

THE GEORGE CHUBINASHVILI NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE FOR  
GEORGIAN ART HISTORY AND HERITAGE PRESERVATION

# TAO-KLARJETI

## HISTORY AND HERITAGE, MOVABLE AND IMMOVABLE MONUMENTS

In memory of Dimitri Tumanishvili



SEASONAL SCHOOL

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Plans, drawings, Photos



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## **“Castle town Artanuji”**

Klarjeti region's centre has been Artanuji for centuries located in Artvini side, which growth was promoted by Castle-town's strategic importance and its Geographical location.

Artanuji had several vital functions: Fortressing strategic location, controlling economical and trading roads, administrative and sheltering place.

The history of the castle town of Artanuji, five important stages can be identified.

### **❖ Stage I - Establishment of the Castle town during the reign of King Vakhtang Gorgasali**

In the IV century, the main town of Klarjeti betrayed king of Kartli and was later subjugated to Byzantium. It was rejoined during the reign of King Vakhtang Gorgasali. First notes about Artanuji appeared at exactly this period. According to “The Georgian Chronicles”, Vakhtang, who had returned from the fight against Byzantium, saw a village named Artanuji in Klarjeti, he liked its strategic location and ordered his Affiliate- Artavazi to build a fortress.

According to the reports of Juansher, prior to the construction of Artanuji fortress, there have been two large fortresses in Klarjeti - Akhiza and Tukharis. The last one had been the residence of the local Dukes (Eristavi) until the V century, which later moved to Artanuji and formed the administrative-political center of Tao-Klarjeti (until the 16th century).

### **❖ Stage II - Downfall of Artanuji**

According to Georgian chronicler Sumbat David, in the 30s of the VIII century the Arabs, under the leadership of Marwan “The Deaf”, invaded Georgia. As a result of the battle, Artanuji fortress was brutally demolished. For the next decade, the abandoned-ruined castle and its surroundings were covered with forest.

### **❖ Stage III - The period of ascension and flourishing of Artanuji**

Significant political-economic developing and rebuilding processes in Tao-Klarjeti begun in the second half of the VIII and IX centuries. We can read about it in the hagiographic work of X century figure George Merchule “The Life of St. Gregory of Khandzta”. During this period, two great figures emerge almost simultaneously: Grigol Khandzteli, who played a major role in the rebuilding and development of monastic life in the region. Also, at the beginning of the IX century, the oppressed Kartli duke (Erismtavari) by Arabs, later King Ashot I, who fled to Klarjeti, takes Byzantine court title of Kouropalates and he creates a new political unit and Artanuji becomes its center.

In a small period of time 12 monasteries were established and renovated in Klarjeti: Opiza, Khandzta, Mere, Shatberdi, Mitznadzor, Tskarostavi, Baretelta, Berta, Jmerk, Daba, Parekhi and Doliskana.

By the end of the 9th century, after the death of Ashot Kurapalati, Ancestry of Bagrationi divides in two – Tao and Klarjeti branches. The administrative and strategic center of the Tao becomes the fortress town of Oltisi (IX-XI centuries), While Klarjeti's center becomes Artanuji, owned by the descendants of Ashot Kurapalati's elder son, Adarnese.

#### ❖ Stage IV - Unification of Georgia and ongoing processes in the region in XI-XVI centuries

At the beginning of the XI century, the process of unification of Georgia under the leadership of Bagrat III led to significant political changes. Including the abolition of the independent Klarjeti principality. In 1010, King of United Georgia Bagrat III invited Sumbat the Arthanujan and his brother in Fanaskert and imprisoned them in Tmogvi castle. Artanuji and the whole Klarjeti were incorporated into United Georgia.

In the XI century, the fortress of Artanuji was occupied for some time by Byzantine Empire, later ruled by Georgian duke (Eristavi) Liparit Baghuashi. And in 1080, according to the historian of David "the Builder", *Klarjeti was filled with Turkish till shores of Black Sea, one day Kutaisi, Artanuji and desert of Klarjeti were burned down.* Since the 13th century, Artanuji has been governed by Athabags of Samtskhe.

#### ❖ Stage V - Turkish-Ottoman Period

From the 50s of the XVI century, Artanuji came into the hands of the Ottoman Turks. In the 19th century, a new, powerful force emerges in the Caucasus in the form of Russia, which engages in wars against Turkey. 1877-1978 Artanuji, Adjara, Shavshet-Klarjeti, Kola-Artaani and the northern part of Tao were annexed by the Russian Empire. In 1918-1921 Tao-Klarjeti is within the borders of Democratic Republic of Georgia. It has been within Turkish borders since 1921.

#### ❖ Description of town

The current state of Artanuji's fortress town makes it difficult to talk about its plans. In addition to this, the archaeological study of the castle has not been carried out yet, and everything is based mainly on reports from Georgian and foreign scientists who have seen Artanuji in relatively better condition, although the damage during their visits was considerable. Artanuji was visited and touched upon by scientists such as Karl Koch, Nicholas Marr, Dimitri Bakradze, Praskovia Uvarova, Robert Edwards, Nicholas Evans and Vakhtang Jobadze.

The poor preservation of the castle and the scientific literature on it make it possible to talk only about the town's settlement and church buildings, as well as about the castle and the castle's hall church.

The present city of Artanuji is divided into two parts: new and old districts, located two kilometers from each other. New district was built in the 20th century on the right bank of the river Artanujitskali on a flat surface. Old district - the historic town of Artanuji, on the left bank of a rocky hill, was surrounded by fortress fence. The town is overlooked by Artanuji Castle from the west, from the cliff top.

According to Constantine VII Porphyrogenetic, historical Artanuji consisted of three parts. It was a fortress, or Acropolis, a small town and a "Rabati". "Rabati" in arabian means "Outdoor District", which was inhabited mainly by merchant-craftsmen. It can be assumed to be the place described by Nicholas Marr, one of main entrances to Artanuji, where the workshops were located.

According to Nicholas Marr, Artanuji had a main entrance on the east side. Gate consisted of two parts: One with big Arabic inscriptions. For today this gate doesn't exist any more, but in its place there is an ornamented stone with an inscription of Ottoman period. The workshops were arranged in two rows at the front door. One door to the north side of the castle town was cut, which was smaller in size, and the town was connected to the river Artanujitskali.

The old building on the territory of the city is considered to be a church built on northern corner, on a rocky cape, on a specially demolished and partially constructed place overlooking the Artanujitskali valley. The structure is almost completely demolished and traces of the western and northern walls about 1

meter high can be recognized. To represent the original architectural state of the church Dimitri Bakradze's, Praskovia Uvarova's and Nicholas Marie's descriptions are important, from which we find that the plan of the church was a rectangular, nearly square, complicated the Cross type building, which led to creating four additional storerooms in all four corners of the structure.

The temple had two wide entrances from the west and south-west storerooms. It also had a smaller sized entrance to the middle of the south wall under which the crypt was located. The altar was illuminated by two windows on the vertical axis, also one window was cut in Pastoforium and in other arms of the building. There is no information about the dome of the church because by the end of the XIX century it no longer existed.

What about church facade, according to Nicholas Marr, the church entrances were covered with medallion-shaped crosses, though the cross carved at the south entrance was taller than at the west entrance.

Local, whitish, rocky, roughly processed stone blocks are used as building materials. Also it's worth noting that at the bottom of the walls big boulders are used. The southern pastophorium's arch was built with incorrect shaped stones. The interior walls also had traces of sharpening and painting.

Use of large less processed stone in churches, building arch with sliced stones, approach to relief decor processing methods, ways and levels correspond to first half of IX-X centuries.

The Crosstype planning with storerooms on all four side are characteristic of the Tao-Klarjeti architecture, more specifically to Klarjeti, where the earliest monuments of this type are found, suggesting that both styles should have been formed here. As d. Khoshtaria says six of the nine preserved domed churches in Klarjeti are cross-sections (Midznadzori, Tskarostavi, Opiza, Artanuji, Doliskana, Shatberdi), And with all four storerooms in complicated style, only three monuments exist – in Klarjeti Artanuji City Church, Doliskana (937-958) and Dadasheni in Tao (X-XI centuries).

The Cross Type monuments complicated with storerooms on all 4 sides more or less close composite parallels can be found in Armenia, where corner storerooms were built into 2 floors, which are considerably smaller, and south and north arms shorter. These were called "Anberdi-type" structures, which formation and genesis are connected with Kupel-Hale type, although in Georgia it was formatted with complication of Cross Type. For note, "Amberdi Type" structures were more frequently built in XIII century, when Georgian corner-roomed Crosstype structures were built and later couldn't find any extension.

Above the church discussed, stood the second church, which was destroyed in the late Middle Ages. On its place, in 1864, resent Ruler of Artanuji Suleiman built Mosque of Isqender-Rectangular building with wooden roofing. Old church stones were used as building materials. According to Nicholas Marr, a stone was placed upside down on one of the walls of the mosque, with 2-lined ancient Georgian inscription of Asomtavruli-, *To Head of the Church and to his sister*. The inscription is no longer visible, presumably due to the late rebuilding of the monument.

In 1790, an Armenian Catholic Church was built on the site of the Old City, which was destroyed in the 20s of the XX century. It is noteworthy that Nicholas Marr mentions the stone with an Armenian inscription, which could have been from the church.

Caravanserai/caravansary also was present in town, which was destroyed by fire in the second half of the XIX century. Hamami (Bath), Elongated rectangular shaped building, built in the XVIII century was located in old district; Springs and fountains were built in the city. To date, only a few such well-preserved springs have

survived. In the XIX century 2-floor Stone Houses were built, with wooden balconies, some of which still exist today.

The historic city of Artanuji was undergoing changes at every stage of its existence, as evidenced by the various purpose-built buildings in its territory that have evolved over time to meet new needs.

#### ❖ Description of Castle

Artanuji fortress is located on a flattened rocky cliff, which is elongated from south to north. Its length is almost 220 metres, width from 20 to 55 metres. Castle's fence follows the landscape, which width varies between 1 to 1,5 metres. For note, there is no sign of tower built in the fence, presumably, because of steep, flattened rock, which safely protected the structure.

Unfortunately, poor guarding of the castle makes it impossible to talk about the system of defence. There are no visible signs of Ambrosians for gunpoint and canons, which are quite significant for middle ages.

According to Nicholas Marr, there were two difficult access roads to the fortress – one from the north and one from south. On the territory of the fortress, signs of four structures are visible. One of them is the old water reservoir made of thin carved stones.

Nowadays, out of the buildings inside the fortress, the smaller hall church located in the middle of the citadel is relatively better preserved with dimensions 10,4x10,4 metres. From the north of the church, rectangular side chapel follows it on the full length, from the east finished with a semicircular apse. From the west portico was added to the church, which connects side chapel and main hall. Entrances are constructed from the south and from the west, to side chapel – from the west. From the north, church has little, elongated storeroom with no windows, which is not connected with side chapel and the church. It has separate entrance for the west, water reservoir is located under it from west to north-west corner. Clay water pipe systems are mentioned by Nicholas Marr. Near the church he describes a pool filled with broken rock fragments, with ball-shaped elongated form. Church's west wall is fully destroyed, but eastern side walls. With apse, 3 metre high wall is preserved. Church's interior was lighted with one window carved into the apse.

The church is built with local, whitish-ivory, rocky, roughly broken, almost unprocessed big stones. The use of large blocks as construction material can be characterized to the early churches of this region. Church's outside and inside walls consist of roughly-shaped stones, which form irregular lines, with frequent use of filler solution. The interior of the temple is plastered and painted, which can be verified with signs of red and blue pigments on the lower parts and northern walls of the apse. On the facade there is no sign of decorations.

Temple according to stylistic signs (architectural embellishment and lack of pilasters resting on the arches) belong to the IX century. From the north side storeroom, added to the chapel, is not attached to northern structure and is thought to be added later in the X century.

According to Sumbat David's notes, the church in the fortress can be considered to be built by Ashot Kouropalates (as personal chapel), which is named as one of his resting places (grave).

Like every other region in Georgia, design of fortresses in Tao-Klarjeti were dictated by the landscape, interior of which incorporated various purpose buildings. At present, in fortification structure preserved in Tao-Klarjeti are readable signs of small churches, but it is hard to speak about functional importance of other structures.

In Tao-Klarjeti in fortificational structures we came up with simple-type hall churches without any signs additional annexes or pastophoriums, with signs in the altar whose plane is inserted in a rectangle. Facade décor is monotonous and simple, interior is divided with one or two pillars. Despite the key features listed above, there are some exceptions.

Basically, the period of construction of fortress hall churches in this region varies from IX-X centuries. Also construction of active defensive structures in the region and its coverage by a single network, mainly IX-X centuries should have taken place, when region was political and economically strong. During this period most of the old castles that were destroyed by the Arab invasions should have been restored. In the late Middle Ages, however, they had to be adapted to the new requirements associated with the introduction of firearms.

In conclusion, we can say about important center of Klarjeti, castletown Artanuji with its geographical location, with strategic and historical importance, with functional load, stylistic-architectural solutions is one of the most interesting example not only for Klarjeti Region, but among all fortificational structures in Georgia, which hasn't lost its strategic importance for centuries. In addition, connections to the Eastern and Western Christendom, later being possessed by Muslim Country has played subsequent role in an urban development and architectural solutions. Despite the poor protection of the castle, different layers of construction can be separated, emphasizing the architectural-stylistic influences of church structures, however, further proper study of the castletown will provide us with lots of new information.

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**Irene Giviashvili**

### **The Cathedral of Bana**

Ruins of a grand Cathedral is located on a top of a small hill in the Oltu valley, Erzerum Province (Turkey). Bana is one of the most important medieval church buildings in eastern Christian world.

According to the medieval Georgian sources, the cathedral of Bana was built during the reign of King Adarnase (888-923) by the hand of Kvirike Baneli, who later became the first bishop of Bana. This earliest date has recently been confirmed by means of 14C dating.

In 1032, King Bagrat IV (1027-1072) married the Byzantine Princess Helena, niece of emperor Romanos III Argyros (1028-1034), at Bana. The event is depicted in a wall painting from 1036 at the nearby monastery church of Oshki, showing the cathedral of Bana as a huge cylindrical building with a gallery above the ambulatory.

In the early twelfth century Bana fell to the Seljuk Turks, but it was retaken during the reign of Queen Tamar (1184-1213). The building structure was further strengthened in this period. In the mid-sixteenth century the south Georgian provinces of Tao-Klarjeti came under Ottoman rule. As a consequence, the cathedral of Bana ceased to function as a place of Christian worship.

The German Botanist Karl Koch still saw Bana in its complete state in 1844. He noted some "Muslim" alterations of the building.

During the Crimean war (1853-1856) Ottoman troops converted Bana into a fortress. The dome of the building collapsed in 1875, and Bana suffered heavily under artillery fire during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878.

When the Georgian historian Ekvtime Takaishvili surveyed Bana in 1902 and 1907, only the eastern apse and the adjacent chambers were still standing.

Large parts of the remaining east apse were destroyed by earthquakes in 1983 and 1984.

The remains of the cathedral of Bana lie on a top of a hill in the valley of the river Penek Su. The closest modern settlement, the small hamlet of Penek, is some 1.5 km away, but in the Middle Ages Bana itself was the site of a town that also served as the residence of the local Bagrationi rulers. Nothing of this remains today. Only archaeological excavations can bring this historically important place back to light.

The site, which is visible from a long distance, is dominated by the impressive ruins of the former cathedral. Although only parts of the east apse, the southern half of the ambulatory wall, and part of the barrel vault that connects the two, remain fully intact, Bana is still the best preserved of all the churches of its building type – the so-called tetraconch with circular ambulatory. Due to its ingenious construction that involves massive square pillars housing vaulted chambers on several levels, the whole cathedral was preserved until the mid-nineteenth century.

The surroundings are scattered with pieces of the former cathedral building that was blown up during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878. In front of the north side of the ruins of the cathedral are vaulted underground chambers that have never been investigated.

Problematic are the uncontrolled illegal excavations that are going on at Bana today. Nothing is known of the potential findings. Furthermore, important data are lost for ever, due to the disturbance or complete destruction of the archaeological context.

The walls of the cathedral at Bana are constructed of stone blocks facing a mortar and rubble core. For the cladding of the exterior and interior of the building mostly yellow/reddish blocks of stone, evenly quarried and with smoothly finished surfaces, were employed. Light grey/greenish stone blocks were used for later repairs. Wooden beams inserted into the mortar core functioned as tension rods.

Typologically, Bana belongs to a rare type of cathedral churches that only occur in the south Caucasus, the so-called tetraconch with circular ambulatory. In Bana, the structure is enriched by chambers placed in the corners between the four exedrae. The ambulatory wall was further strengthened by an arcade that may or may not have supported an upper gallery. There are different reconstructions of the building's contested, but it is clear that it must have had three stories surmounted by a central dome on a drum.

The cathedral of Bana is closely connected to the restoration of Georgian kingship in 888. A 14C analysis carried out in 2012 confirms the earliest possible date of construction around the turn of the ninth-tenth century. However, the building reflects older prototypes, most of all the Armenian cathedral of Zvartnots from the mid-seventh century, thus testifying to the interaction and cross-fertilisation between two East Christian cultures of the South Caucasus during the early Middle Ages.

The cathedral of Bana once displayed the richest collection of Classical elements of any early medieval building in the South Caucasus. This raises important questions about the connection of this apparently deeply provincial region in Eastern Anatolia to imperial capital and artistic centre of Constantinople.

For five centuries, Bana functioned as the funeral church in which the Georgian kings and their consorts were buried. Undoubtedly there must be a crypt, which today lies beneath the debris of collapsed building parts.

Bana also played an important role in Turkish history. However, the changes which the building most probably underwent while it was under Seljuk rule, are not fully understood today. Furthermore, Bana is a rare monument in Eastern Anatolia that witnesses of the military history of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, later additions to the church building that turned it into a fortress, like the buttressing tower in front of the east side of the ambulatory wall, have been evaluated as dispensable by those in search of treasures and building materials, and have thus been removed.

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## DOLISKANA

### I) LOCATION

The church is located in the historic province of Klarjeti, near the city of Artvin (presently in Turkey). The name of the village we are currently in is called Hamamlı Kçy. It is located high above the right bank of the Imerkhevi river.

### II) MEANING OF DOLISKANA

Doli means “wheat”, while Khana is a field of crops.

As such, the name of Doliskana means “field of wheat”.

### III) HISTORY OF THE MONUMENT

On the historical point of view, we know almost nothing about the earlier period of the church. But we are sure that it falls within the context of the spiritual movement initiated by Gregory of Khanzta. The earliest document mentioning Doliskana is the *Life* of Gregory of Khanzta, written by Giorgi Merchule in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Bagrat Curopalates had received the right to be chamberlain instead of his father Ashot, and he received a visit from Gregory of Khanzta. Gregory went before Bagrat and congratulated and praised him on becoming a chamberlain. To save the king’s soul, they used a fertile land which was offered by Ashot to Khanzta, and they built Shatberdi.

Later, Gregory invited all the contemporary rulers to come and see the constructed monasteries in the desert of Klarjeti. They first visited Shatberdi, where Zakaria, bishop of Ancha, joined them. Then they went to Jmerki, Berta, Daba and finally to Doliskana.

Doliskana belongs to the twelve monasteries which were under the governance of Gregory of Khanzta, who had become archimandrite of the Klarjeti monasteries.

#### IV) HISTORIOGRAPHY

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a number of travelers have given written accounts of the church of Doliskana.

The first account was from a French professor, Mari Brosset. He was a scholar of the Imperial Academy of St. Petersburg and he was respected for his work on Georgian antiquities. He received an inscription from the church from a geologist, Otto Wilhelm Hermann von Abich.

The second account of the church was from the Georgian historian Dimitri Bakratze, who organized an ethnographic expedition to the area of Shavsheti, Klarjeti, Lazeti and Adjara.

In 1888, the Russian professor Pavlinov published a report of his journey to Tao-Klarjeti. In his report, he included photos and measurements of monuments such as Mamatsminda, Sveti, Khanzta, Opiza, Doliskana and Yeni Rabat.

David Winfield published an important article about “Some Early Medieval Figure Sculpture from North-East Turkey”, which includes many photos and drawings of the carvings of the churches of Tao and Shavsheti.

And last but not least, Wakhtang Beridze and Wakhtang Djobadze contributed significantly to the knowledge and understanding of these monuments through their studies.

## V) ARCHITECTURE

Doliskana is a relatively small church, compared to the other monuments of Tao-Klarjeti. It is made of roughly squared sandstone blocks, for the main part (bricks are also used as a building material).

The original appearance of the church has undergone many changes. During the 90s, the church was converted into a mosque, and it was completely abandoned. More recently, some holes were somewhat controversially drilled in the walls. This situation contributed to the bad conditions of preservation of the church, which is of historical value. The church has also suffered from negligence. In the end, the Embassy of Georgia in Turkey managed to cease further alterations.

The church is a cross-in-square.

Architecturally speaking, the closest parallel is the monastery church of Khanzta, which belongs to the same architectural type and possesses similar dimensions.

The east arm consists of a deep semicircular apse with one window on the east end. The apse is flanked by two pastophories which, as in the case of Khanzta, are not connected to the apse but are open to the cross-arms. The southwestern portion of the church is almost completely gone. It is possible that, as in Khakhuli and Oshki, there was an open gallery. Such galleries are attested in early Georgian architecture (Bolnisi Sioni, Tsromi), Armenian (Odzun, Ezeruk), as well as Syrian and northern Mesopotamian. We don't know the exact purpose of the northwestern side of the church. In its forms and proportions, it resembles a similar room in the northwestern part of the Khakhuli church. This room, as in Doliskana, is accessible from the southwestern part of the western crossarm and was, according to Ekvtime Takaishvili, used as a pantry and wine cellar – very important in Georgia. Archaeological evidence has shown that the longitudinal northwestern room in Doliskana might have been used not only for the storage but perhaps also for the preparation of the Eucharistic bread.

For the construction of the drum of the dome, smoothly finished stones were used in the same manner as in Opiza (now lost) and Khanzta. Its exterior dodecagonal surface is divided by twelve blind arches resting on paired colonnettes surmounted by twin capitals which are decorated with split palmette leaves. We distinguish two groups of capitals, according to their shape: first, carefully carved palmette leaves with rounded tips and second, summarily carved foliage with pointed tips and a vertical stem in the middle. Wakhtang Djobadze observed their appearance in neighboring Armenia (Zvartnots) and in several Tur Abdin churches as well.

On the molding of upper cornice, we find, at irregular intervals, a very rare motive, which recalls the Lesbian cymatium, and which is apparently unique in the architecture of Tao-Klarjeti. This motive was infrequently used in other provinces of Georgia. The earliest and closest example for comparison is in Vale, where it can also be observed on the cornice of the church.

There were exceptionally close similarities between the drum of the dome of Doliskana and its counterpart in Opiza, which no longer exists. They were very similar in shape: dodecagonal, with their exterior surfaces divided by the same number of blind arches supported by twin colonnettes with stylized capitals.

The main difference between these two monuments lied in the roofing, which in Opiza had the shape of a half-opened umbrella, whereas in Doliskana, it has the form of a cone. There were other slight differences, but this was the main one.

To the same group belongs the dome of Khanzta which, in comparison with those of Opiza and Doliskana, is structurally more rigid and less adorned.

Despite their differences, all three drums were similar in size and shared a common ratio between their height and diameter.

The walls of the church have kept two very important *Asomtavruli* inscriptions which mention King Sumbat I, the son of Adarnase II. Sumbat was “King of the Kartvels”, the only ruler of

Klarjeti who held the title of King, and he was endowed with the Byzantine title of Kuropalates in 954. He ruled until his death in 958.

