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# **Racha-Imereti Episcopacy**

**(Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda)**

**1529-1820**

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## GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE THESIS

**Topic actuality.** In the Soviet epoch, covering 70 years of the last century, due to the atheistic ideology dominated in the country less scientific works were written on the history of the Georgian Orthodox Church. But according to Ivane Javakhishvili, the history of the Georgian church has archived numerous significant and noteworthy data for studying the civil history of Georgia. The research of the history of the Georgian church has recently been expanded. A plenty of important issues have been studied and investigated, but the history of Racha-Imereti episcopacies (Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda) has not been discussed entirely yet. Racha-Imereti episcopacy departments (especially Gelati episcopacy department) enclosed in Abkhaz Catholicate (West Georgia) were not only the religious, but cultural and educational centres as well, playing a significant role in the life of the Georgian nation. Therefore, it is important to study the history of the mentioned episcopacies (Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda) not only from the viewpoint of church history, but the history of the State as well. In our dissertation work we tried to represent entirely the history of the episcopacies of Racha-Imereti (Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda).

**Main goals and objectives of the thesis.** The research subject of the dissertation represents a monographic study of the history of the three oldest episcopacies of West Georgia - Gelati, Khoni and Nikortsminda in chronological order within 1529-1820 years, i.e. from the very outset of the above-mentioned episcopacies until their actual abolition. The goal of the dissertation is to ascertain the dates of foundation of Gelati, Khoni and Nikortsminda episcopacies and their borders, chronological lines of the bishops, serving in these episcopacy departments, to study simultaneously Genatian, Khonian and Nikortsmindian bishops' multilateral activities. Our dissertation aims to research the bishops' rights and obligations and the rules of management and governance existing in the episcopacies of West Georgia during the XVI-XVIII centuries, also to study social and economic issues of Racha-Imereti episcopacies (Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda) and etc.

**Scientific innovation of the thesis and its main outcomes.** The dates of establishment of Racha-Imereti episcopacies and their borders are ascertained in the given dissertation according to the existing historical sources (In 1529 the episcopacy departments were founded in Gelati and Khoni, and in 1534 - in Nikortsminda as well). There are also taken into account the opinions and views regarding this issue. Genatian, Khonian and Nikortsmindian bishops' living details unknown up today have been researched, the chronological lines of Genatian, Khonian and Nikortsmindian bishops composed by different authors have been rechecked and the gaps found in them have been corrected. During the research process some unknown up today bishops of Racha-Imereti were found in the historical documents, among them Abashidze the Genatian appointed by Giorgi II (1565-1584), the king of Imereti, in seventies of the XVI century, whose name we could not find in the sources. In our dissertation we investigated the management and government rules of the episcopacy departments and the bishops' rights and obligations in Racha-Imereti and generally in West Georgia in the XVI-XVIII centuries. In addition we drew attention to the social and economic issues of Gelati, Khoni and Nikortsminda episcopacies. We studied the economic mechanism of the abovementioned episcopacies and the amount of taxes the peasants of their flock were liable to pay.

**Theoretical and methodological principles of the research.** The thesis is based on the modern methodology of history research adopted in Western Europe, also the modern methodology of history research of the Georgian Apostolic Church and the history of Georgia that means making conclusions as a result of a critical study and analysis of narrative and documental or other kind of sources regarding the researched topic and historiography as well.

**Theoretical value of the thesis.** Theoretical importance of the dissertation is that the history of the three oldest episcopacies - Gelati, Khoni and Nikortsminda within 1529-1820 years (from their very outset until abolition) have been studied basically and fundamentally based on the existing sources.

**Practical importance of the work.** The results of our dissertation make complete and comprehensive and deepens our knowledge about the past of the significant part of the Georgian Apostolic Church - Racha-Imereti, especially Gelati, Khoni and Nikortsminda episcopacies. We consider that the present work will be interesting not only for the researchers of the history of the Georgian church, but for the readers interested in the socio-economic and political history of Georgia during the Middle Ages.

**Structure and volume of the thesis.** The dissertation “Racha-Imereti episcopacies (Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda) within 1529-1820 years” includes annotation, preface, sources and literature review, seven chapters, conclusion, certified sources and references.

**Annotation** contains 3 pages (2 pages Georgian version, 1 page English version) with a summary of the doctorate work.

**Preface** contains a half page, where the research actuality of the doctorate work is briefly described.

**Sources and reference review** includes 8 pages, where the documents and historiography existing around the topic to be researched are reviewed.

**Chapter I. The Georgian Apostolic Church and its episcopacies from the very outset until the XVI century** contains 14 pages, where the history of the Georgian church and its episcopacies is reviewed from the first century until the XVI century, i.e. Gelati, Khoni and Nikortsminda episcopacies until their foundation in the first half of the XVI century.

**Chapter II. The Establishment of the new episcopacies on the initiative of Bagrat III, the king of Imereti, in the first half of the XVI century** contains 4 paragraphs and 26 pages.

In the §1 the motive and goal of foundation of the new episcopacies (Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda) are discussed.

§ 2 refers to the establishment of the date of foundation of Gelati episcopacy and its borders.

§ 3 refers to the establishment of the date of foundation of Khoni episcopacy and its borders.

§4 refers to the establishment of the date of foundation of Nikortsminda episcopacy and its borders.

**Chapter III. Management and governance of the episcopacies in West Georgia in the XVI-XVIII centuries and the rights and obligations of the bishops** contains 8 pages, where the management and governmental rules of the episcopacies in West Georgia and the bishops' rights and obligations are discussed during the XVI-XVIII centuries.

**Chapter IV. Social and Economic situation in Racha-Imereti episcopacies (Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda)** includes 16 pages where the social-economic issues of Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda episcopacies are reviewed.

**Chapter V. Genatian bishops' serving and their chronological line** contains 78 pages, where 19 Genatian bishops' multilateral activities are researched and their chronological line is composed.

**Chapter VI. Khonian bishops' serving and their chronological line** includes 32 pages, where 13 Khonian bishops' activities are researched and their chronological line is composed.

**Chapter VII. Nikortsmindian bishops' serving and their chronological line** includes 23 pages, where 14 Nikortsmindian bishops' activities are researched and their chronological line is composed.

**Conclusion** contains 6 pages, where the issues discussed around the researched topic and the conclusions made on them are summarized briefly.

**Sources and references** include 10 pages, where the certified sources and references are placed in alphabetical order.

## General contents of the thesis

### Chapter I. The Georgian Orthodox Apostolic Church and its episcopacies from the very outset until the first part of the XVI century

#### (Brief review)

History of the Georgian Orthodox Church and its episcopacies takes its beginning from the first century. In accordance with the information defended in “The History of Kartli” the Georgian church was established by the Apostle Saint Andrew, who consecrated the first bishop in Atskuri and founded an episcopacy faculty there.

The information that Christianity in Georgia was preached even by the Apostles of Jesus Christ besides the Georgian historical sources is certified by the reports of the foreign authors too, (“Masterpiece writing of Ruis-Urbnisi’s Meeting”, Eftvime Mtatsmindeli’s, Eprem Mtsire’s and Giorgi Mtsire’s compositions, Epiphane Constantinopolitan, Epiphane Cyprusian and etc.).

After certain time the Georgian church was strengthened and a number of episcopacy faculties increased as well in West and East Georgia. There were occasions, when some episcopacy faculties were cancelled and instead of them new episcopacies were established. Frequently the cancelled episcopacy faculties were restored as well.

A “bishop” is a Greek word and means a supervisor. Bishops were “highly respected chief priests” and due to it clergymen and all church servants were subordinated under their command. Bishops were allowed to get married at first. The sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681) forbade bishops’ marriage and after that this title can be granted only for black clergy representatives (monks).

