accession at the Kakhetian throne of his son, Archil, and care for the authority of the Mukhranbatonis.

On request of Kakhetian noblemen and Vakhtang V Shahnava, who visited Shah in Iran and according to the will of Teimuraz I, who died there in 1663 in captivity, Shah gave the permission to bury him in Georgia. In accordance with Vakhushti Batonishvili's data, "then the Catholicos and Bishops of Kartli and Kakheti gathered by order of King Vakhtang and buried (Teimuraz I) in Alaverdi..."²⁶ The fact of burial of Teimuraz I in the family graveyard of Alaverdi proves that Alaverdi is active in 1664.

In that very year, 1664, the Kakhetian throne was granted to the son of Vakhtang V, Archil Mukhranbatoni, who had adopted Islam and was given the name of Shah Nazar-Khan. For ten years the father and son ruled Kartli and Kakheti together.

The rule of Archil in Kakheti Kingdom was beneficial not only for Alaverdi eparchy, but for all churches and monasteries of Kakheti. During the reign of Archil in Kakheti (1664-1675), he "made a palace in Telavi and renovated all churches in Kakheti and set bishops, strengthened faith and construction in the country."²⁷ According to Vakhushti Bagrationi, Archil continues the rehabilitation works initiated by Rostom. Alaverdi was "great, reinforced by fence, with chambers and a dome", "ruined by an earthquake", whose "reconstruction was started by Rostom and completed by Archil".²⁸

Immediately after his crowning in Kakheti in 1664, King Archil resumes donations to Alaverdi St. George's Cathedral interrupted since the times of Teimuraz I and Rostom Khan and promises not to break the practice.²⁹ Unfortunately, there are no first-hand data that prove Archil's care for Alaverdi. It is evident that being a thinker and a cultural figure, the ruler of Kakheti must have given due care to the main church and the royal graveyard, especially that the whole family of Archil's wife, a descendant of the Kakhetian Bagrationis – Queen Ketevan, was buried there, namely, her father – David Bagrationi, grandfather – Teimuraz I, grandmother – Khoreshan, brothers – Luarsab and Giorgi.

During the coordinated rule of Vakhtang V and Archil, East Georgia, which was practically united, became a serious power.³⁰ "(The Kakhetians) were in all ways united with the Georgians" and "Kakheti was being built... Lezghins dared no more attacks".³¹ In spite of non-availability of direct data, Alaverdi eparchy was obviously on the way to development.

Strengthening of Kartli and Kakheti contradicted the interests of Iran. The Shah of Iran Suleyman (1666-1694), summoned the grandson of Teimuraz I, the brother of King Archil's wife Ketevan – Erekle Batonishvili from Russia and, according to the historical data, promised to grant him the royal throne of Kakheti and at the same time, the right to remain a Christian.³² The Shah's purpose is quite clear to Vakhushti Batonishvili, who mentions that Suleyman brought Erekle to Iran in order to oppose him to the Mukhranbatoni family. – “to be a rival of Vakhtang and Archil”³³

In 1674 Archil received with honors Erekle who came to Kakheti and saw him off to Iran. Archil is sure that the Shah will grant the Kakhetian throne to Erekle and in 1675 leaves the Kakhetian Kingdom.

On Archil's departure, for a short period, until 1675, Kakheti is governed by Vakhtang V. In 1675, Vakhtang V dies while visiting Iran.³⁴ In a letter to the Russian Tsar dated by February 6, 1676, the Catholicos-Patriarch of East Georgia Nikoloz (IX) and Kakhetian bishops ask him to act as a mediator before the Shah of Iran to sent Erekle Batonishvili to Kakheti, left in deplorable conditions without a ruler, for crowning him as a King. The letter of Catholicos is signed by the Archbishop of Alaverdi, the Bishops of Bodbe, Rustavi, Ninotsminda, Nekresi and Sameba.³⁵

The descendant of the Kakhetian Bagrationi family, Erekle Batonishvili stayed at the Russian royal court for almost twenty years. The Kakhetian Prince was constantly expecting and preparing for accession on the Kakhetian throne. Erekle's mother, Queen Elene Diasamidze, as well as a strong group of supporters of the Kakhetian Bagrationis, consisting of clerical and lay feudal lords, was thoroughly preparing for his coronation.

The fate of the Kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti was decided on the court of Iranian Shahs. To prevent the unity and future strengthening of Kartli and Kakheti, the Shah of Iran granted only the royal throne of Kartli to the son of Vakhtang V, Giorgi XI (Shah Navaz Khan) (1676-1688; 1703-1709), while the reign of Kakheti was given to Gorjaspi Kakhbrishvili (Bezhan Khan), who had adopted Islam. He governed Kakheti in 1677-1683. By this time the Kakhetian Kingdom significantly fortified and strengthened; Kakhetian noblemen hardly obey the Khan and demonstrate independence. In his turn, Khan does not favor them and contributes to intensification of Lezghin raids and ravage of Kakheti. Kakheti openly expresses dissatisfaction with Bezhan Khan. Kakhetians, hoping to crown the lawful heir of the Kakhetian royal throne, Erekle Batonishvili, who at that time was in Iran, require his substitution. It is noteworthy that this change is dated by 1683. Contemporary to the above change is preparation of a crown for the Archbishop of Alaverdi by the order of Elene Diasamidze and a significant donation to

Alaverdi. The royal family of Kakheti and their confidants are well aware of the ongoing processes in Kakheti and the ground is well prepared for Erekle's coronation in 1683. Though, instead of Erekle who is ready to be crowned, "another Khan" (1683-1688) is being sent to Kakheti.

There are no direct data, but based on general situation in Kakheti it is possible to conclude that the end of Archil's reign is also an end of Alaverdi's development (1675). The period of rule of Bezhan Khan must have been rather hard for Alaverdi eparchy as well.

In spite of the complicated situation in Kakheti Kingdom in that period, the tradition of donations to the main church of Kakheti and its graveyard from the Georgian royal family still continues. It is treated with special care by the lawful heir of the Kakhetian throne Erekle I and his mother – Queen Elene Diasamidze. In the 60-ies-70-ies of the 17th century Elene Diasamidze ordered for Alaverdi Cathedral in the workshop of Stroganovs an embroidery of "deposition" (1654-1674), which afterwards, according to her will, Erekle I donated to Alaverdi Cathedral.³⁶ She also ordered St. George's icon (1677)³⁷ for Alaverdi from a famous Russian icon painter, Simon Ushakov. In 1683, on arrival to Shah Suleyman's court in Isfahan she donates serf lands to Alaverdi Cathedral for the peace of souls of her sons – Luarsab and Giorgi Batonishvili (Erekle's brothers) and Queen Nestan-Darejan and for the health of Erekle.³⁸ Also in 1683, by order of Elene Diasamidze, the above-mentioned Archbishop crown is prepared in Isfahan. According to the benefactor's inscription on the crown, Queen Elene Diasamidze ordered and donated the crown to Alaverdi St. George's Cathedral for the peace of souls of Teimuraz I, Queen Khoreshan, Queen Nestan-Darejan, David Batonishvili, the sons – Luarsab and Giorgi Batonishvilis (Erekle's brothers), for the health of Erekle and his family and for easing of her own soul.³⁹