One of those inscriptions can be found on the drum of the dome, under a high relief representing the king himself holding in his hands the model of a cupola church. It reads: “Christ exalt our King Sumbat”. The second one, which consists of two concentric lines, can be observed above the south window, and it bears these words: “Christ exalt our King Sumbat lasting as the sun” (here the word “*mzegrzelobit*” or “lasting as the sun” enhances the glorification of the power of the living king).

## VI) ARCHITECTURAL SCULPTURE

The most striking sample of architectural sculpture is the donor’s figure.

It is not an easy task to give a written account of the donor. The only way to focus on its stylistic details is to use binoculars. This obliges us to rely on the most relevant bibliography. David Winfield wrote that the head was severely damaged by target practice. Indeed, its upper part is completely destroyed. The face was carved frontally, showing a beard indicated by simple radiating lines. The body is also carved in a frontal position, in contrast to the feet which indicate that he is walking forward and should be seen from a sideways position. According to Wakhtang Djobadze, the origin for the combined frontal and sideways pose of the figure is to be found in Sassanian and, more distantly, in Assyrian sculpted figures. Did the lamassu serve as a possible but indirect model? It seems that it was just a convention adopted here.

The act of offering the church was awkwardly handled. Sumbat’s left hand, holding the church, is not related in any natural manner to his body, and it is clear that the sculptor was concerned simply to emphasize the connection between the king and the church by putting the model of this church in both hands; Sumbat’s left hand under the church is detached from the drum. The relief is small and placed high up on the drum, where it is hardly visible. Moreover, the inscription

which proclaims Sumbat as king, can barely be read from such distance. For those reasons, Antony Eastmond concludes that the image was not intended to receive scrutiny from terrestrial viewers. And he thinks that, due to the crudeness of this relief, Sumbat had no access to the funds employed at Opiza, an argument which is strengthened by the modest dimensions of the church itself. Obviously, the aim of the relief was not to impress the Georgian people with the ruler's power. It is clear, especially if we compare it to the sculpture of Ashot II Kukhi from Tbeti. Rather, it was aimed at showing a visual proof of the generosity and faith of the donor, as was the case in Opiza, with the relief of Ashot IV and Davit II (Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi). Of the representation of the church itself, only a door is still visible, but the model seems to have approximated more to the shape of the actual church than does the king to a human figure. Another point of iconographic interest is that Sumbat is standing alone. There is no intercessor or representation of a figure, such as Christ, to whom he might be presenting the church, and no sign in the masonry of the drum which could prove that further figures ever existed.

Moving on to the south window, we can see on each side small figures of archangels in low relief, symmetrically placed, with accompanying inscriptions. There is also an inscription saying that it was "made by the hand of the deacon Gabriel". The figures and the main inscription form a decorative archivolt for the window. Both archangels hold imperial insignia, but their imperial costume is missing. We must point out the punch-holes technique which has been used here to indicate a jeweled hem on their garments. The orbs which are carried by the archangels are represented as flat discs and one can notice the same punch-hole technique on them. One of the main byzantine examples for comparison is the famous Berlin ivory, perhaps representing the crowning of Leo VI in 886.

We should observe the placing of the Doliskana figures in relation to each other. The curious isolation of the donor in the drum has already been noted, but it becomes less odd if Sumbat is considered in relation to the sculptures around this window. Such a connection is established by the similar inscriptions "Christ exalt our King Sumbat", as a result of which we can assume that

the two archangels beneath the window inscription perform the function of heavenly guardians for the King. In this matter, David Winfield even proposed to identify the Biblical King-Prophet David in the circular frame (sunburst), because it is known that King David was the one from whom the Bagratids claimed their descent. And beneath is a Star of David! So, one might be inclined to interpret it in a way to serve directly this legitimization. Yet, it is highly questionable whether masons (more generally artists) of that time were aware of its meaning. It is difficult – and somewhat risky – to firmly say that they intentionally used the Star of David to establish a direct connection with the Bagratid family, and so to serve a political purpose. It is a controversial issue. Indeed, based on the latest research, Prof. Michele Bacci suggested that in that period it was just a cabalistic and merely decorative motive.

Unfortunately, below the circular frame or *imago clipeata*, the inscription makes very likely that the figure depicted is the deacon Gabriel. Some scholars have suggested that this Gabriel, protected by the archangel Gabriel, his guardian, who has the preeminence over Michael thanks to a little circle-shaped detail carved on his costume, is the mason responsible for the sculptures of Doliskana.

But there is one problem because the sculptures, as well as the inscriptions, can be divided into two stylistically divergent groups.

Indeed, Wakhtang Djobadze makes a distinction between two groups of sculptures. According to him, one mason must have executed the two-line inscription on the keystone of the window of the south crossarm. This inscription displays the same accuracy and precision in rendering the *Asomtavruli* letters as in the architectural decorations. On the other hand, there are other inscriptions, executed by the deacon Gabriel, which share flaws that are characteristic of the first group of carvings. And so, Djobadze thinks that the architectural sculpture was executed by two masons.

In Doliskana, the deacon Gabriel is mentioned in two inscriptions, once below his portrait and again on the eastern part of the southern porch as deacon and teacher. So, this means that despite

his artistic shortcomings, he enjoyed prominence as a teacher and deacon. It is interesting because it has been suggested by scholars that this Gabriel may have been not only a sculptor but even an architect who built the church.

In this region, Serapion of Zarzma, who lived in the same period, was not only renowned as a church father but was considered “very knowledgeable and trained in architectural skills”. He participated actively in rebuilding the monastery of Opiza. A similar situation existed in Syria – Georgia and Syria being interconnected in ecclesiastical matters and Georgian monks having the habit to stay in Syrian monasteries.

Our deacon Gabriel could have been the builder of Doliskana, but this is not certain. This is a very complex topic, and I will not enter into the details. According to Wakhtang Djobadze, the construction technique and some architectural considerations speak against that.

Now, we can wonder: who was the builder of the church? The original church of Doliskana must have been built, according to Djobadze, by an anonymous master mason shortly before 945. And one may also wonder: why before this date and not during the rule of Sumbat I? In the *Life* of Gregory of Khanzta, Georgi Merchule, enumerating the monasteries established by Gregory in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, states that “Doliskana became a monastery later”, namely after the death of Gregory in 861. Since Merchule completed his biographic work of Gregory of Khanzta in 951, Doliskana could not have been built during the rule of King Sumbat I in 954-958 but a few decades earlier. It means it can have existed only before 951. From an inscription located on the church’s south porch, one could suppose that it was built during the rule of Adarnase’s son, Bagrat, who died in 945. On the other hand, the presence of the relief depicting King Sumbat in the dome, who was the second son of Adarnase and Bagrat’s brother, leads to the conclusion that Sumbat only finished the construction of the church. Soon thereafter, the better economic conditions in Tao-Klarjeti stimulated renewed building activities. This must have led Sumbat Kuropalates (954-958) to embellish the southern facade and the drum, where he incorporated his image with the model of the church in his hands. For that he needed two masons: Gabriel and an anonymous one.

This conclusion, according to which the church was built under the rule of two kings, and not only one king is corroborated by an inscription in the niche of the southwest porch, which says: “Jesus Christ (help) our kings (Sumbat and Bagrat) builders of this holy church during the Last Judgement. Jesus help!”

Notice the way Gabriel is depicted in the solar clipeus. Analogies are possible with Armenian examples of bust-length figures within circular frames dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries at Ptghni monastery (Ptghnavank), and several 10<sup>th</sup> century examples on the walls at Aghtamar. Such figures in medallions are relatively common in Byzantium. They are then spread in Russia, on facades of the cathedrals of St. Dimitri at Vladimir and of St. George at Yuriev Polsky, 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Finally, over the window of the south crossarm, is an omega-shaped brow. Its face is curved with a continuous strip of palmettes, which can be interpreted as an indicator of different artistic practices. Indeed, the motive appeared in the 10<sup>th</sup> century in some manuscripts produced in neighboring monasteries, but also in some textiles woven in Byzantine workshops and in Georgia or neighboring Armenia. We must bear in mind that a textile trade route went through the territory of Tao-Klarjeti. And it seems that such textiles have been available not only as a fabric but also as ready-made garments, some of which being sent by Byzantine emperors to Georgian noblemen (see sculptures of Duke Bagrat and David Magistros in Oshki).

On the south façade of the church, there was an interesting sundial, where twelve equidistant radiating segments were carved with fourteen letters. When N. Marr visited Doliskana in August 1904, the sundial was used to regulate the irrigation of the orchards. A similar sundial was on the south facade of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (now destroyed) church of Ekeki. Another one existed also on the south facade of Phoka church.

Doliskana is the earliest known church in Tao-Klarjeti that shows that polychromy and sculpture on the facades had become typical practices. Such embellishment occurs on the

keystone of the apse window of the eastern facade, and on the semicircular space between the keystone and the window brow of the south facade, where one can see blocks painted in yellow and red. It seems that the practice of accenting windows with polychromatic radiating blocks appeared for the first time in Doliskana. By the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, it became mandatory for all churches of this region to articulate in this way the upper parts of windows (e.g. Khakhuli, Oshki, Parkhali and Otkhta Ekklesia).

## VII) INSIDE THE CHURCH

Two stories are discernable. The upper story was used as the mosque. The lower one was used as a storage room.

The dome is supported by four stepped arches. The transition from the square to the circular base of the drum is achieved by stepped pendentives, flanked by two teardrop-shaped segments which have a decorative rather than structural function. A similar architectural motive appears about a decade later in the church of Kumurdo (964).

It is interesting to notice that the architectural principles of the facades of the drum are reflected inside, below the cupola (other examples of that kind are Goghiouba, Zegani, Yeni-Rabat and Ishkhani).

We also witness a process towards simplification of the architectural structure, most visible on the walls and at the junction between the walls and the vaults. Doliskana shows a new step in the evolution of architecture of Tao-Klarjeti (see for example Kumurdo and Khanzta for better comparison).

Originally, the interior of the church was decorated with frescoes, but Pavlinov had found in 1888 only fragments in the apse, where he saw two rows of saints. Nicholas Marr translated

Georgian inscriptions with names and he also discovered in the conch fragments of an image of Christ on Throne.

In the apse, the paint has vanished, which has left the masonry bare in the lower part. But on the southern part, one can still discern four bishops, two of whom are painted with a subtle pastel green color. Above them are the remnants of two saints (only their feet are preserved). The two rows are separated by a decorative frieze.

It seems that the dome was decorated with wall paintings too. Perhaps, this part was occupied by a glorious representation of the Ascension.

In the western part of the south crossarm is a partially preserved ottoman inscription, which is religious in content (passages from the Koran). Next to it is (or was?) another large inscription: Ali Rajab Ali. Doliskana is the only church with such inscriptions among the churches of Tao-Klarjeti.

A far lot more can be said about this monument. And the last up-to-date interpretation of the architectural sculpture of the church is in the wonderful book *Medieval Georgian Sculpture*.

Presentation made *in situ* on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2019, within the framework of the Seasonal school “Tao-Klarjeti: History and Heritage of Movable and Immovable Monuments” (08 - 16.09.2019).

Rjmi Terryn

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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.

## Ishkani

Irene Giviashvili

Ishkani is located in the high mountainous village of the same name Işhan, overlooking once a beautiful valley of Chorokhi river. The village belongs today to the vilayet of Artvin, once being part of the historic Tao region of Medieval Georgian Kingdom. Ishkani functioned as an important ecclesiastical center until the Ottoman occupation of the region in 16-17th cc.

On the site of Ishkani the remains of a grand domed church and a small hall chapel are survived; in recent years, during the excavations of the site remains of several other churches and structures were revealed. Studies of the Ishkani started with E. Takaishvili, who visited the monument during his field survey of 1917. Ishkani was largely discussed by W. Djobadze. Ishkani became a turning point in started the studies of Georgian monuments in Turkey. Dr. Mine Kadiroglu has dedicated her Ph.D. and later a monograph to Ishkani. Ishkani became a gateway through which the Turkish scholarship later was built. Ishkani is the first Georgian site in Turkey, where the restoration works started. The restitution project was made by Anfora Mimarlik Restorasyon, and the restoration works were conducted by the firm Osman Gulsum (2012-2016), the conservation works of the frescos and the floor was made by ArkIstanbul. Since the rehabilitation of the site, it has been closed and is inaccessible for the visitors.

History of Ishkhani goes back to the VII century. According to The Life of Saint Grigol Khantsteli, written by Giorgi Merchule, Grigol together with his disciples visited the site and found the church abandoned and widowed. His nephew Sabah fall in love with the place, and came back, restored it and became the first bishop of Ishkani.

*„And when they reached the vicinities of Ishkhani, God revealed to the blessed Grigol and Saba the original greatness of Ishkhani and the holy churches of the site, and he announced to them that it would be restored again to its former state by the hand of Saba. And the trail to get there was shown to them, for at that time this place was inaccessible to man. And when they arrived in Ishkhani they were very happy to find this glorious place, because it had everything to provide both material and spiritual consolation“ (ch. 15).*

According to Giorgi Merchule, the first church in Iskhani was built by the Nerses Catholicos (640-661), who had come from Iskhani and later became the patriarch of Armenia (D. Lang, 1956:135-153). *„ By the will of God, Saba became the bishop of Ishkhani – of the main church built by the blessed catholicos Nerse [my emphasizing] – and of his throne which for many years had been widowed. Now again the spiritual wedding took place, and the church was built a second time [my emphasizing] by this blessed [Saba] with the material support of those God-imbued kings“ (ch. 26).*

The passage has commonly been interpreted in that way that the Armenian catholicos Nerses III Shinogh (641-661), who, according to Sebeos, was a native from Ishkhan, had built a church in his native town, either in the 630s, that is before he became the catholicos of Armenia, or in the 650s, during the years of his exile in his village of Ishkan. There is no single word in Armenian texts on Nerses connections with Ishkan and his construction activities here. This silence has meaning. It's obvious that for Armenians Ishkani remains as an estranged

monument- as it serves to the religious needs and values the Georgian-Armeno community of the miaphysite faith.

The main building of the site is a large cross domed church (36.60 m in length, width 19 m at the crossing; western arm 15 m. long and 9 m wide; height is about 35 m; the dome height is 11.40 m; diameter 7.86 m). Built of a yellowish sandstone of a moderate size, facades are clad with the smoothly cut stones in even rows. The tall conical roof of the dome is covered with the tiles glazed in dark red and green. Four arms were originally covered with stone slabs, but after the restoration were covered with the tiles too.

Church has a unusual planning that is the result of several reconstructions. The eastern side of the church comprises of an elevated apse surrounded with the open exedrae. The semicircular wall of the apse is covered with the conch. The apse is elevated and it comprises an open exedra. A horseshoe-shaped arcade whose arches rest on eight monolithic columns with decorated cubic capitals opens on to a rectangular ambulatory. It is a narrow corridor, that also connected to the side chambers. The rooms flanking the apse have upper stories and are open into the interior with the double arched openings.

The dome rests on four free-standing massive pillars that mark the junction of the cross. The dome is tall and covered with the blind arcade (16 niches). The western arm of a single nave is longer (16 m) than the northern and southern arms and divided in 5 equal bays with blind arcade. On the north side of the western arm is a long and darkroom, on the opposite, on the south, there are remains of several chambers, that does not exist anymore.

From the outside, the church has a cross-domed shape, typical to the architectural monuments of the Caucasus. Its facades are clad with the smoothly cut yellow sandstone, but in several parts, the existence of non-cladding (south wall of western arm) indicates, that originally the church was built in more modest quality. Ishkani is not rich with the figural reliefs, but its geometric and floral ornamentation, together with the blind arcade, that marks all facades and the drum of the dome, makes the church of an elaborate design.

The original floor (reviled and conserved 2012-16) it is made of red black and white lime was covering the whole interior with the floral and geometric ornamentation.

Church was covered with frescos, but it has survived mostly in the dome and badly on the walls of the church. The dome is covered in Lapis lazurite and comprises the Ascension of the Cross. Four massive figures of angels are floating the cross in the sky. Below this scene, repeated four times at each axis, is a two-wheeled chariot, drawn by four winged horses and driven by a standing figure. Above each chariot, there is a Georgian inscription mentioning the colors of the horses. This repetitive scene is generally accepted as depicting the "Vision of Zachariah" (6:1-6) from the Old Testament. Within the blind arcade of the drum, eight standing figures alternate with eight windows; On the arches of the window jams, there are the busts of other holy figures.

Ishkani is particularly rich with the inscriptions, that were scattered on its stone facades and also written on the plaster. The oldest inscription is over the entrance that connects the north-western chamber to the western arm. „*In chronicon RLZ (= 137) in the month of September Z (= 7) with the help of Christ and the blessing of the holy Catholic church by the*

*orders of Adarnase, King of the Georgians, our blessed Father Basil was appointed as bishop, and he served this holy church (of Ishkhani) 17 (= 19) years with outstanding dedication and in complete faith, and he entrusted his soul to God in the month of December 15 (= 26) on Friday. May Christ rest his soul, amen. After him by the orders of our glorious (and) worthy kings – may they be exalted by God – David, King of the Georgians, Ašot Kuropalates, Bagrat Magistros (and Sumbat Antipatrik) dispatched to Greece-Trebizond our honorable, worthy Father Stephane, and he was consecrated as archbishop (of Ishkhani) by the hand of the honorable and God-imbued Greek Patriarch Basil in the month of March 1 (= 1) Sunday. May God endow him benevolently with success, amen. [...]*” (translation by Djobadze, based on Takaishvili’s reading).

The second inscription which is of interest in order to clarify the building history of the cathedral of Ishkhani was located in the west arm of the cathedral. It was read by Taqaishvili in 1917. Below the portraits of three princes, who were depicted together with the military saints St George and St Theodore, were the painted inscriptions which identified them as “Adarnase Kuropalates, son of Bagrat Magistros,” “Bagrat Magistros, king of the Georgians [ქართველთა მეფე],” and “Bagrat, eristavt eristavi, son of Adarnase Kuropalates.” The group portrait thus rendered the representatives of three generations: the first mentioned Adarnase (d. 961) was the father of Bagrat, eristavt eristavi (r. 961-966), and David Kuropalates (r. 966-1000), the two princely brothers, who later founded the church at Oshki (963-973). Bagrat Magistros (d. 945), on the other hand, was the father of Adarnase Kuropalates and thus the grandfather of Bagrat, eristavt eristavi.

The third and most visible inscription is located over the porch on the south facade. The inscription is cut in beautiful letters, following the semicircular shape of the tympanum stone. The inscription was covered in red and blue paint. It reads: *„In the name of God, I, miserable Antoni, bishop of Ishkhani renovated this porch of the holy Catholic church for the glorification of kings: King Giorgi and his children, for (the) prayer for the soul of Bagrat Kuropalates, (and) for forgiveness of our sins. Holy Catholic church aid and protect us before God and be our abode during the awful day of retribution before the universal judge (so that) we can be worthy of forgiveness for our sins and of (the) benevolence of God. I beseech all entering (through) this gate to commemorate me in (your) prayers“.*

The king mentioned in the first line of the inscription and in its main corpus is the anti-Byzantine Georgian king Giorgi I (r. 1014-1027), the son of Bagrat Kuropalates, first king of the united kingdoms of Georgia (1008-1014). Giorgi’s enduring political conflict with the Byzantine emperors Basil II (r. 976-1025) and Constantine VIII (r. 1025-1028) explains why he is mentioned without any of the customary Byzantine honorary titles.

Another important inscription is made on the upper part of the same facade, around the large window and its decoration. In analogy to the inscription of the south portal, the first line is carved onto the profiled brow above the window opening, while the rest of the inscription is carved onto the stone facing to the right of the window. Altogether, the inscription reads:

*„In the name of God, I, Antoni, archbishop of Ishkhani, renovated and completed this temple of God, the Catholic church for (the) glorification for Bagrat Kuropalates, for prayer and for the commemoration of my soul and for the forgiveness of my sins. Chronicon was SNB (= 252). And I built (this church) with the hand of Iovane Morčaisdze“.*

The inscriptions discussed above together with the architectural remains give us a general idea of the different stages in the construction of the cathedral of Ishkhani that stretched over a long time. They enable us to establish the following relative chronology.

Taqaishvili who visited the monument in a more complete state in 1917 believed that the eastern exedra was a remnant of an early tetraconch building. This conclusion was based on several factors. According to *The Life of Saint Grigol Khantsteli*, written by Giorgi Merchule, the first church in Iskhan was built by the Nerses Catholicos (640-661), who had come from Işhan and later became the patriarch of Armenia (D. Lang, 1956:135-153). The second factor Işhani has an open exedra on its eastern side, the motif of which characterizes Zuart’noc Cathedral, a famous memorial building in Armenia built by Nerses; The established fact dating the eastern exedra of Işhani to the 7th c was correctly rejected by Dr. M. Kadiroğlu in her monograph dedicated to Işhani (M. Kadiroğlu,1991:55). Dr. Kadiroglu argues that the Işhani exedra comes from the second building period of late 9th and early 10th cc., though the pillars may have been reused from the 7th c church. Nicole Thierry, who has analyzed the remaining wall paintings of Ishkhani, including those of its dome, arrived at the conclusion that the entire interior of the cathedral must have been embellished with wall paintings during the second half of the tenth century. If this is correct, this would mean that the construction works that were carried out in the 950s and early 960s concerned not only the west arm of the church but the entire structure of the cathedral as we know it now. Consequently, its interior must have been completed before 966, the year when Bagrat, eristavt eristavi, died. Since it in several important points resembles the contemporary church at Oshki (963-973), founded by Bagrat, eristavt eristavi, and his brother David Kuropalates, a construction date around 960 for the cathedral at Ishkhani seems not at all unlikely.

If the main shape and the scale of the church were created during David’s times, the embellishment of it took place when Anton became a bishop. He was responsible for the coverage of all facades with the beautiful cladding, adding the porch and richly decorated moldings, he must be behind the floor that according to the parallel material is dated as of the 11th c.

Opposite of the main church, on the south, stands a small chapel, with a plain facades and with the richly decorated porch, that mentions the Georgian King Gurgen and the year of construction, 1003. The date is given in Armenian letters. The small chapel has a fresco painting, that shows a scene of communion in the apse wall and Christ Pantocrator in the conch.

During the rehabilitation works a large number of churches were revealed. There was a small basilica, two hall churches and a number of monastic structures.

Number of burials were discovered, mostly from the medieval period, also from the times of Russian-Turkish war, when the church was used for worship by thy Russian troops.

Later, within the Turkish rule, the mosque was open in its western arm. Today, the church is closed and not accessible for visitors. The reason is a floor: the problem of how to make the interior accessible and save the original floor remains unsolved.

Ishkhani with its unique architecture, decoration, amazing mural paintings and inscriptions was always been considered as an outstanding monument of Georgian history and culture, a monument that deserves acknowledgment as an important piece of the world's heritage.

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## Khakhuli

## Monastery

Location: historical Tao, modern-day Haho/Bağbaşı

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The Khakhuli monastery was founded by David III of Tao (r. 966-c.1001) in the 960s before he was bestowed the title of *kuropalatesin* 978 for his participation in crushing the revolt against Basil II. Described by Giorgi Merchule in his mid-tenth century vita of St Gregory of Khandzta as “a builder of holy churches and a collector of religious writings”, David III co-founded Oshki with his brother Bagrat II (961-966) and founded the monasteries of Parkhali and Otkhtawhich represent extraordinary revivals of basilical architecture. These buildings are large and strikingly original structures. Little of this scale has survived from the Byzantine world from this period.