A bishop can be a person or representative with any social status and representative of black clergy undergone church hierarchy, in accordance with his personal dignities and relevant erudition. A bishop was assigned by a catholicos. In the VIII-X centuries both laymen and clergymen participated in choosing an ecclesiastic person for getting a bishop’s title in the Georgian church. But for a while this right was deprived to the laymen and granting a bishop’s title was a fate of the candidates desired only for king-rulers, being ecclesiastic person from feudal society. According to Vakhtang VI’s law a title of an archbishop, metropolitan, bishop and archimandrite is equal to the title of prince and the value of their blood is the same as the princes’ one.

In 70s of the XV century the Abkhazian (West Georgia) episcopacy was separated from the united Georgian church. The episcopacies existing in West Georgia were subordinated by Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia). In the beginning of the XVI century based on the historical sources only the bishop of Kutaisi was in Racha-Imereti. The young king of Imereti Bagrat III (1510-1565) aimed to strengthen the weakened church and he laid the foundation for new episcopacies (Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda) in his kingdom.

## **Chapter II. The Establishment of the new episcopacies (Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda) on the initiative of Bagrat III, the king of Imereti, in the first half of the XVI century.**

### **§1 Motive and goal of establishment of the new episcopacies**

As we mentioned only Kutaisi episcopacy existed in Imereti region in the beginning of the XVI century that supposedly covered even the Racha region. West Georgian church was rather weakened in those times. The bishop of Kutaisi was not able to defend flock, lands and a great part of the church lands transferred into the ownership of the powerful feudal lords that were against the public interests. Bagrat III (1510-1565), the young king of Imereti, aimed to strengthen the church, always supported the blessed kings in the struggle against separatism. King Bagrat aiming to defend the church lands and creating political support after agreement with Malakia Abashidze, Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia), separated Gelati and Khoni episcopacies from Kutaisi episcopacy in 1529. In 1534 Bagrat founded a new episcopacy in Nikortsminda too. He forwarded the church this way and got a faithful ally in the struggle against feudal lords.

### **§2 Date of the establishment of Gelati episcopacy and its borders**

According to the information noted in “The History of New Kartli” and “The Chronicle of Paris” on the initiative of Bagrat III’s (1510-1565), king of Imereti, Gelati and Khoni episcopacies were separated from Kutaisi episcopacy in 1529, and Melkisedek Sakvarelidze was appointed as a Genatian bishop. Vakhushti Batonishvili and some chronological postscripts date the foundation of Gelati episcopacy by 1519. This fact is dated the 1525 year in the manuscript of book where the holy gospel is translated in Georgian language.

The existence of different dates of the foundation of Gelati episcopacy caused conflict of opinions among the scientists. Some of them consider that the mentioned fact happened in 1519 (T. Zhordania, M. Gogsadze, T. Koridze), and the others reckon that it happened in 1529 (S. Kakabadze, B. Lominadze, O. Soselia, M. Rekhviashvili, G. Mchedlidze, L. Tkeshelashvili, P. Gabisonia and etc.).

In our opinion Gelati episcopacy must be founded in 1529 that is certified by the data noted in “Continuation of the history of Kartli” and “The Chronicle of Paris”. In the mentioned chronicles it is indicated that Kutateli Gerasime died in 1529 and his nephew Svimon was sanctified as a bishop of Kutaisi (Kutateli) in Bichvinta, (in 1529 the fact of sanctifying Svimon as a bishop of Kutaisi episcopacy is confirmed by the other data as well). In 1529 King of Imereti Bagrat III “separated Imereti region into three episcopacies”, Melkisedek Sakvarelidze was appointed a bishop of Genati, Manoel Chkhetidze became a bishop of Khoni, they were consecrated by Malakia Abashidze, the Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia) in Bichvinta. Melkisedek Abashidze and Manoel Chkhetidze travelled to Bichvinta on June 20, 1529 and on July 20 they returned to Imereti. This fact is confirmed by the Deed granted by king Bagrat III towards Gelati dated the 1527 year. It is noted in the deed: "Manase - a big Confessor of the Great Church", clarifying that in 1527 a confessor still existed in Gelati and the episcopacy department had not been established yet. In other case, the bishop of Genati would be mentioned in the deed. So the data defended in “The History of New Kartli” and “The Chronicle of Paris” referring to the separation of Gelati and Khoni episcopacies from Kutaisi episcopacy in 1529 must be authentic.

In the undated document drawn up by Malakia, the Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia), and referring to the foundation of Gelati episcopacy the data is defended about the borders set for the Gelati flock. The large territory was allocated for Gelati episcopacy including the bank of the River Rioni and the part of Kutaisi, also Okriba. Argveti side was within the borders of Gelati episcopacy too “to the border of Katskhi and to Khreiti to Racha Mountains”. Gelati episcopacy covered approximately one-third part of Imereti.

There are suppositions that the episcopacy department in Gelati existed even until 1529, but due to the lack of sources it's difficult to determine, when it stopped functioning. Actually in 1529 a new episcopacy was founded in Gelati with new borders, and Melkisedek Sakvarelidze was sanctified as a bishop of Genati.

### **§ 3 Date of the establishment of Khoni episcopacy and its borders**

As we mentioned in accordance with the data defended in “The History of New Kartli” and “The Chronicle of Paris” in 1529 on the initiative of the King of Imereti –Bagrat III Gelati and Khoni episcopacies were separated from Kutaisi episcopacy. Manoel Chkhetidze was appointed as a bishop of Khoni. “... at that very time the same master (Bagrat III) sanctified Manoel, the son of Mcheti (Chkhetidze) as a bishop of Khoni by the hand of Catholicos of Abkhazia in the church of Bichvinta, and the chronology was: (218) – 1529

Vakhushti Batonishvili called a pastor of the plain part of Imereti to the bishop of Khoni. According to him: “Khoni church belonged to the archbishop of Kartli. After separation there a bishop was appointed.” Khoni episcopacy covered plain part of Imereti. According to the missionary monk of Teat - Christophoro Castel, episcopacy of Khoni or Konoli was on the edge of Kutaisi and Samegrelo where the bishop chosen by the king lived who was so called Pistore. Even German traveller - Giuldenshtedt wrote about the borders of the episcopacy of Khoni. According to him:” Khonian archbishop’s flock is a part of Imereti located between the river Rioni and Tskhenistskali.”

The borders of Khoni episcopacy were almost unchanged until 1820-22, i.e. till the abolition of the mentioned episcopacy faculty.

### **§ 4 Date of the establishment of Nikortsminda episcopacy and its borders**

The data on the foundation of Nikortsminda episcopacy is mentioned in the Deed granted to Nikortsminda by the King of Imereti – Bagrat III that is supposedly kept in the historical archive of Petersburg. In the deed there is written about creation of Nikortsminda episcopacy by the king – Bagrat and appointment of Manoel as a bishop of Nikortsminda. This latter must be Khonian Manoel Chkhetidze. The mentioned deed was published by T. Zhordania and S. Kakabadze. In T. Zhordania’s version the deed is dated the 1534 year: “it (the Deed) was written during Indiction of reigning on our forth chronology i.e. in 1534”. According to the version of S. Kakabadze: “The order and deed were written during the indiction of reigning on our forth chronology i.e. on August, 1544”.

The different dates of the mentioned deed caused conflict of views among scientists. The part of them (E. Takaishvili, M. Berdnishvili, G. Gugushvili) considers that Nikortsminda episcopacy was founded in 1534, while the other part thinks that it happened in 1544 (T. Beradze, M. Murusidze). According to the indicator of the king Bagrat III noted in the deed is irrelevant with 1534 and 1544 as we know that Bagrat III ascended the crown in 1510, consequently the forth indication of his reigning would be 1513. S. Kakabadze deems that the king - Bagrat mentioned in the deed is not the King of Imereti – Bagrat III (1510-1565), he was Bagrat, a holder of Racha-Argveti who reigned during 1541-1548 and he established Nikortsminda episcopacy.