Alaverdi is no less cared for by Erekle I and his wife, Queen Anna Choloqashvili. There are numerous documents verifying significant donations made by her to Alaverdi.⁴⁰

As is made clear from the document of Erekle I Nazaralikhani dated by 1701, before fleeing from Kakheti, his grandfather, the King of Kakhetians Teimuraz I, had hidden the icons of all churches and monasteries of Kakheti in Svetitskhoveli. During the rule of Erekle I in Kartli, because those icons were the property of the Kakhetian monasteries, according to the will of his grandfather, he returned the icons and kept them at his place, and later handed them to the Head Priest, Nikoloz Choloqashvili and re-confirmed them as the property of Alaverdi.⁴¹

According to the epitaphs on the headstones of parents of Erekle I, David Bagrationi⁴² and Elene Diasamidze,⁴³ buried in Alaverdi Cathedral, were made by Erekle's order.

In 1684-1696 Nikoloz Endronikashvili, a candidate welcome by Erekle Batonishvili and his supporters, is at the head of Alaverdi eparchy. From the moment of his accession, Nikoloz Endronikashvili took up energetic work to establish the disturbed church order among the serfs and congregations of Alaverdi, the evidence of which can be found in numerous documents dated by 1865.⁴⁴

During the reign of Erekle I in Kartli, subordination between the Catholicos' residence in Mtskheta and Alaverdi is maintained – the candidate for the Kakhetian royal throne is the King of Kartli, the post of Catholicos is occupied by a favorable candidate, and the Head Priest of Alaverdi is the Archbishop who had not long before rebelled by his initiative and encouragement. The existing state of things makes separatism of the Head Priest of Kakheti senseless.

The Head Priest of Alaverdi is actively involved in the ecclesiastic life of East Georgia. Abba of Alaverdi Nikoloz Endronikashvili is a participant of a church assembly summoned in 1690 by order of Erekle I, which was also attended by Catholicos Ioane Diasamidze, Arsen of Ninotsminda, Nikoloz of Rustavi, Nikoloz of Sameba, the Archbishop of Kartli and other clergymen.⁴⁵ In 1694 Abba of Alaverdi, Nikoloz Andronikashvili, along with Catholicos Ioane, the Archbishop of Tbilisi - Nikoloz Choloqashvili, the Bishop of Rustavi Nikoloz Choloqashvili and some lay noblemen participated in mediation of an "affair of blood" of the Guramishvili family under the initiative of Erekle I.⁴⁶

In 1695, the successor of Nikoloz Endronikashvili, the Head Priest of Alaverdi Nikoloz Choloqashvili, before his accession, on his visit to Catholicos in Mtskheta for receiving sanctification as an Archbishop, gives the Deed of Devotion to Catholicos Ioane Diasamidze.⁴⁷ The above-mentioned document gives us grounds to assume that by the end of the 17th century Alaverdi eparchy is a part of the Patriarchate of East Georgia. The long-lasting work of Abba of Alaverdi Nikoloz Choloqashvili was rather fruitful for Alaverdi, though the gravest political conditions that the country fell into on the edge of the 16th-17th centuries considerably hindered the further development of the eparchy.

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*The Chronology of the
Archbishops
of Alaverd
(17-th century)*



XI century

The present work is an attempt to determine a more or less complete succession of the archbishops of Alaverdi in the 17-th century on the basis of the available documentary and narrative sources. I have studied and established the chronology of the archbishops of Alaverdi during the 15-th-16-th centuries. The work in question is published in the issue *Analebi* of Ivane Javakhishvili Institute of History and Ethnology of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, Tbilisi, 2005, 34-38. The present paper is a continuation of the above research and the first attempt to determine a comparatively exact chronology of the archbishops of Alaverdi. The process of researching in the problem was impeded by the paucity of sources, also by the fact that the available material either was not supplied with dating or the dates were wrong; this called for additional research. It should be noted that the Georgian variant of the work is much more

voluminous as it includes corresponding excerpts both from the documentary and narrative sources, which were not translated into English due to the volume of the Georgian sources and the difficulties connected with the specific features of the old Georgian language.

Part I

Abba Alaverdeli (of Alaverdi) Philippe (Michabadze) *1590-1602 / 1604-1611*

At the end of the 16-th century and the beginning of the 17-th century the Archbishop of the Alaverdi see was Abba Alaverdeli Philippe (Michabadze). The Russian envoys, who stayed in Kakheti in the years 1589-1590, mention him as the archimandrite and the pastor of the king of Kakheti;¹ according to the information provided by the same envoys the archimandrite Philippe acted as a mediator between Aleksandre II (1574-1605), King of Kakheti and the Russian envoys. In the available documentary sources Philippe Alaverdeli is mentioned only in two documents dated to the years 1590-1600² and 1599-1603³. One is the

document promising loyalty to Catholicos Domenti by Philippe Alaverdeli and Zacharia Bodbeli (Bishop of Bodbe). At a later period Philippe's name is mentioned in such a reliable source as "Archiliani".⁴ At the end of the 16th century Aleksandre II, King of Kakheti, rebuilt the Alaverdi cathedral appointing Philippe (Michabadze) Archbishop of Alaverdi.⁵ In 1707 the king David Imamqulikhan renewed the document.⁶

In 1601 Prince David, taking advantage of the illness of his father Aleksandre II recovered though he yielded the throne to his son, he handed the Royal banner, the crown, girdle and sword over to David, after which he took monastic vows in the Alaverdi Monastery.⁷ But peace never triumphed in the Kingdom of Kakheti: David punished his father's and his brother Prince George's supporters, also those loyal to them, ruthlessly. Under such circumstances David cannot be expected to have shown any mercy towards the Archbishop of Alaverdi, who was very popular with people and loyal to King Aleksandre II. So he removed Philippe from his post and replaced him by a man whom he trusted and who was loyal to him. (see Abba Alaverdeli Choloqashvili). Subsequently, when Teimuraz I ascended the throne, Philippe Alaverdeli (Michabadze) was restored to his post. He must have become the Archbishop of Alaverdi a second time during the lifetime of King Aleksandre, in the year 1604. At this period Shah Abbas I (1587-1629), who was the first to violate the truce between



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Iran and the Ottoman Empire, achieved great success in the military operations. At the very beginning of the war Shah Abbas summoned the Kings of Kakheti and Kartli to his court. Aleksandre II was obliged to go to Iran together with a special army and numerous gifts. Among the retinue there was the Archbishop of Alaverdi as well, still Philippe (Michabadze), at this time. In the spring of 1604 capturing Yerevan the Shah took Aleksandre to Iran, and it was only in January of 1605 that the King was allowed to return to

Georgia.⁸ In the letters, the holy father from Portugal, Belchior dos Anjos sent to Rome, there is information that in March, 1605 the Archbishop of Alaverdi was in Tavriz among the people accompanying Aleksandre II, King of Kakheti. The Portuguese missionary was personally acquainted with the Georgians, who was in Tavriz at that time.⁹ Thus, from April 1604 including January of 1605 the King of Kakheti Aleksandre II was at the Shah`s court, accompanied with the Archbishop of Alaverdi.