Located up a western bank of the Tortum River in modern-day Bağbaşı village, Khakhuli was once a sizable and populated monastic complex and is the only one of David’s foundations which is mentioned in medieval historiography. The chronicles describe it as “God’s throne – the holy church of Khakhuli”. The main site is enclosed by 3m high walls and comprises of the *katholikon*, a small church, three chapels and oratories as well as remains of other structures which may have served as a refectory and a scriptorium. Southeast of the complex there are remains of another hall church and 1km west of it, on top of a cliff, there lies another chapel with a panoramic view of the Khakhuli valley.

### Interior

In the very heart of the walled enclosure of the complex lies the *katholikon* dedicated to the Theotokos. This cruciform domed building is traditionally dated to the 960s and reflects the early cross-dome plans. Construction techniques and materials used are essentially the same as for other churches of Tao-Klarjeti of this period. Eastern arm is tripartite, with 4 by 3m apsed *pastophoria* on either side of the apse. The *pastophoria* do not have access to the sanctuary but rather open into the transepts as at Tbeti and Dolisyana. Similarly to the Otkhta Church built in the 970s, there are rectangular niches with gabled tops on either side of the sanctuary for the accommodation of icons.

One of the most striking features of the interior are eight niches built into the semi-circular wall of the apse which rise from floor level to a height of about 5m. Such niches gained popularity in the tenth- and eleventh-century Georgian and Armenian architecture. Wachtang Djobadze believes that the origin of this architectural motif must be sought in the early Syrian churches of Tur Abdin, citing the example of the church of el ‘Adhra. Another noteworthy architectural element of the interior is the 3m high niche found in the north-west pier of the dome. It is most closely comparable to niches from David’s other foundations, Parkhali and Oshki. When Djobadze visited the site, several fragments of painting were still visible in the upper parts of the niche and he argued that the image would have represented the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. According to recent scholarship, niches like this were allocated to important members of the ecclesiastical community, local lords or rulers of the region who would have stood there during services. Indeed, the niche at Khakhuli contains still contains remnants of a one-line inscription in *asomtavruli* which mentions a local ecclesiastical figure.

## Wall paintings

The fragments of high-quality wall paintings that survive in the dome (Glorification of the Cross and Ascension of Elijah), sanctuary (a row of apostles), south arm (Entry into Jerusalem), north arm and west wall (which features an intriguing image of a *ktitor*) have been variously dated to the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.

## Stonedecoration

The figural carving of the church is mostly concentrated around its south door where we find an unusual cycle of images executed in low relief and conveying ideas of the triumph of the Christian religion, of the Resurrection, of the ultimate Ascension to Heaven. The tympanum over the door is decorated with the scene of the Exaltation of the Cross featuring four angels with abnormally large faces. Representations of the subject appear frequently in both Georgian and Armenian churches from the sixth century onwards, when there is a sixth-century example at Jvari in Mtskheta, and a tenth century example at Aghtamar Cathedral in Lake Van. An arch of the south gallery, which was added in the fourteenth-century, cuts across a part of the tympanum and partially covers the three reliefs to the left of the door. These include a griffin, a lion fighting a bull and an image of Alexander the Great's Ascent to Heaven in the upper register, one of the earliest representations of this subject in the South Caucasus. Previously it was erroneously identified as an Old Testament scene of Daniel in the Lion's Den which was a widely popular choice for stone decoration of facades of tenth-century churches of Kartli. At Khakhuli, Alexander is depicted as a young, beardless man with a halo rather than a traditional crown or diadem which he wears in the Byzantine examples of this iconography. The halo coupled with his general resemblance to images of the young and curly-haired St. George underscore Alexander's divine origin and perceived equality to Christian saints rather than his associations with divinely endorsed kingship which David III may have sought to stress in his royal foundation. On the right side of the south door we find images of St. Peter holding the key of Heaven, an Old Testament scene of Jonas emerging from the whale's mouth and further down a cock and a lion.

## Khakhuli triptych

The Khakhuli triptych, one of the most venerated icons in Georgia, derives its name from the Khakhuli monastery where its central part was kept throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In the 1120s, the central image of the supplicating Theotokos was transferred to the Gelati monastery (Western Georgia) at the request of David IV (r.1073-1125) and his son Demetre I (r.1093-1156). It was soon after the transfer that the enamelled icon was incorporated into a triptych, and in this manner reconfigured and reconceptualised to look decidedly Georgian. Its history before the transfer to Gelati is poorly documented and its first mention as the icon Khakhuli in historical sources is found in David IV's will and testament of 1125.

The central part comprises three surviving enamels of remarkable size corresponding to the Theotokos's face and hands. The repoussé background is now lost. The face measures 11.5 by 7cm whilst the hands are 9 by 5cm, making these fragments the largest pieces of enamel to survive from the Christian East.

In *Greeks Bearing Gifts* (published in *Medieval South Caucasus*, 2006) Antony Eastmond dates the central icon to the late tenth century and argues that it is a Byzantine gift from Basil II to David III after the defeat of Bardas Skleros. This is in opposition to most Georgian literature which argues that these three enamels are Georgian in manufacture.

## The Khakhuli Dome Decoration: Eschatological and Historical Context

Ekaterine Gedevanishvili LV

Khakhuli monastery is located in the historical Kingdom of Tao in modern-day Turkey in one of the gorges of the Tortrum river. Cathedral of the monastery was one of the series of large-scale churches and monasteries founded by David III of Tao (ill.1) in the second half of the tenth century. The present paper is dedicated to the dome decoration at Khakhuli and it aims to demonstrate the contextual complexity of its iconographic programme.

The summit of the dome features a monumental image of the Glorification of the Cross, a theme that has a long history in medieval Georgian art (ill.2). The image represents the widespread version of this subject referred to in scholarship as the “Vision of Constantine”: a huge cross is depicted against the starry sky and enriched with the theophanic elements such as a mandorla and radiating rays behind the arms of the cross. As noted by Tinatin Virsaladze and other art historians, the Khakhuli painting follows the dome decoration of the neighboring Iskhani church (ill.3) as well as Manglisi church (ill.4) which similarly feature the elevation of the cross by four Angels in their domes.

The significance of the theme of the “Glorification of the Cross” in medieval Georgia is unmatched elsewhere in the Byzantine world. Even though the theme frequently appears in the art of Cappadocia, Cappadocian material cannot come near to Georgian examples in terms of the consistency of appearance, iconographic diversity and richness. That is why this theme has come to be regarded to be a traditional iconographic choice for the Georgian dome programmes. Its popularity is explained mainly by its eschatological context – the image of the triumphal cross relating to the theme of the Second Coming of the Lord and the Last Judgment. However, in secondary literature the popularity of the subject in Georgian art is also linked to the historical events described in *Kartlis Tskhovreba* or *The Life of Kartli*, the principal historical source and chronicle of medieval Georgian history. Giorgi Chubinashvili linked this pictorial theme to the actual events described in the Georgian sources. In this light of particular note is the section that describes the elevation of the crosses in the capital of Iberia - Mtskheta by newly converted Georgian king Mirian and the apparition of the cross over the city. Events symbolically related to

the vision of the cross to Constantine the Great (312) and the famous miracle of the apparition of the cross over Jerusalem in 351, thus, emphasizing the belonging of the Church of Georgia to the Ecumenical Church having national history of its own. The “Glorification of the Cross” of Georgian dome decorations seems to follow iconographically the texts describing the miracles which took place in Mtsketa; the event that is regarded as a symbol of Christianization of Iberian Kingdom in Georgian history.

In Georgian monuments the theme of the “Apparition of the Cross” is often accompanied by the image of the “Deesis”. The Old Testament themes also often appear in the dome— the row of prophets holding appropriate texts, or representations of more narrative scenes which feature prophets, for example Zechariah in a chariot as seen in Ishkhani murals (ill.5), or even the cycle reflecting the biblical story featured in the thirteenth-century katholion of the Kirants monastery (ill.6). In the murals commissioned by the famous Mkhargdzelis family, the band of the bottom of the dome is occupied by scenes from the life of different prophets. The Khakuli case can be regarded as a variation of these choices, since it is the scene of the Ascension of prophet Elijah which appears there (ill.7). The latter is presented beneath the huge cross on the southern section of the dome. In the scene of the Ascension of Elijah, the prophet is generally represented as ascending to the heaven in a quadriga mostly driven by four horses; that is regarded in patrology as a symbol of four main virtues of man. In most cases he is presented together with Elisha receiving *his mantle*.<sup>1</sup> *The Khakhuli image represents traditional version of this scene combining two episodes of the story. What is unusual here, is that behind Elijah appears the figure of Angel identified by Asomtavruli inscription as “Raphael”.*<sup>2</sup> Archangel Raphael is considered to be a protector in the prophet’s journey, and it seems that the inclusion of this specific angel in the composition can be explained by this aspect of his service – he accompanies the Prophet Elijah in his sacred journey to heaven.

Let us now consider the iconography of the Ascension of Elijah in the broader context of dome programmes of Georgian churches, since several comparable examples can be cited here. We have

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<sup>1</sup> For iconography of this scene see: M.Kadiroglu, N. Peker, B.Isler, *The Iconography of the Scene of Ascension of Elijah in Capadocian and Tao –Klardjetian Wall Painting*, p. 100- 101

<sup>2</sup> At a first glance, an inclusion of Archangel Michael would have been more understandable here, thanks to the liturgical texts of the Ascension feast telling the meeting of Archangel Michael with Prophet Eliza, focusing on the theme of the Ascension of the prophet to the heaven and the second coming of the Lord.

already mentioned the dome of the Kirants Church (ill.8) where among the Old Testament scenes the Ascension of the prophet occupies a prominent place. This episode from the Old Testament is also attested in the Nikortsminda Church decoration (ill.9). These murals are dated to the 17<sup>th</sup> c, although according to Virsaladze they follow the scheme of the original, 11<sup>th</sup> c. layer of the painting. The scene of the Ascension of Elijah also appears in the early twelfth century on the ceiling of the Natlismtsemeli monastery in the David Gareji desert, demonstrating the transition of this theme from the dome program to the domeless decoration.

Virsaladze traditionally explains the dominance of this theme in the dome programmes of Georgian churches by its eschatological context. It is well known that Prophet Elijah is one of the most important protagonists of the Old Testament story. He occupies a special place in Judaic as well as Christian Eschatology. According to Judaic tradition, he is a “messenger” of the Messiah and restorer of God’s people, whereas in the Christian tradition he is considered to be the “witness” and forerunner of the Second Coming of the Lord. Thus, the inclusion of the prophet entering the heaven by means of a chariot of fire? on the “heaven” of the dome, alongside with the Vision of the Cross is considered to be a reference to the biblical story of his Ascension and the final events of the history. I would argue that the representation of the Ascension of the Prophet alongside the Glorification of the Cross illustrating the “end of the world” could also contain historical references; and can be related to one of the most precious relics kept in Georgia – the mantle of Prophet Elijah which was left to Elisha as a witness of his corporal Ascension and promised return into the world. According to medieval Georgian chronicles *Conversion of Kartli* the mantle of Elijah was allegedly brought by Jews driven out of Jerusalem during the siege of Nabuchodanazzar. According to the ecclesiastic tradition it was buried with the Chiton of Christ that was brought to Mtsketa by the Jewish priest Elioz in the main church of Mtsketa - the Svetitskoveli – rereferred to in the Georgian sources as the “Holy of the Holies” or the “Mother of all churches” (ill.10) . The transition of these relics and the foundation of the most sacred site became the basis of “Jerusalimisation” of Mtskheta. Thus, the popularity of this theme in the dome programmes can be related to the relic of the Svetitskoveli cathedral and, the Georgians refer to this biblical story not solely for its eschatological interpretation, but as a *memoria* of one of the major shrines of the Georgian Kingdom. This association in medieval thinking should have been more vivid. If we take into account the importance of this relic as reflected in Georgian historical sources, as well as in a large number of deeds, this symbolical link appears highly plausible. What

makes it especially significant is that in Georgian sources the mantle of the prophet is always cited in conjunction with the shroud of Christ. Indeed, in the *Conversion of Kartli* these two relics seem to be inseparable in its significance. It is obvious that in Georgian spiritual history the mantle is perceived to be a “forerunner” of the major relic and palladium of Georgia – the shroud of Christ. Their unity and presence in one and the same sacred space - the Svetitskhoveli cathedral, stands for the fulfilment of the Old and the New Testaments in “new Jerusalem” of the city of Mtsketa. It is obvious that the importance of the relic of the mantle stimulated the special cult of the prophet in Georgia as attested by the folk feasts dedicated to St. Elijah, numerous churches dedicated to him, or many toponyms inspired by his name. Even the prominence of the sheep’s cloth of Elijah attested in the Georgian folk feasts is regarded to be an influence of the importance of the mantle relic in Georgia, by ethnographers.

It is noteworthy that according to all existed versions of the texts of the conversion of Kartli the first Christian king of Georgia was converted into Christianity on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June; on the very day when the church commemorates the feast of the “Ascension of St. Elijah to Heaven”. If we take into account a very special role of the prophet Elijah in patrology, this ‘coincidence’ would show a deep symbolic roots: The Prophet Elijah defended the worship of the Hebrew God, returning the Hebrew people to the right faith, because of that, by significance he is sometimes compared to the lawgiver Moses. He is considered to be a protector of the royal dynasties and we find an epithet of “protector of the Kings” in reference to Elijah in the Akathist text. The royal aspect of his cult seems to be especially pronounced in Georgian history, since the first Christian king of Iberia was converted on the feast day of the Great Prophet. Thus, St. Eliajah and his mantle believed to have been buried in Georgia became a natural protector and palladium of the Georgian state. Therefore, the representation of this biblical episode at Khakhuli may be interpreted as a distant remainder of “national” relic of the country. The local importance of this theme may have encouraged the designer of the Khakhuli murals to give it such prominence in the overall programme. It is noteworthy that the painter distinguished it even by a manner of execution: the curves of the flowing drapery are comparatively thick and differ from the rest of the painting by expressiveness remotely reminding the partitions of the enamel work (ill.12), thus differentiating this image from the others stylistically. It cannot be accidental either that the whole composition differs from the rest of the painting by the choice of colours.

The key to understanding the context of the Khakhuli image can be found in the murals of the chamber of the David Gareji monastery from the Udabno desert. Here the scene of the Ascension of the prophet Elijah appears alongside images from the life of St. Nino, apostolic saint of Georgia. The principal wall-paintings represent the history of conversion of Kartli, among which the miracle of the Svetitskoveli – the life-giving pillar attracts a special attention. According to Zaza Skhirtlaze the inclusion of the scene of the Ascension of the prophet in the programme representing the history of conversion of Kartli can be variously interpreted – in general mantle stands for the symbol of divine grace left by prophet on the Earth. It can also be interpreted as a symbol of the unity of the Old and new Testaments in the Svetitskoveli Cathedral. I would argue that the symbolic link to the Svetitskoveli church in the murals of the chamber is further stressed by the images of the Trinity and that of the Ladder of Jacob. Both of them appear as important symbols of the life-giving pillar of the Svetitskoveli in the famous twelfth-century *Sermon on the Living Pillar, The Lord's Tunic and the Catholic Church* written by catholicos Nikoloz Gulaberidze. The ladder of Jacob is presented in the text of conversion of Kartli as a prefiguration of the burial place of Christ's Tunic and that of the mantle of the prophet Elijah. Therefore, the murals of the Gareji reveal the “national” overtones of the overall programme giving a palpable allusion to “second Jerusalem” or new Jerusalem of Georgia with the reference to its main Locus Sanctus.

The symbolic link to the sacred city of Mtsketa is supported by other ecclesiastical buildings commissioned by the tenth-century king David Curopalates. One has an impression that Svetitskoveli symbolically ‘re-appears’ in all churches commissioned by this influential ruler of Tao –Klarjeti region. For instance, note the prominence of the image of Zion included in the sanctuary programme of the Otkhta murals (ill.14) . Zaza Skirtladze interprets this image as a symbolic allusion to the Mater Ecclesia of Georgia, the Svetitskoveli Cathedral, which in some Georgian sources is referred to as the ‘Church of Zion’. Even the choice of the basilican plan for a group of splendid churches commissioned by David of Tao in historical Tao is considered to have been inspired by the old Svetitskoveli church. The sculptural decoration of the Oshki church is worth evoking in this regard (ill.15) - the image of St Nino carved into one of the pillars in the south gallery obviously promotes the remembrance of this major church of Georgia, illustrating the miracle of the erection of the life giving pillar of the Svetitskoveli. These allusions seem to be natural??. Along with the special significance of Mtskheta as the ecclesiastic capital and spiritual center of Georgia, the political situation of the country should be taken in account. Unifications of

kingdoms generally took place through the hegemony exercised by central regions. In Georgia, we have a very atypical case, whereby the unification started from what was traditionally considered to be the periphery of the country, since traditional centers of the kingdom, such as Kartli, were occupied by Arabs. In fact, the kings and aristocrats of Kartli were exiled by Arab emirs to the southern part of Georgia and the former worked towards unification from this very part of the country. Thus, the symbolic reference to the “heart” of Georgian kingdom, the Svetitskovieli, so to say, *Axis Mundi* of Georgian church and state – evidenced in ecclesiastic building campaign carried out by David III of Tao may well contain political undertones. It demonstrated the spiritual unity of Georgia and the idea of its political unification which was about to be begin.

This attitude is fully ‘illustrated’ by the inscription preserved at Samtavro, one of the main churches of Mtskheta (ill.16). Unusual inscription on the triumphal arch tells the story of coronation of the Bagrationi king from the Tao region in Mtskheta. The latter is identified to be the king Adarnase II who was the first to receive the title of the Georgian King” after the abolition of the kingdom of Kartli by Sasanians in the sixth century. This eleventh-century inscription reflects the restoration of Kartvelian monarchy in Mtskheta, and it was considered to be so important by the later restorers of the church that it was repeated and saved as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, Mtskheta the site of coronations of Georgian kings and of consecration of catholicoi, maintained the significance of spiritual center even in the period under Arabian rule and the inscription cited here gave a special emphasis to this circumstance. It is instructive that during the centuries everywhere?? Mtsketa the formal capital of Kartli is called the “capital” - metropolis of Georgia , the word that stands for the meaning of the Heavenly Jerusalem in patrology.

I would also argue that the reference to one of the “national” relics in the Khakuli church might give also evoke concrete associations relevant to Byzantium, where the cult of the Prophet Elijah was strongly promoted. It is well known that the prophet Elijah was proclaimed to be a patron saint of the Emperor Basil I and in course of time the prophet became one of the most important patrons of the Macedonian dynasty, contemporary to David III’s rule Nea Eklesia built by Basil I was the most ambitious church building erected in Constantinople since the sixth century<sup>3</sup>. One of the most important relics of the church was the sheepskin of the prophet Elijah.<sup>4</sup> The feast of the prophet on

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<sup>3</sup> Observations on the Nea Ekklesia of Basil I, p. 52-53.

<sup>4</sup> 58.

the 20<sup>th</sup> of June was especially important to this site. According to the typikon of the great church in the Nea “a more splendid festival is celebrated, with the Emperor and senate and patriarch assembling there”.<sup>5</sup> It is inconceivable that king David Curopalatos was not aware of this Byzantine practice. Support for this historical parallelism can be found in a special personality of David III per se. David III “kurapalatos of whole East” was the dominant ruler of Caucasus; the most distinguished representative of the Bagrationi family in Tao. His rulership is regarded as a turning point in the history of unification of the Georgian lands. After his successful campaign against the rebellion of Barda Skleros in 979, he conducted a more active policy of independence from Byzantium, breaking away from the shadow of powerful Christian neighbors to the west.

Thus, the claim of possessing this precious relic, strongly promoted in ancient Georgian historical sources and Georgian visual art, gave a special authority to Georgian sovereign, possibly reflecting the challenge to Byzantium pretending to possess the actual relic. Moreover, it is well known that Emperor Basil I promoted his symbolic connection with the biblical kings David and Solomon. The sermons of Nea Ecclesia openly attested to this attitude and aspirations of the Emperor. The Biblical provenance of the Bagrationi royal house was a well-known topos by the tenth century. The special importance of this theme was reflected even in the writings of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, according to which Iberians claimed to be the descendants of the Biblical King Davit and consequently the progenies of the Virgin. Notably, none of the dynasties in the history of Byzantine Empire succeeded in establishing the idea of their Biblical origins, the fact that gave a special privilege to Georgian sovereigns. The representation of the Ascension of Alexander the Great (ill.17), the widely-recognized archetype of the powerful ruler, on the southern facade of the Khakhuli church demonstrates the scale of ambition of Georgian rulers who overtly challenged the might of Byzantium.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that the text of conversion of Kartli elaborates the statement that the relics buried in Georgia – the mantle of Elijah and the Chiton of Christ had implications not only for the past and the present but also in eschatological terms, and their time would in fact come when they “appear in glory over the world”. This future-centric context is strongly emphasized in a number of Georgian royal documents. Thus, in medieval Georgia both of these relics carried eschatological connotations, and their conceptualization was linked to their active protection of

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<sup>5</sup> Basil I p. 195.

the Georgian kingdom, but also to a special mission which Georgian kingdom was to embark on in “future time”.

## Khandzta Monastery

In the late eighth century St. Gregory initiated a large monastic movement in Klarjeti region. After he spend two years in Opiza monastery, St Gregory in around 782 established his first monastery here (Khandzta, Shatberdi, Nunneries – Gunatle, Mere; Ubisi – in west Georgia). During the centuries this monastery was the most important centre in Klarjeti, it was some kind of principal base of monastic colonies in this region. As V. Djobadze characterizes the monastery, “*it was destined to revive once again the national identity of Georgia by mobilizing its spiritual forces against the Arab overlords*”.

The complex consists of several buildings, from which some are in ruins: the main church dedicated to St George, Bell-tower, ruins of a refectory, a tiny chapels and three rectangular cells in three stories. On the west there are a spring and a small barrel-vaulted chapel above it, which according to V. Djobadze should have been built in 820s. On the outside of the monastic enclosure, on the southwest (some three hundred meters) of the monastery on top of a hill there are three small barrel-vaulted chapels. When in 1904 Niko Marr visited the monastery, he described several buildings which now no longer exist: he identified the seminary or library, storage rooms and other subsidiary buildings on three layered terraces, as well as winepress on the southwestern side.

