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Saints of Orthodox Church, who were converted from Islam

1. Saint martyr Constantin Hagarit, +1821, (2/15 June).

Constantin was born in a poor muslim family. It there was turk. We do not know his moslem name. He was brought up without father, he grew with his sister and brother.

He was living in Smirna and working in a market place as a verdure peddler. While working it was often happened to him to visit of the metropolitan's house. And there he met some Christians and Christianity. By the way he found some friends amongst Christians. In contact with them he studied greek language.

Once upon a time the young muslim has heard something from Gospel and these words have produced extraordinary impression on him. And then he made decision to become Christian.

However local Christians, in fear of their lives, did not dare to baptize him and sent him on Athos.

On Athos our hero visited four monasteries and everywhere was refused. And he was about to despair completely. Finally residing in holy monastery of Iviron patriarch Grigory V agreed to baptize him and personally made it. In christening he was named Constantin.

For some time he lived on Athos, in Kausokalivit monastery under the spiritual supervision of elder Gabriel. After a while, by his own intention and also being blessed by the elders, saint Constantin tripped in Magnisia in order to convert his sister into Christianity. However he was not fated there to see his sister. On the way in one of the the ports he was come to find out of the one official. There he was arrested and summoned to the judge. Before judge he confirmed that he had been a moslem, and proclaimed that he came to believe in Christ. Constantin was battered and concluded in a dungeon. Judge in the interim causes pasha of Machsonisia for analysis of its deal. Arrived pasha offered martyr to return in islam, promising in this case many wealth and honours for him. Constantin refused and once again professed Christian faith. Hereon he was

put to the standard torture (heel wallops), but then, as even this did not bring the expected result, he was sent to a volunteer-executioner, "specialist" on tortures on Christians. But also suffering the most fastidious excruciations he kept the faith. Hereon pasha sent him in Istanbul for further court.

There the saint martyr for some time inhaled on penal servitude, then - heel wallops once again, tortures & captivity into a dungeon. In the dungeon a Christian priest visited him, and, seeing such young age of the confessor, spoke that local Christians can ransom him. Constantin refused, saying that he is ready to martyrdom, he had been said by Theotokos in vision which about. The next day he was called to the judge once again and, as persevered in his "retreat", he was sentenced to hanging. Execution was carried into effect June 2, 1819.

2. Saint martyr Achmed Kalfa, +1682 (3/16 May).

Achmed, also a Turk, lived in Istanbul 150 years before saint Konstantin and, in contrast the latter, he was comfortably off, occupied a significant government post and at moment of converting he was middle-aged.

He had a Russian slave concubine. Achmed magnanimously allowed her to attend Christian Church and he had noticed her particular gracious changes occurring every time her came from the liturgy. Interested in this, he had expressed to the priest his wish to attend the liturgy during the service of Patriarch, and, of course, he had got such an opportunity. As a distinguished guest he had got a special place.

And so during a liturgy this moslem official suddenly had seen that when Patriarch blessed people, his trikiri and fingers irradiated and rays beamed on the heads of all christians, and only its own chapter remained empty. Astonished with such a miracle, Achmed had expressed a desire to be immediately baptized, and this sacrament was secretly perfected on him.

The martyr remains for some time a secret christian. This phenomenon has its justification in Holy Scripture too: 2 Kings 5:17-19, Jn 3. What was happening with him during this period is not reported. It is possibly that his love to her, who guided his

converting to Church, now, in a unity of faith, became immeasurably finest and empyrean. Perhaps the saint had for this period several meetings with a spiritual father in Church, where he was baptized, for edification in Law of Christ.

And so he continued until once during a meeting officials did start to argue about better decision.

When queue run up Achmed, and have asked his opinion, he unexpectedly for all aloud has declared:

- A Christian faith is better.

- Are You a christian? - has asked with smile one of the sitting officer.

- Yes, I am a Christian. - slowly, peacefully and audibly has answered the saint and smile climb down on face of asking...

And saint Achmed has endured all and had underwent a martyr's death on May 3 1682.

3. Saint martyr Abu of Tbilisi, +790 (8/21 January).

Highborn Arab, born in Baghdad, Abu was a sincere faithful moslem and, according to his biography, "excellent connoisseur of mohammedan books" - Qur'an and Law. We do not know, why ca. 775 he had fled from home to distant Georgia (emirate of Tbilisi), together with only just rescued ruler by Kartli Nerses as one of his attendants. This blast was rather a tribute to his youth.

On arrival to Georgia, Abu, how the author his life reports, still a moslem, "has deserved love and respect of the whole people". Probably this young Arab was a person of scientific habit of mind: he studies Georgian language and proceeds to the serious study of Bible and Christianity on the whole. He attends the Divine Liturgy, perceives its meaning. He talks with educated Christians. All this gradually convicts Abu to decision to embrace the christianity as a single true religion. It is very important for us that in his converting both heart and mind were participating.