This supposition is not authentic. It's difficult to believe that the king of Imereti – Bagrat III whose influence covered the west Georgia and Samtskhe-Saatabago that time, let somebody to dominate over Racha-Argveti. Foundation of the new episcopacy faculties was one of the components of Bagrat III's policy aiming to create political support in the Imereti Kingdom. So the king - Bagrat, the founder of Nikortsminda episcopacy mentioned in the document is the king of Imereti – Bagrat III and not someone - Bagrat, the owner of Racha-Argveti.

Based on T. Zhordania's supposition instead of "indiction the forth of our reigning" mentioned in the Deed the twenty forth must be meant. In this case the date of the deed creation and the twenty forth indication of the king Bagrat III "chronicle (1534) coincides with (151924 = 1534). We think T. Zhordania's version on this issue is accepted. The king Bagrat III must have founded Nikortsminda episcopacy in the twenty forth year from his reigning i.e. in 1534.

Nikortsminda episcopacy covered the Racha region totally. According to the data noted in the above mentioned Deed its south west and south east part covered the mountains of Totendauri, Okriba, Nakaloebi and Mukhura. In addition Nikortsminda episcopacy included "Gebi, Glola, Mountain Dvaleti, the river Rioni and the total Racha region on the other side of the river Aska". The borders of Nikortsminda episcopacy were still unchanged in the XVIII century. According to Vakhushti Batonishvili: "up to Khotevi, near the river, joins to Agara mountain region. On this mountain region there is Nikortsminda, the church with dome, a great building, there sits a bishop, the pastor of Glola, down of Racha."

There are suppositions that the episcopacy department was functioning in Nikortsminda even until the XVI century though the data confirming this fact is very poor. The king Bagrat III created a new episcopacy and established its flock borders in Gelati and Nikortsminda as well in the first part of the XVI century.

In 1820-22 on the commission of Russian government after the church reform undergone in the west Georgia by hexarchy of Georgia Gelati, Khoni and Nikortsminda episcopacy faculties with their borders were cancelled and were united in a newly created Imereti eparchy.

### **Chapter III. Management and governance of the episcopacies in West Georgia in the XVI-XVIII centuries and the rights and obligations of the bishops**

Episcopacy was an administrative unit of the catholicon the management-governance of which was similar to the management of the catholicon. A bishop led episcopacy. The board containing ecclesiastic persons and laymen: archpriest, chore bishop, manager and etc. assisted it in the management and ruling. The first assistant was a chorbishop. A title of chorbishop was "the highest title of priesthood" and he was a "head of the holly churches",

especially of rural churches. Priests and deacons of villages were subordinated by a chorbishop. An archpriest, head of monastery, priest or deacon may be appointed as a chorbishop too. A chorbishop's obligation was to "go from village to village and from church to churches" and to arrange matters. For this serving he was given one tenth part of the income of the episcopacy.

In the management of the episcopacy the priests, Fathers with laymen were involved who were obliged to gather taxes, also supervision of agricultural, construction and other activities.

In 70s of the XV century the united state of Georgia were divided into principalities. These processes in the whole country and especially in the west Georgia caused anarchy that continued for a very long time and covered church too. Order and regime of church was broken. For restraining the fallaciousness on the initiative of the king of Imereti – Bagrat III the church meeting of Georgia was hold on the 50s of the XVI century in the west Georgia. The meeting discussed the issues and determined the rules of management and government of the episcopacies of the west Georgia and bishops' rights and obligations. According to the meeting's decision that is known as "law of catholicos" a bishop was forbidden to leave his flock more than 20 days unless there was any considerable reason.

Besides taking care for spiritual life of flock a bishop was obliged to implement constructive works, upbringing of servants of church and create agricultural conditions for manufacturers inside the episcopacy as well.

A bishop was forbidden to sanctify a worthless priest or deacon if a bishop knew about their dishonesty. A bishop did not have to mercy a priest or deacon unpardoned by other bishops.

"A bishop who committed an offence in "religion activities" and due to it a Catholicos pointed him to correct offence and if a bishop did not fulfil Catholicos' instructions, he would be "expelled from liturgy" by the king and he would have to leave his episcopacy. The king punished all persons: prince, nobleman or peasant who resisted unjustly to the bishop and did not obey him. The persons swearing Catholicos and bishop were punished too. As it seemed the decree adopted at the meeting was caused by non-fulfilment of the above mentioned rules.

Bishops were obliged to make military mobilization in their flock in case of necessity. The army gathered from the episcopacy consisted of princes and noblemen.

The bishops had to implement diplomatic activities too and involve in the court disputes as well. In this respect the bishops of Genati were distinguished: Zakaria Kvariani, Ioseb Batonishvili, Eftvime Sharvashidze; The bishops of Khoni: Ioseb Machabeli, Maksime Iashvili, Anton Chijavadze; the bishops of Nikorstminda: Germane and Sophronios Tsulukidze and others.

In the XVI-XVIII centuries in the west Georgia management and governance of the episcopacies was almost unchanged. As a result of the church reform undergone in 1820-22 in the west of Georgia the management system of the existing episcopacies was broken and Georgian eparchies were transformed into the Russian style.

## Chapter IV. Social and economic situation in Racha-Imereti episcopacies

The agricultural mechanism was well arranged in the episcopacies of Racha-Imereti (Gelati, Khoni, Nikorstminda). The land tenure took the leading place in the industry. Viticulture and apiculture were well-developed. In Gelati episcopacy wine-making was drawn a great attention. In the episcopacy of Genati head of wine maker and wine maker took an important place. In Khoni episcopacy sericulture with other branches was well-developed that is certified by the “raw-silk” tax indicated in the tax lists of Khoni church. In Imereti silkworm was called raw-silk. Existence of raw-silk tax means that in Khoni flock sericulture was developed.

Economic strength of the episcopacy was mainly depended on the agricultural production. The flock members of the episcopacy produced economy. Flock of episcopacy united society of prices, noblemen and peasants. Each social representative was charged with some obligations for their episcopacy faculty. Obligation of prices in case of necessity was military service. Noblemen were busy with treating guests, participation in campaign and other honourable activities. Church peasants had much more obligations. A peasant had to give a part of income to the church. State of the church peasants was a little better compared with kingdom and corvee peasants as church peasants were free from state taxes.

Church peasants as well kingdom and corvee peasants were divided into several groups. Among them were Azats and the peasants paying duties. These peasants were divided into servants and “Moinale” certain group of peasants who were charged to pay a duty in favour of church. Azats were more privileged than the peasants paying duties. Some of them even had their own peasants. Azats were obliged to treat guests, serve with a horse, to pay a little amount of natural taxes and so on. Main obligations and taxes were charged to the peasants paying duties. The tax peasants lived too who had to pay only taxes of soul’s mention of the donors for church annually. Duty of funeral repast feast included candles, bread, wine, meat, fish, cheese and other meals and during fast the fast meals.

Head of each episcopacies granted a great importance to taking care of the peasants of his flock as peasants were “active force of this world” and economic strength of the episcopacy too. A church peasant as we mentioned was obliged to transfer the part of his income to the church. A peasant paid duties in kind though there were monetary taxes as well. Taxes included cattle (cow or ox). In the list of Khoni church there was mentioned cattle to be slaughtered and a pig separately), pig, hen, fish, egg, wine, bread, barley, millet, candle and etc.

Amount of the taxes charged to the church peasants was depended on his total income. It was important how much fertile was the land of the peasant. Frequently bishops gave advantages on taxes to the peasants and charged only duties of wine or millet. The peasants income of which was up to living wage the church did not charge them taxes.

