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## Esbeki Architectural Complex

### Esbeki Basilica

Esbeki is a less known and unexplored architectural complex in the region of historic Tao-Klarjeti. There is not enough information in the historical sources as about this settlement so about this important architectural ensemble, which is one of the interesting examples of an early Tao-Klarjeti architectural building period.

One can read the only brief text and see some photos about Esbeki in Vakhtang Djobadze's fundamental scientific work "Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historical Tao, Klarjeti and Shavshethi". Even V. Djobadze had noticed himself with a great regret that he couldn't observe and study this complex in details as well. It should also be noted an annotation, a plan and some sketches of Esbeki basilica listed in Tao-Klarjeti architecture and wall painting exhibition catalog / G.Chubinashvili Institute of Art History expedition in 1995; a graphic documentation/. And the last author, who had mentioned Esbeki basilica as a parallel edifice for Parekhi basilica is Dr. David Khoshtaria.

I was there, in Esbeki, exactly twenty years ago, in 1999, during the expedition organized by German scientists, but I couldn't survey the complex appropriately. Nevertheless, I still wrote a brief article about this amazing location.

Esbeki is situated in historical Georgian province of Tao, Artvini region, in the territory of Turkey, on the left bank of Oltisi River.

Architectural complex of Esbeki is located in an expansive, spacious territory, 990 meters above sea level.

V. Djobadze had mentioned that this place, this location had a strategic meaning, because from here you will find everything extraordinary. This place was protected both naturally (by the rocks, the mountains), and artificially (by a fortress). Such kind of protected

location is characteristic for the other early medieval Christian monasteries in Klarjeti – Khandzta, Parekhi, Nuka Sakdari, Tskarostavi.

Esbeki is a small village. There are some fragments of a huge stone wall at the entrance of the village. The height of the wall varies from one meter to seven meters, and the thickness – from half a meter to one meter. According to V. Djobadze opinion, this wall was an aqueduct, which supplied the population with water (because of lack of it). The same system of water supplying is a frequent occurrence in this region (Aetanuji, Khandzta, Parekhi).

There are several buildings in the ensemble of Esbeki – a three naved basilica, which is the main edifice of the complex, a watch tower, a brick chapel, a burial chapel, and the traces of the secular buildings or cells. All of abovementioned buildings are surrounded by a massive stone wall except basilica. There is one more interesting stone chapel in a few meters away from the basilica.

There are two chronological layers in Esbeki complex. To the earliest layer belongs three naved basilica, which is a dominant edifice of the ensemble. We should probably date back Esbeki basilica to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, because there are noticeable similarities to Parekhi basilica, which dates back to the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century (there are great resemblance of planning, of roughly carving dry masonry without using of connecting liquid, of the solution of inner space, etc. ) .

The second phase of construction belongs to the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> or to the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century – a brick chapel, a watch tower, the traces of the secular buildings.

I have a great desire to take part in Tao-klarjeti summer school. I'm sure participation in this school will give me a great opportunity to continue my scientific research in this region and study appropriately Esbeki architectural complex.