For the time being Abu, like Achmed, does not declare himself a Christian. At this time political circumstances change and newly

deposed Nerses with 300 servitors leave Kartli and set off to Chazaria.

There Abu accepts baptism.

Meantime Stephen, a nephew of Nerses, was elected in Kartli as ruler, pleading to caliph for his uncle's return. Nerses (and Abu) return to Georgia. For three years he openly professes and preaches about Christ in Arabic quarters of Tbilisi and nobody does not venture to cause him ill. However hostility to "apostate" amongst influential Muslims relentlessly rises.

In December 785 the saint first was arrested and thrown in dungeon. After several days, on solicitation of ruler Stephen, he was freed. However the saint was not free for a long time. His foes inform kadi that Abu was born Muslim and already later converted in Christianity, so on this base they asked repeatedly for his arrest. Having heard about this delation, some Christians alert saint beforehand, and offered to escape, but the saint peacefully answered to that:

- I am ready for Christ, not only to torments, but also to death. - and with glad face, he made advances sent for him posse from judge.

He was brought to judge. Hereinafter all took place according to the known scheme: judge tries to charm him with generous money remunerations and good career possibilities, the saint spurns them, he was shackled in shackle and again thrown in dungeon.

Throughout his martyrdom Abu shows amazing example on his veneration and humility before Church of God. In dungeon martyr takes the first opportunity that offers through friends on will sell his property and proceeds lay out feeds for own poor cellmates. He asks to buy on part of the money incense and candles and benefaction on churches with request prayer for him. At the day of the block saint asks the possibility to receive Communion and in the third to hour him visits the priest.

He was led to the place of execution across the whole city.

After prayer saint places the head on block. The Executioner thrice knocks dull edge of sword, hoping that he would alter his mind in fear for his life. Martyr keeps quiet. Finally executioner slashes...

january 6 786.

4. Saint Barbarian (former gangster), +830s (3/16 May).

Information about this saint is so scarce that even his genuine name is unknown. He was born at the end of VIII century, and lived during the first half of IX century. He was probably an Arab, born and well-mannered in moslem family.

He distinguishes from saint Constantin, Achmed and Abu with one very essential circumstance: he was a soldier of moslem army and took part in the march on Nikopolis under Michail II (820-829). He was fighting with Christians and killing Christians. For muslims such war is not merely a war, and such warrior is not merely a warrior. Death in Jihad is "single mystery of islam", giving moslem assured way to paradise. Religious ardour of such warriors was very high.

Verily, to convert such "warrior of islam" something extraordinary should occur...

Near Dragomest the moslem army has suffered a defeat and many soldiers perished. Our hero had had a narrow escape, was hiding in vineyard. Probably, when he dare to come out of coverture, retreating army has left already much far off. He remained alone on enemy's territory and was occupied in that his contemporaries have named brigandage, and we now name guerrilla war. Hitch-hiking, he robs and kills the solitaires of wayfarers-Christians, not entering in contact with anybody from the local inhabitants and terrorizing the whole county.

Being in Etolia's limits, Barbarian comes into a church, intending to kill the priest.

The Liturgy goes on. A priest named John serves. The Barbarian waits when the service is through to do what he's conceived without witnesses. But suddenly he sees the Angels, in all brilliance of greatness in their co-serving with the priest, whom he intends to kill. Feeling an awe and gazing a highwayman falls on laps, and after the service he confesses and asks to baptize him. Father John fulfils his request.

Having become a Christian, the saint goes to the mountains and

conducts in solitude several years, in fasting and prayers and avoiding contacts with local inhabitants. As form of penance the saint wears the chains on his neck, hands and legs.

Once upon a time late at night huntsmans, stopped on place to sleep, took the saint for beast, when he grabbed in high herb, and archered him. Subsequently the remains of St. Barbarian were moved to church and at one time they began to amply give off fragrance chrism, from which multiple healings occurred.

5&6. Saint martyrs Petr and Stefan of Kazan, +1555 (24 Marñh/6 April).

They were Tatars, both were baptized in 1552, after the capture of Kazan by the czar Ioann the Terrible.

Saint Stefan. Among all the saints described above he is distinguished by the age in which he came to Christ - he became a Christian in old age.

It happened as follows. When he had arrived from Moscow to the Kazan priest Timothy, he was visited once by an elder Tatar who said:

- for 30 years my legs ached so I could not firmly stand on them. When the Moscow's Tsar took power here, and we knew the Christian God, I began thinking: great is the God in Which Christians do believe. If He can give health to my legs, I shall believe in Him and baptize. And suddenly my legs started to recover. Now I came to fulfil the promise. Please, baptize me.

