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Book Review: A Short History of the Georgian Church [Sak'art'velos eklesiis mokle istoria]

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Metropolitan Anania Japaridze, *A Short History of the Georgian Church* [Sak'art'velos eklesiis mokle istoria]. Translated from Georgian by Bakar Matsaberidze and Marina Samkharadze New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2014. xi, 93 pp. ISBN 978-1-62808-536-5

Reviewer: Paul Crego. Book Review editor of OPREE

Metropolitan Archbishop Anania Japaridze (1949-present) is a member of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in Georgia and has served as a bishop in that church since 1991. He has published several books, mainly on the history of the Orthodox Church in Georgia, but also books on how Georgians have been converted to other Christian denominations or religions, and, thereby “converted” to other ethnicities. The thesis of one such book is that Georgian converts to Islam in the northwest part of historical Georgian territories lost their Georgian language and national identity and became Abkhazians. (*Ap'xazet'i: k'art'velt'a "gaap'xazeba"* = Abkhazia: Georgians becoming Abkhazian) His history writing is not critical and tends to be what Professor Robert Thomson (1934-2018), who wrote extensively about Christianity in the South Caucasus, referred to as “received history,” i.e., history that tends to repeat, in this case, what the institutional church has passed down and that uses sources that have not been critically assessed.

The present book, published in several editions in its original Georgian, is a short summary of the long history of the Orthodox Church in Georgia, beginning with the apostolic visits of St. Andrew the First-Called and others of his apostolic colleagues. It continues with the missionary work of St. Nino, Equal to the Apostles, and the establishment of Christianity as the state religion of Georgia (in the part of Georgian territory called Kartli). Japaridze takes the history through the 20th century, but the brief format of this summary leaves us with very little information.

Generally speaking, this book should rather be called a “History of the Orthodox Church in Georgia and its relationship to the Georgian State.” The agenda at this point seems to be more how the Orthodox Church was maintained at the state church over the period of many centuries, no matter where the state existed among historical Georgian territories. In the absence of a unified state, the Orthodox Church served as a unifying institution for the Georgian people. Often, we hear more about the ruling dynasty than we do about the various patriarchs or monastic leaders of the Georgian Church.

The abbreviated nature of this work does not allow for a comprehensive treatment of the Georgian Church. What I found most wanting was the minimal treatment of the history of monasticism in the Georgian Church and how vitally important that monasticism was for this Orthodox Church. Georgian monasteries were found both within Georgian territories and among various important sites in the Byzantine Empire and its successor states. I found it especially striking that the Georgian monastery of Iveron on Mount Athos received no mention at all. This was one of the most important institutions of the Georgian Church during its long history. It was the site of many translations of important church documents, including those of Holy Scripture and works of the Fathers of the Church.

This edition, a translation from the original Georgian into English, however, suffers also from its translators' shortcomings in regard to English vocabulary and sentence construction. Much of it is labored. The translators do not know sufficiently well the English usage of articles. Sometimes words are used that missed the mark altogether: "During the 1nd to 3rd c.c. Georgia used to be a polygon of missionary work (according to the Greek and Latin historians) and was not lacking attention from the Christian centers of the world." (p. 7). It would seem that "paragon" was meant here and not "polygon." Another obscure passage: "The conditions for the Church worsened again under the rule of N. Khrushchev. The so-called 'democratic worm-up' implemented by him was not extended to the Church." (p.86). Presumably, "warm-up" was meant instead of "worm-up." This edition could have used the services of an editor whose native language is English.

The English language is in need of a good and comprehensive history of the Orthodox Church in Georgia. Many articles of good critical history have been written in the past 20-30 years. This book, because of its brevity and because of its poor translation, is not the book that is needed.

There is an index at the end of the book and scattered bibliographical references, but the latter are not extensive.