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SEVERAL EPISODES OF STRUGGLE FOR RETAINING AUTOCEPHALOUS STATUS (8TH – 11TH)

The Georgian Apostolic Orthodox Church is one of the oldest churches in the world. In the 4th century Christianity was declared the official state religion in Georgia, and the Georgian Orthodox Church became autocephalous during the reign of St. Vakhtang Gorgasali and Byzantine emperor Leon the Great, approximately in 468-470. In the 8th century, during the reign of the emperor Costantine Copronime (741-775) several monks from Georgia were sent to Antioch, one of whom, Ioane was consecrated as the Cathalicos of Kartli by Theophilactes the Patriarch of Antioch. The very data were provided by the 11th century Georgian Monks – Ephrem Mtsire (Ephraim the Small) and Nikon of the Black Mountain, who have apparently used the “Chronograph of Antioch”. According to Ephrem Mtsire (Ephraim the Small), during the time of Theophilactes of Antioch two monks arrived in Antioch from Kartli. Theophilactes of Antioch consecrated one of them as the Cathalicos of Kartli. Ephrem’s work contains tendentious information as well, namely the one that states that since the time of Anastasy the patriarch of Antioch no ordination of Cathalicos had taken place in Kartli which is not true. Approximately sixteen Cathalicoses carried out their duties in Mtskheta between the periods of Anastasy’s (602-610) and Theophilactes’s work. According to the Life of Kartli, “the Cathalicos has not been consecrated by Greece” since 520s.

The issue of autocephalous status of the Georgian Church was questioned again by the representative of the Greek church in the 11th century. “Lord Peter”, the Patriarch of Antioch mentioned by Antiochene canonist Theodore Balsamon is the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch Peter III (1052-1056); According to Balsamon, then the Church of Iberia became autocephalous. However, by the 11th century it had its autocephaly obtained long before. This is clearly indicated in the 1057 debate between Theodosius III (1057-1076) and Giorgi Mtatsmindeli (George the Hagiorite; of the Holy Mountain). During the very debate Giorgi Mtatsmindeli succeeded to substantiate his claims regarding apostolic origin of the Georgian Church by providing the Greek sources in support of his claims, stating that since the 1st century the Georgian Church had been autocephalous. Since then numerous illegal acts by the representatives of the Greek church have occurred against the Georgian Church.