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Kutaisi Museum Is a Century Old

Georgia, with its numerous cultural monuments, has always attracted the attention of foreigners with professional interests and private collectors who bought and took these unique items to their own countries.

In this respect, we must pay attention to the document sent to the chair of the historical and ethnographic society of Georgia, Ekvtime Takaishvili on May 11, 1916: “The government wants to draw your attention to the fact that in the nearest future, Petrograd Historical Society will send Professor Schmidt from Kharkov University on his journey in Lazistan and Trabzon. As there are a lot of Georgian antiquities kept in these places, we strongly believe that you should also send a person to these places who will be allotted the task of examining, describing and, if possible, bringing anything for our museum.

This person will need a document from the viceroy according to which no one will interfere with his (or their) activity and even support his scientific research... From our side, we are sending Vukol Beridze, who is eager to take on this most important and necessary responsibility” (5286/12 N34).

It is clear that being under Russian empire, Georgian people had to struggle to protect and keep their cultural heritage.

In order to preserve the cultural heritage, the Georgian elite who received their education in Europe and Russia, established a Caucasian Museum in Tbilisi in 1852. Unfortunately, their activity didn't reach different regions and at the beginning of the XX century, Kutaisi elite decided to establish a historical and ethnographical society in order to collect and preserve antiquities.

On December 4, 1911, a six-member committee at Kutaisi gymnasium introduced a law which was proved on July 17, 1912, according to which an independent historical-ethnographic society with a museum department was established.

In 1913, the founders of the society, Samson Kipiani, Ioseb and Simon Otskheli, Triphon Japaridze and Konstantine Jorjikia elected a 13-member committee which started collecting historical and archaeological monuments and antiquities.

A particular role in the establishment of Kutaisi Historical Museum and scientific, cultural and educational institutions was played by Trifon Japaridze, who travelled through Zemo Imereti region between 1913-1916 together with his companion Evsev Nikoladze. They registered historical monuments and gathered museum exhibits.

Due to this contribution, at the intelligencia meeting in Georgian Gymnasium, Trifon Japaridze was elected the chair of the Independent Society of History and Ethnography of Kutaisi.

Initially, the findings were kept in the gymnasium, later they were kept in the private flat of the head of the museum department, Grigol Gvelesiani. From December 1, 1922, all of them were kept in Kutaisi historical and ethnographical museum created on the basis of the collection of the historical-ethnographical society, where historical monuments were accurately registered and protected, material cultural items were found and gathered and other evolutionary processes were underway.

On June 10, 1923, on the day of the first exhibition, Trifon Japaridze made a speech: "The importance of the museum for the people's national development and cultural revival is so big that the day of the establishment of such institutions is a very pleasant event and that's why I want it to be specially celebrated in our history" (works 2011:12).

It is impossible not to mention those great people who made an invaluable contribution in enriching the scientific library of Kutaisi Historical and Ethnographical Museum.

First of all, we must mention Kirile Lortkipanidze's manuscripts and ethnographical materials which he bought at different times in order to give to the Georgian Society. He also gave the museum his own library rich in unique books.

Another great contribution to the fund of the scientific library was made by Heronti Kikodze and Trifon Japaridze.

In the fund of manuscripts of Kutaisi State Historical Museum, there are other important documents about the successful work of finding and gathering antiquities. Among them, we must mention the report from the artist of Kutaisi historical and ethnographical society, Grigol Parteni sent to the chair of Georgian Historical and Ethnographical Society, Ekvtime Takaishvili. Grigol Parteni had to present the works of artists from Tbilisi at the first picture exhibition in Kutaisi: "The artist Mose Toidze agreed to donate his works and participate in the exhibition..."

Sculptor I. Nikoladze presented the museum with his bas-relief and promised to donate more valuable and distinguished works...

The artist Grinevsky, who was born in Kutaisi province, found it his duty to donate his works to Kutaisi Historical and Ethnographical Museum...

Artists G. Gabashvili, A. Mrevlishvili, S. Tsimakuridze and S. Eristavi also promised to donate their works...

Brothers Agladzes, who work at building the bank, donated David Agmashenebeli's bas-relief made on Grinevsky's sketch.

As for our collectors, A. Sarajishvili and P. Tumanishvili, they promised to donate as well" (5288/2).

This document proves that the exhibition was greatly contributed by those enthusiasts who were among the representatives of Paris artists' school and participants of Montmartre exhibitions.

This is how approximately 1000 paintings and sculptures by Lado Gudiashvili, Elele Akhvlediani, Gigo Zaziashvili, Vasil Krotkov, Alexander Bazhveuk-Melikov turned out in the fine arts collection of Kutaisi State Historical Museum.

With the enthusiasm of the founders of Kutaisi Historical and Ethnographical Society and the contribution of prominent people, today, Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum is the treasury of ancient cultural heritage and is a century old.

Among the Museum's diverse funds, the richest one is the Fund of Modern and Contemporary History, which offers the materials depicting the independence of Georgia, its annex, Soviet period and World War II, as well as the materials and documents on independence movement, revival of independence and social, economic and cultural life of Kutaisi.

All in all, the fund keeps 17516 items of exhibits and it increases by 500-600 items of museum materials every year and its database is processed according to modern standards.

The fund of modern and latest history also successfully develops scientific and research activity. The annual publications reflect research materials. We regularly participate in scientific conferences, different types of educational programs, cultural actions and thematic exhibitions. But time changes and the attitude to the museum as a general scientific and educational cultural center changes as well.

The following aspects contribute to the process of presenting the treasures gathered by the founders of Kutaisi Museum: more publicity, involvement of the society, dynamics, popularity, establishment of innovations and international exchange programs ; all this will support the purpose of education and entertainment.

From the above mentioned, we strongly believe that Kutaisi State Historical Museum will become an important scientific and educational institution and will have a valuable place alongside international member museums of ICOM.

Used literature:

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6. Collection of works of Kutaisi State Historical Museum, XXI-XXII, Kutaisi, 2011-2012
7. Kutaisi State Historical Museum "Guide", Tbilisi, 2011.