A church peasant paid flock (episcopacy), Matchari (new wine) tax (autumn tax), cheese tax (tax during the beginning of great feast), and bread tax (hospitality), lamb tax (tax after East). “Batki” means a lamb according to Sulkhan Saba’s explanation), and other kinds of taxes. Payment of the above mentioned taxes basically were paid in kind but there were monetary taxes too. In accordance with duty lists kept in the documentation of Khoni and Gelati church the amount of the peasants’ taxes of these episcopacies in the second part of the XVI century was twice more than the amount of the taxes being in the XVII-XVIII centuries that is certification of economic crisis in the west Georgia in the mentioned period (XVII-XVIII).

In Imereti kingdom after establishment of Russian governing the issue of transformation of the episcopacies in the Abkhazia catholicon (west Georgia) into the structure of Russian eparchies was in the agenda. In 1817 Teopilakte Rusanov, exarches of Georgia, began to undergo the church reform in the west Georgia. In 1820-22 on base of the reform four episcopacies faculty of Racha-Imereti (Kutaisi, Gelati, Khoni, Nikorstminda) were cancelled and joined to Imereti eparchy. The traditional economic system existing in these episcopacies were abolished too and the taxes to be paid in kind charged to the church peasants were changed by monetary taxes that in total caused to increase the taxes twice that was a great burden to the poor peasants.

## **Chapter V. Genatian bishops' serving and their chronological line**

In 1529 Melkisedek Sakvarelidze was consecrated as a bishop of Genati. A Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia) – Malakia Abashidze mentions him as “a man devout and like an angel”. Melkisedek Sakvarelidze carried out construction works in Gelati. His fresco is still kept in Gelati Virgin Temple. Melkisedek’s serving on Gelati episcopacy department must be continued until 1550.

After Melkisedek Sakvarelidze Anton, a former bishop of Matskveri, got a title of bishop of Genati. There is an inscription on the fresco in the north entrance of Gelati Virgin Temple: “I drew Anton, former Matskverelian and now Genatian archbishop, on the entrance for my soul and for praising the King Giorgi, amen”. Anton as a bishop of Genati, is mentioned among the bishops participating at the Church Council of West Georgia held in 50s of the XVI century. Anton is noted in the document dated 1568 too. He had been a bishop of Genati from 50s of the XVI century up to the end of 60s of the same century.

After Anton someone Abashidze got a title of Genati, whose name is not found in the historical documents. The king of Imereti –Giorgi II (1565-1583) stated in one of the documents that he appointed Abashidze as a Genatian. The document must be written after 1568. We have not found other data about the Genatian Abashidze. Period of his Genatian is determined by about 70s of the XVI century.

According to our supposition, Domenti Chkhetidze got an honour of Genatian after Abashidze. Domenti Chkhetidze is mentioned in the inscription of the church named Our Savoir: “Jesus, please, pardon and protect Genatian Domenti Chkhetidze peacefully in the both of worlds, amen”. He is mentioned in the inscription carved on the cross of the church named our Savoir in Godogani: “Cross of Jesus, mercy Genatian Domenti Chkhetidze in the both worlds.” The fresco of Domenti Chkhetidze with the inscriptions was carved on the south part of Virgin’s church of Gelati and it is described by G. Tsereteli. B. Lominadze could not find the mentioned fresco and inscriptions in 1955. It’s pity that none of the inscriptions where Domenti Chkhetidze is mentioned is not dated on. So it’s difficult to determine his serving years on the episcopacy faculty of Gelati. Domenti Chkhetidze may have served about in 80s of the XVI century in Gelati.

Since 90s of the XVI century Svimon Batonishvili is a Genatian bishop. He was a member of royal palace as he was mentioned as a child of a tsar. His fresco is painted on the north part of Gelati Virgin Temple with the inscription: “Batonishvili Genatian Svimon”. Svimon Batonishvili must be a Genatian bishop until 1637.

Since 1637 Zakaria Kvariani became a Genatian bishop. Construction of house and fortress on Mtsvanekvavila in Kutaisi is connected to his name. Genatians had a residence on Mtsvanekvavila during further period too. Zakaria

Kvariani was a faithful and reliable person to Imereti Kings – Giorgi III (1583 – 1637) and Aleksandre III (1637 – 1660). He was actively involved in the political processes as well. In 1657 Zakaria Kvariani became a Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia) but in parallel he was a Genatian bishop too. He died in 1660.

After Zakaria Kvariani Abraam became a Genatelian bishop for a while. He as a Genatian bishop attended the consecrating ceremony of Imereti King – Archil, the son of Vakhtang V (1658 – 1675), the king of Kartli, in 1661 in Kutaisi.

From 1663 Gedeon Lortkipanidze was a Genatian bishop. He simultaneously was a Nikortsmindian bishop too, but from 1668 he was mentioned only as a Genatian bishop. Gedeon had to serve during the very difficult period. Political anarchy reinforced in the Imereti Kingdom. Kings were changed with kaleidoscopic speed on Imereti throne. Gedeon supported to Bagrat IV, the son of the King Aleksandre III who was able to get back the throne from time to time during inner feudal struggles. At the period of these difficulties, Gedeon took care to save economy and keep his flock lands. He settled the peasants on the lands remained without an heir and created working conditions. He was a rich and important person in the whole Imereti. In 1673-1678, because of unclear reasons, Gedeon Lortkipanidze moved from Gelati to Khoni. Since 1678 he returned to Gelati again and he managed Gelati episcopacy until his death (1682). In 1673-1678 while Gedeon Lortkipanidze was on the episcopacy faculty of Khoni Davit Nemsadze was appointed on the episcopacy faculty of Gelati for a little period in 1673, who in the same year (1673) he became a Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia), and Grigol got an honour of Genatian bishop that lasted from 1673 to 1678.

After Gedeon Lortkipanidze's death since 1682 Nikoloz Lortkipanidze took the episcopacy faculty of Gelati. He is mentioned by Imereti King - Bagrat IV in the inscription of the deed granted to Gelati. The inscription is subscribed by Imereti King – Aleksandre IV. Nikoloz Lortkipanidze was a Genatian bishop until 1690 as in the document dated on 1691 Markoz Lashkishvili is mentioned already as a Genatian bishop. We have not found the other data about Markoz Lashkishvili. He served in Gelati in 90s of the XVII century.

After Markoz Lashkishvili Gabrieli, Giorgi Dadiani-Liparteliani's son, became a Genatian bishop for a while who combined Chkondidloba and Jumatloba with it simultaneously. He was a Genatian bishop supposedly from 1698 to 1701.

Since 1701 Nikoloz became a Genatian bishop. He together with Grigol Lortkipanidze, a Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia) actively struggled against Ottoman aggression and bullet purchasing spread in the country.

In the document dated on 1717 two Genatian bishops – Nikoloz and Gedeon Chkhetidze are indicated. In our opinion there is a mistake made by rewriter as Gedeon Chkhetidze became a Genatian bishop from 1723.

After Nikoloz in 1717/20 – 1723 Bezhan's son - Gabriel Dadiani, was a bishop of Gelati. The last with Imereti King – Aleksandre V, Bezhan Dadiani and Zurab Abashidze was a mediator in the court dispute between Papuna Tsereteli and Zaal.

As we mentioned since 1723 Gedeon Chkhetidze, a brother of Shoshita Chkhetidze, a head of Racha unit was a Genatian bishop. At first Gedeon was an opponent of the king – Aleksandre V, then he became a faithful person to him. The king Aleksandre even created a plain administrative unit for him and called a head of the plain unit. According to Vakhushti Batonishvili: "Head of the plain unit was a Genatian bishop and a brother of Shoshita, the

head of Racha unit. He sent a wife, a daughter of King Vakhtang, to his nephew – Papuna, got married and came with the king. He pardoned and gave a land in Imereti and called a head of the plain unit.” In spite of the immoral behaviour of Gedeon he combined a Genatian bishop with a head of the plain unit for a while. Gedeon remained faithful to Aleksandre V till the end. In 1741 he came with the king to Kartli persecuted from Imereti. Khan of Kartli received the king Aleksandre with great respect as a king but then he took him prisoner. The head of the plain unit seeing it came to Shah, the sovereign of Iran being in Darubandi and transferred him the king’s request. The Shah showed mercy on the request of the King of Imereti and with the help of the Phasha of Akhaltsikhe - Iusuph he gave back Imereti throne to Aleksandre V. After it we have not data about Gedeon, the head of the plain unit.