The first church, constructed by St Gregory, as well as cells for monks and refectory were built with wood. In the 820-s the wooden church was replaced by the masonry church with the material support of a local nobleman Gabriel Daphanchuli. Since then this monastery became a resting place for Daphanchuli family, but only for male descendants of Gabriel Daphanchuli; as for women, they were buried in Gunatle nunnery (Shavsheti). The Vita of St Gregory keeps numerous interesting information including the description of rules for the everyday, monastic and liturgical life in the monastery. According to the Vita, while working on monastic rules, Gregory of Khandzta asked a friend who was on his way to Jerusalem to write down the Sabaite rule/Typikon and bring it back to Georgia. In about 826 Gregory’s friend handed him „*The Rule of Mar Saba*“, according to which Gregory compiled his own. This story described in the Vita once again shows how closely Georgia was connected to the Holy Land and especially to the monasteries established by Sabas. In the Vita this description occupies important part of the text, part of the text below vividly illustrates everyday life of monks: „*During the first days of our Blessed Father Gregory, the typicon for his disciples was very strict. There was a small bed within their cells, a few meager items, and a vessel for water, whereas there was nothing else to give comfort to the flesh, neither food nor drink. They only*

*received sustenance when they ate together at trapeza, this was how they lived. Many of them did not drink wine at all and those who did, only partook of a little bit. They did not have a fireplace in their cells, because fires were not lit, neither did they light a candle at night. Instead the night was spent in Psalmody and the day was spent reading books”.*

From the early tenth century, a new wave of construction activity started in the region caused by the increased number of monks on the one hand, and by the growing power of their donors on the other. In 910s and 920s the monastery of Khandzta underwent significant renewal, commissioned by the member of the royal family Ashot III Kukhi, when in 918 Ashot died, the main church still was not finished and it was completed by Gurgen Duke of Dukes, a nephew of Ashot. Another quotation from the Vita of Gregory regarding the construction of the church: *„Through Arseni’s (Arseni was an abbot of the monastery) initiative, the new and beautiful church was started upon a bare, uncompromising cliff. After much time they cleared a place through extensive labor with rock and mortar, made all the preparations for construction, until it was completely built. May Christ bless Amona, the wise builder and all those who helped, through whom the church was victoriously built. Men brought rock and mortar on their backs from a great distance upon a difficult path. “*

The church built by the architect named Amona is one of the outstanding monuments in terms of artistic and technical quality. The church is an inscribed-cross structure with a dome supported by apse projections on the east and two free-standing piers on the west. The facades of the main volume remain plain, while the dome is more elaborated. Geometrically crystallized octagonal shape of the drum is vivified not only by the decorative arches on double colonnettes, but also by the broken line of cornice and the roofing in the form of a half-opened umbrella. When V. Djobadze studied the church he noticed the well-preserved purple pigments on the double colonnettes, based on which he suggested that these collonettes were painted in purple.

*“Amona obviously was aware of and respected the architecture of the previous times, for this church he applied graded scheme of the squinch system with three rows of squinches, which never appears after the 7<sup>th</sup> c in Georgia and its neighboring countries. A tall octagonal drum is erected above four big squinches. In the upper corners of the drum we have eight smaller squinches and above them 16 diminutive ones are made. This reminiscence witnesses for Amona’s knowledge and appreciation of classical forms rather than for his conservatism”* (D. Khoshtaria). The church was painted at some point, from which only few fragments has survived.

So the Khandzta monastery, namely the main church of St George “*turned out to be hotbeds of new architectural ideas. Amona, as the “builder with great wisdom” constructed the church which heralds new developments in the architecture of the region. It shows that the previous humble churches built of roughly cut stone corresponded no more to the aspirations of the time. With a lots of novelties, such as the blind arches on the drum and the broken line of cornice, wide omega shaped adornments above the windows, the church is considered as a predecessor not only of Opiza and Doliskana churches, but the churches built by David Kurapalate in Tao*” (D. Khoshtaria).

On the south of the main church there is remains of the **refectory**, presumably also built by Amona. This was a rectangular structure divided into two equal parts by four pairs of cruciform piers bearing five pairs of arches. The only entrance to the refectory was from the north side directly facing the southern door of the main church. Underneath the refectory there is a basement storey, perhaps a room used as a kitchen. Between the church and the refectory a tiny church and cells are erected, dated back to the 10<sup>th</sup> c. Such planning of the two most important buildings (church and refectory) of the monastery should have been determined by the regulation/typicon of the monastery. Typically refectories are situated to the west, south and north of the main church and doors of the church and refectory are facing each other. 13<sup>th</sup> c. Typicon from Shiomgvime monastery, as well as some other typicons of different monasteries in Byzantine, describe the procession which took place after the conducting the divine liturgy. According to the typicons after conducting a service the monks were gathered near the door of the church and headed to the refectory, chanting the Psalm (Psalm 144, 1-7). The monks took seats in accordance with a hierarchy and the meal was served. Then the reader would begin to read texts from the Gospel or from the lives of saints and the brethren would start having meal. After the meal, the reader was obliged to clean up plates and dishes, and the cook had to put leftovers in a basket. Then some prayers were read and afterwards the monks left the dining hall.

Apparently, the above-described regulations that required the monks to collect near the door of the church after holding a service and follow together to the refectory, determined the location of a church and a refectory in the monastery. This procession meant that the church and the refectory should be situated close to each other, in a way that the monks could walk freely from one building to the other.

On the west we have two-story **bell tower**, which must have been built in the fourth decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> c. On the walls of the bell-tower there are two inscriptions, which mention the builders of it: hieromonk Markoz, Anton and stone masons Abesalma Kldeli, Kamiri,

Kazani and Msakhura. Markoz, mentioned in the inscription is the same person who is also mentioned in the Sinai Georgian Synodikon, that is the Sinai commemorative Chronicle, as „builder of the Bell-tower in Khandzta“. According to Synodikon, Markoz from Klarjeti, in about 1545 moved from Khandzta to Sinai (in the monastery of St Ekaterine).

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### **Kumurdo**

The church of Kumurdo takes up a special role in the development of Georgian architecture, as much due to its unique spatial layout as to its – attested – early building date of 964, mentioned in the inscription of the main portal tympanum.

*“With God's help, the bishop Iovane laid the foundation of this church by my hand - of the sinful Sakostari, in the time of King Leon - may he be glorified by God - in koronikon 184 [=964 CE] the first of May, Saturday, at the new moon, when Zvia was eristavi; this foundation was laid by him. Christ be a fellow fighter to your slave, amen.”*

A second inscription, placed on the eastern façade, once more secures God's mercy for the Bishop Iovane. It must be one of the largest and most visible ones in medieval Georgia: the bishop made sure that his memory would remain present for beholders centuries to come.

### **Original structure of the 10<sup>th</sup> century**

The church built under Iovane appeared cruciform from the outside, with short cross arms to the north and south, a slightly longer one to the east and an even longer but narrower one to the west. A dome surmounted the crossing, today missing. This seemingly simple spatial structure hides a very complex inner disposition, in a way typical for Georgian architecture from the late 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards. A hexagonal dome bay is surrounded by lateral apses and a variety of divided spaces in the West and East. The internal tripartition of the eastern parts of the church is perhaps the most common element; the elongated central bay with apse flanked by pastophoria is known since the 7<sup>th</sup> century and becomes ubiquitous under the Bagratides.

#### Exterior

In consequence, the eastern façade with the large inscription can be integrated quite easily into the large group of buildings with a straight façade interrupted by triangular niches, marking the space between the apses. Here, the niches are much higher than the central window, (unlike, for example, the early example of Tsromi), but there are no blind arcades decorating the surface (as in Oshki and many other places). Emphasis is put on the decorative value of the excellently carved, pink stones (everything in grey is part of the 1930s and 1970s restoration campaigns). Shallow cross reliefs and ornaments decorate the smaller windows, while the central window possesses an unusual double frame which integrates figures of the evangelist symbols on both sides. It is remarkable that the architect used a dark red stone for certain elements such as a cross in the gable, which is not made as a relief but nevertheless becomes visible through the colour effect.

The lateral façades follow the same system, but as they hide only two apses – as we will see on the inside -, there is consequently only one triangular niche in the middle of each façade, flanked by windows (with the more ancient type of hood moulds).

All that rests of the western cross arm exterior is the (later added) surrounding porch.

#### Interior

Unlike the exterior suggests, the interior is a centralized space, once dominated by the dome. The dome rests on six piers, which form a hexagonal crossing bay. The lateral cross arms are divided in two axis by the lateral piers of the hexagonal dome bay. Behind their straight exterior walls, two apses on each side are hidden. This combination of hexagonal dome bay and “radial” apses is usually connected with the group of centralized multi-apsidal churches such as Bochorma (10<sup>th</sup> c) or Katskhi (11<sup>th</sup> c). The only church with a vaguely similar plan (even if closer to the model of Katskhi) is the cathedral of Nikortsminda, also of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

The western cross arm is largely destroyed today. Older drawn reconstructions suggest that it had a U-shaped tribune running along lateral and western walls. This would have found parallels in the early solution of Tsromi, with its “emperor tribune”, or the later example of Bagrati Cathedral in Kutaisi, to name just a few. At the same time, the presence of aisles and a tribune in the nave is a distinctive factor if for example compared to Oshki, built right around the same time. There the western arm is indeed also narrower than the choir, but not divided by piers or filled with a tribune.

The system of vaulting appears rather straightforward in Kumurdo. Barrel vaults surround the central dome. The six piers which carry the dome are of simple polygonal shape; only above the capital a system of stepped moulded arches and responds is developed. Similar piers appear in Oshki – there only the eastern pair of the four dome piers. The transition to the dome is made possible with small stepped squinches inserted into larger pendentives. The function of the squinches is not so much to create a transition from polygon to circle (of the dome) but rather to house sculptures [here: Queen Gurandukt, mother of Bagrat III and King Leon]. We know little about the destroyed dome. Of the drum remains the lowest layer, including odd niches with a cusped arch. Could these be additions of the attested 16<sup>th</sup> century remodeling [inscription above the precinct portal?]? This would mean that, similar to other large Georgian churches, the dome had already been destroyed a first time during the Middle Ages.

Of the barrel vaults the choir one is best preserved. It shows one remarkable element, the transversal arch resting on corbels placed high above the ground – instead of the more common stepped wall piers. This raises questions for the possible reconstruction of the nave: did the vault arches rest on protruding stepped piers there or were the piers flush with the rest of the wall - then a similar solution as in the choir would be thinkable for the vault.

The drawn reconstruction proves to be somewhat contradictory: while the lower piers indeed are not stepped, the upper, tribune ones carry the wall piers under the transversal arches – thought in 3d, this is practically impossible, as the upper piers would protrude over the lower ones. In consequence, it appears that one of the distinctive features of Kumurdo church is the use of corbels instead of wall piers, giving preference to undisturbed surfaces (for the application of paintings?) also on the inside.

### Southern Porch

One of the most interesting features of Kumurdo Cathedral is the southern porch. It seems to be one of the earliest examples of a porch placed in front of the southern portal (and not alongside the western cross arm), which has the shape of an individual chapel with own eastern apse. The origins are open – perhaps it was inspired by solutions such as that of Samshwilde (before 777), where a pastophoria-like chapel was placed at the eastern end of the southern porch wing. Later, in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, these chapel-porches become widespread and often, as in Manglisi take the shape of a miniature dome-hall church with a figured umbrella vault marking the central “domed” bay. In Kumurdo, the porch only consists of a square bay, a small barrel vault and the apse to the east, as well as an even more miniature version of the same spatial concept forming a chapel in the wall strength between porch and church. It is not certain how the spare

bay way vaulted. Squinches with small angel figures remain in the east, but if they supported a rounded dome as in the main church or filled the corners of a vault similar to the ones of the Oshki porch, has to remain open.

The function of such porches is still not entirely clear, but the apse, together with the prothesis-like side chamber, speaks for a liturgical or ceremonial use of the space. A key to the interpretation of the space's function might be the many inscriptions, studied by Antony Eastmond. That of the portal tympanon has been mentioned before. In the centuries after the church was built, numerous commemorative inscriptions were added around the foundation inscription, occupying primarily the northern wall around the main portal. They mention feast days fixed in honour of probably local noblemen – according to Eastmond containing an almost legal character in announcing the consequences (before God), should the feast not be celebrated in the intended way. Again according to Eastmond, the careful graphic layout as well as ostentatious placement would make the inscriptions some kind of “textual icon”, an object “serving as representation of truth with access to the divine”. We must thus assume that the liturgical use of those porch-chapels was strongly connected to questions of personal memory and preoccupation for the afterlife – perhaps as placement for an altar, where masses for the deceased would be held.

A parallel case for this is Manglisi, where the porch-chapel contains inscriptions of similar content and sometimes almost identical formulation – yet, they are decisively less elaborately carved. Would this contradict Eastmond's interpretation? Apparently, there, some decades later, the visual quality was losing importance and the focus was laid on the content conveyed by the texts. Also, in Manglisi several inscriptions of similar content appear in entirely different locations, such as on the outer church walls or on the outside of the porch. Was this choice made in a hope for better visibility, compared to the dark interior of a porch chapel? Many questions remain open.

### **Western Porches – Expansion of the 11th century**

In any case, the topic of porches remained an important one. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, under Bagrat IV, the western cross arm was surrounded by a large U-shaped porch, a feature present in Georgian architecture throughout the medieval period (presumably once developed from the type of the Late Antique “Dreikirchenbasilika”). The porch was richly decorated with blind arcades resting on slender double colonettes, typical for the architecture of the Bagratide period. The two central arches of the southern porch wing were entirely open towards the outside, again a very common solution for most porches alongside the nave or western cross arm; similarly common the fact that it possessed its own apse as well.

An interesting feature is the building inscription that runs along the entire porch below the stringcourse. Large inscriptions in this area of the building are rare, but at the same time geographically widespread during the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries: for example there is one in Cufic letters at Hosios Loukas in Greece, a number of examples adorning Fatimid Mosques in modern Egypt and a late one, in Greek letters, at the Martorana church in Palermo from the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Sculpture - Royal Images**

Apart from the Evangelists of the Eastern window and the hard-to-interpret heads in the triangular façade niches, it is in particular the two reliefs from the dome squinches, which attract interest. The female figure is identifiable as Queen Gurandukt, mother of Bagrat III, through an inscription. It was through her that Bagrat III received Abkhaseti and was able to unify Georgia.

The man opposite does not possess an inscription. It might be that it is her brother King Leon III. According to Eastmond, the reliefs are the only example for royal imagery of the kings of Abkhaseti.

### **Planned Reconstruction**

Even if the ruin already contains considerable parts of replaced masonry, reconstruction works are supposed to continue, much as in the case of Bagrati Cathedral. This caused controversy, as the church is contested between the Armenian and the Georgian church. Furthermore, the reconstruction of dome and western cross arm cannot rely on evidence but will be a complete invention. In the choice of forms for these parts, it is well possible to reach a falsification, making it stylistically lean more towards the 11<sup>th</sup> century Bagratid stylistic idiom than underlining the transitional status (geographically and temporally) that the church indeed has. In particular the dome is a problem: in following the proposition of Chubinashvili, the reconstruction plan shows a dome drum with a large blind arcade, much alike for example the one of Ishkhani, but also similar to the other 11<sup>th</sup> century dome drums, which we still have. However, as explained, Kumurdo has a very specific preference for unarticulated surfaces – can we nevertheless expect this kind of decoration for the dome (as is the case in Manglisi), or would the dome not rather have followed the principles of the lower façade zones?

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### **Church of the Holy Cross in Manglisi**

The cathedral of Manglisi, also known as Manglisi Sioni and dedicated to the Holy Cross until at least the 15th century, is one of the first important sites of Christian faith in the country and remained of central cultic importance far into the medieval period – as we will see when discussing the structure in detail. The current building is a result of at least three large construction campaigns: one in late Antiquity, one in around 1020 to 1027, as is revealed by several recorded inscriptions, and a last one in the 1850s, resulting in the loss of many original features.

In terms of historiography, the church was rarely in the focus of scholarship. While it created considerable interest in the early days of scholarly investigations in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when many of the now-lost inscriptions were recorded, only two articles of the 1920s (Chubinashvili, Shanidze) and a monographic treatment of the 1960s (Dvali) followed. This is even more surprising as the church remains a unique exception among the many 11<sup>th</sup> century churches of Georgia in several aspects, as well concerning the typology of the architecture as the – presumed- history of its creation.

#### **First building phase**

The church is one of the most ancient foundations in Kvemo Kartli. The legendary account of the Kartlis Tskhovreba claims that it was King Mirian himself, who had asked the emperor Constantine to send Greek stonemasons and carpenters to erect the church. Constantine would have accepted this and not only sent stonemasons but also gave them valuable relics – the suppedaneum of the True Cross and the nails of the crucifixion in order to help endow the church of Manglisi and that of Erusheti.

This legend is of central importance for understanding the unique building history of the church – even if, in fact, the bishopric was only established under King Vakhtang I Gorgasal of Iberia (\*449 †502/522) in the years between 472 and 484. A bishop of Manglisi appears in synodal lists of the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, and we might assume that a cathedral was in existence at that point. In the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenian catholicos forbids his people the pilgrimage to the venerated relics of Manglisi and thus indirectly confirms a thriving cult and supraregional importance of the church.

Since the work of Chubinashvili, the first church is imagined as a tetraconch inscribed in an external octagon, of which everything but the eastern conch would be inscribed in today's building. Indeed, the peculiar shape and remarkably low proportions of the medieval church testify to this: in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Late Antique church was only encased in a new shell of ashlar and equipped with a new eastern end and porches. One peculiar feature of the first church remains: small chambers with apses placed in the wall strength in the corners between the conches, which originally were open towards the exterior and possessed doors to the interior. The closest parallels to this arrangement can be found in the later 5<sup>th</sup> century churches of the Kathisma and on Mount Garizim in Palestine, both erected at biblical memorial sites. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of centralised triconch or tetraconch buildings of the late antique period had a memorial function or marked important sites of veneration. Thus, it is probable that this shape was chosen in connection with the veneration of the Cross relics mentioned already in the early legends.

The eastern end of this building, replaced in 1020, is of uncertain shape – it might have mirrored the western half, with a conch and small spaces in the diagonal axis, or have shown a more

classical tripartite choir. As a consequence of this uncertainty, we also cannot confirm that the first Manglisi church indeed played a key role in the development of the Jvari-type, as sometimes postulated, or is rather part of a parallel development.

Finally, one might wonder if a tetraconch church of the rather modest dimensions still perceivable could have served as pilgrimage / memorial church and cathedral at the same time. Perhaps, one might speculate, there was a second church, a basilica more in line with the architectural standards of early cathedrals in Georgia. This would have been abandoned in the medieval period, when building activities were focused on the revalorisation of the venerated and venerable centralised structure.

## **Second building phase**

In the early 11th century, during the reign of George I. (1014–1027), son of Bagrat III., the original building was enlarged and adorned with sculptural decoration of the period. The remodelling of the church entirely changed the exterior appearance. In the first step, a rectangular transept-like bay and an adjoining tripartite choir with central apse and two pastophoria was added – following the standard scheme of Georgian architecture of the period. Subsequently, the original building was fully encased in a new outer shell of ashlar and a high dome drum was erected, encasing a dome resting on pendentives. Finally, two porches were added to the west and south.

Building joints help to distinguish the phases, most prominently one at the junction between choir and northern wall, indicating the latter's posteriority. The western porch seems to have been a decision taken during the encasing of the old core, while the southern porch belongs to a third phase but cannot be much later than the rest.

Sculptural decoration is – rather unusually – limited to the blind arcades of the porches and the dome drum as well as the carved window frames. These are all heavily restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even if a drawing of Giorgi Gagari of the 1840s confirms that the church never collapsed, making its dome drum one of the few preserved from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, together with Nikortsminda (the domes of Oshki and Ishkani are slightly older). However, one has to treat many parts of the sculptural decoration with care, as various idiosyncratic details such as the fa ade crosses were added rather arbitrarily.

In any case, the medieval remodelling created a church very much in the style of the 11th century, but different from the newly erected ones of the period. Its rather low proportions and the dominance of the centralized nave underline this difference just as much as the importance given to undecorated surfaces of well-cut large ashlar masonry.

It is here that we have to briefly talk about possible reasons for the remodelling. Already the fact that the building was remodelled, and not rebuilt from scratch requires explanation: it appears to be the only case for such a procedure in 11th century Georgia, at least among the more prominent churches. Together with the apparent intention to somewhat update the decoration, but not hide the differences to cotemporary new buildings, it seems clear that there was an agenda to visualise the old age of the church even after the remodelling. This can be connected to the tradition of a pilgrimage, of a relic veneration at this site – according to legend one of the longest lasting traditions of a relic veneration in the entire country. This tradition was supposed to remain visible, to be conveyed by the shape of the ‘upgraded’ church. The medieval beholder would presumably not have taken note of details such as ornamental decoration in the same way we do this now; however, he would have been able to distinguish aspects such as spatial shape, proportions or the dominance of plain ashlar walls. All this must have been aided by an oral narrative certainly present on site, which would have additionally ‘activated’ the memorial qualities of the building (to use a term coined by Stephan Albrecht in the discussion of similar strategies of conveying tradition through architecture in the abbey of Saint Denis).

Unfortunately, the building inscriptions, which were recorded, do not tell us who commissioned the rebuilding, but in turn are rather clear on the dates. Eugene Brosset's translation of the lost

southern octagon window inscription, originally containing the donor's name, is as follows: "In the name of God, through the intercession of the Living Cross, I was considered worthy, me, the poor [...] to build this holy church, to pray for my soul. It was the year 240 [1020]" He found another now lost fragment, mentioning a consecration in 1027, while Shanidze mentions another previously overlooked fragment, which reads "[...] during the reign of Giorgi, ruler by the God over the East, *Novelisimus*". This, together with another fragment mentioning 1020, it appears clear that the remodelling took place in around that year, with another consecration – perhaps of the southern porch, which was added later and possesses its own apse – in 1027. All this indeed falls into the reign of Giorgi – and, additionally is confirmed by the sculptural decoration absolutely typical for the 1010s and 1020s.

Controversy about who commissioned the church was sparked by the reading of an inscription in the apse of the southern porch, below the window, today half covered by a 19th century altarpiece. Brosset read the last decipherable word as "Baghou[...]r[...]". which he completed to Baghouach Liparit. Ever since, the idea was entertained that the church was indeed remodelled on behalf of the Liparitids, relatives of the powerful Armenian Orbelians and engulfed in a "family feud" with the Bagritids during much of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even if the inscription is evidently not sufficient to confirm the assumption, we additionally possess a manuscript of 1047, executed in the convent of the Holy Cross of Manglisi and commissioned by Liparit *Eristaw of Eristaws* – this confirms the close relations of the family to the site in Manglisi around 20 years after the remodelling. Additionally, the church possesses many parallels in shape and decoration to the monastery church of Katskhi, which served as family mausoleum to the Liparitids during much of the period in question: this church is of characteristic octagonal shape as well, perhaps indicating an inspiration from or reference to the building in Manglisi.

Finally, if we accept this theory to be true, the remodelling of the ancient church with a strong interest in showing its ancient roots, would have been a purposeful political statement. The honour to be responsible for the revaluation of one of the oldest sites of veneration in the country would have reflected on the family's tradition, shown its status as equal to that of the Bagratids and in a way legitimating the family's claim for power. Manglisi would, in this reasoning, have become for the Liparitids what Jvari was for the Bagratids.

## **Paintings**

The remains of medieval paintings in Manglisi, presumably executed after the remodelling of the building in the 1020s, are fragmentary. Still covering the entire church in the 1840s, the restoration of the 1850s seems to have wiped away all but those of the drum and dome.

In the centre of the dome the Glory of the Cross (also e.g. in Timotesubani, Ishkhani), which is a rather usual scene but in the case of Manglisi receives a double importance, as it refers to the veneration of the cross relic as well. Further references to the cross are made in the portal gable and in the porch vault (the design of which is closely related to models originating perhaps in Oshki).

A small figure riding on a lion has been interpreted as Saint Mamasor personification of the sun (elaborate?/discuss?)

In the drum, Christ is shown as central part of a Deesis with the Virgin and John, as well as eight prophets.

## **Remarks on individual building parts**

(for the discussion during the visit)

Eastern end: the typical layout developed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Jvari/Saint Hripsime in Vagharshapat) and further developed until the medieval period. This type (with flat eastern wall and two pronounced niches between the apses) for the first time in its 'perfection' in Tsromi

(626-634).

The Manglisi solution is much closer to the 7<sup>th</sup> century examples than to contemporary ones: niches have the same height as the central window and are subsumed under a common hood mould, instead of a continuous blind arcade (in Manglisi only used for the porches).