On March 12, 1605, Constantine-Mirza, who had adopted Islam, following the order of Shah Abbas I, killed his father Aleksandre II and brother, Prince George. Queen Ketevan, the widow of Aleksandre II`s son David, buried them in Alaverdi – the burial ground of the royal family.¹⁰ According to the information of the Russian envoys, who were there at that time, the Archbishop of Alaverdi was wounded during the assassination of King Aleksandre II and his son George.¹¹

In 1606, Teimuraz, grandson of Aleksandre II, and son of David, appointed King by Shah Abbas I, returned to Kakheti. The young King was met by Kakhetian noblemen and bishops, the Archbishop of Alaverdi and Teimuraz; The meeting between them was accompanied by certain tension and awkwardness. As Archil writes, the Archbishop, rather advanced in years, tried to manifest his priority as a religious leader. After this haughty meeting Alaverdi allowed other clergymen and dignitaries to appear before the King.¹² It is noteworthy that the Archbishop of Alaverdi only after reminding Teimuraz of his spiritual obligations and obedience confers his blessing on him.¹³ On his part Teimuraz ignores Alaverdeli`s haughty demeanour.¹⁴ Such an attitude on Philippe`s part must have been caused by his loyalty to King Aleksandre which, on its part was the result of the conflict between the Archbishop and David, Teimuraz`s father.

According to Archil, Teimuraz on coming back from Iran, first met Archbishop of Alaverdi, bishops, all the clergymen

and nobility and only after that left for Mtskheta; there, after the meeting with Catholicos, archbishops of Kartli and all the Georgians he was crowned King; it was followed by a liturgy, a great festivity and distribution of alms.¹⁵ In contradistinction with Archil, Prince Vakhushti writes that Teimuraz was crowned king in Bodbe monastery and thinks that Archil is wrong.¹⁶

In his work “The life of Shah Abbas I”¹⁷, the Iranian historian Nassrola Falsafi, on the basis of the information of Jalal Munejim writes, that at the end of 1609 in keeping with King Teimuraz’s order the “priest Alaverdi” and Shermazan Choloqasvili (Gorgi) left Georgia (Kakheti – E. K.) and arrived at the Shah’s court with numerous gifts. Abbas would not receive them. After many requests and a promise that Teimuraz-Khan would visit him personally in the nearest future the Shah accepted the gifts. In case the promise was not kept Shah Abbas threatened that he would invade Kakheti. At this time the Shah was angry with the King of Kakheti because he (the King) did not pay a visit to him when the Shah was in Shemakha; the “priest Alaverdi”, evidently was Philippe Michabadze, who was sent to Shah on a diplomatic mission together with Shermazan Choloqasvili. In 1610 in connection with the death of Teimuraz’s spouse, Shah Abbas sends the Carmelite monk Giovanni Taddeo di Saint Elliseo to Teimuraz to convey his condolences. In this connection Pietro della Valle writes that King Teimuraz received Giovanni Taddeo di Saint Elliseo with great respect, not only as the Shah’s envoy, but also as a Christian Catholic monk. The king allowed the Carmelite monk to celebrate liturgy at the Alaverdi Cathedral in the presence of the Metropolitan, i. e. of Alaverdeli, the monk was granted some land to found a Carmelite monastery. According to Pietro della Valle both the King and the Archbishop of Alaverdi expressed great sympathy and goodwill to the Church of Rome.¹⁸ The attitude of the Archbishop of Alaverdi to the Catholic missionary in addition to the fact that Teimuraz suggested to the Carmelite monk that he should establish a mission of the Carmelite order in Kakheti provide grounds to surmise that the Alaverdi Eparhy was headed by the Archbishop



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Philippe, King Aleksandre's contemporary who expressed great loyalty to Catholics.

Shah Abbas I expressed profound hostility towards Philippe Alaverdeli. He knew "this Sheikh and leader of Christianity" very well, who should be viewed as one of those who are loyal to Aleksandre II, King of Kakheti and Prince Giorgi, whom he Shah Abbas I, had assassinated. Shah Abbas I's attitude is clearly expressed by the information provided in the work published by Nasrola Falsafi¹⁹, which says that in 1019 (1610), when Quizilbashes captured one of the Kurtistan fortresses, among the belongings of the owner of the fortress a beautiful coral rosary was found the Shah had it sent to the Archbishop of Alaverdi in Georgia with the words: "tie it round the necks of the hounds in hell." Abbas must have sent him this gift after Alaverdeli and Shermazan Choloqashvili's visit in 1610. The hatred, the Shah showed towards the Archbishop of Alaverdi, gives us grounds to infer that this Archbishop was well known to the Shah and he, the Shah, could never approve of him, neither could he approve of Shermazan Choloqashvili for his anti-Persian orientation.



No.3

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Abba Alaverdeli Choloqashvili

1602-1604

The name of Abba Alaverdeli Choloqashvili has been unknown so far. His name is mentioned only by Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi. We know only his family name – Choloqashvili, which refers to his noble origin, we also know his brother Otar Choloqashvili, who was close to the royal

court of Kakheti and even was Aleksandre II's adviser in the state affairs.²⁰

The period of his being the head of the see of Alaverdi was very short. He must have been ordained Archbishop of Alaverdi in 1602, during the reign of David, son of Aleksandre. Vakhushti Bagrationi's mentioning: Abba Alaverdeli – Choloqashvili evidently refers to the period when King David died; it was in October, 1602, when Aleksandre II again became the King. But it can be presumed that Aleksandre did not replace Alaverdeli Choloqashvili immediately. According to Vakhushti²¹ in 1602 the Jerusalem Patriarch demanded some donations from the King of Kakheti. Aleksandre commissioned Otar Cholokashvili's brother Archbishop of Alaverdi to collect the money and take it to Jerusalem. The Archbishop collected 5000 drachmas and left for Jerusalem. Therefore, it may be assumed that at this time the Kakhetian throne was still occupied by Aleksandre II, who saw to fulfilling the demand of the Jerusalem Patriarch and Alaverdeli Choloqashvili's seems to have been the Archbishop of Alaverdi. It must have been at the junction of the years 1602 and 1603.

It must have been during the reign of Aleksandre II in Kakheti that a nunnery was founded in Alaverdi. In the monastery there were members of the royal family as well.

As Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi writes King Aleksandre's sister was also among the nuns of Alaverdi. The sister of Aleksandre II, mentioned by Vakhushti must have been Princess Thekla. Vakhushti also adds that Princess got pregnant by Archbishop of Alaverdi; therefore Domenti II (circa 1595-1610), Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia anathemized him. According to Vakhushti Bagrationi in the end King Aleksandre forgave Princess Thekla and Alaverdeli, who had fled to Imereti (western Georgia); they were brought back and allowed to get married.²² In 1603 the nun Thekla donated to the Shuamta monastery one serf household living in Gremi,²³ it means that at that time she was still a nun, and Alaverdeli was still the Archbishop. She and Alaverdeli must have got married between the years 1603

and 1604, before King Aleksandre II left for Iran to appear before the Shah.

An unknown Abba of Alaverdi (perhaps Iovane Avalishvili)

approx. 1612-1627

Based on the existing opinion of the Georgian historiography, the chief priest of Alaverdi by 1612 was Iovane Avalishvili. He was an outstanding penman and bibliophile, the Abbot of Saphara and Kvatakhevi monasteries, the Archbishop of Kartli and probably the chief priest of Alaverdi as well.

The assumption on Iovane Avalishvili's being the Abba of Alaverdi chief priest of Alaverdi, popular till present, is based purely on a deed issued by Queen of Kakheti, Anna Gurieli, as an act of donation by Teimuraz I to Alaverdi, where Iovane Avalishvili is referred to as the archbishop who had authored the deed, where there is no mentioning of his affiliation of any see. The above fact, in S. Kakabadze's opinion, must be the evidence of Iovane's being [Abba] of Alaverdi. This opinion is fully shared by G. Chachanidze and G. Jandieri.²⁴

Natural as the ascent of Ivane Avalishvili to the see of Alaverdi seems to be, this argument is not enough to give the final answer to the question. Although I failed to obtain direct information on the issue, I tried to search for additional argumentation supporting the above opinion and to look through the existing data concerning the history of the Alaverdi eparchy up to the thorties of the 17th century and the unknown [Abba of] Alaverdi acting in the given period (1611-1627).

The abundant donation issued under the deed of 1612 by Teimuraz I who had just returned from Iran concerned the second marriage of the King. Establishing of close ties between the East Georgian kingdoms was caused by a possible aggression from Iran. The already existing close kin relations of kings of Kartli and Kakheti created an obstacle to their family members marrying each other and thus becoming

related, which is evident from both Paris chronicles as well as the historical data by Pharsadan Gorgijanidze.²⁵ Both sources emphasize that “the Patriarch and the bishops assembled for a consultation” and in order to strengthen Christianity and unity, the Church allowed Teimuraz to marry.

In that period Iovane IX (1612-1616) was the Catholicos-Patriarch of East Georgia. Iovane Avalishvili, who had witnessed how Samtskhe-Javakheti became a part of Ottoman Empire and acknowledged the importance of the unity of Kartli and Kakheti and of strengthening of the Georgian Christianity, must also have attended the assembly.

It is no ordinary coincidence that Archbishop Iovane Avalishvili, an influential clergyman who is keeping close relations with the Kakhetian court and supporting resolution of the issue for the welfare of the country and is prompted by state interests, is the author of this truly significant document.

However, this clergyman protecting the state interests might be the Archbishop of either Alaverdi or of Kartli.

By 1610-1611 the see of Alaverdi is presided by Philippe Michabadze, who had ascended the see in the reign of King of Kakheti, Alexander II (1574-1605) and must have deceased by 1611. According to the available data, Iovane Avalishvili is the Abbot of Kvatakhevi monastery up to 1611, while after 1611 the monastery already has another Abbot. The fact that this replacement in a certain way coincides with the replacement taken place at the see of Alaverdi strengthens the assumption that Iovane was actually [Abba] of Alaverdi.

The letter addressed by Abbas I to the Ottoman Sultan is an evident proof of the damage inflicted by the Iranians upon the eparchies of Kakheti. The Shah makes a special notice of “the joy of the Holy War for raising the Islamic flag” and the pride about “turning many Christian churches and holy places into temples of the true faith – Islam”. According to Iskander Munsh, the Shah occupied Alaverdi church – “the greatest holy place and church of Christians”, “a magnificent structure”, which he surrounded by a fence and where he placed a detachment of Kizilbash riflemen.²⁶

The condition of Alaverdi was reflected in both the deed sent hidden in Torgha fortress, Abbas I captured the crown of the

by King Teimuraz to Moscow by 1618* and in notes by Beri Egnatishvili.²⁷ Along with the treasure of King Teimuraz chief priest of Alaverdi valued by jewelers at five hundred Iraqi Shah tumans.²⁸

The Shah sent the crown of Abba of Alaverdi together with other gifts to the Ottoman Empire.²⁹

The acting Archbishop of Alaverdi (perhaps Iovane Avalishvili) and his family members happened to be among the captives taken by Shah Abbas from Georgia. Notes about family members, namely, sisters of [Abba] of Alaverdi – Nestan-Darejan, Tinatin and Mariam are provided by Pietro della Valle, who was in Iran by 1617. Unfortunately della Valle never mentions their family name. Based on the data by Pietro della Valle, the unknown [Abba] of Alaverdi must have been of an exceptionally noble origin, which speaks in favor of Iovane of Alaverdi. The Roman aristocrat and his wife had especially close relationship with the sisters of the above [Abba] of Alaverdi. He baptized the sons of one of the sisters.³⁰ In a lengthy report to Urban VIII, Pietro della Valle noted that he was well acquainted with the life of the Georgians and was connected to many of them by friendship and spiritual affinity. Pietro also mentioned that one of the sisters of [Abba] of Alaverdi was the wife of a nephew of the previous Archbishop of Alaverdi. By that time [Abba] of Alaverdi had already escaped the captivity, thus jeopardizing the safety of his sisters who were staying in Ispahan under constant fear. The situation was also aggravated by the fact

*"В нашей же земле монастырь великого чудотворца Георгия, а в нем была митрополия и тот монастырь разорен до основанья в церкви был поставлен шахов шатер, и в том шатре шах сам стоял с месяц, и наругаясь нашей истинной православной хрестьянской вере блуд всякой творил, чтоб осквернить Божию церковь. И престол господень, где скрвенно бывает тело Господа нашего Иисуса Христа, выкинул из церкви вон." (27. 50)

that they kept Christian religion and therefore had no support from the Shah. The sisters of [Abba] of Alaverdi were selling their goods taken from Georgia and were making their living by their own labor. Despite the material hardship they enjoyed high authority with the Georgians staying in Iran, which in our opinion, apart from personal qualities, was also caused by their social status, which was also mentioned by Pietro della Valle (“educate nella Georgia in abbondanza di ricchezze e grandezze”).³¹

Pietro and his wife adopted a Georgian girl, Tinatin from that very noble family, who Pietro married later, after his first wife had deceased. Later on Pietro kept showing concern

towards the fate of the relatives of [Abba] of Alaverdi whose material conditions gradually worsened. Apart from having maintained their religion and managed to avoid the status of the Georgian renegades, even being separated from Georgia they kept struggling for the welfare of their homeland. Pietro della Valle mentioned that their family was a reliable stronghold for the missionaries and other Europeans visiting or passing by Iran and could be considered as a trustworthy ally.³² The historical data by Pietro della Valle about the sacred relics of Queen Ketevan are of especial significance. In his report on Georgia addressed to Pope Urban VIII Pietro claimed that the sacred relics of Queen Ketevan were treasured by the relatives of the Metropolitan of Alaverdi, apparently by his sisters and not by the Augustan monks, as had been considered before.³³

By 1617, when Pietro della Valle maintained relations with the sisters of [Abba] of Alaverdi, Abba had already escaped the captivity, which is also witnessed by the historical data by Ludovico Grangerio, who stated that by 1615 the Archbishop of Alaverdi was in Samegrelo together with King Teimuraz. According to Ludovico Grangerio, he had failed to meet Prince Dadiani on his arrival in Samegrelo due to the lack of time of the latter. Ludovico states that one of the reasons of

Prince's inability to meet him was "the arrival of Thebris-Khan". Later on, with the help of an interpreter, Ludovico Grangerio was able to meet also Teimuraz "together with the metropolitan of his country"³⁴ in a church.

