

The churches of Parkhali and Otkhta are unique among the tenth century churches of the Tao-Klarjeti, both in their form (they are both three-aisled basilicas) and in their monumental scale (both at around 28 x 18m). The basilicas stand in strikingly close formal dialogue with each other – Otkhta was even significantly rebuilt to more closely mimic the features of Parkhali. Beyond their artistic features, each church bears witness to the significant power and economic strength of the people who built them and the communities that were housed there. Built on platforms cut into the mountainside, it is easy to forget that they are as much feats of engineering as artistic endeavour. However, as similar as the churches are, it is important not to too easily elide their differences – Parkhali's relatively extensive, complex and intramedially playful sculptural programme and the many prominent and legible inscriptions on the exterior which testify its construction history, their differing materials and differing states of preservation. Each of these differences speak to the ways in which the churches of the Tao Klarjeti can be used to tell histories beyond formal development and exchange and help us better situate these monuments in their economic and social contexts and this is what both this presentation and the conversations we had around these churches attempted to bring out.

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