A possible model would be Samshvilde (759-777), at 20 km distance but today largely destroyed. The non-hierarchical treatment of the heights appears also on some Armenian examples of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, for example Marmashen.

### Octagon:

The folded roof structure is particularly typical for Armenian churches, such as Xckonq (1025) or Marmashen (1029), there usually only applied to the dome itself. A folded circular roof for the lower zone of a centralized building is rather to be found in Georgia: Bochorma from the 10th century and Katskhi, 1010-14.

The dome drum is most comparable to Katskhi (before the 19th century restoration) and Nikorts'minda (before 1014). A difference lies in one small but decisive detail: the introduction of a triple colonette in the blind arcade, where other contemporary churches resort to a double colonette. While not changing the overall appearance a lot, this detail demonstrates an understanding of the systematic connection of the colonettes with the arches above: in Manglisi, the outer arches of the blind arcade are merged on top of the capitals, logically requiring a third, central support below the capitals, while for example those in Nik'orts'minda die into each other a good bit above the capital. The triple colonette system is in use much later for such prominent buildings as the Church of the Virgin in Gelati (after 1106).

### Porches:

Most remarkably, the southern porch possesses a central pronounced vault and an apse to the east. It appears to have not only functioned as a transitional entrance space but also as an in some ways autonomous chapel in dome-hall shape. The combined porch/chapel type as it appears in Manglisi appears to be a development originating from the tradition of 'Dreikirchenbasiliken' of the 6th century. The church of Oshk'i, before 973, possesses a small open porch to the south of the central triconch structure and another one along the southern side of the nave, mirroring a closed elongated space to the north, both with eastern apses embedded in the wall strength. Structurally the later examples differ: already in K'umurdo, before 1000, we find a fully developed porch-chapel of a single bay, whereas the southern porch in Nik'orts'minda originally did not possess an apse, the current chapel to its east being a later addition.

The strong presence of commemorative inscriptions as well in Manglisi as in K'umurdo might indicate a use of these spaces in memorial contexts.

## **Inscriptions of the Holy-Cross Church in Manglisi mentioned by Brosset 1851, Brosset 1859 and Shanidze 1926**

### I. Building Inscriptions

#### 1. Southern Octagon Window – lost

Brosset 1851 [2]: "... to commemorate my soul, mine, of the bishop Cuirice [Khatchce], who was considered worthy to build this Holy Church ..."

Brosset 1859 [4]: "In the name of god, through the intercession of the Living Cross, I was considered worthy, me, the poor [...] to build this holy church, to pray for my soul. It was the year 240 [1020]" Shanidze 1926: mentioned, but not republished

#### 2. Inner Southern

Brosset 1851 [4]: "C[...] has built this great church in the easterly year 240 [1020]"

Brosset 1859 [6]: "[...] this great church was built, it was the year 240 [1020]"

3. Unknown (Above a Window or doorway?) – lost  
Shanidze 1926 [3]: “[...] during the reign of Giorgi, ruler by the God over the East, *Novelisimus*”
4. Stone Fragment – lost  
Brosset 1859 [10]: “Glory to you, Lord, [...] was consecrated in the month of February, the first day of the moon, in the year 247 [1027]”
5. Fragment in the Precinct Wall – lost  
Brosset 1851 [3]: “[...] Gabriel has built”  
Brosset 1859 [5]: “[...] Gabriel has built”  
Shanidze 1926 [10]: did not find the inscription
6. Western Porch – not traceable  
Shanidze 1926 [8]: illegible except for “[...] bishop of Manglisi [...]”
7. Precinct Tower  
Brosset 1859 [11]: “Christ Lord, have pity with Arseni, bishop of Manglisi, and the artisan Theimouraz. In 355 [1647]”  
Shanidze 1926 [11]: “Christ God have mercy with the master craftsman and archbishop of Manglisi Arsen, February 355 [1647]”

## II. Memorial Inscriptions

### 8. Southern Porch, Next to Apse Window

Brosset 1851 [6]: “Holiest Lord [...] archangel, we offered for an agape, in favour of our son; the priest and the bishop will read mess for him for two days. Whoever changes this, will pay for his sins. Christ, have mercy of Baghou[ach and of Tzkhov]r[eba]” (Alternative ending: Baghou[ach Lipa]r[it])

Brosset 1859 [8]: “On 8<sup>th</sup> of November, feast of the Archangel, I made an offering for an agape, in favour of [...] all the priests and the bishops who will read mess. Whoever changes this, will pay for his sins. Christ, have mercy of Baghou[ach Lipa]r[it]”

Shanidze 1926 [7]: “On the 8th of November, the day of Archangels [I] donated an agape to [commemorate] Tevdore son of Vachinai with evening prayers [liturgy], whichever priest will be pray for him. Whoever changes this, will pay for his sins! Christ have mercy on **Bagatur!**”

### 9. Southern Porch, Pillar Base in the Eastern Half

Brosset 1859 [9]: “[...] I established an agape [...] Whoever changes this, will pay for his sins.”

Shanidze 1926 [6]: “ The day of Saint John I donated an agape for every night with evening prayers [liturgy]. Who changes it, will pay for his sins. “

### 10. Southern Porch, Eastern Outside Wall

Brosset 1851 [5]: “Lord, remember the soul of Chalwa and of Constanti Ghodomis-Dze”

Brosset 1859 [7]: “Lord, remember the soul of Chalwa and of Constanti Ghodomis-Dze”

Shanidze 1926 [1]: “Our Lord, commemorate the soul of Ghodom’s sons [...and?] of Constanti”

### 11. South-Western Octagon Window

Brosset 1851 [1]: “Christ have mercy for Aboulidze”

Brosset 1859 [2]: “Oh Christ, have mercy for Saba Aboulidze”

Shanidze 1926 [2]: “Christ forgive Abolira”

### 12. South-Western Octagon Corner – very abraded

Brosset 1851 [1]: “Christ have mercy for Saba Bibilouri”

Brosset 1859 [1]: “Oh Christ, have mercy for Saba Bibilour”

13. Southern Porch, North-Western Pilaster of the Central Bay

Brosset 1851 [1]: “Lord, have mercy for the soul of Soula Saqwarelidze, amen”

Brosset 1859 [3]: “Lord, give peace to the soul of Soula Saqouarelidze. Amen!”

Shanidze 1926 [4]: mentioned.

14. Southern Porch, North-Eastern Pilaster of the Central Bay

Shanidze 1926 [5]: mentioned as fragmentary

III. Other

15. Dome

Shanidze 1926 [9]: mentioned as fragmentary

## Murals at Oshki Church

In 1917, during the expedition organized under the direction of Ekvtime Taq'aishvili in historical Tao-Klarjeti, already special attention was given to the church of Oshki. Taq'aishvili gave a brief description of the frescoes surviving in the church and deciphered also the fragmentary donor inscription running along the painted band that divided the two registers of figures below the conch of the main apse.

### Foundation and Date

The church in the small village of Camliyamac, is dedicated to St. John the Baptiste and had been built under the patronage of the rulers of the Tao-Klarjeti Kingdom, **Bagrat the Magistros** (d. 966) and **David III Curopalates** (who ruled from 958 to 1001) in 963-976. David was greatly respected at the court of Constantinople as an important ally of the Byzantine Empire against Arab domination, first as a military supporter of Nicephoros Phocas and later of Basil II, against the rebellious Barda Skelleros. David was widely regarded as the mastermind behind the unification of Georgia, a process finalised 1022 under king David IV.

Given the scale and magnificence of Oshki Church, and its refined sculptural decoration, we must regard this monument as conveying the key artistic aims of the period. It is the crucial projects of the ambitious rulers of Tao-Klarjeti. More than twenty inscriptions survive from Oshki. Of these, the principal foundation inscription is to be found painted over the main entrance to the church in the south transept. This extensive text states that the church was built by Bagrat, eldest of the Bagratids, and his brother Davit III Magistros, the two sons of Adarnase II. It goes on to detail the costs and construction methods of the building. Bagrat and Davit are mentioned together or individually in at least six other inscriptions and a further two commemorate the Byzantine emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII. These date from the 1020s, when Oshki was in the Byzantine-controlled theme of Iberia. All the inscriptions indicate the importance of Oshki to the rulers of this region.

### Inscriptions

The exact dates of the building can be established from two other inscriptions. The first of these, on a stone reused in a later building states that the church was begun on the Feast of the Annunciation, 963, and the second, on the east façade of the church, claims that it was completed within ten years. The first inscription also gives the date of Bagrat's death as October 2, 966, indicating that much of the work must have been carried out by Davit alone. The church was still unfinished. The two Georgian rulers appear together twice at Oshki, once on the exterior and once inside the church in relief. This makes Oshki one of the few securely dated medieval churches in Tao-Klarjeti.

According to another inscription the frescoes in the apse were executed with the donation of **Jojik the Patrikos**, in *koronikon snv*, i. e. in 1036.<sup>1</sup> This painted inscription is among the image of church fathers in the main apse.

*"... I have restored to grandeur and have painted the church of the blessed Forerunner, at the expense of Jojik, patrikos, of charitable soul. My God bless and protect him. Kornik'on was 256 (= 1036) of the Greeks..."*

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<sup>1</sup> Only small fragments of the inscription have survived. For the English translation: Eastmond 1998, 232.

The paintings of 1036 adorned the entire interior of the church. However, over the past century most of these frescoes, which already survived only at separate fragments, have been lost.

Oshki appears to have been not only a sizable monastery but also an administrative centre of the rulers of Tao-Klarjeti as well. But almost nothing of the secular structures has survived. Aside from the main church, a few monastic buildings have been preserved. Some 50 m northeast of the church are the ruins of the refectory, with adjacent seminary and scriptorium. And on the hill about 30 m north of the church may have been the residence of the bishop. A church of such dimensions must have had quarters for the clergy and visitors, a bath, warehouse, and administrative building, all of which may have perished.

### Architecture

The church as a three-stepped platform – traditional for Georgian architecture – and is built with squared and smoothly finished yellowish limestone blocks. The dimensions of the churches increased in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The church in Oshki is a complex, richly decorated, and spacious structure whose interior length without its west annexe is 41, 60 m. Its width equals 27 m, and its height reaches 34 m. Also, a new architectural type evolved. Typologically, it is a triconch, cruciform plan in which the dome is supported by four freestanding piers. The dome is circular and the 24-sided drum has 12 windows openings. The transition from the square bay to the circular base of the drum is accomplished by means of pendentives, which are almost completely covered by huge squinches. These are not functional here and serve merely to adorn the pendentives. Together with the high decorated bases of the piers, they play a significant role in the interior decoration. The columns creating an extra bay in front of each arm. Behind each column and between the corners there are four spaces having a square form on the plan. From these spaces' doors are leading to the side chambers. The east-, north-, and southarms of the church are terminated by semi-circular apses, while the westarm consists of a long barrel-vaulted, latin-cross nave. The Western arm is flanked with long naves from both sides, on the south there is an open gallery, when on the north there is a dark room. The apse and transepts terminate in conches with side chapels in two storeys (the galleries are now almost destroyed). In Oskhi there are six chambers on the ground floor and six chambers above them. The upper storey rooms are much traditional in Georgian architecture. But there is no single church in the Georgian architecture to have such amount of the rooms. The side-chambers and upper-storey rooms did not exist for structural and aesthetic reasons alone. The majority of them had apses and niches showing that they were intended for liturgical use. Some of them could indeed have been private oratories, while others might have been chapels dedicated to the commemoration of a saint whose relics were kept in them. There is no indication of what kind of relics were kept in Oskhi. The interior of the church can be accessed through three entrances made in the western, northern and southern arms. The latter that serves as the main entrance has a square domed porch. The architecture of Oshki shows that in the 10<sup>th</sup> century the organization of interior masses becomes more complex. In the domed church, the centre of the crossing moved closer to the apse by the elongation of the westarm, the remnant of a basilica plan, which effects an important change in perception of interior space, by evoking a greater sense of monumentality. It is a kind of combination of triconch with inscribed cross type building. Such combination of different architectural structures enabled the architect to enlarge the space of the building.

The remaining blocks in the east apse suggest that originally here, in the middle of the wall, may have been the bishop's throne. There are no traces of any church furnishings left in the apse or in any other part of the church.

This architectural type became a model for the following cathedrals of Medieval Georgia. So, Kutaisi as the closest parallel.

A tripartite, underground, barrel-vaulted chamber, which extends from the south wall of the west crossarm to the south, is now filled with refuse. Taq'aishvili found in it the remains of human bones indicating that it was a crypt in which members of the ruling Bagrationi family may have been buried.

### The oldest Murals

The second half of the tenth century is characterized as a time of building large cathedrals throughout Georgia. Their scale suggests that none of them was originally entirely painted. It is proposed that originally only separate parts (presumably the dome, apse and some parts of the walls) may have been painted. So the adoption and adaptation of the Byzantine complete system of church painting was not considered an urgent task in Georgia at that time, as it was well shown by Zaza Skhirladze.

The interior decoration of Oshki in the decades from the 970s has remained unclear. On the drum of the dome are painted crosses. They display a great range of formal variations. Some of the crosses resemble contemporary processional crosses.

The south pastophorium of the church shows the traditional composition of the glorification of the Lord that was widespread throughout the early-medieval Christian East. Christ on a throne set with gems, surrounded by a mandorla, is flanked on both sides by archangels clad in patrician robes set with precious stones, and by tetramorphs standing on fiery wheels. The lower register separated from the conch by a band of simple geometric ornament, comprises a row of medallions and the frontal figures. In the centre, above the window, are the three medallions: the central one bears the image of the cross embellished with precious stones, while the other two feature half-figures of saints. On the walls of the apse a row of standing apostles was represented on both sides of medallions: seven to the north, and five to the south. The gestures of the apostles vary: the first has his right hand raised in benediction in front of the chest: only the upper part of the halo has survived from the second and third figures; the fourth holds a closed book in his hand; the fifth holds an open book with a nine-line, partially damaged text. The sixth probably also held an open book. Of the figures represented on the south half, only the heads and insignificant fragments of the haloes of the first three figures survive. The last image of this row has survived the best: the upper half of the figure of a beardless young apostle, with his right hand extended forward.

The geometric ornaments preserved on the triumphal arch of the apse, and the fragments of the two scenes, on the south slope of the vault, as well as the traces of painting elsewhere in the space indicate that the interior of the chamber was completely painted.

The scene on the south wall, presented against a classical-type architectural background, probably with Christ to the left, might be a scene of a miracle of healing. A fragment of a composition immediately above it resembles the Annunciation by its scheme, with an angel depicted in the left part.

The style of painting is different from the painting that survives elsewhere in the interior, and bears the artistic features seen in paintings created at monastic artistic centres of the ninth-

tenth centuries. This dating is supported by the palaeography of the inscriptions in Georgian *asomtavruli* script, which is close to the calligraphy of tenth-century manuscripts.<sup>2</sup>

All this suggests that originally only separate parts may have been painted. The practice of fully adorning the church interior with fresco images in Georgia must have become finally established from the first decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

#### The Stelae

Two funeral stelae came to light in the passage of the pastophorium from the south apse 2003. There is an inscription on the eastern wall of the south-east chapel that refers to its connection to Bagrat the Magistros. It was ascertained that the stelae bore portraits of the Tao rulers – King David and his brother Bagrat, together with the Virgin and St. John the Baptist. 16 Georgian *asomtavruli* inscriptions were recorded on both stelae, based on which they were dated to the 966-973. Thus, precisely this section must have been the burial place of the donor-builders of the church. This supposition is supported by the fact that the principal donor image was placed on the south façade of the chapel – a large-scale relief image of the Deesis flanked by the figures of Bagrat the Magistros and David the Curopalates in imperial robes.

#### The Paintings of 1036

Jojik was a Georgian nobleman of high standing, honoured with the dignity of Patrikios, who served as strategos in Dorystolon. Of Jojik's decoration little survives. Some church fathers stand in the apse, and some fragmentary scenes exist in the south conch. The painting of the huge, vast apse incorporated the image of Christ enthroned between two archangels in the conch, below it the orant Virgin and St. John the Baptist between two rows of the Apostles, and finally the figures of Church Fathers and deacons.

For a long time, the south apse of the church had been converted into a mosque by local residents. The fragmentary painting, still visible while the mosque stood, was fully revealed at the structure's demolition in the early 1980s. The main composition occupies the middle register of the central section of the apse, between the two windows and over the main door. The heads and shoulders of three figures are now lost, but their identities can be established from the surviving fragments, as well as Taquaisvilis photographs of 1917. It is certainly not an ordinary Deesis, as the photo shows the torso and face of the right-hand figure, in which it is clearly a man in secular dress. John the Baptist stood in the centre, holding a scroll inscribed in Georgian (John 1:29), with an unidentifiable bishop wearing an omophorion to his right with and a secular figure to his left, who wears a mantle clasped at the breast and a tall turban. This could represent the donor, Jojik patrikios.

To the left, the entire length of the eastern wall of the apse must have displayed a large, multi-figure scene of the Crucifixion, of which only fragments at present. Of the depiction only the lower right part, showing the mourning apostle John, the centurion (holding a shaft rather than a lance), the one with the sponge, and the group of men who are shown in the moment of terror whilst they recognise the Son of God (Matt 27, 54) survives. The figures are rendered with an astonishing degree of empathy and expressivity.

The composition represented to the right of the central scene, on the western wall, is also fragmentary, it shows two groups of secular figures approaching the cathedral of Bana in Tao, which is identified in an inscription. Behind Bana is Davit *kuropalates'* foundation of Otxta Eklesia (now Dört kilise in Turkey), which is also named in an inscription. Although nothing survives to link this scene with the Bagrationis, a royal scene remains the most likely subject for such a contemporary secular depiction. The cathedral of Bana was one of the principal

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<sup>2</sup> Skhirtladze 2010, 108.

royal churches of Tao. It was used for the coronation of Bagrat IV in 1027 and his marriage to Helena, a niece of the Byzantine emperor Romanos III Agyros in 1032. To underscore the importance of this marriage, the Byzantine princess was set off on her journey to the South Caucasus in company with an important icon and a nail from the true Cross. It is not known, where the relic, to which the Georgians developed a great attachment, was kept, but the depiction of the ceremony in front of the cathedral at Bana in the south apse of Oshki commemorated its arrival to Tao.

Since the wall paintings were added to Oshki in 1036, it is reasonable to assume that the scene commemorates one of these important royal events.

As Eastmond has well shown, to place such a royal scene level with a Christological scene suggests that it was designed to carry great weight in the overall scheme, extolling the grandeur of the Bagrationis and their alliance with the byzantine throne. Its location by the main entrance to the church only adds to its prominence.

Narrative depictions of a royal event are very unusual in Byzantine ecclesiastical monumental art. Given the state of the wall painting, it is impossible to come to any firm conclusion about its content. However, the location and size and the scene show that in the 1030s the promotion of the Bagrationis could dominate the decorative scheme of a church. Since Oshki had been under Byzantine control from the 1020s until 1034, as two surviving inscriptions in the church show, this image could have played an important role in the reassertion of Bagrationi rule in the region and in the propagation of its links with the Byzantine imperial family.

The windows jambs between the three scenes contain the remains of images of two women saints, Marina and Thekla.

The niche in the eastern face of the north-west pillar appears also to have had paintings and reliefs, but these images have been purposefully damaged.

The niche in the south-west pillar supporting the dome of the church – the special place of the *erismtavaris* – is also painted. The large-scale figure of Christ in the niche is flanked on both sides with half-figures of the founders, each accompanied by long painted inscriptions written in old Georgian uncial script inscriptions mention the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist. The style of the painting points to its execution in the 1030s.

### Conclusion

The designers of Oshki ha two interrelated aims: to build a church of great scale and high artistic quality, adorning it with highly refined reliefs, ornaments, painted graphic images, and extended inscriptions; and to apply frescoes only to those individual sections with liturgical, memorial or some other function. The complete painting of the south-east chapel must be linked to its funerary role. As a result, its creator never set themselves the task of decorating the entire interior with frescoes.

The later, nonroyal patronage of the paintings and the prominence of the image of Jojik Patrikios demonstrate the importance of members of the aristocracy in the promotion of the royal family at this time.

Oshki had a particular rich monastic life, producing a large amount of manuscripts. Oshki monastery is a manifestation of the cultural, political and spiritual strength of medieval Georgia.

The following literature served as a basis for this overview of the monastery

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### Oshki Sculptures

The history of the Oshki church of St. John the Baptist, built between 963 and 973 in Tao, is closely linked with the 1000-year-old dynasty of Georgian kings – the Bagratians. The “Kingdom of the Georgians”, in academic literature also known as the Tao-Klarjeti region, became a refuge for the Bagratians, who were forced to leave Kartli at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> century, after the creation of the Tbilisi Caliphate by the Arabs. The Bagratians turned Tao-Klarjeti into the cultural and ecclesiastical center of Georgia with a new capital – Artanuji. At the same time, the Georgian kings formed a political alliance with the neighboring Byzantine Empire against common Arabian enemies. The close political and cultural relations with Byzantium were also conditioned by the single orthodox faith. Although within the sphere of Byzantine influence, the Georgian rulers also wished to emphasize their own dynastic power. Therefore, in a region remote from Mtskheta (the spiritual capital of Kartli), a new royal ideology was formed based both on Byzantine culture and the old traditions of the Kingdom of Kartli. Tao-Klarjeti, situated at the intersection of important trade routes, also actively participated in cultural dialogue between the Orient and the Occident. Each of these historical circumstances is perfectly reflected in the Oshki high-reliefs, which are good examples of the dynamics of cultural interaction.

The sculptures of Oshki can be divided into several thematic groups. Special emphasis is made on royal representations, reviving close connections with Byzantine art and court culture. Religious scenes and a large number of zoomorphic figures mostly reflect eastern Christian and local Georgian traditions.