"The metropolitan of Teimuraz's country" is without doubt the [Abba] of Alaverdi. On his arrival in Imereti together with kings and princes of West Georgia Teimuraz started working on an action plan against the Shah of Iran. The reason of Teimuraz I's staying at Dadiani's court accompanied by the metropolitan and his and Dadiani's absence of time mentioned by Lui Grangerio can be explained by the abovementioned preparation.

Teimuraz had to return to Kakheti due to a riot which had started on September 15, 1615 and ended successfully, though it was obvious that Alaverdi church, having served as a fortress and a battlefield during the riot, suffered significant damage. It is apparent that [Abba] of Alaverdi also went back to Kakheti. The success of the Kakhetian King turned out to be rather short-term. In spring of 1616 Shah Abbas advanced into Georgia. Teimuraz had to retreat to Imereti.

Because of abolishment of the see of Alaverdi in 1614-1626 as a spiritual center, we should assume that the Archbishop of Alaverdi who had fled from Shah Abbas in 1615 was in the retinue of Teimuraz I. As for specifically Iovane Avalishvili, we could find no relevant data concerning him or the period of 1614-1630. The identity of the Archbishop of Kartli of the mentioned period, which would help us greatly in resolving the issue, is also unknown to us. From the deeds of donation issued by Teimuraz I to the Avalishvilis we find out that Iovane's brother, Zakaria and his family accompanied the migrant Teimuraz and are assumed to be among other persons loyal to him.³⁵ Zakaria's son, Arsen had been raised by Iovane, which makes us think that Iovane also had to be in West Georgia together with his brother's family. Probably Iovane Avalishvili and [Abba] of Alaverdi were in one and

the same location, which increases the possibility to identify them as a single person.

The military counsel held before the Marabda battle of July 1, 1625 was attended by the Archbishop of Alaverdi and the Bishops of Kharchasheni, Rustavi and Mrovi.

According to Archil, during the battle of Marabda, “[Abba] of Alaverdi had a narrow escape, and [Bishop] of Kharchasheni was killed”.³⁶ As it seems, [Abba] of Alaverdi was an immediate participant of the battle.

Assumingly the change at Alaverdi see took place after Teimuraz had returned to East Georgia. By this time Iovane Alaverdeli already should have been ordained as the

Archbishop of Kartli and Mitrophanes (who since 1628 is by all means [Abba] of Alaverdi) – the Archbishop of Alaverdi.

Abba of Alaverdi Mitrophanes

1628-1636

Mitrophanes of Alaverdi was in charge of the Alaverdi eparchy in the twenties-thirties of the 17th century. Mitrophanes is mentioned in the inscriptions made on the mitre of the Archbishop of Gelati and on the Tsalenjikha icon.³⁷ We were unable to find any information on Mitrophanes in the Georgian historical sources. In the available foreign sources Mitrophanes of Alaverdi is referred to only as *Alaverdeli*, a bishop or a metropolitan. The title of the chief priest is preserved only in the data of the Russian envoys while the family name is not mentioned in any available source.

Mitrophanes of Alaverdi is a significant figure of the first half of the 17th century. The most exhaustive information about him is provided by Pietro della Valle, Pietro

Avitabile, Archangelo Lamberti, Christophoro Castelli and Giuseppe Giudiche.

According to the data provided by the Greek monks and the Russian envoys visiting the court of Prince of Samegrelo – Levan Dadiani, Mitrophanes must have received theological education at Mount Athos^{38**} where he must have stayed during 1610-1622. The grounds for such assumption are given by the information provided by Mitrophanes himself, as preserved in the data of the Russian envoys: firstly, Mitrophanes was no longer present in Georgia by the time of the invasion of Shah Abbas into

**« ... митрополит Митрофанъ былъ у святыхъ гор 12 летъ, а учился грамоте греческой. (и ныне де онъ человекъ изрядень и грамоте гораздъ.) (38 . 331).

Georgia (1614) and was already on Mount Athos^{***} and On his arrival in Georgia, Mitrophanes paid a visit to Abbas I in Iran.³⁹ The aim of his trip to Iran was secondly, he was ordained as a metropolitan by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril, who held the above title in 1621-1638. ^{****} Therefore, Mitrophanes could not have returned to Georgia earlier than in 1621.

On his arrival in Georgia, Mitrophanes paid a visit to Abbas I in Iran. The aim of his trip to Iran was repatriation of his captive relatives to Georgia. ^{*****}

Based on the outcome of Mitrophanes's visit to the Shah, he can be considered a rather influential figure.

Abbas I gave him permission to take back to Georgia his captive relatives and around three hundred other Georgians. ^{*****}

The exact time of his visit to Iran is unclear to us, although based on the aforementioned, it should have taken place between 1623-1624 – before the martyrdom of Queen Ketevan and the battles of Martkhopi and Marabda. It is obvious that the Shah would not show such favor after the above battles.

***«яз де природою грузинец Темрязова земли, а был я святых горах двенадцеть летъ и в черныцы де там пострижен...», «какъ де был я в святых горах и послъ де меня Грузи шах воевал и моево де роду братью иных побили, а иных в полонъ побрали;» (38.331,360,368).

** ** «... митрополитство мнъ дано рукоположением Царяграцким Кирилом потриархом.» (38.360).

*****« и я де, пришедъ из святых гор, ходил к шаху бить челом, чтобы, мнъ отдал моих сродников, которые живы.» (38.368-369).

*****«...шах меня отпустил и пожаловал – отдал мнъ Грузинсково ясырю сродникъ моих и всяких людей с триста человекъ.»(38. 369).

The residence of the Archbishop of Alaverdi must have been enabled after Teimuraz I overtook the throne of Kartli and Kakheti and must have been active until 1633. According to Catholic missionaries, from 1628

Mitrophane was certainly the chief priest of Alaverdi and accompanies Teimuraz. Based on the data available to us so far, Mitrophane led the Alaverdi eparchy in 1628-1633. Catholic missionaries were noticeably active in the mentioned period. Initially, the Archbishop of Alaverdi did not seem to object to settlement of Theatinan missionaries who arrived in Gori by 1628⁴⁰ but, apparently, their relations gradually aggravated.