After Gedeon Chkhetidze, Eftvime I Sharvashidze took the throne of Gelati episcopacy. He sanctified Anton (Teimuraz Batonishvili as a layman and further the Catholicos of Kartli Anton I), the monk consecrated as a deacon in Gelati in 1738. Eftvime I seems to be a Genatian bishop in the document of 1744 year too. He must be a Genatian bishop during 1736/38 – 1745.

Since 1745 the Genatian bishop became king Aleksandre V’s son and king Solomon I’s brother – Ioseb (Iese) Batonishvili. On the initiative of Ioseb, a Genatian bishop, and Solomon I a plenty of churches and public reforms were undergone in the Imereti Kingdom. Ioseb supported to his brother – King Solomon in the liberation war of the country. Ioseb had to serve on the diplomatic filed too. In 1766 Solomon I sent him as an ambassador in Istanbul to hold negotiations between the Ottomans and Imereti. Ioseb’s travelling was a success. In 1769 Solomon appointed Ioseb as a Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia). Ioseb combined Genatian bishop with catholicos. He tried to reconcile Rostom, the head of Racha unit and King Solomon. Because of it Ioseb went to Racha himself and promised Rostom that the king would not hurt him. Rostom hoped with it went to Imereti with his family to reconcile with the king. But the king Solomon I broke the promise given to his brother that he would “treat fantastically” to Rostom. On the contrary Solomon took the eyes of Rostom Chkheidze and his children out. Racha unit was cancelled. When Ioseb knew about taking the eyes of Rostom Chkheidze and his children out he regretted very much and after it he did not serve a liturgy any more. Ioseb dies on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, 1776.

After Ioseb Batonishvili Eftvime II Sharvashidze became the last bishop in Gelati. Eftvime was the last bishop when Gelati episcopacy was cancelled. He had served on Gelati episcopacy faculty for 44 years and during this period he took care of his flock very much. In 1819-20 in the west Georgia carrying out the church reform by the exarches of Georgia - Theophilact Rusanov aiming to cancel Racha-Imereti episcopacies and transform Georgian church into Russian style was resisted by Eftvime Sharvashidze together with Imereti society. Due to it Russian government arrested Kutateli Dositeos Tsereteli and Eftvime Sharvashidze and exiled to Russia. Dositeos Kutateli dies on the way because of the wounds got during arresting and he was buried in Ananuri. Eftvime passed through in Russia and on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, 1822 he expired in the monastery named Aleksandre Svireli. In 2005 by blessing of Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of the whole Georgia the relics of Eftvime, the Genatian bishop, took to Georgia and buried in Gelati land. Eftvime Sharvashidze, a Genatian bishop, devoted for Georgian people and the Georgian church, was imputed as a saint by the Georgian Orthodox Church.

## Chronological Line of the Genatian Bishops

Melkisedek Sakvarelidze	1529 – 50s of the XVI century
Anton (former Matskvereli)	50s of the XVI century - 1567/68
Abashidze (first name is unknown)	1567/68 – 70s of the XVI century
Domenti Chkhetidze	80-90s of the XVI century
Svimon Batonishvili	1595/96 – 1637
Zakaria Kvariani	1637 – 1659/60
Abraam	1660 – 1662?
Gedeon Lortkipanidze	1662 - 1673
Davit Nemsadze	1673
Grigol	1673 - 1678
Gedeon Lortkipanidze	1678 - 1682
Nikoloz Lortkipanidze	1682 – 1690/91
Markoz Lashkhisvili	1690/91 – 1697/98
Gabriel I son of Giorgi Dadiani	1697/98 – 1701
Nikoloz	1701 – 1717/20
Gabriel II son of Bezhan Dadiani	1720/21 -1723
Gedeon Chkhetidze (head of the plain unit)	1723 - 1733
Eftvime I Sharvashidze	1736/37 - 1745
Ioseb Bagrationi	1745 - 1776
Eftvime II Shervashidze	1776 - 1820

## Chapter VI. Khonian bishops' serving and their chronological line

In 1529 Manoel Chkhetidze was appointed as a bishop of Khoni who was consecrated by Malakia Abashidze, a Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia) in Bichvinta. According to T. Zhordania's supposition Manuel Kutateli indicated in T. Tophuridze's bloody deed may be Manuel Chkhetidze, a Khonian bishop in 1529. The deed of Tophuridze must be written in 1484-88. If we identify Manuel Kutateli mentioned in this deed to Khonian Manuel, it will be found out that by 1529 Manuel Chkhetidze was old. Manuel had not been on Khoni episcopacy faculty for a long time; in 1543 the king Bagrat III transferred him from Khoni to Nikortsminda. Later Manuel Chkhetidze took Atskuri episcopacy faculty too.

After Manuel Chkhetidze Zakaria Chkhetidze became a bishop of Khoni. He participated at the meeting held in the West Georgia in 50s of the XVI century. Zakaria Chkhetidze created a cross for Khoni church that has an inscription: "I, worthless Khonian archbishop Chkhetidze Zakaria, trustful and protected by you, created a cross for my soul". The inscription is fulfilled during Giorgi II's (1565 – 1583) reigning, the son of Bagrat III. Zakaria served on the episcopacy faculty of Khoni for about 30s-70s of the XVI century.

Basil Chkhetidze seems to be a bishop of Khoni after Zakaria. He is the third one from Chkhetidze's noble who served on the episcopacy faculty of Khoni. He forbade a duty for Khojono Ketiladze and his descendants. Basil Chkhetidze must have served on the episcopacy faculty of Khoni from 80s of the XVI century to the beginning of the XVII century. After being a bishop of Khoni he became a bishop of Kutaisi too.

It's unknown for us who ruled the episcopacy of Khoni in 10s of the XVI century. Since 20s of the XVI century Malakia Abashidze, the Catholicos of Abkhazia (west Georgia) who at the same time combined a bishop of Tsaishi and Jumati with it too. Since 1625 year the Catholicos Malakia became a head of Guria as well. It was extraordinary occasion that one person held higher secular and ecclesiastic occupations simultaneously. Malakia Gurieli became a respective person in the whole west Georgia. In 1621 on base of Malakia's order a great book was drawn up of Abkhazia Catholicos peasants according to which it is found out that he was an owner of 24 large lands. Malakia had one of the residences in the village – Matkhoji nearby Khoni that was damaged and he repaired it. Malakia ruled over Khoni episcopacy in 1619/21 – 1639. In 1639 the Catholicos Malakia died.

Svimon Chkheidze became a bishop of Khoni after Malakia Gurieli. He had been a bishop of Nikortsminda before. Svimon Chkheidze was a brother of Chkheidze, the name sake of Head of the residence of Imereti King. He carried out construction works in Khoni. Svimon had disputes with Prince Nijaradze who unjustly arrested the man of member of Khoni flock. The mentioned dispute ended with victory of Khonian Svimon Chkheidze. Svimon Chkheidze served on the episcopacy faculty of Khoni about in 1639 – 1650. Then he was granted an honour of Kutateli bishop. Since 1660 Svimon Chkheidze became a catholicos of Abkhazia.

Svimon Chijavadze seems to be a bishop of Khoni after Svimon Chkheidze. In accordance with the data in the church book of Khoni during being a bishop of Khoni Sanavardo region joined to the flock of Khoni episcopacy. Svimon Chijavadze actively participated in the meetings of Imereti King – Aleksandre III (1637 – 1660) and Russian ambassadors. Russian ambassadors – Aleksii Ievlev and Nikiphore Tolochanov were in Imereti Kingdom in 1650-52. Svimon Chijavadze is also mentioned in the letter sent by Imereti King – Bagrat IV (1660-1681) towards

the sovereign of Russia, (the letter is dated on 1669). His serving on the episcopacy of Khoni is determined about by 1650 – 1673 years.