The “portraits” of donators, David *Magistros* (in future David *Curapalates*) and Bagrat *Eristavt-Eristavi*, are repeated three times here. One of the donor compositions, carved on the south facade, shows Bagratians in the “*Deesis*” scene. Bagratians are shown wearing ornate Byzantine clothing. As evidenced by *Constantine* Porphyrogenetos in his “*De administrando imperio*” (10<sup>th</sup> c.), the allies of Byzantine Empire received richly decorated garments and regalia as gifts, together with bestowed titles. The Oshki kings are attired in *chlamys*, a ceremonial cloak appropriate to their rank and no another imperial regalia – *loros*. For example, in a high-relief from Tbeti, Ashot Kukh, who had no byzantine title, is shown clothed in a traditional Caucasian royal costume, embellished with the figures of lions. The garments of kings in Oshki are adorned with palmettes and eagles inscribed in a circle, which were perfectly known in Byzantine culture as well as in Iranian and Caucasian art. According to the evidence of *Constantine* Porphyrogenetos, the gifts of Byzantine emperors included garments embroidered with red eagles. A similar *chlamys*, decorated with eagles, is worn by Armenian King Gagik Arwruniin an image on the west facade of the Holy Cross Church in Aghtamar (915-921). The *chlamys*, *fibula* and *crown*, in Oshki presented together, were important coronation paraphernalia. So, in the Oshki scene, the fact of the legacy of Bagratians’ kingship was clearly emphasized. Bagratians are depicted in bejeweled low crowns, but the diadem of Bagrat *Eristavt-Eristavi* is additionally decorated with pendants, exclusively imperial insignia. As is seen in “*De Administrando Imperio*”, Byzantine emperors did not usually interfere in the inner affairs of the Kingdom and did not violate its sovereignty. Accordingly, Georgian kings allowed themselves to use well recognizable emblems of imperial authority for the strengthening of their own ideology and power. The *vita of Grigol Khandzeli*, written by Giorgi Merchuli (10<sup>th</sup> c.), as well as other historical works, like “*De administrand oimperio*” and *Georgian Chronicles* (or “*Life of Kartli*” by Leonti Mroveli, 11<sup>th</sup> c.), mentioned that the Bagratians considered themselves descendants of the biblical King-Prophet David and thereby relatives of the Mother of God. In this regard, the

remarkable fact of the kings' images being included in the "sacral" space of the "Deesis" was an unusual iconographical detail, which especially emphasizes their divine ancestry. The iconography of the Oshki scene seems to have been inspired by the Byzantine compositions of Christ blessing the Emperor, and also by the entrance mosaic of Hagia Sophia. Accordingly, the Bagratians quite consciously used the forms of Byzantine imperial imagery to highlight their own royal ideology. But the closest example of such rare iconographical design is the donor scene from the Cappadocian murals of the 11<sup>th</sup> c. Here, the donors depicted at the feet of Christ express high humility. In Oshki both divine and secular figures are of equal scale and shown almost life-size. N. Aladashvili explained this particularity by the artistic tendencies inherent for Georgian and Armenian sculptures. The images of donor and deity equal to each other are found on reliefs from Opiza (9<sup>th</sup> c.) and Javakhetis Akhasheni (10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> cc) in Georgia and on the relief of King Gagik in Armenian art. One could only suppose that the general principles of iconography of Caucasian rulers, as well as the oldest idea of divine ancestry of kings, might have come from neighboring Iran, with which Georgia and Armenia had a centuries-old cultural interaction. Monumental figures of rulers executed in the Iranian Hellenized style, were already represented on reliefs of Jvari in Mtskheta in the 7<sup>th</sup> c. In this respect, interesting examples are offered by Sasanian monumental high-reliefs, representing the investiture of the Iranian Kings of Kings. Thus, all the royal images discussed above reveal the synthesis of Iranian monumentality and Hellenistic elaborated forms.

On the bases of the donors' inscription and the iconography of composition, the theme of salvation is stressed here too. The square halos of donors attract a special attention as a sign of a living person. One could assume that the square halos in the donor scene are some kind of markers, separating the earthly and heavenly spheres.

Another example of monumental sculpture in Oshki is the eagle above the south window. The oldest sign of royal power and a Christian symbol of Christ, it is accompanied by Archangels here. In Byzantine art, there are numerous examples of sculptural eagles mentioned by Tao-Klarjeti researchers. An eagle attacking a hare also is found in the Khakhul Church in Tao (10<sup>th</sup> c.) and is perceived as a recognizable image of the Kingdom.

Another couple of royal "portraits" are presented in the interior of the church on both sides of central niche of the southwest pillar. The kings are robed in a different kind of Byzantine embroidered array, also bearing low crowns and scepters. According to V. Jobadze's suggestion, the Bagratians stood in this niche during liturgy. Additionally, in the depths of the niche are the remains of a painted figure, probably Christ, while beside the royal representations there are *areasomtavruli* inscriptions naming the Mother of God and St. John the Baptist. Thus, the text and images together provide an original variation of the Deesis theme. In this context, the so-called "sacred charisma" of the emperors might be stressed, whereas the supreme rulers were a part of the liturgy.

The royal images of Bagratians are also represented on the two steles, embedded in the wall in the south-east part of the Oshki church interior. These portraits have a more intimate character and appear like icons for prayer. According to one of inscriptions, Bagrat *Eristavt-Eristavi* had already died and brothers are depicted here with the gestures of Orants. They are attired in richly gemmed garments (as K. Machabeli argued, it should be *loros*) and high soft hats. The themes of prayer and salvation are stressed by the images of the Mother of God and St. John the Baptist in the upper parts of the steles. Therefore, the royal images of Oshki represent the original adaptation of the formulae of supreme rulers' might, intrinsic to Iranian and Byzantine royal ideology and linking here to the ideas of salvation and the legitimacy of the Bagratians' reign.

The iconography of Oshki's sculptural decoration also shows links with the Conversion of Kartli. In the history of Georgia, David *Curapletes* is primarily known as a king actively fighting for the unification of the country. Moreover, he enthroned his foster-son, Bagrat III, first king of united Georgia, at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> c.

The special interest of the Bagratians in the past of their culture is also reflected in literary sources. An excellent example of this is the manuscript rewritten in Shatberdi monastery in Klarjeti before 970. The Shatberdi compilation includes a version of the "Conversion of Kartli", which has a postscript written by the scribe Ioane Bera. Ioane Bera writes that the lost text of the "Conversion of Kartli" "has been found". This source is quite important for understanding the iconographical program of the Oshki sculptures. According to A. Oqropiridze, the decorated octagonal pier in the southern gallery is a reference to the pillar of *Svetitskhoveli* or the Life-giving pillar, the greatest relic of the Georgians. This supposition is also confirmed by the stone image of St. Nino accompanied by an *asomtavruli* inscription. St. Nino is depicted in the gesture of prayer, which also echoes the text of the "Georgian Chronicles", according to which the Life-giving pillar prepared for the construction of Svetitskhoveli was magically erected by an angel only after her prayer. A notable detail is the crowned head which, according to scholars, might be Emperor Constantine the Great, or biblical King David or King Mirian, the first Christian king of Georgia.

The image of St. Simeon Stylites carved on the upper part of the pillar is another symbol of Georgian identity in the sculptures of Oshki. The monumental figure of the saint is also repeated above the window of the west façade. The cult of St. Simeon was fairly popular in Georgia. In old Georgian translations of the life of St. Simeon (the manuscript of Jerusalem, before 8<sup>th</sup> c.; and the one from Mount Sinai, 10<sup>th</sup> c.) and in the work of Byzantine canonist of the 11<sup>th</sup> c., Nikon of the Black Mountain, it is mentioned that Georgians enjoined the Saint's especial patronage; in Georgian hagiographical literature, St. Simeon is considered the spiritual father of "The Thirteen Assyrian Fathers", who arrived in Georgia in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. to strengthen Christianity and to found the monasteries (among them Zedazeni, Shio Mgvime and David Gareja). Images of St. Simeon Stylites in Georgia are found on the chancel barriers of Zedazeni and Shio Mgvime (11<sup>th</sup> c.), in the Parkhali basilica (10<sup>th</sup> c.), on the chancel barrier of Chrdili (10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> c.) and in Katskhi Church (11<sup>th</sup> c.). This indicates the close ties of Georgian monasticism with Eastern Christendom and further emphasizes the origin of Georgian monastic tradition.

The reliefs of the pier in the southern gallery of Oshki are perceived separately from the whole sculptural decoration of the church, although they echo iconographical ideas of the main program. For example, the *Deesis* is repeated here. The reliefs of the pillar are directly connected with the history of Georgia, reflected also in a more expressive style inherent to Georgian medieval art. Another allusion to the Conversion of Kartli is also shown in the composition on the south façade of the church. According to I. Mamasakhlisi, it represents the composite image of the sacral hunting of St. Eustace and that of King Mirian; accordingly, the plant in the center of scene seems to be a symbolic image of the Tree of Life and the Cross of the Survivor. But one detail might be added here: the universal symbol of the Tree of Life is also found in the "Chronicles of Georgia" and is described in the Shatberdi manuscript. From this tree were created three wooden crosses erected in Mtskheta and Ujarma by St. Nino and King Mirian. Thus, the hunting scene in Oshki refers to the sacred space of Mtskheta and its relics.

Another group of reliefs represent zoomorphic figures, mostly decorating the architectural details. Such a large number of animals could be explained as inspiration from the work attributed to Basil of Caesarea, included in the Shatberdi manuscript and describing animals and fantastic creatures. The images of rabbits, eagles, lions and fighting animals, typical for Iranian and east Christian medieval art, were quite popular in Caucasian reliefs and were depicted in

Georgia for centuries. Accordingly, the Oshki reliefs, besides showing Byzantine art tendencies, offered traditional artistic interaction with Oriental art that primarily reflected the historical reality.

Thus, the sculptural decoration of Oshki emphasizes several themes, reflecting the common political course of the Bagratians in the 10<sup>th</sup> c. On the one hand, the idea of royalty is represented in well recognizable forms of imperial iconography; on the other, a number of the reliefs underline the hereditary relation between the Bagratians and the center of Georgia, expressing hope for the future unification of the country.

## Opiza Monastery

Opiza monastery is one of the oldest monastery in Klarjeti region. Around 370-s due to the political situation in Kartli kingdom, namely when Kartli was conquered by the Persians Klarjeti region was separated from the kingdom and subordinated to the west Roman empire. This region was taken back only in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. by the King Vakhtang Gorgasali, who appointed Artavaz, his foster-brother, as a ruler of Klarjeti region, with whom he built several churches (Akhiza, Daba Meri, Shindobi) and castles (Tukharisi) in this region, including Opiza monastery and Artanuji castle. After the invasion of the Arabs, in the first quarter of the 8<sup>th</sup> c., the monastery was demolished and abandoned and sooner, in 750-760 the life in the monastery was revived. When in 780-s Grigol Khandzteli came in Klarjeti Opiza monastery was the only active monastery in this region. The monastery at that time had a small brethren and a tiny church of St John the Baptist (according to the tradition the monastery kept the throat of John the Baptist).

Although, we don't have anything tangible here prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> c., as the archaeological excavations have never been conducted in this site. What we see here is dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> c. and on. At present, the church and other buildings are virtually ruined. The monastery was abandoned after the region was conquered by the Ottomans in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. The church was destroyed as a result of an explosion in 1965, in order to construct a road. But fortunately the main church and other buildings were photographed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The monastery is located on a slope of a steeply rising mountain, so in order to build different buildings masons in advance created artificial substructures, on which they erected all these buildings. The complex consisted the Church of St John the Baptist, the refectory, storage rooms and other unidentified, auxiliary buildings.

In the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> c. Guaram Mampali, son of Ashot I kurapalati<sup>1</sup> (786-826), erected new church, which fragments we see now and according to the Vita of St Gregory after his death in 882 Guaram Mampali was buried here.

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<sup>1</sup> Ashot Kurapalat was the ruler of Kartli region, but because of the Arabs he was urged to leave Kartli and to move to Klarjeti around 813-s, where he had great support of Byzantium and was given the title of Kurapalar. He started war against Arabs from there and for the 820 he had most part of Kartli under his administration. He rebuilt Artanuji castle and built a city beneath this castle; in this castle he built his palace and church of St Peter and Paul, where he prepared his burial place. During his reign

The cross-shape **plan** (so called *croix semilibre*) of the church with the unusually elongated west arm and two additional chambers on the both sides of the sanctuary date back to the ninth century, while the dome with the roofing in the form of a half-opened umbrella (a form obviously borrowed from Khandzta) should have been restored in the mid-tenth century by King Ashot IV. Beneath the church there is an ossuary/crypt, with an entrance-hall and 4 chambers.

From the architectural point of view, one of the most interesting detail in this church is the way how the transition from the central square bay to the circular base of the dome was implemented. *“For this builders of Opiza and a little bit later builders of Dolisqana used a hybrid structural form, a squinch inserted into a pendentive. Unlike the earlier squinch that had a conical shape, this squinch was flattened in order to follow the curve of the pendentive. Few years later, this form was adopted in Tao and applied in a much more decorative way. This hybrid structural form, which was developed in the architecture of Tao-Klarjeti, underwent significant development during the 10th c., becoming more elaborated, like in Khakhuli, Oshki, and Ishkhani”* (D. Khoshtaria).

From the description of N. Marr, we know that the interior of the church was painted; He noticed some fragments of foliate and geometric decorations, as well as figures of angels and saints. Besides, according to him, on the drum, within the blind arches figures of prophets were placed and in the south arm the figures of local rules were painted, one of which had an explanatory inscription, based on which the figure was identified as Ashot IV.

The donor relief, representing Christ with Ashot and David, which is now kept in the National Museum in Tbilisi was placed somewhere on the south facade of the main church, but we don't know the exact location.

On the south-west of the main church there is a **refectory**. It was a large rectangular building built with huge stones. Interior of the refectory was divided into three naves by for pairs of piers and was covered with vaults. Apart from its high-quality building technique, the refectory is interesting for the fact that it was supplied with water. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a little vaulted pond still existed in the north-west corner of the building, which delivered spring water to the refectory, confirming that the monastery had a good irrigational system. The refectory also was built by Ashot IV. When N. Marr visited the refectory, he noticed on one of

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with commission of local duke Gabriel Daphanchuli new church in Khandzta monastery was built and also nunnery of Gunatle was established.

the arches, an inscription inside the refectory, which can be translated as follows: “*this was built by me, Ashot, in 4 years.*”

On the east side of the church there was a **rectangular building**, „abbot’s dwelling“ as A. Pavlinov named it, which was divided into three chambers, the length of the building was 18 m. and the south façade had 5 arches resting on the rectangular piers. One of the rooms (east one) was covered with dome.

On the south-west of the church we have **bell-tower** built either in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> c., or in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> c.

And lastly, the Monastery was one of the most important cultural and religious centres. A lot of manuscripts were written here. Also, we know that one of the most prominent Georgian medieval philosopher Ioane Petritsi lived here, later he moved to Georgian Monastery named Petritsoni (aka Bachkovo monastery) in Bulgaria and continued his activities there. Moreover, it is well known that in Opiza monastery there was a goldsmith’s workshop.

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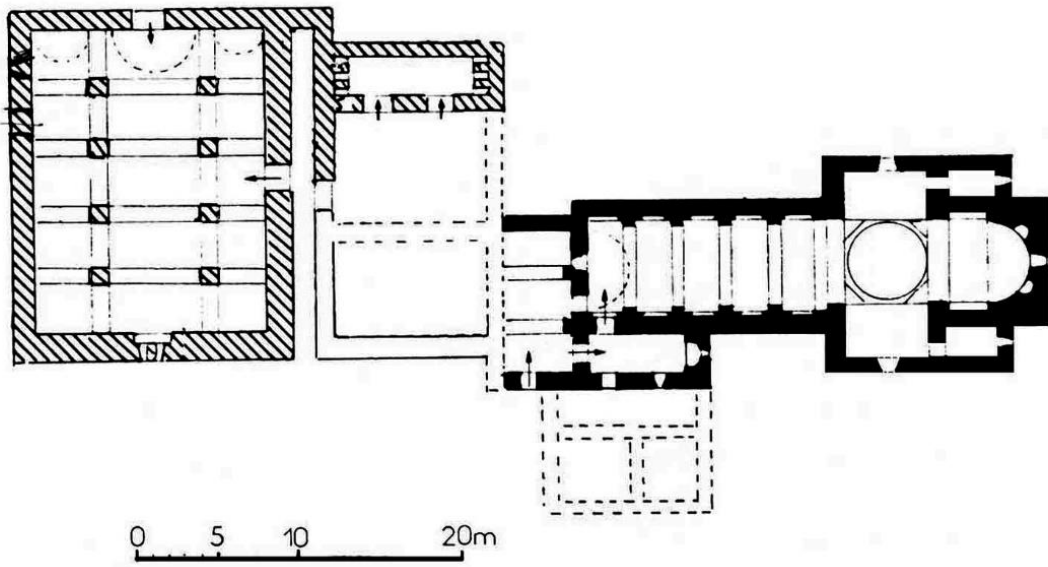
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Внутренность Рипизъ, Сибирь, 1880 г.

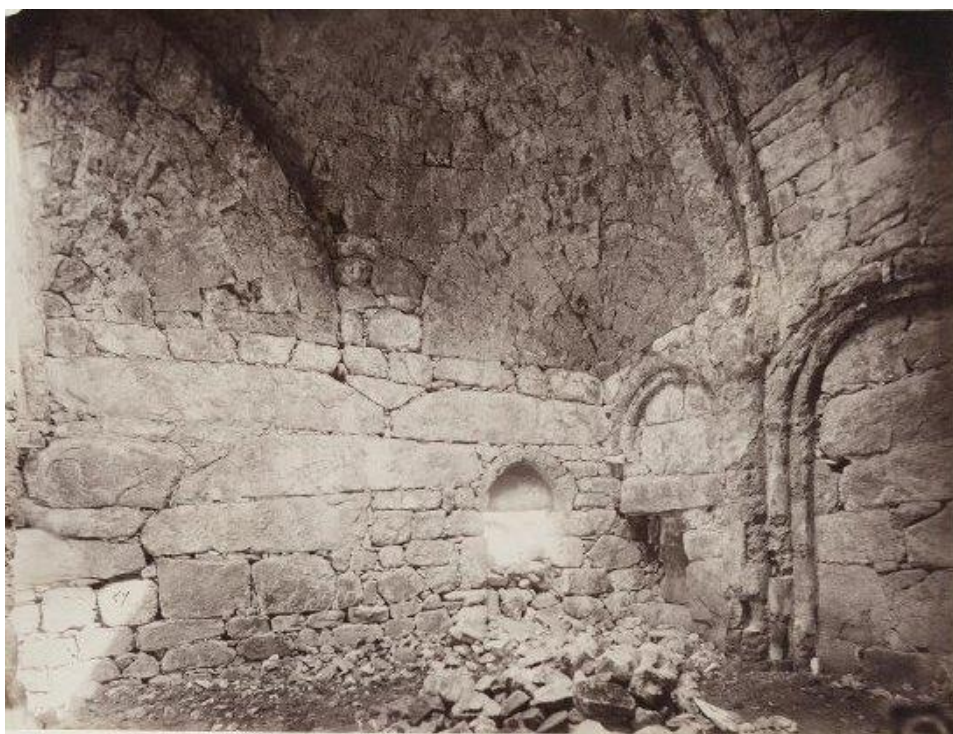
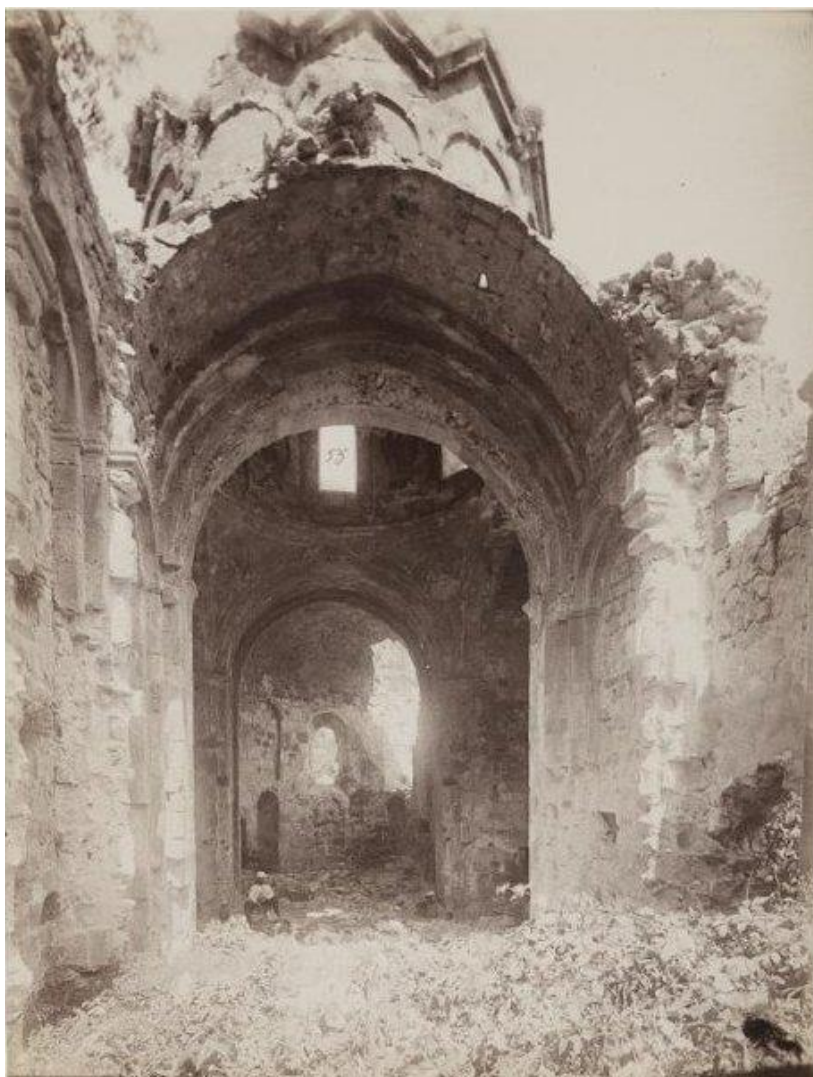
Внутренность развалинъ монастыря въ Рипизъ.



Фотомонета Шореръ, Ватиканскъ и Мъ въ Римъ.

ВНУТРЕННОСТЪ РАЗВАЛИНЪ ЦЕРКВИ ВЪ РУЖИЦАХЪ.





## The murals of the Otkhta Ekklesia

Tolga B. Uyar

Complex multi register bema programs, among which is that of the Otkhta Ekklesia, represent a significant peculiarity of the monumental painting in Tao-Klarjeti between tenth and twelfth centuries. They offer minor analogies with some of the programmatic arrangements which can be found in other easternmost regions of the Christian art like Cappadocia. Yet, four or five bands into which the iconographic programs divided and confined to the walls and the conch of the apse appear to be a product of the architectural and functional prerequisites as well as the spatial perceptions of the sacred in Medieval Georgia.

The murals of the Otkhta Ekklesia are commonly attributed to the second half or the last quarter of the tenth century. The apse is decorated with a program in five registers. An enthroned Christ of the apocalyptic type is in the conch. The first register is depicted with prepared throne, the Hetoimasia, glorified by the choirs of angels. Virgin Orans standing on a low pedestal in front of a throne with an archangel on either side occupies the third register. Both heavenly guards are holding a scroll, on which according to N. and M. Thierry, the words of the disciples at the Ascension and the Second Coming (Acts 1:10-11) must have been written. St John the Baptist is flanking the angel to the right. The fourth register below is interrupted at the center by a large opening, on either side of which are groups of prophets and Church Fathers (four of each on the two walls) led by David and Salomon on either side. The intrados of the window is decorated with a female personification of Zion. She is in imperial attire with an elaborate headdress in the form of the city walls or a crown. The side jambs are respectively depicted with the images of Moses receiving the Laws to the south and that of the Melchisedek holding the paten. A developed Christological narrative occupies the fifth and lowermost register where a number of chronological scenes follow: Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Presentation in the Temple, Baptism, Transfiguration, Crucifixion, Raising of Lazarus?, Anastasis, Holy Women at the Tomb of Christ, and Christ Appearing to the Holy Women.

We can find *comparanda* for this condensed program in late tenth and early eleventh century Georgian monumental decorations in Oshki, Khakuli, Ateni, Chvabiani (the church of Christ Savior) and Natlismtsimeli. Superposed bands organization limited to the apse seem to have been maintained during the twelfth century in Georgian monumental art. In Betania,

Matskhvarishi and Sio Mgvime more condensed variants with reduced number of superimposed registers differentiate the painted programs of this period.

From the thirteenth century onwards, the abbreviated program is limited to three registers as in Ksintsvisi or in other examples of Transcaucasia like in Kobair, Kirants, Akhtala and Tigran Onents. Bishops are below, Communion of the Apostles above and a *Majestas Domini* with the Virgin and Prodrome to left and right is in the conch. In the remote provinces of Byzantium, the three register programs combining the Communion of the Apostles, the group of apostles and prophets, and the Apocalyptic Vision sometimes 'contaminated' with intercessory figures of Virgin and John the Baptist are widespread from eleventh century onwards. Thus, this earlier 'visionary' type of Christ in Majesty, which may be possibly seen as the 'predecessor' of the Pantocrator, persists in Cappadocia and Georgia. However, sometimes, the standard Deisis which acquires a regular 'intercessory sense', especially in funeral contexts, was also preferred in these regions where Constantinopolitan influence is not entirely absent.