Greek clergymen who were actively opposing Theatinan padres in Kartli⁴¹ had the sympathy of the Archbishop of Alaverdi. On May 11, 1628, Portuguese Augustan monks, padre Ambrozio dos Anjos and lay brother Pedro dos Santos arrive in Gori to hand over the holy relics of Queen Ketevan to Teimuraz. Teimuraz assigned to Catholicos-Patriarch Zacharia Jorjadze and other clergymen to receive the sacred relics of the Queen and bury them in the churchyard of the Kakhetian royal family in Alaverdi church. The sacred relics were placed into a

precious coffin and laid onto the sanctuary. According to Arachel Davrijec, “Teimuraz buried his mother’s remains in his church with honor”.⁴² The ceremony was attended by Achbishop Mitrophan as well. A confrontation took place between [Abba] of Alaverdi and Catholicos Zacharia. The Catholicos who allowed the Augustan monk, padre Ambrozio, to conduct liturgy and preach, prohibited the head priest of that very cathedra, the Archbishop of Alaverdi from doing so. Teimuraz was offended by the occurrence of the conflict in the presence of the Portuguese monks and left the church. The monks from Constantinople tried to soothe the King, but he blamed them for the incident and left the place. As padre Ambrozio wrote in his letter dated by June 29, 1628, that day “Patriarch did not let the archbishop to conduct liturgy.”⁴³ The exact reason of the conflict is not known to us. Probably that was a disagreement with a religious background, which is attested by the activity of the Greeks and their accusation by Teimuraz, as well as by different attitudes of the Catholicos and [Abba] of Alaverdi towards the Catholic monks.

Another discord occurred between Catholicos Zacharia and [Abba] of Alaverdi on the issue of sacrament of baptizing. The Archbishop of Alaverdi who had been educated in Greece considered that Georgian priests conducted the rite in a wrong way. Therefore, Mitrophan baptized many noblemen anew. Catholicos Zacharia forbade the Archbishop of Alaverdi to baptize the second time. [Abba] of Alaverdi did not obey the Catholicos who accused him of heresy and cursed him. In order to resolve the misunderstanding, Catholic monks personally attended the ceremony of baptizing conducted by the Georgian priests and as they made certain of correctness of the Archbishop of Alaverdi, they justified him and reconciled him with the Catholicos.⁴⁴

We are extremely interested in the letter addressed by Giuseppe Giudicce to Pietro della Valle dated by November 16, 1631. Giuseppe Giudicce and other Theatinans who had accompanied him to Kartli brought from Rome the first printed Georgian books ***** and letters to King Teimuraz, Catholicos Zacharia and the metropolitan⁴. The letter addressed to metropolitan does not reveal his identity. In M. Tamarashvili’s opinion, who is well aware of the negative attitude of [Abba] of

Alaverdi towards the Catholics, this letter of gratitude must have been addressed to the Archbishop of Alaverdi. The researcher explains this by frequent relations of

***** Nikiphore Irbach participated in establishing of the Georgian printing house in Rome. Nikoloz Irubakidze-Choloqashvili also took part in preparation of the first Georgian printed books published in 1629 – a Georgian-Italian dictionary and a Georgian prayer book. Most likely, these were the books that missionaries brought to Teimuraz. (45.11)

[Abba] of Alaverdi and the Catholics and considers that probably he had “done good to them in a civil way.”⁴⁶

We also think that in spite of the attitude of [Abba] of Alaverdi, the reason why the Propaganda had sent to him a letter of gratitude is rather unclear. However, the metropolitan must be the [Abba] of Alaverdi and the reason of sending a letter of this kind to the archbishop acting against the mission could be viewed as a diplomatic step. Our opinion is proved by the letter dated by March 28, 1629, sent by Pietro Avitabile to the congregation where, while mentioning close relations of [Abba] of Alaverdi with the Greeks, Pietro suggests to the Propaganda to send to [Abba] of Alaverdi, a second most important clergyman in the kingdom, a gift and a recommendation letter by which the missionaries could obtain his goodwill.*****⁴⁷

The abovementioned letter of gratitude whose addressee is the metropolitan could be viewed as the reaction of the Propaganda on Pietro Avitabile’s letter.

The arrival of the Catholic missionaries with the books, letters and gifts turned out to be so effective that not only their position in Kartli strengthened, but even Teimuraz wished for several of them to settle in Kakheti. He even issued an order to allot a place for them in Gremi. Giuseppe Giudicce writes that Archangelo Lamberti and Giacomo di Stefano set out for the capital city of

Kakheti completely ruined by the Shah but had to return to Kartli because of getting ill. Giudicce also notes that the

***** “ Non sarebbe se non molto bene di mandar qualche presente al Metropolita, chiamato Allaverdi, che e`la seconda persona Ecclesiastica in questo Regno, e fargli una lettera in nostra raccomandatione; perche` questo sta assai unito con i greci, e con queste dimostrazioni d`amore forse s`unirebbe con noi.” (Sti[matissi]mi e R[everendissi]mi Sig[no]ri e Pr[et]ori Colfndissimi)(47.84)

place allotted for them in Gremi is their property and that they would go to Gremi on the arrival of Pietro Avitabile
48

Obviously the efforts by the Catholic missionaries failed to impress Mitrophanes of Alaverdi like it had impressed the King and some other members of his entourage. This is attested by the rest of his activities in West Georgia. [Abba] of Alaverdi would barely support the aspiration of Teimuraz to establish the Catholic mission in the capital city of Kakheti. We assume that Teimuraz's decision must have deeply upset the Archbishop of Alaverdi and even given occasion to a serious trouble. Though, after all, settlement of the missionaries in Kakheti was hampered by enthronement of King Rostom in Kartli.

Because of seizure of Kartli by Rostom by 1633, King of the united kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti Teimuraz, accompanied by his retinue, fled to Imereti once again.

From autumn of 1633, the Archbishop of Alaverdi was staying in Samegrelo Principality at Levan Dadiani's court (1611-1657). Levan Dadiani was trying to surround the court of his Principality by the best and the most educated Georgians. Archangelo Lamberti spoke of his contemporary clergy of Samegrelo in a rather negative way, emphasizing their self-interest and ignorance. In the existing state of things Dadiani, without doubt, strove to

have clergymen of high education and moral standards like Nikoloz Irubakidze-Choloqashvili and Mitrophanes of Alaverdi beside him. Apparently, this must have been the cause of Nikiphoros Irbakh acting as the Abbot of Khopa Monastery⁴⁹ and the appointment of Mitrophanes of Alaverdi to the post of a Bishop of Tsalenjikha, which is attested to both by the inscription by Levan Dadiani on the Tsalenjikha icon⁵⁰, and Christophoro Castelli's letter of November 14, 1642, claiming that Mitrophanes of Alaverdi is the Bishop of Tsalenjikha ("uno chiamato Allaverdeli vescovo di Schialencicelle..."⁵¹ – that is to say, Bishop of Tsalenjikha called *Alaverdeli*). According to Archangelo Lamberti, Tsalenjikha Cathedral had been the burial place

of the princes of Samegrelo.***** It is remarkable that Levan Dadiani appointed Mitrophanes as the bishop of the church where princes had been buried. When describing the debates of the Archbishop of Alaverdi and Antonio Giardina, which took place in the province of Guria, Castelli notes that "the Kakhetian Archbishop of Alaverdi at the same time was the Metropolitan of Guria."⁵²

Antonio Giardina arrived in Guria together with Castelli in 1634 and died in 1637. Archbishop of Alaverdi, who had come to Samegrelo in 1633, was also granted the title of the Metropolitan of Guria between the years 1634-37.