Gedeon Lortkipanidze got a title of Khonian bishop after Svimon Chijavidze. Gedeon was a bishop of Nikortsminda in 1660-63. In 1663 he combined being a bishop of Genati with it too and was mentioned as a Genatian Nikortsmindian bishop. Since 1664 he was only a bishop of Genati. In 1673 – 1678 Gedeon Lortkipanidze moved from Gelati to Khoni, since 1678 he returned to Gelati again and ruled Gelati episcopacy until his death (1682). During serving in Khoni Gedeon Lortkipanidze restored the icon of Saint George that has an inscription: “our Khonian archbishop - Gedeon and we strewed the icon of Saint George that was first burned to bless us in the both of the world, amen”.

After Gedeon Lortkipanidze had returned to Gelati Svimon Sakvarelidze had to become a bishop of Khoni. This confirms the oath book of Bezhan Kipiani given to Gedeon Lortkipanidze, the bishop of Genati: “this oath I, Kipiani Bezhan, presented you, Mr. Gedeon, a bishop of Genati, I could not find other thing and then I presented you the nine land-cornfields of the Kipians... I, Chichinadze, the priest, have written on the date of chronology three hundred sixty six (1678) and the archbishop –Sakvarelidze Svimon attended at the writing this book and was a witness of it.” “Archbishop Sakvarelidze Svimon” mentioned in the document must be a bishop of Khoni who supposedly served on the episcopacy faculty of Khoni in 80-90s of the XVII century.

Romanozi was appointed on the episcopacy faculty of Khoni after Sakvarelidze Svimon. He has described “clergymen’s life” in the postscript of which Romanozi himself is mentioned. This manuscript book is kept in the Khoni church book depository. Romanozi must have served from the end of the XVII century including 10s of the XVIII century.

During the first part of the XVIII century due to the anarchy existing in the country Khoni episcopacy stopped functioning temporarily. Its restoration was carried out on the initiative of Imereti King – Solomon I in the beginning of 50s of the XVIII century. Ioseb Machabeli was assigned as a bishop of Khoni on the restored episcopacy faculty of Khoni. Ioseb Machabeli is mentioned as the son of the head of Aragvi unit in the documents. He was ten years old when he was sent to Besarion Orbelashvili (afterwards catholicos of Kartli) in Gareji monastery to be brought up. Ioseb had got the relevant education in Gareji. In the beginning of 40s of the XVIII century Ioseb first became a priest of Jvari and then – a bishop of Mroveli. In 50s of the XVIII century he moved to the west Georgia. Imereti King – Solomon I appointed Ioseb first as a manager of Khoni church, and then after restoration of Khoni episcopacy as a bishop of Khoni. Ioseb Machabeli was respected very much by the King Solomon. By Ioseb’s solicitation, the king granted an honour of deacon of Khoni to Michael Kutateladze. Ioseb got back the slaves appropriated by the heads of the units to Khoni church. He was a bishop of Khoni until 1763. Ioseb Machabeli died about at the age of 71.

After Ioseb’s death in 1763 Maksime Iashvili got a title of bishop of Khoni. Maksime Iashvili was a bishop of Bedia before. There is a supposition that for a while he was an archbishop of Kutaisi too. Khonian Maksime Iashvili with Genatelian Ioseb Batonishvili opposed against Besarion, the Catholicos of Abkhazia (west Georgia) who unjustly appropriated Anchiskhati (Jesus’ icon) of Khoni church and its donations. With support of Maksime and Ioseb Anchiskhati (the icon of Jesus) with donation was back to Khoni church. Maksime Iashvili spent his last years on the episcopacy faculty of Khoni. He donated his own property to Khoni church. Maksime died about in 1770-71.

Since 1771 Anton Chijavadze was a bishop on the episcopacy department of Khoni. Anton was distinguished with his serving among the bishops of Khoni. He was very educated person but had strange living rules. Because of it the dispute was set between Anton Khonian and the king Solomon I. The king delivered Anton from Khoni episcopacy. Anton was forced to move to the East Georgia. Erekle II, the King of Kartli-Kakheti received Anton persecuted from Khoni with great respect.

After Anton had moved to the east Georgia Ioane was appointed as a bishop of Khoni. Ioane set the same taxes for the peasants of Matkhoji of Khoni flock on base of their request as the peasants of Satsulukidze, Nakhakhulaveri and Kontoeti had. It was to give one pot of “Ghomi” (a meal made of flour of corn) every third year. Ioane must have served on the episcopacy department of Khoni from the end of 70s of the XVIII to 1784- 87.

After king Solomon I’s death (1784) Anton Chijavadze returned to Imereti. In the document dated 1787 he was noted as a bishop of Khoni again. Anton, having returned to Khoni, began to serve actively. On his initiative parish school was restored nearby Khoni church, a hospital with a hundred places for the children with inherent disabilities and etc. Anton took care of the peasants of Khoni flock too and created the conditions for agriculture. In 1819-20 the church reform commenced in the west Georgia caused the people’s agitation. In Imereti the revolt explored. One of the organizers of the revolt was Anton Chijavidze and because of it according to the order of exarches of Georgia he was deprived of governance of Khoni eparchy and was granted a pension with amount of 700 roubles on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, 1820. The old bishop of Khoni got this fact with melancholy and irony at the same time. Despite that Anton Chijavadze was deprived of governance of Khoni episcopacy and he had a title of bishop of Khoni formally until his death. Anton Chijavadze died in 1822 and according to the Will he was buried under the tower of Khoni church.

## Chronological line of the Khonian bishops

Manoel Chkhetidze	1529 – 1534
Zakaria Chkhetidze	70s of 1534 – XVI century
Basil Chkhetidze	80s of the XVI century and the beginning of the XVII century
Malakia Tsaishel-Jumatel-Khoneli	1619/22 – 1639
Svimon Chkhetidze	1639 – 1650
Svimon Chijavadze	1650 – 1673
Gedeon Lortkipanidze	1673 – 1678
Svimon Sakvarelidze	1678 – 90s of the XVII century
Romanozi	the end of the XVII – XVIII centuries

Ioseb Machabeli	50s of the XVIII century – 1763
Maksime Iashvili	1763 – 1771
Anton Chijavadze	1771 – the end of 70s of the XVIII century
Ioane	the end of 70s of the XVIII century – 1787
Anton Chijavadze	1787 – 1820

## Chapter VII. Nikortsmindian bishops' serving and their chronological line

In 1534 Manoel was appointed a bishop of Nikortsminda on the newly established faculty of Nikortsminda. Manoel must be a Manoel Chkhetidze, the former bishop of Khoni. Imereti king - Bagrat III mentioned Manoel as “holy and devout” person. It seems that Manoel was a faithful and trustful person to the King Bagrat. It was the reason that the King Bagrat appointed Manoel Chkhetidze on the newly founded episcopacy faculty of Khoni and then of Nikortsminda. Manoel did not stay on the episcopacy faculty of Nikortsminda for a long time. In one of the postscripts he is mentioned as a bishop of Matskveri: “Manoel Chkhetidze, the bishop of Matskveri, God forgave him sins”. Supposedly with the aim of strengthening his positions in Samtskhe after agreement with the catholicos of Kartli, the king – Bagrat appointed Manoel, the bishop of Nikortsminda, as a bishop of Matskveri in Atskuri on the most influential episcopacy faculty of Samtskhe. Manoel may have moved from Nikortsminda to Atskuri in 1538 – 1545.

Ioakime took place of the episcopacy faculty of Nikortsminda after Manoel. He participated in the meeting held in the west Georgia in 50s of the XVI century. We have no other data about Nikortsmindian Ioakime. He must have been a bishop of Nikortsminda from the second part of 40s of the XVI century till 50s of the same century.