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The Little Upper Church of Otkhta Eklesia (named as Arseniseuli)

One of the significant monuments of early medieval Georgian architecture, one of the ancient Georgian hub of theological and educational culture, the Monastery of Otkhta Eklesia now situated on the territory of Turkey. Today Turkish name of this village is Dort Kilise which means “ four church “and it’s situated at a distance of about 5 km to the West of Tek-Kale Village, on the left bank of the river Chorokhi, in the historical Georgian province of Tao, in the Arthvini Vilayet. The monastery complex of Otkhta Eklesia is located itself in a magnificent gorge of Otkhtaeklesiistskali, on an elevated, triangular shaped hillside.

The subject of our report is an one of the exquisite little chapels in historical Tao (now the territory, you know, of Turkey) which dates back to the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and it’s a part of an abovementioned monastery.

First of all we should especially emphasize the location of this beautiful monument. It’s situated at a distance of about 2 km to the West of a well-known Otkhta-Eklesia great three- naved basilica, on the top of a steep rock and is proudly overlooking the gorge of Otkhtaeklesiistskali. The chapel with it ’s graceful and splendid architectural forms is erected on the heightened plateau , specially created platform ( artificially corrected from three sides - West, East, North with half smoothed rocky stones). The South façade proceeds a vertical direction of the rock, so one can see the only general forms of the wall ( from the southeast corner). The substructure has a function of a basement and has a simple-profiled cornice. We can freely say the chapel is two-storied – the substructure itself where the crypt is arranged /with an entrance from the East/, and the church, of course, with a fronton type roof. There is an opinion, that the chapel had a burial function like otkhta eklesia lower two storied chapel near basilica. The ground store is considered as a burial chamber /generally, the tradition of the building of two-storied chapels with crypts was established from an early period of Christianity in Caucasus/.

The facades are built with well dressed yellowish tuft blocks which brightened up the walls represented without any ornamentation. The fronts of the interior walls are undressed and covered with a thin layer of plasterer. The church was completely painted, but now the painting is partially preserved / only the poorly, insignificant details of the saints’ heads, hands

and clothes, of the vegetable motives, separate colored spots, etc/. The facades are completed with the complex moulded cornice.

The church constructively represents the cylinder-vaulted building (11.20 x 7.15m). There is a large window cutting in the middle of the apse. There are two accommodations on each side of the altar apse with a single window and the independent entrances, i.e. the altar is divided into three parts. Arrow like outline two-stepped triumphal arch terminates the apse. The interior longitudinal walls are divided into two unequalled sections with massive projecting two-stepped pilasters-pylons and two-stepped vault supporting arch based on it.

The only entrance is cut in the north-west portion of the north façade at the corner of the supporting pilaster.

There are two windows cutting in the south wall. One of them is cut out on the symmetrical axis, but the second – diagonally, where its left flank is cut into the wall pilaster body.

The significance of the west wall /in the interior/ is determined by one storied two arched open accommodation – patronycus arranged on the first floor level which was uncommon element for Georgian aisleless architecture /the characteristic element for the basilicas, the domed churches mainly arranged on the second floor of the west wall/ . There are two three small windows in the west wall.

Among the church facades one can distinguish the east façade with three windows and lateral triangular high niches for its compositional decision. The upper parts of the niches ornated like a fan.

It should be noticed that in Otkhta Eklesia upper church the master attains the artistical-decorative expression of the highly plain facades with the help of the masonry carried out with an inconceivably refined, almost mathematically accuracy.

There is a nine-lined building inscription made in Asomtavruli on the north-east corner of the northern façade on the square plate where the name of builder Arseni is exactly mentioned and pointed the building date – 984 /generally speaking, there is a rare case to depict a builder personality or a building date on the facades of Georgian churches/.

Arseni was a bishop ( +1082) at Ninotsminda Eparchy /southern Georgia, Samtskhe-Javakheti/, but he left his bishop rank for God, consecrated a monk in Jerusalem. At the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century he lived as a monk in the surroundings of Otkhta Eklesia and he erected

two little chapels on the top of the mountain there /an another chapel lies in the ruins nowadays/. So our upper little church is called "Arseniseuli".

One more detail should be marked by the north façade description – one can hardly notice the track of the arcade to the east of the northern façade and the painting fragments on the walls of the arcade. We think that the chapel had the portico from the north.

Here is our modest attempt to define the meaning and place of this beautiful chapel in the extension of medieval Georgian aisleless architecture which was widespread and popular type in every part of Georgia from ancient times are cleared up.

The aisleless church type was conceived in Georgia as far back as in the ancient period, from the early Christian medieval period, from the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries and exists till today. This type with particularly intensity was used from the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, when basilicas building diminished in Georgia. "Every large monastery usually had a little church in Georgia".

Highest possible constructive simplicity of the aisleless buildings and unpretentious building conditioned their popularity. There are examples of the aisleless churches where the architect thanks to his refined taste attains the significant artistic effects in the inner space and facades decisions – simplicity, whole perception of the interior, proper selection of the proportions.

The ancient aisleless churches in Georgia date back to the juncture of the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries – they are the aisleless chapels of small dimensions with the only rectangular hall and an altar. There is no articulation of the interior yet with wall pilasters and supporting arches ( two small churches on the Katskhi Pillar, Oltisi, Tetri Tskaro, Akvaneba ). Additional accommodations along the whole longitudinal facades of aisleless churches like portico appear from the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

In the chapels interior of the juncture of the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries new architectural-constructive elements appear – the supporting arch rests upon the capital-horn and the wall pilaster.

In the interior of the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries chapels, in the eastern part very significant novelty is given on both sides of the altar – two additional apartments with apses. We can also notice three- parted altar composition later on.

From the transitional period (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries) the articulation of the interior longitudinal walls and the vault into two parts with a pair of pilasters and supporting arches

rest on the pilasters evidently revealed. The number of the pilasters and supporting arches steps are changeable – they may one, two or three stepped. Articulation of the walls with pilasters and supporting arches has both constructive significance and purely artistic load.

During the centuries the proportions of the chapels plan have been changed, but the building material remains unchangeable – mainly well dressed stone aligned in regular masonry courses.

In the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> and in the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries the walls of the majority aisleless buildings were articulated into three parts on the whole with two or three stepped pilasters. It should be said that from the 11<sup>th</sup> century the wall pilaster lost its tectonic function and the decorative moment condition spatial decision. In the same period the inner space of the chapels was apprehensively shortened.

From the 10<sup>th</sup> century the whole plastering and the partial painting of the church interior walls based as a general necessity. Aisleless churches in Tao-Klarjethi underwent the same changes.

Here is the architectural-composition and artistic decision peculiarity of the medieval Tao chapels against the background of the other countries aisleless churches of Georgia.

The meaning and the artistic value of the Upper Church of Otkhta Eklesia are conditioned by the refined masonry of the wall and its colors. The beautiful, regulated masonry of the walls is created by the symmetrically aligned blocks.

The church represented without any façade decoration is interesting and uncommon for its interior solution. The master-builder is particularly interested in inner space which is one of the characteristic features of Tao-Klarjethi architecture. First of all decision of three-parted altar-apse and pastophories with their own windows and entrances is worth mentioning.

Here is the type of the "open divided into three parts" altar where the doors of additional accommodations are open in the main space of the hall but not in the altar. This version of three-parted altar solution is an exclusion in the Georgian aisleless churches – the lower and the upper churches of Otkhta Eklesia and Chala Church (10<sup>th</sup> century).

The other interesting moment of the interior decision is one storied two arched open accommodation on the first floor level arranged at the west wall – patronycus whis is uncommon and uncharacteristic for the Georgian aisleless architecture, Analogous patronycus

but two storied is in the 10<sup>th</sup> century aisleless church of the Assumption in Saphara Monastery (historical Samtskhe). The basing of the arches of the patronycus transferred to the west wall on the horn, also the asymmetrical arrangement of the wall arches represented in the west portion of the interior and the south-western window proves that the church and the two-arched open accommodation were built in the same time.

The most interesting façade for its composition solution is the east façade with two high triangular niches. If the niches in Khakhuli chapel have the only decorative function, here the use of the niches is conditioned by the existence of pastophories /even a constructive function /.

The only entrance is cut in the north-west portion of the north façade which is a rare moment and it ever met in the Georgian architecture. The northern door was made for the aisleless churches only as an additional passage mainly connected with the liturgy (Khtsisi, Patara Oni, Agara, Spethi, Ekhvevi, Darkveti, Tserovani). But in our church the cutting of the northern door comes from the church location.

As we above mentioned there is a nine lined building inscription made in Asomtavruli on the northern façade of the church.

There is one more significant detail. One can hardly notice the track of the arcade and the painting fragment on the north façade near the door. We may think that the church had the portico from the north. Aforementioned building inscription against to the tradition depicts not on the door tympanum which the church has and which is plainly left but on the north-east part of the northern wall, on a small plate. Thus we may think that the northern portico of the church was the same period to the building.

Thus the upper church of Otkha Eklesia is a typical building of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The subject of the master's interest was to make an impression not by ornamentation, but with the help of its location, by underlining the main architectural masses.

The aisleless church of Otkhta-Eklesia belongs to the number of rare buildings of Georgia the exact building date and the builder's name of which are pointed in the inscription. The mentioned inscription and its historical-artistic analyse show Otkhta Eklesia chapel by a number of significant elements continues the Georgian architecture line characteristic for the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and, by using rare architectural-constructive elements represent very important example of architecture the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.



## Parekhta Monastery

Tao-Klarjeti was and is of great importance for Georgia. This region has a particular meaning for each Georgian and is known as the area where St Grigol Khandzteli (749-851) had unfolded his activities. In the 8th-9th centuries, St Grigol and his disciples were very active in founding new monasteries and rehabilitated the old ones, the monasteries becoming most significant centers of culture. Even more, the spiritual fathers who were educated there were founding new Georgian monasteries abroad, which became important cultural and spiritual centers in Byzantium, Palestine, Syria or on the Holy Mountain of Athos. Especially the Georgian (Iberian) Monastery of Mount Athos (10th c.) and the Georgian Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem (11th c.) were, along with their cultural designation, also of political importance.

It must be noted that there are no evidences about early buildings in Klarjeti. Some scholars thought that a monastery of Parekhta should be established at 6-7 century. Researchers' opinion is based on the life of Serapion Zarzmel, that St. Michael One of Shio's disciples (follower), arrived in Klarjeti, stayed in Opiza for a while, and then built a monastery Parekhta for his and his brothers.

According to the life Gregoli of Khanzta when Khandzta became known for its grace and of its spiritual fathers, at that time a great desert ascetic, Father Mikel came to Khandzta from Midznadzoro and settled in Parekhta, because he was a friend of Blessed Father Gregory. He longed for the eremitic life and found his own place to dwell at Parekhta in Berta. Through the intents of this holy man, he settled therein and became even more pleasing to the Lord.

When the devil saw the brevity of the holy men. He troubled Mikel through visible and hidden visions, that he might drive him from the desert. Mikel however defeated every appearance of his evil tricks through the help of Christ and the supplication of the saints.

There was one occasion where Father Mikel had departed from his cell and was standing at the top of a high cliff in a desolate place. The devil cast him down from the heights. Christ God the King of All protected him, completely unharmed. When his spiritual father, Father Gregory knew [nju:] about this incident, the saint quickly went to the aid of his brother through the power of the Lord and gave him spiritual encouragement. He created of his own accord two wooden crosses, marks of Christ, to give him victory, protect him, and to drive away the enemy. He erected them here and there, at some distance from his cell and established them as a boundary for the holy man as thus:

— “Remain without fear between these two Crosses of Christ through the help of the Holy Trinity and the power of the Honorable Cross. If you cross this boundary, you shall suffer even worse than the first time.” The Blessed Mikel however found complete respite, because he had

defeated the prideful enemy through humility. He did not trust in his own righteousness, but instead brought his spiritual father and brother, Gregory as help, by trusting in God.

Blessed Mikel was from the land of Shavsheti, from the village of Norgiali, and became a monk at Midznadzoro, whereas after the passing of many years, he earned his salvation in Parekhi and when he had finished his earthly course, he was buried in that very place. He is buried together with the glorious Father Basil, who dwelt in Parekhta after him. They bestow healing upon men who go to them in faith.

According to Davit Khostaria The historical fates of Serapion Zarzel's life must be old. parekhta Monastery was probably founded in the 6th century by the mikhael. However, today's architecture is not early than the 9th century, and he cannot find it early building.

the Monastrey of Parekhta is located in the Karchal Valley and eight kilometers north of Berta Monastery. The Monastery is located on the left side of small mountain stream called Duganli. The Mandra lies on a horizontal ledge about 150 m long. The only access to the monastery is from west side through the narrow fortified gate, which is now collapsed. From the narrow path can be reach to the hermitages and other monastery structure. According to V. Djobadze he discovered rock cat two Hermitages and other Monastery structure. He counted three or five rectangular buildings. They were constructed with roughly dressed stones. All of them were ruined. The scholar thoughts that can be monks cells or storage room. Among the ruined building V. Djobadze show a larg rectangular room. He accept to N. Marr to the function of this structure. According him that can be a refectory, which could have easily accomadated twenty to thyrt Persons.

Near to the refectory there are two buildings: waterfall and a small cistern which can be provided more water for whole Monastery. Northwest of the gate there are two water mills and further west fields and orchards. The surrounding of the monastery and the plentiful environment would have supplied the monastic community with an abundance of food and amount of heating and constructing materials.

On the north side Marr mentions a sizable funerary chamber in which he found numerous human bones. According of the life of Grigol of Khanzta this was the burial place of Michael, founder of the Monastery and his followers Basil. When researchers talks about the Monastery of Khazta they always mention her attention of the two churches. As we show this churches are erected substructures on the mountain ledge.

### **The first church**

The first church built on the level of the east-west path of the monastery is a vaulted rectangular longitudinal nave with a semicircular apse that has two wide symmetrically placed niches. the construction material is locally and the masonry of the churches is rather crude. the interior and

exterior facing consists of poorly squared blocks. the stones used on the interior of the building are more carefully dressed. Its western and northern walls as well part of the apse are rather well preserved. the south wall on the other hand is almost completely gone. the interior of the church is filled with debris and covered with two trees. the south half of the church is supported by high substructure. On the west is an 1. 20 m. wide entrance which could be entrance which could be approached by a narrow passage through a descending staircase, part of which still remains. The light would have entered the church from the window above the western door and the apse, as well as was from the now destroyed south wall window. The north wall, for security reasons has now windows.

Attached to the north side of the church is longitudinal barrel vaulted side chamber, accessible only through the church itself by wide door. On the east it is terminated by a semicircular apse pierced by a single window. According Jobadze inhabitants found a large wine vessel below the floor on the west side. A second vessel was in situ when he arrived in Parkhali. According him it may be contained wine for the Eucharist and northern chamber was used for the prothesis. This possibility is suggested by other Georgian churches built in early medieval period in which similar vessels have been found.

After study many Georgian materials can be said that in early Period a wide variant of single naved churches was built in Tao-Klarjeti. this type have been lived the most long time in Georgia. After study this region the scholars agree with that churches, which are built of the end of eight and the first half of the ninth century have the common features:

### **The second church**

The second church built also special substructure. Its three nave basilica. Its very common architectural type in early medieval Georgia not only in Tao-Klarjeti (Nukas Sakdari, Esbeki) but in other provinces of Georgia as well. In comparison with the first church this is more carefully constructed. With rhythmic articulation of exterior walls Parekhta church look like monuments of the same time period. namely at the church of Tsirkoli.

The only entrance to the church is from the western door and its preceding which is now collapsed. The second opening in the south wall of the church is located at the edge of the vertical cliff. Jobadze can not say about the function of this exit. According him it can be the door to the balcony.

On the south side of the apse wall of the both pilasters of the west wall flat rectangular impostes are in situ. According to V. Jobadze that can be three nave basilica, which was flanked both side with chamber.

We have not documentary evidence when the second church was constructed, the researchers did not find any inscription they dated this second church with the analysis of the structure of architecture. They suggest that it can be dated at the end of the ninth or the early tenth century. The smaller church could no longer satisfy the demands of the growing monastic community, making necessary another large church. This process was described in the life of Gregory of Khantzta. Additional information concerning the activities of the monastery Parekhta was a significant centre of literature studies. After the death of the foundation Michael at the end of ninth and the beginning of tenth century monks of Parekhta composed his biography. It has not survived. We also know about the renowned man Ilarion who was living during the time of Grigol Khanzeli. A significant information gives us the Colophon of Parkhali Gospel. The author is Makari, who was living in sixteenth century and according to this evidence the monastery of Parekhta was still flourishing.

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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.

Harry Prance

Prof. Dr. Barbara Schellewald zum 65. Geburtstag

Henriette Hofmann, Caroline Schärli  
und Sophie Schweinfurth (Hg.)

**INSZENIERUNGEN VON  
SICHTBARKEIT  
IN MITTELALTERLICHEN  
BILDKULTUREN**

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Annette Hoffmann und Gerhard Wolf

## Licht und Landschaft: Zur Sakraltopographie Mzchetas in Georgien\*

Abstract

From early times, Mzcheta, situated between the hills at the confluence of two rivers, had great political and mercantile importance. The capital of Kartli in the state of Iberia, since the fourth century, was considered the site of the conversion of Georgia to Christianity. It is there that Saint Nino is said to have performed miracles and King Mirian (with his Persian family ties) accepted Christianity as the religion of the true God. The article studies this legendary tradition from its earliest versions to the elaborated compilations of the tenth and eleventh century, focusing on the descriptions of luminous apparitions. It analyses the bipolarity of the royal and hagiographical tradition as well as that of the territory itself. For the pagan topography was supplanted by two Christian poles: Svetitskhoveli cathedral located in the center of the city, with its relic of the tunic of Christ, and the Jvari hill, a sort of Golgotha with its monumental cross. This sacred topography and the role of luminous apparitions in it reveal a topomimetical reference to both Jerusalem and Constantine, with the cross as a territorial and universal sign of Christian victory. With the shift of political and economic power from Mzcheta to Tbilissi, the former became a pilgrimage site and an »icon« of Georgian Christianity, narrated in texts and »copied« in other places, such as Svanetia.

Der Zusammenfluss zweier Flüsse prägt die bergige Landschaft von Mzcheta, der ehemaligen Königsresidenz und Hauptstadt Iberiens. Mzcheta liegt in der Region Kartlien, in der die Christianisierung Georgiens ihren Anfang genommen haben soll (Abb. 1, 3). Der von Norden nach Süden verlaufende Fluss Aragwi mündet in die Kura, die von der Türkei aus durch Georgien und Aserbajdschan ins Kaspische Meer fließt. Im Dreieck der Flussmündung, also westlich des Aragwi und nördlich der Kura, liegt in der Ebene die Stadt Mzcheta mit ihrer Kathedrale Svetitskhoveli. Hier muss sich in vorchristlicher Zeit der königliche Palast mit Garten befunden haben. Östlich der Stadt, jenseits des Aragwi, erhebt sich über dem Zusammenfluss der sogenannte Jvari-Hügel mit der Kirche des Heiligen Kreuzes (Abb. 4, 5). Es ist jener Ort, an dem wohl eines der ersten christlichen Kreuze in Georgien aufgestellt worden ist. Der Tradition (oder jedenfalls einem Strang) nach ist die Kreuzerrichtung auf die hl. Nino zurückzuführen.

Die wissenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit Mzcheta und seiner Sakraltopographie konzentrierte sich weitestgehend auf seine Stellung als georgisches Neues Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Der Legende nach war nicht nur zur Zeit Nebukadnezars II. der Mantel des Propheten Elias, sondern später von dem georgischen Juden Elioz auch der ungenährte Rock Christi nach Mzcheta gebracht und dort in dem Grab seiner Schwester Sidonia in Svetitskhoveli rekondierte worden (Abb. 2). Über diesem Grab soll eine Zeder gewachsen sein, aus welcher Säulen für den Bau einer Kirche gefertigt wurden. Eine dieser Säulen



1 Blick auf Mzcheta mit der Kathedrale Svetitskhoveli (vom Jvari-Hügel aus gesehen)

sei zunächst nicht zu bewegen gewesen – ein Motiv analog der Legende des Kreuzesholzes, das sich im Tempel Salomos nicht verbauen ließ.<sup>2</sup> Auch die Bezeichnung von Svetitskhoveli, wörtlich Kirche der »lebenden Säule«, als »Allerheiligstes«, als »Große Zion«<sup>3</sup>, oder die in ihr gefeierte Liturgie, die jener der Grabeskirche folgte,<sup>4</sup> sind als klare Verweise auf Jerusalem zu verstehen. Stets hervorgehoben wurde außerdem die Beschreibung der namensgebenden »lebenden« Säule als Feuersäule, die sich erst nach dem Gebet der hl. Nino auf ihrem Platz niedergelassen haben soll. Die insgesamt außergewöhnliche (und im Laufe der Jahrhunderte zunehmende) Rolle hingegen, die nicht nur das Feuer, sondern allgemein das Licht und mit ihm die Landschaft Mzchetas in der Inszenierung der Christianisierung Georgiens und bei der Ausbildung einer Sakraltopographie spielen, wurde bisher kaum thematisiert.<sup>5</sup> Diese soll hier vor dem Hintergrund der mäandrierenden Überlieferungsgeschichte der Legenden um Licht und Landschaft untersucht werden.