The relations of [Abba] of Alaverdi and the Catholic missionaries continue in the Principalities of Guria and Samegrelo. Judging by the character of these relations it may be said that neither the support of [Abba] of Alaverdi nor the resolution of his conflict with Catholicos Zacharia in his favor, nor the efforts of the Propaganda had any effect. [Abba] of Alaverdi kept on his selfless struggle against settlement of missionaries and broadening the scope of their activities.

According to the Catholic missionaries, the attitude of [Abba] of Alaverdi towards them changed in the final years of his life. The missionaries repeatedly marked out the fact that the Archbishop Alaverdi was converted into

Catholicism. Their information is to a certain extent controversial and biased. In the period of close relations with the Catholics, [Abba] of Alaverdi often discussed theological issues with them, though avoiding expressing his own opinion and sharing their opinion only partially. He made inquiries in the theological literature and observed the divine services conducted by the Catholics.

***** Church of Tsalenjikha was built in the name of Transfiguration. Princes are buried here. Its Bishop is named *Tsalenjikheli* (of Tsalenjikha)

Mitrophane of Alaverdi duly valued padres' education, though this hardly indicates the fact of his conversion into Catholicism. Information on the matter provided by Cristophoro Castelli is contradictory. In the unpublished letter by Castelli, he noted that Antonio Gardina, who had defeated [Abba] of Alaverdi in debates in Guria, converted him into Catholicism. However, according to other data by Castelli, [Abba] of Alaverdi was one of the active participants of persecution of the missionaries in Guria.

Russian envoys Fedot Yelchin and Pavel Zachariev met Metropolitan Mitrophane at the Holy Virgin's Monastery on Palm Sunday, March 26, 1640. They spoke with Mitrophane on christening of West and East Georgia and on the Catholic missionaries. Mitrophane noted that by 1638, the Pope had sent missionaries to Samegrelo Principality but he had refused to cooperate with them. Later, on April 23, they met him again at St. George's Church in Ilori together with Catholicos-Patriarch of Abkhazia Maxime Machutadze (1639-1657) and the Prince of Guria Vakhtang. Mitrophane of Alaverdi was among those who had accompanied the newly enthroned Catholicos-Patriarch of Abkhazia and taken part in the festive ceremony.⁵³

By 1635 Teimuraz gained control of Kakheti. In 1636, the Archbishop of Kartli Iovane Avalishvili ordained Zebede as the Archbishop of Alaverdi. While describing the

events of Alaverdi Monastery in 1639, Russian envoys Volkonsky and Khvatov, who were staying at the court of Teimuraz in 1637-1640, stated the following about Zebede of Alaverdi: «А он архиепископ еще только третей год, как поставлен в архиепископы, а ставил ево Иван архиепископ Самтаврского монастыря.»⁵⁴ Three years before, in 1636, Zebede had been appointed as the Archbishop of Alaverdi by the Archbishop of Kartli Iovane. The fact interests us inasmuch as Mitrophanes of Alaverdi was still alive and stayed in West Georgia. It is not known exactly why Mitrophanes of Alaverdi was unable to return to his see (there may be a number of possible reasons: captivity of Dadiani, a conflict with Teimuraz or illness). The fact is that another person, Zebede, was ordained as an Archbishop of Alaverdi yet in Mitrophanes's life.

Castelli's letter of October 30, 1642 revealed that at that time Mitrophanes of Alaverdi was still alive. According to the inscription made on the Tsalenjikha icon, Mitrophanes of Alaverdi died in Tsalenjikha, Samegrelo. "He was suffering an incurable disease and passed away in front of us" – noted Giusseppe Giudicce⁵⁵ who traveled to Rome in 1643. That means that [Abba] of Alaverdi had already died by the time of his departure. According to Lamberti, before his death, [Abba] of Alaverdi summoned the missionaries and adopted Catholicism. "He accepted every communion with great piety and publicly stated that he wanted to die with the faith that Saint Apostles Peter and Paul had taught him and soon after that passed away."⁵⁶ We have no opportunity to recheck the data by the missionaries, though we are inclined to think that these data serve as the means of exaggeration of their accomplishments and barely reflect the reality.

The Archbishop of Alaverdi Mitrophanes spent the greater part of his life and activities as a refugee, owing to the tribulations of time. The whole period of his being the Archbishop was hard and hazardous. Up to 1633 he was in the retinue of king Teimuraz and shared all the misfortunes that befell the royal family at this period. [Abba] of Alaverdi, who had settled in Odishi since 1633, acquired the title of the Bishop of Tsalenjikha and the Metropolitan of Guria. The chief priest of Alaverdi was a staunch champion of the Orthodox Christianity, highly educated and energetic in his activities; the Catholic

missionaries are unanimous in emphasizing his wisdom, education, piety, high morality, charity and great authority. By their information, Mitrophan of Alaverdi is the first Georgian man-of-letters and scholars respected by all and considered a Saint. In spite of lack of insufficient information on Mitrophan of Alaverdi, it should be noted that he was a remarkable clerical figure of the 17th century.

Abba Alaverdeli Zebede

1636-1648

Zebede's name is attested in King Teimuraz's charter (of the year 1630) granting Arsen Avalishvili the post father superior and some land, the charter is written by Zebede himself.⁵⁷

Another document mentioning Zebede Alaverdeli is a deed issued specially to Zebede by King Teimuraz, Queen Khoreshan and their son David. According to the deed, Zebede is already Archbishop of Alaverdi. The document is not dated. T. Jordania dates it to the year 1612. I. Dolidze is of the same opinion, though notes that he does not consider it to be finally determined, putting a question mark next to it. In the annotated dictionary of persons the same document is dated by the years 1612-1639.⁵⁸ Proceeding from the research some doubts were aroused by the dating the document to the year 1612. In this connection the information provided by the Russian envoys Volkonski and Khvatov, who were at Teimuraz's court at that time, is the most exact. When writing about the events concerning the Alaverdi Monastery, they note that by this period, i. e. 1639, it was already three years that Zebede Alaverdeli had been ordained by Archbishop Iovane. Hence, he had been the Archbishop of Alaverdi since 1636. Accordingly, the above mentioned deed, which, besides King Teimuraz and Queen Khoreshan also mentions their son David, cannot be dated

to the earlier period than 1636.⁵⁹ This is also supported by the information of the Russian envoys, according to which in 1639 Zebede Alaverdeli was 30 years old. (therefore in 1612 he must have been only three years old). It follows therefore that this document must have been issued in 1636-1648, when Teimuraz was King of Kakheti. The same document mentions Zebede as the pastor of the royal family. In this deed King Temuraz gives a promise that he would always support Zebede`s decisions.

