12/05/2021

BUST OF ROMANIAN PRIEST MARTYRED ON PASCHA UNVEILED IN ALBANIA



A bust of Fr. Haralambie Balamace was unveiled in Korçë, Albania, on Monday, commemorating his martyrdom on Pascha night in 1914.

The bronze statue was erected in the local Youth Park. The opening ceremony was attended by the Ambassador of Romania to Albania and representatives of the Aromanians in the area, reports the Basilica News Agency.

Fr. Haralambie was killed for celebrating the Divine services in Romanian rather than Greek. There was an unsuccessful attempt on his life 10 years earlier, and in 1905, one of Fr. Haralambie's churches was attacked and the Romanian service books were burned. He was finally killed in 1914.

About 1,000 Romanians from the Balkans, including teachers, professors, priests, and even ordinary students met a similar fate, "because they defended the Romanian identity and served the communities they belonged to in the Romanian language/Aromanian dialect/Megleno-Romanian dialect."

The martyred priest played a very important role in the development of Romanian-

language education among the Macedo-Romanians in Epirus and Albania and for the Church emancipation of the Romanians in the Balkans, for which he drew the ire of the Greek Church authorities.

In 1972, he was declared a hero of the Albanian nation.

His daughter's testimony about the terrible murder has been preserved, in which she recalls that soldiers came to their house, threatening to burn it down if Fr. Haralambie and his brother Sotir didn't surrender, by order of the local Greek Metropolitan.

Though they willingly left the house, they were beaten with rifle butts. When a soldier slapped Fr. Haralambie, he turned the other cheek, saying: "Hit me on this side, too, for I don't believe I am tormented more than Jesus Christ. I know that I am dying for justice and for the nation!"

They were later taken out of town to be brutally murdered. Their bodies were beaten and mutilated beyond recognition, Fr. Haralmbie's daughter recalls.

His Grace Bishop Varlaam of Ploiești, vicar of the Romanian Patriarch, has commemorated Fr. Haralambie as a martyr for the Orthodox faith and the Romanian language.
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