In the document dated on 1559 year, Davit Sakvarelidze is mentioned as a bishop of Nikortsminda. He endowed with Lazare Donadze residing in Khvishi to the church of Nikortsminda. S. Kakabadze considered this document to be drawn up in 1669 and Nikortsmindian Davit Sakvarelidze identified to Nikortsmindian Davit Metropolitan serving in the XVII century. M. Murusadze shared S. Kakabadze’s opinion too. Identifying Nikortsmindian Davit Sakvarelidze mentioned in the document dated on 1559 with Nikortsmindian Davit Metropolitan serving in the XVII century requires to be made precise. Due to the lack of information we leave this question open.

In the beginning of 60s of the XVI century Ambrosi Bakradze holds an honour of the bishop of Nikortsminda. Imereti king – Bagrat III restored him a deed charter and donated the village – Rtskhilati with three households of peasants to the church of Nikortsminda. Due to the reasons unknown for us Ambrosi Bakradze was replaced by Melkisedek sakvarelidze, the first bishop of Genati on the episcopacy faculty of Nikortsminda.

The following is written with the angular alphabet on the stone in the north part of the west wall of the Temple of Nikortsminda: "Saint Nicholas: Bless the King George: with his mercy I, Sakvarelidze Melkisedek, the bishop of Nikortsminda, built the monastery – "Chelishi": amen." Melkisedek Sakvarelidze must have got an honour of the bishop of Nikortsminda after 1565 and held about until 1573.

Ambrosi Bakradze became a bishop of Nikortsminda after Melkisedek again. His name is indicated in the donation book of Imereti King – Levan, dated on 1591. This dating is not exact as it's known that the King Levan arrested by Mamia Dadiani died in 1590 in the prison of Shkhepi and respectively in 1591 he could not issue the document. According to the dating mentioned in this document the Deed is written in 1591 during the second indiction of Levan's reigning. Levan ascended the throne in 1583. Respectively the second indiction of his reigning is 1584 year and not 1591. Therefore, the above-mentioned document must have been written in 1584. Ambrosi Bakradze held an honour of bishop of Nikortsminda about until the beginning of 90s of the XVI century.

Nikoloz became a bishop of Nikortsminda after Ambrosi Bakradze. Nikoloz is mentioned in the promise book given by Otar Iashvili. The document is written during George III's reigning, Imereti King (1604 – 1639). In other documents Nikoloz is not indicated. He held a title of bishop of Nikortsminda from the end of the XVI century including 20s of the XVII century.

In 30s of the XVII century Svimon Chkhetidze seems to be on the episcopacy faculty of Nikortsminda. He was a brother of Chkheidze, the sakename of the head of household of Imereti King. The king George III endowed with Espopoa Mgrdeladze for Nikortsmindian Svimon. Since 1639 Svimon Chkhetidze became a bishop of Khoni. In the beginning of 50s of the XVII century he was already a bishop of Kutaisi, from 1660 – a Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia).

After Svimon Chkhetidze Davit became a bishop of Nikortsminda. Nikortsmindian Davit Metropolitan is mentioned by Russian ambassadors, Aleksii Ievlev and Nikipore Tolochanov who were in Imereti Kingdom in 1650-52. Nikortsmindian Davit took place in the meeting held between Imereti King – Aleksandre III and Russian ambassadors. Nikortsmindian Davit had signed on the oath book taken by the king – Aleksandre towards Russian sovereign on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October, 1651.

Approximately in the second part of 50s of the XVII century on the episcopacy faculty of Nikortsminda Davit Metropolitan was replaced by Svimon Japaridze, the chief cashier of Imereti King - Lomkats Japaridze's brother. It's unknown for us this replacement was stipulated by which fact. Svimon was not a bishop of Nikortsminda for a long time. Since 1660 Gedeon Lortkipanidze seems to be a bishop of Nikortsminda.

Gedeon Lortkipanidze is mentioned in the Deed issued by Imereti King – Bagrat IV that is dated on 1660. Since 1663 Gedeon had been a bishop of Genati at the same time and for a while he became a bishop of Genati and Nikortsminda. From 1668 he is mentioned only as a bishop of Genati.

It was found out that Davit Metropolitan got back a title of the bishop of Nikortsminda again about in 1666-67. "Saint Nicholas (Nikortsminda) Davit with other bishops is mentioned in the letter sent to Russian sovereign by the king – Bagrat IV in 1669. He must have been a bishop of Nikortsminda until the beginning of 80s of the XVII century.

Since 80s of the XVII century Svimon Tsulukidze, the famous feudal lord - Merab Tsulukidze's brother, had served on the episcopacy faculty of Nikortsminda. On the inscription written on the church silver dish donated for the church of Agara Merab Tsulukidze mentions that he appointed his brother as a bishop of Nikortsminda. Merab Tsulukidze brought up by Levan II Dadiani, Head of Samegrelo, enjoyed with great privilege in the west Georgia that time. This is clearly obvious from the fact that the feudal lord enjoyed the right to establish a bishop himself on the episcopacy faculty of Nikortsminda, in this case – his brother. Svimon Tsulukidze had served in Nikortsminda for quietly a long time. He seemed to be a bishop of Nikortsminda in 20s of the XVIII century too. Svimon with Gedeon, the bishop of Genati certified the Deed issued by Imereti King – Aleksandre V. The deed is out of date. Gedeon was a bishop of Gentali since 1723-24. This document must have been written during this period as well. By that period Svimon Tsulukidze must have been very old.

In the document existing from 20s of XVIII century till 50s of the same century the bishops of Nikortsminda are not mentioned. Supposedly during that period like Kutaisi and Khoni episcopacies, Nikortsminda episcopacy stopped functioning too. Its restoration happened on the initiative of Imereti King – Solomon I in 50s of the XVIII century. Germane Tsulukidze was appointed on the restored episcopacy faculty of Nikortsminda.

Germane Tsulukidze was a son of Merab II Tsulukidze, the commander of Racha-Lechkhumi and Darejan Abashidze. It is found out that he held catholicos throne of Abkhazia (west Georgia) before being a bishop of Nikortsminda, but due to the lack of sources it's difficult to determine his serving years on this occupation. In the scientific sources, Germane is mentioned as a catholicos of Abkhazia simply in the second part of the XVIII century. There exists legend that Germane make concession and gave a title of catholicos to Besarion, the brother of the head of Racha unit and he held himself the episcopacy faculty of Nikortsminda, but it's difficult to say how much this legend corresponds to the truth. Germane, the bishop of Nikortsminda, had good relations with Rostom Chkheidze, the head of Racha unit and his brother – Besarion who were opponents of the King – Solomon I. Because of it after arresting Rostom and cancellation of Racha unit Solomon dismissed Germane from being a bishop of Nikortsminda in 1769 and appointed Silibistro Gogoberidze instead of him.

Silibistro Gogoberidze was chief priest at the Imereti royal palace in 50s of the XVIII century; he had a degree of archimandrite. Simultaneously Silibistro was a writer and was authorized to certify plenty of documents being drawn up at Imereti royal palace. In 1766 he assigned the head of Samegrelo – Katsia Dadiani “Lechkhumi named Sairme” as a Father of the desert. Silibistro seems to be a priest of Sairme desert in the document dated on 1771 too. His appointment as a bishop of Nikortsminda must have happened between 1771 and 1773. Silibistro's serving in Nikortsminda ended tragically. He became a sacrifice of the peasant – Nadiradze. The reason was the following: at the time of disturbances in Racha the Lezghins abducted a wife of one of the peasants who was saved by Nadiradze and he got married with her himself. Silibistro took away Nadiradze's wife and gave back her to her first husband. According to Davit Batonishvili, Nadiradze offended because of it made an ambush to Nikortsmindian Silibistro and “shot a weapon at the church door and killed him”.