During the years 1637-1640 among the Russian envoys there were many clergymen, whose duty it was to study the

situation of all orthodox Christian religion in the Kakheti Kingdom and introduce some corrections if need be.

In their report they give a detailed account of Zebede`s active participation in holding talks with the envoys, his tense relations with the Russian clergymen and his opposition to the Russians` interference in the internal affairs of the local church.

In August-September of 1642 there were new Russian envoys in Kakheti. On September 14, during the church feast of the Elevation of the Cross, they accompanied King Teimuraz to the the Epiphany. Hence, according to the Russian sources in 1642 Zebede was Abba of Alaverdi.⁶⁰

Though no direct documents are available, in my opinion, based on the further study of the issue of Arsen (Avalishvili), the following Archbishop of Alaverdi, Zebede must have headed the Alaverdi see until 1648, the time when Teimuraz moved to western Georgia.

Abba Alaverdeli Arsen (Avalishvili)

1648-[1660]

Due to the onslaught of the Otoman Empire part of the Avalishvili family clan moved to Kartli from Samtskhe-

Saatabago (southern Georgia) in the 17-th century and settled there among them must have been Zacharia, Arsen Avalishvili's father, his uncles, archbishops Iovane and Domenti. Arsen Avalishvili's father Zacharia Avalisvilili was very close to the royal family. Teimuraz I in his charter dating to 1630-1633, mentions Zacharia Avalishvili and his sons, Arsen among them, who was Archbishop of Bodbe at that time, as those "who have always served him with loyalty and devotion." In the same charter the king promises the Avalishvilis safety, immunity and defence from the Shah of Iran and Rostom-Khan.⁶¹ In the charter issued in 1633 to the Avalishvili family King Teimuraz notes that when he fled to Imereti the Avalishvilis remained loyal to him, never leaving him and "suffering many hardships and villages of Somaneti

(granted to them earlier by the kings), Abisi and the lands of Iotam Pavnelishvili, Zacharia Avalishvili's cousin and others. Arsen's uncle and his teacher was Iovane Avalishvili, Father Superior of the Sapara (southern Georgia) and Kvatakhevi monasteries, Archbishop of Kartli and a brilliant calligrapher. When appointing Arsen Avalishvili Father Superior of the Holy Cross Monastery of Sapara, the King mentioned Arsen as the nephew of "the first Archbishop, Archbishop of Kartli," specially brought up as a future monk by Iovane Avalishvili, a philosopher and a scholar."⁶² Another uncle of Arsen Avalishvili's is Domenti Avalishvili, the Bishop of Ruisi, considered "a clever man" by Joseph Tbileli, who, as a mediator, settled the relations between the King and Giorgi Saakadze.⁶³ In the same context he is mentioned in the composition by Beri Egnatashvili.⁶⁴ Together with Archbishop of Alaverdi, Kharchashneli and Rustveli, Domenti Mroveli participated both in the military meeting held on July 1, 1625 before the battle of Marabda and in the fighting proper as well.⁶⁵

In 1636, when Teimuraz again ascended the throne in Kakheti, the Avalishvili also appear in Kakheti, which is attested by King Teimuraz's document, mentioning Zacharia Avalisvilili and his children Arsen, Archbishop of Bodbe,⁶⁶ among them. According to King Teimuraz I's charter, dated by the year 1630, issued to Arsen Avalishvili, after the Turks'

devastating Sapara, the serfs of the Sapara Monastery fled to Kartli and Teimuraz bestowed on Arsen Avalishvili the post of the Father Superior of the Holy Cross Monastery which had been transferred from Sapara.⁶⁷ Subsequently he became the head of the Bodbe see. Arsen Bodbeli is mentioned in the Charter of Pledge given to Zacharia Avalishvili by King Teimuraz. On the basis of this document in one place the years 1630-1633 Archbishop of Bodbe, in another – the years [1631-1650]⁶⁸, and in the third place it is the years 1633-1648.⁶⁹ Regarding the dating of the document to 1630-1633 S. Kakabadze suggested that the document must have been written in 1636-1637.⁷⁰ None of these dates takes into account the Russian envoys' information to the effect that in 1640 the Archbishop of Bodbe was Gabriel, who, according

to the same information, was rarely present at Teimuraz's court due his old age.⁷¹ I could not trace any information about Gabriel Bodbeli in Georgian sources, but on the basis of this information of the Russian source it is possible to determine the period of Arsen's being the Archbishop of Bodbe with more precision. The autumn of 1640 may be considered to be the date of his ordaining the Archbishop, but Arsen Avalishvili's appointment the Archbishop of Alaverdi may be dated to 1648, after Teimuraz left Kakheti. Proceeding from the above the date of the document, according to which Arsen is considered to have been the Archbishop of Bodbe earlier, must also be changed. Namely, the Charter of Pledge, granted to Zacharia Avalishvili by King Teimuraz, must be dated to the years 1641-1648 instead of the 30s.

In about 1648-1658, when Arsen was the Archbishop of Alaverdi, Queen Mariam, the wife of King Rostom confirmed the inviolability of the lands granted to the Alaverdi St. George's church, the other half-to the state.⁷²³⁷ As Mohamed Taher says Alaverdeli participated in the 1659 rebellion. Therefore it is possible to place Arsen's being the Alaverdi Archbishop between the years 1648 and 1660.

This is what the chronological succession of the Archbishops of Alaverdi according to the available sources looks like today. The paucity of the sources prevented me from reconstructing a complete picture of the life and activities of the Archbishops of Alaverdi, quite a few details of their biographies remain still unknown. In spite of the incomplete information about the Alaverdelis, it should be noted that the Archbishops of Alaverdi occupied a significant place in the 17-th century Georgia.

Their activities could have followed quite a different course if the Kakheti Kingdom had had normal, peaceful conditions for its development; they would have contributed more to the spiritual, cultural-educational and constructive activities in the country. Unfortunately, for the Kingdom of Kakheti in the

17-th century was the period when her life was completely conditioned by the foreign policy.

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Photography by N. Aghapishvili, G. Bagrationi.

Icons – Georgian National Museum. Sh. Amiranashvili Art Museum.

1. **Triptych of Alaverdi, XVI century. Silverware.**

An inscription informs us that the icon was offered by the Prior Philipe to the church of Virgin of Kvareli, founded by his care. (size 60x69)

2. **Icon of the Virgin (New Shuamta), XVI century. Gilt, silverware, precious stones, wood. (size 49x41)**

3. **Icon of St. Nicholas, XVI century. Gilt, silverware, precious stones, wood. (size 27x20)**