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GEORGIAN CHURCH CALLS ON GOV'T TO RETURN ANCIENT ANCHA ICON OF CHRIST



His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II and the Georgian Patriarchate have appealed to the government to return an ancient miraculous icon of the Lord Jesus Christ that is currently kept in a Tbilisi museum.

According to tradition, the Ancha (Anchiskhati) Icon was miraculously imprinted with the face of Christ via contact with the Image of Edessa (Holy Mandylion) and was brought to Georgia by the holy Apostle St. Andrew. It was kept at the Ancha Cathedral in the Georgian princedom of Klarjeti (now Turkey) until it was moved to the Nativity of the Theotokos Church in Tbilisi after the Ottoman conquest in the

16th century. It was moved to the National Art Museum by Soviet authorities in the 1920s.

In his letter addressed to Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, and Culture Minister Tea Tsulukiani, Pat. Ilia emphasizes that necessary measures have been taken for the Church to receive and preserve the icon, including having a special kiot made, which has been installed in the Anchiskhati Church in Tbilisi, reports civil.ge.

The return of the icon would be “the greatest gift,” especially as the Georgian Church marks the 1,500th anniversary of the Nativity of the Theotokos (Anchiskhati) Church this year, the Patriarch emphasizes, asking the Ministers to consider the importance of the Georgian people being able to pray before their beloved icon in church.

The Church has called for its return before, though this latest appeal comes amidst a controversy surrounding the fate of the museum and its dilapidating building.

According to art expert Tamar Amashukeli, there could be “some deal between the state and Patriarchate” to transfer the items of religious significance to the Church.

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