- Your compatriots will try to alienate you from the Christian faith. - the priest said to him.

- They won't alienate me. - had answered the elder and have wrested a shred from its beard, havong torn it to shreds, - Even though they will tear me apart, how I have torn to shreds my hair - and then I'll not abdicate God.

And he was baptized with name Stefan.

Approximately at the same time Peter took a baptism too. The circumstances of his converting are unknown.

After the withdrawal of the troops from Kazan, an armed insurrection had broken out. Khan Shich-Ali, left as viceroy, ran to Svijazchsk, and many Russians, residing in the city, were murdered. Having an opportunity to flee, st. Stefan decided to remain in the city and for hardness in Christian faith was sheared asunder, his body was bestrewed, and house was robbed.

Thorny path was waiting for St. Peter too. After the expelling of Russians, natives have withdrawn him home: father and mother, brothers and sisters, distant relatives, friends, familiar - all tried to compel him into renunciation from Christianity. Herewith they named his former moslem name, on that saint martyr answered:

- In holy Baptizm I took the name Peter, so this is my name, not that you call me with.

Having seen his inflexibility, family gave him to torture. The tortures lasted several days, but stiff, amongst most cruel torments, saint does not cease to repeat the same:

- I am a Christian.

So he died under tortures and was buried in Kazan. Soon the local veneration of saints Peter and Stefan began among the Kazan Christians. These saints remember are recalled at one date, albeit not acquainted there were with each other, their feat of love to Christ had united them for eternity...

7. Saint martyr Abrahamy Bulgarian, +1229 (1/13 April).

The information about his life is much more scarce. Several laconic phrases of a chronicler - that is all that we have. St. Abrahamy was a Bulgar living at the end of XII - beginning of XIII centuries. He was among those few rich men, who managed to reach the Kingdom of Heaven. Abrahamy was a rich merchant. Maybe in Byzantium, or even in Russia, he got acquainted with Christianity. As it would seem, profession of such sort does not predispose to spiritual studies, however, Abrahamy becomes a Christian.

Not only he personally confesses, but he also proclaims the Christianity to Bulgars. In contrast to Abu and Achmed, Abrahamy does not pass any period of secret Christianity, that points to power

of his spirit and fiery sincerity of his converting. He does not abandon his profession, but uses it for sermon of God's Word; so each trip on sale simultaneously becomes a mission.

In 1229 Abrahamy arrives to Volga to trade in main city of Volga's Bulgars, Bolgar Great. His christian sermons probably draw attention to him. Having heard that he is not Russian, and consequently not under protection of duke of Souzdal, he is arrested. He undergoes much and long remonstrance. On all this he, as it is said in chronicle's record, "curses Mohammed and faith of Bulgarian". He is hung head-down, and is then decapitated. Russian merchants, arrived with st. Abrahamy on trade, have taken his body and buried in a christian graveyard. At his casket soon the tokens of healing began, promoting his veneration. On march, 9, 1230 his remains were carried to Vladimir. In the XVI century st. Abrahamy Bulgarian was venerated as a protector of Kazan, and all those who were converted from islam.

8. Saint monc Serapion (Turtas) from Kozchi-lake, +1611 (27 June/ 10 July).

Like saints Peter and Stefan, a Tatar Turtas lived in Kazan. He was borne in a noble family, and during the taking of Kazan he was rather young. Probably he took part in defence of his town and fought against Russians. When he was captured, he voiced a desire to be baptized and so he was christend with a name of Sergiy. During hardships a man can be more simply driven to a conclusion that overtakes whole his life. Having gotten liberty, Sergiy emigrates to Russia, where for a long time he lives in house of boyar Plesheev. Here his catechisation and making a church-goer occurs and as a result Sergiy so candidly, so deeply, so purely has loved Lord Jesus, that he dare part with the world to obey the highest rule of new faith.

Near the deserted lake Kozchi he had met he hermit Nifont and, charmed with his life, began living with him. This took place in 1560. After a trial Sergiy on his request took the monastic vows with a name Serapion. His hermit life lasted nearly 18 years.

When were going monks to Nifont and Serapion, elder Nifont has gone to Moscow, to ask permissions to make the priory, but he died in road. Then Serapionin set to Moscow. He got a charter from the

Tsar and blessing from Metropolitan for making the priory and having returned he made a monastery and erected temple of Theophany. The construction of priory lasted more than 36 years. In 1608 Serapion, aggravated by old age, retired at his own request, having assigned as hegumen his disciple Abrahamy. On June 27, 1611 saint Serapion is passed, leaving a monastery with two churches and about a 40 monks.

[Upwards](#) [Home](#)

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