After Silibistro's death Germane Tsulukidze returned on the episcopacy faculty of Nikortsminda again. He held this honour even in 1792. Since 1793 Sopronios Tsulukidze seems to be a bishop of Nikortsminda.

Sopronios was the close relative to Germane Tsulukidze. He got religion education in the church of Nikortsminda. In 1778 Eftvime, the bishop of Genati, consecrated Sopronios as a monk in Gelati. Sopronios from the first years of being bishop actively began serving and working. He took care of his flock strengthening. He

created working conditions to the church peasants of Nikortsminda. Sophronios was involved in the political processes too. At the time of revolt 1819-20 Sophronios unlike other bishops of Imereti supported Russian government and his working was appraised by them too. After suppressing the revolt he was assigned as an archbishop of Imereti according to the order. Sophronios was respected by the exarches of Georgia – Teopilakte Rusanov. He mentions Sophronios as: "with really great respect and fraternal love the most obedient servant and prayer..." On the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, 1821 Sophronios was officially confirmed as a manager of Imereti eparchy. Though he actually began to rule Imereti eparchy from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, 1820 when Racha-Imereti episcopacies (Kutaisi, Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda) stopped existence after forced interference of Russian government and joined to Imereti eparchy. Sophronios Tsulukidze spent the last year of governance of Imereti eparchy in hospital. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, 1841 the holy synod of Russia on base of the private request due to the illness the archbishop - Soproni was released from governance of Imereti eparchy. After it Soproni did not live for a long time and he died on the first of January, 1842, he was buried on the Cathedral Temple of Kutaisi.

### **Nikortsmindian bishops' chronological line**

Manoel Chkhetidze	1534 – the first part of 40s of the XVI century
Ioakime	the second part of the XVI century - 50s of the XVI century
Davit Sakvarelidze	1559
Ambrosi Bakradze	beginning of 60s of the XVI century
Melkisedek Sakvarelidze	1565 – 1573
Ambrosi Bakradze	1573 – 90s of the XVI century
Nikoloz	the end of the XVI c 20s of the XVII century
Svimon Chkhetidze	beginning of 30s of the XVII century – 1639
Davit Mitropolitan	1639 – the first part of 50s of the XVII century
Svimon Japaridze	the second part of 50s of the XVII century – 1660
Gedeon Lortkipanidze	1660 – 1666/67
Davit Mitropolitan	1666/67 – beginning of 70s of the XVII century
Svimon Tsulukidze	80s of the XVII century – 20s of the XVIII century
Germane Tsulukidze	50s of the XVIII century – 1771
Silibistro Gogoberidze	1771 – the end of 70s of the XVIII century

Germane Tsulukidze	80s of the XVIII century – 1793
Sophronios Tsulukidze	1793 – 1821 (Imereti eparchy – 1821 – 1842)

## Conclusion

Gelati, Khoni and Nikortsminda episcopacies faculties created during the first part of the XVI century existed three centuries.

On the initiative of Imereti king – Bagrat III (1510-1565) the foundation of Gelati, Khoni and Nikortsminda episcopacies aimed to strengthen the weakened church and create political support for Imereti King. The bishops serving on these faculties were mainly faithful to Imereti kings and supported them in struggling against foreign conquerors as well as separatism.

Racha-Imereti episcopacies represented not only church centres but cultural-educational centres as well and played a significant role in life of Georgian people. On these departments as more protected places, a plenty of treasures and clearness were gathered there.

The church meeting held in 50s of the XVI century in the west Georgia took measures to suppress the existing fallaciousness spread in the nation and church. The management and government rules of the episcopacies of west Georgia including Racha-Imereti and bishops' rights and obligations were determined. A bishop was forbidden to leave his flock for more than 20 days unless any reasonable excuse was. Besides taking care of the flock's spiritual life a bishop was obliged to carry out construction works inside the episcopacy, to increase church lands and create economic conditions for manufacturer society. Bishops had to make military mobilization in his flock in case of necessity. The army from episcopacies consisted of noblemen.

Racha-Imereti episcopacies (Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda) were holders of a lot of slaves and lands that was reflected on their economic strength. In these episcopacies the economic mechanism was well managed and arranged. The leading field was land-tenure. Viticulture, apiculture and sericulture were developed too. According to the duty lists of the church of Khoni and Gelati in the XVI century the income of these episcopacies was twice higher than the income being in the XVII-XVIII centuries which was economic crisis indicator in the west Georgia in the XVII-XVIII centuries.

Gelati episcopacy department was the most privileged among Racha-Imereti episcopacies. Bishops of Genati enjoyed with great privileges at Imereti royal palace. In 20s of the XVI century Gelati Academy stopped functioning and respectively Confessor (Academy Rector) Institute was cancelled that was heavily reflected on Georgian educational system that time. Within such difficult circumstances the newly founded episcopacy faculty of Gelati took the inheritance of Gelati Academy while a bishop of Genati took the functions of a confessor. The bishops of Genati carried out this function for further period too.

The bishops of Genati had to serve in the diplomatic field too. In this respect the diplomatic activities of Zakaria Kvariani, Ioseb Bagrationi, Eftvime Shervashidze and the others are worth to be mentioned. In our thesis

identity of nineteen bishops of Genati and their chronology line is established. In addition their multilateral activities are studied in it.

The episcopacy faculty of Khoni and the bishops appointed on this faculty played a significant role in the development of the country. According to the existing sources identity of the thirteen bishops of Khoni serving in the XVI-XVIII centuries is known for us. Among them Malakia, the Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia) was distinguished with his activities, he simultaneously was a bishop of Jumati, Tsaishi and Khoni, the former Mrovi and afterwards Ioseb Machabeli, the bishop of Khoni, also the last Khonian bishop – Anton Chijavadze who served more than fifty years on the episcopacy faculty of Khoni and etc. Opening the parochial school and the hospital with hundred places for children with inherent disabilities in Khoni is connected with Anton Chijavadze's name.

Nikortsminda episcopacy department included the historical Racha. The bishops of Nikortsminda were greatly respected in Racha as well as in the whole Imereti Kingdom. According to German traveller – Giuldenshtedt Nikortsmindians' residence was the best constructed building in the whole Imereti that indicates to the economic strength of Nikortsminda episcopacy. Identity of fourteen Nikortsmindian bishops is known for us. Among them Svimon Chkhetidze, (further Catholicos of Abkhazia), Germane and Sophronios Tsukukidze and others were distinguished.

Hexarchy of Georgia subordinated under the government of Russia underwent the church reform in 1820-1822 in the West Georgia according to which the four episcopacies (Kutaisi, Gelati, Khoni, Nikortsminda) of Racha-Imereti were cancelled and instead of them Imereti eparchy was created; due to devotion to the government of Russia the last Nikortsmindian bishop – Sophronios Tsulukidze was granted the right to manage and rule over the flock.

Episcopal departments of Gelati, Khoni and Nikortsminda and the bishops serving there during the three centuries played a significant role in the history of the Georgian people.

**The list of publications interconnected to the theme of dissertation:**

1. Besik Gaprindashvili: From history of Nikortsminda episcopal department. The Georgian national academy of sciences, "Matsne" №1, Tbilisi, 2012. (P. 18-27).
2. Besik Gaprindashvili: To identify of Khoni-bishops personalities in 1529-1820. The Georgian national academy of sciences, "Matsne" №1, Tbilisi, 2013. (P. 51 – 65).
3. Besik Gaprindashvili: The social-economical condition in Racha-Imereti episcopal departments. The Georgian national academy of sciences, "Matsne" № 2, Tbilisi, 2013. (P. 56 – 71).
4. Besik Gaprindashvili : Bishops from Nikortsminda in 1534 – 1822 . Samtskhe –Javakheti state university, "Gulani" 14, Akhaltsikhe, 2014. (P. 141 – 162).