#### Licht und Erzählung

Die Christianisierung Georgiens beginnt selbstredend mit einer Dunkelheit. Eine Gefangene, später als die hl. Nino, die »Erleuchterin« (*Illuminatrix*), bekannt, hatte zuerst ein Kind und dann Nana, die Frau des Königs Mirian III., von schwerer



2 Mzcheta, Svetitskhoveli, Grabmonument der Sidonia mit der lebenspendenden Säule, 15. Jahrhundert (?) und 1678/88

Krankheit geheilt, lehnte aber Geschenke ab, die der König ihr zum Dank dargeboten hatte. Am nachfolgenden Tag begab sich der König auf die Jagd, als plötzlich Nebel und tiefe Dunkelheit die Berge und Wälder bedeckten, die er durchritt, sodass er sich verirrt. In seiner Ratlosigkeit rief er die Götter an, die er seit jeher verehrt hatte. Als dies nichts fruchtete, bat er den Gott der gefangenen Frau zu Hilfe, und kaum hatte er mit dem Gebet begonnen, löste sich die Dunkelheit auf, die aus dem Nebel aufgestiegen war, die Luft wurde klar und Sonnenstrahlen drangen in das Gehölz. Mirian konvertierte zum Christentum und befahl den Bau einer Kirche. Als die Säulen der Kirche aufgestellt werden sollten, ließ sich eine von ihnen nicht bewegen. Die Seile rissen, Geräte zerbrachen, weshalb die Sklavin die ganze Nacht vor dieser Säule im Gebet verbracht haben soll. Durch die Kraft Gottes habe sich die Säule schließlich erhoben und aufrecht über ihrer Basis geschwebt, bis am nächsten Morgen der König kam, das Wunder sah und sich die Säule vor seinen Augen auf ihren Platz niederließ. So wissen die Geschichte schon Rufinus von Aquileia um 400,<sup>6</sup> Sokrates Scholastikos im frühen 5. Jahrhundert<sup>7</sup> und zeitgleich Sozomenos zu erzählen.<sup>8</sup>

Verortet ist der Wald der Bekehrung des Königs in den Berichten des 5. Jahrhunderts nicht. Das Ereignis, das gemeinhin ins Jahr 326 n. Chr. datiert wird, könnte mit einer Sonnenfinsternis erklärbar sein, die sich in Mzcheta im Jahre 319 tatsächlich ereignete.<sup>9</sup> Die Finsternis als Motiv verbindet sich dabei zugleich topisch mit der Geschichte einer Konversion. Die Säule in der Kirche als Referenz auf das Kreuzesholz ›leuchtet‹ in den Texten des 5. Jahrhunderts nicht. Erst viel später, in der sogenannten *Mokcevoy Kartlisay* (der »Bekehrung Kartliens«), einer Kompilation verschiedener Dokumente zur Geschichte Georgiens und zum Leben der hl. Nino, die im Šatberdi-Codex (973) und zwei wenig älteren Fragmenten im Katharinenkloster am Sinai sowie dem sogenannten Celisi-Sammelband des 14. Jahrhunderts erhalten sind,<sup>10</sup> lesen wir von diversen Lichterscheinungen. Während das erste Kapitel der *Bekehrung* eine Art Kurzchronik enthält, die in ihrem Kern, wie Fairy von Lilienfeld dargelegt hat, vermutlich ins 7. Jahrhundert datiert werden kann, dürften die anderen Kapitel der *Bekehrung* dem 8., 9. bzw. frühen 10. Jahrhundert zuzurechnen sein.<sup>11</sup> Tatsächlich spricht das erste Kapitel noch lediglich von »der Säule von Holz, die sich selbst aufrichtete«, und nennt sie »die lebende Säule«. Im zehnten Kapitel hingegen heißt es, die hl. Nino habe »mit erhobenen Händen« gestanden und über ihr »ein Jüngling, ganz mit Licht umkleidet und wie in einen Feuerschleier gehüllt«. Der Jüngling habe »die Hand an die Säule« gelegt, sie aufgerichtet und in die »Höhe der Himmel« gehoben:

Und siehe, ich sah wie die Säule in Feuergestalt herunterkam [...]. [...] und er [der König] sah dort ein Licht, das in dem Garten wie ein Blitz zum Himmel flammte. [...] (da) senkte sich die wunderbare, in Licht erstrahlende Säule auf ihren Ort, sie stellte sich gleichsam auf ihren Sockel und wuchs fest, von Menschenhand unberührt.<sup>12</sup>

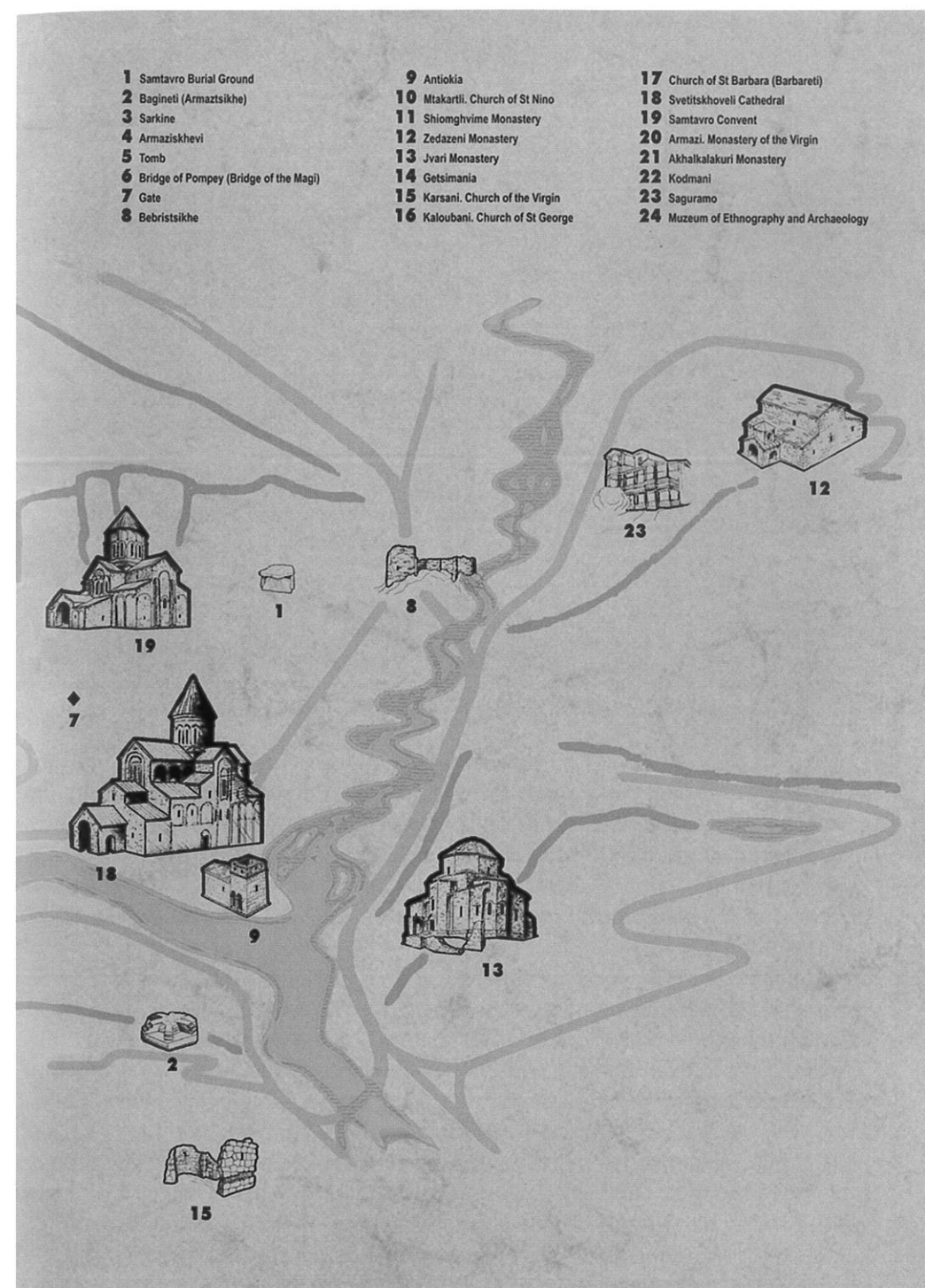
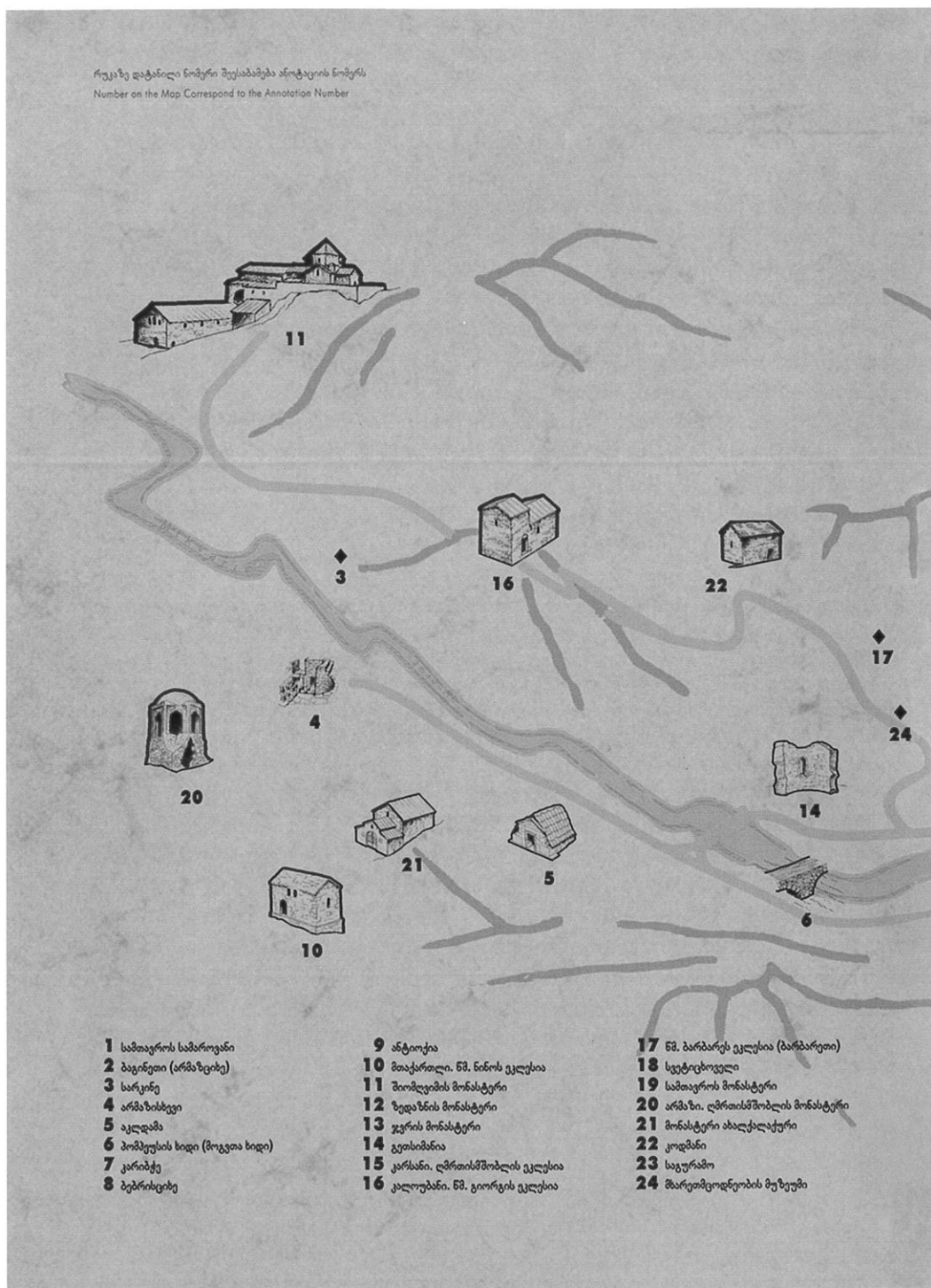
Der Sockel ist dabei nichts anderes als die Wurzel jenes Baumes, dem sie entstammte, sie wächst so gleichsam wieder an ihrem Ursprungsort an, nicht zufällig einer Zeder des Libanon, die auch Salomo für den Tempel verwendete. Das Motiv der Säule in

Feuergestalt erinnert, wie antizipiert, an den Exodus, als die Feuersäule die Israeliten durch die Nacht geleitete.<sup>13</sup> Es kommt aber auch in byzantinischen Visionsberichten vor, unter anderem in einem Text, der wiederum in Verbindung mit Jerusalem steht. So ist im *Leimón* des Johannes Moschos (540/50–620) zu lesen, Ephraimios von Amida, *comes Orientis* und Bischof von Antiochia, sei im Schlaf just in jener Zeit, als er nach einem Erdbeben (526) mit dem Wiederaufbau Jerusalems beschäftigt war, mehrfach ein Bischof erschienen, über welchem eine sich bis zum Himmel erstreckende Feuersäule stand.<sup>14</sup> Letzterer hatte sich zeitgleich aufgemacht, um beim Wiederaufbau der Heiligen Stadt zu helfen. Auch hierin ließe sich also ein Bezug zu Jerusalem finden.

Die Feuersäule ist aber nicht die einzige Lichterscheinung, die mit der Sakraltopographie Mzchetas in Verbindung steht, berühmt ist ferner eine Kreuzesvision. In der *Mokcevoy Kartlisay* lesen wir im 13. Kapitel, einem Abschnitt, der von einem Priester Jacob verfasst worden sein soll, zunächst von einem Baum, der am Ende des Sommers, als alle anderen Bäume schon kahl waren,<sup>15</sup> noch schön, belaubt und wohlriechend gewesen sein soll und dessen Laub sich auch nicht veränderte, als er gefällt worden war. Aus diesem Baum seien dann Kreuze geschaffen worden, woraufhin sich ein neues Wunder ereignete:

[...] am ersten (Tag) im Monat Mai, machten sie diese Kreuze und am 7. desselben Monats stellten sie sie unter Mitwirkung des Königs auf [...]. Und als sie alle in der Kirche aufgestellt waren, sah die Menge aus der Stadt in den dunklen Nächten, und siehe, ein Kreuz von Feuer kam herab, umkränzt von Sternen, und verweilte über der Kirche bis zur Morgendämmerung. [...] Und bei Tagesanbruch, zur Zeit der Morgenröte, gingen zwei Sterne von ihm aus: einer ging nach Osten und einer nach Westen, und es selbst blieb ebenso strahlend stehen, und ganz allmählich wich es zur Seite der Aragua hin und hielt über einem Felsenhügel, über der Höhe, nahe der Quelle, die aus den Tränen der heiligen Nino entsprungen war.<sup>16</sup>

Diese Lichtkreuzerscheinungen, die am 7. Mai in Mzcheta beginnen und einige Nächte fort dauern, antworten offensichtlich auf zwei verschiedene an diesem Tag gefeierte Ereignisse.<sup>17</sup> So begingen orthodoxe Kirchen am 7. Mai nicht nur die Erscheinung des Kreuzes am Himmel von Jerusalem, die nach der üblichen Datierung im Jahre 351 stattgefunden haben soll, sondern auch die Kreuzauffindung Helenas ebendort.<sup>18</sup> Von einer Staurophanie am 7. Mai berichtet zuerst Kyrill von Jerusalem (ca. 315–386) in einem an Konstantius II. (337–361) adressierten Brief,<sup>19</sup> der nicht nur auf Griechisch, sondern auch auf Armenisch, Syrisch und Georgisch überliefert ist.<sup>20</sup> Genau wie das Kreuz in Mzcheta, das von »der Menge aus der Stadt« von der Nacht bis zum Morgen grauen, also über mehrere Stunden hinweg, gesehen worden sein soll, so soll auch das kreuzförmige Zeichen über Jerusalem mehrere Stunden lang am Himmel gestanden haben, von Blitzen begleitet. Es habe, so schreibt Kyrill dem Kaiser, vom Golgatha bis zum Ölberg gereicht und sei von der ganzen Stadt gesehen worden. Kyrills Text setzt die Kenntnis der Kreuzesvision von Konstantin, dem Vater des Konstantius, voraus (ohne sie eigens zu nennen<sup>21</sup>) und erinnert den Kaiser auch an die Kreuzauffindung durch seine Großmutter Helena. Er verbindet diese Erinnerung mit den besten Wünschen für eine gute Herrschaft in christ-



3 Karte mit Monumenten von Mzcheta und Umgebung

lichem Sinn.<sup>22</sup> Kyrill hatte also gleichsam die Erscheinung in Jerusalem als ein gutes Vorzeichen bzw. *monitum* für den Kaiser aufgefasst.<sup>23</sup> Darüber hinaus hatte er ihr mit dem Verweis auf Matthäus 24,30 zugleich eine eschatologische Komponente beigelegt.<sup>24</sup> In diesem Sinn dürfte auch der Sternenkranz, der das Lichtkreuz von Mzcheta umgibt, zu deuten sein. Er verbindet die Erscheinung mit einem weiteren großen Himmelzeichen: dem »signum magnum« der Offenbarung, der Frau im Strahlenkranz.<sup>25</sup>

Zu Konstantins Kreuzesvision im Jahre 312 schreibt Eusebius von Caesarea, der Kaiser habe um »die mittäglichen Stunden der Sonne, als sich der Tag bereits neigte, [...] mit eigenen Augen gesehen [...], daß am Himmel das Siegeszeichen des Kreuzes, das aus Licht bestand, die Sonne überlagerte, und damit sei ein Schriftzug verknüpft gewesen: »Durch dieses siege!«.<sup>26</sup> Im Traum von Christus dazu aufgefordert, habe Konstantin ferner »eine Nachbildung des Zeichens, das er am Himmel gesehen hatte« anfertigen lassen, um es im Kampf mit sich zu führen. Der Kaiser habe deshalb Künstler, »Goldschmiede und Juweliere« herbeigerufen. Er habe »sich in ihre Mitte« gesetzt, ihnen »das Aussehen des Zeichens« beschrieben und ihnen den Auftrag gegeben, dasselbe »aus Gold und Edelsteinen nachzubilden«.<sup>27</sup> Die Vision Konstantins materialisierte sich folglich durch Künstlerhand, während wir in der *Bekehrung Kartlis* weiterlesen:

Das durch ein Wunder des Himmels erschienene verehrungswürdige Kreuz von Mxeta ergriffen wir mit Menschenhänden und brachten es unterhalb des Hügels, an die Quelle, und wir wachten die Nacht hindurch und beteten zu Gott. [...] Und am folgenden Tag stiegen wir auf den Felsen [...]. Und dort errichteten sie das Kreuz in königlicher Herrlichkeit.<sup>28</sup>

Das Kreuz, das auf dem Hügel jenseits des Aragwi errichtet worden sein soll, lässt sich nach Jacobs Bericht als eine Erscheinung verstehen, die gleichsam greifbar geworden ist, eine materialisierte Lichtvision, die einer Antwort auf Konstantins Kreuzesvision und deren Nachbildung gleichkommt. Diese hatte dem Kaiser als Siegeszeichen im Kampf gedient, während auch der Bericht der *Bekehrung* mit konstantinischer Siegesrhetorik fortfährt: »Und der König [Mirian] beugte seine Knie und (mit ihm) alle Edlen und die ganze Menge des Volkes, und sie beteten das mit Sieg umkleidete Kreuz an [...]«.<sup>29</sup> König Mirian ist damit in der *Bekehrung* nicht nur ein zweiter Konstantin, sondern auch ein zweiter Konstantin, dessen Zeitgenosse er im Übrigen ja war.<sup>30</sup>

Allerdings ist dies nur eine Version der Geschichte, und hier wird der kompilatorische Charakter des Dokuments deutlich:<sup>31</sup> Im nachfolgenden 14. Kapitel der *Bekehrung*, das von einem anonymen Autor stammt, lesen wir nämlich, es sei König Mirian selbst gewesen, der das Kreuz aus einem stattlichen Baum fertigen ließ: ein Holzkreuz also, aber auf des Königs Anweisung entstanden, so wie das Goldkreuz, das der Kaiser anfertigen ließ. Mirians Geschichte verläuft dabei allerdings umgekehrt: Der König habe nämlich erst im Nachhinein verstanden – »er erinnerte und erkannte« –, dass es jenes Zeichen des Kreuzes gewesen sei, das damals, »als sich der Tag auf dem Berg verfinsterte«, »[...] vor seinen Augen die Dunkelheit erhellt hatte«.<sup>32</sup> Das Licht nach der Finsternis, in die Mirian geraten war, verschmilzt hier



4 Jvari, Kirche des Hl. Kreuzes

also gleichsam mit dem Licht der Kreuzesvision, die in dieser Erzählung erst einige Zeit nach der Aufrichtung des Holzkreuzes folgt, dieses gleichsam himmlisch sanktioniert. Das in den Wald als dem Ort der Bekehrung des Königs dringende Licht wird gewissermaßen rückwirkend als Lichtkreuzvision interpretiert. Damit scheint es, als habe der Autor dieses Teils der *Bekehrung* einen bekannten Bericht der Ereignisse in der Art, wie ihn schon Rufinus und Sozomenos lieferten, durch das Motiv der Erkenntnis des Königs konstantinisch ausgedeutet und aufzuwerten versucht. Der Ort, an dem das Kreuz errichtet werden sollte, war darüber hinaus dem König im Traum von einem Engel offenbart worden: Dieser »zeigte ihm einen Hügel jenseits der Aragva«, an dem dann auch das ganze Volk Gefallen fand: den Jvari-Hügel.

Ein weiteres Werk, das von der Kreuzesvision in Mzcheta berichtet und lange als deren ältestes Zeugnis galt,<sup>33</sup> ist inzwischen mehrfach und mit guten Gründen ins 8./9. Jahrhundert datiert worden und somit zeitgleich mit der *Bekehrung* entstanden, wenn nicht partiell jünger.<sup>34</sup> Es handelt sich um die *Geschichte der Armenier* des Moses von Choren, in der man wohl eine Geschichtskonstruktion zugunsten der armenischen Bagratiden erkennen kann.<sup>35</sup> Dort heißt es, Nino habe den Befehl erhalten, das Götzenbild des Armaz zu zerstören, das außerhalb der Stadt, und zwar jenseits der Kura stand (Abb. 3).<sup>36</sup> Die Edlen der Stadt hätten daraufhin gefragt, wen sie stattdessen anbeten sollten, und als Antwort erhalten: das Zeichen des

Kreuzes. Sie hätten dieses gefertigt und auf einem Hügel östlich der Stadt jenseits des schmalen Flusses aufgestellt (der Hügel von Jvari ist nicht mit dem Platz des Götzen identisch). Alle Menschen der Stadt hätten daraufhin das Kreuz von den Dächern ihrer Häuser aus verehrt, so wie sie zuvor von dort die Idole anzubeten pflegten. Als sie aber selbst zum Hügel gekommen seien und dort nur ein Stück gehauenes Holz vorgefunden hätten, also kein »Werk aus Meisterhand«, hätten sie es verachtet, weil ihre Wälder voll solcher Objekte seien, und seien fortgegangen. Gott aber, der von oben ihr »Stolpern« gesehen habe, habe eine Wolkensäule vom Himmel geschickt, und der Berg sei von süßem Geruch erfüllt gewesen, und es sei eine Schar zu hören gewesen, die mit großer Süße Psalmen sang, und ein Licht in der Form eines Kreuzes sei erschienen, in derselben Gestalt und von derselben Größe wie das hölzerne Kreuz auf dem Hügel, und das Lichtkreuz habe über ihm gestanden, umgeben von zwölf Sternen.<sup>37</sup>

In der Geschichte des Moses von Choren ist es also das aufgerichtete, von Menschen (aber nicht von Meisterhand) gemachte Holzkreuz, das für das Bild der Vision in Gestalt und Maß formgebend ist. Die Vision wird hier gewissermaßen selbst zu dessen Abbild, schwingt sich damit zugleich zum legitimierenden, himmlischen Urbild auf, aus welchem sich dieses künstlerisch anspruchslose Objekt begründet. In den Beschreibungen der Ereignisse in der *Bekehrung Kartliens* war der Ursprung des Bildes jeweils das Licht am Himmel, das sich auf unterschiedliche Weise mit dem von Menschenhänden geschaffenen Werk verknüpft, sich auf dessen Vollendung hin einstellt oder ihm vorangeht. In der Passage des Jacob liegt die Betonung der Erzählung auf den »Menschenhänden« (ჰეღოთა ვაჭობროვითა), die etwas Übernatürliches, Lichthaftes, nämlich ein Wunder des Himmels, »nehmen« bzw. greifen (აღვიძებრთ) und aufrichten, etwas, das eben nicht von Menschenhänden geschaffen ist (dazu gegenläufig die von Menschenhand geschaffene, aber acheiropoietisch aufgerichtete Säule). Mirian wiederum erblickte im Holzkreuz das Zeichen seiner ersten Lichtvision: »und als er es (jetzt) sah, erkannte er es«.<sup>38</sup>

Angesichts der so unterschiedlichen Versionen der Kreuzesvision in Mzcheta stellt sich die reizvolle (wenn auch kaum zu beantwortende) Frage, wie man sich das Kreuz von Jvari vorstellen kann, um welches sich die Legenden ranken. Eine materialisierte Lichtvision mag man sich in jedem Fall anders vorgestellt haben als ein einfaches Stück gehauenen Holzes, dessen Bild erst danach im Himmel erscheint. Wir wissen nichts über das tatsächliche Aussehen des Jvari-Kreuzes. Seit 1998 steht ein monumentales, silberverkleidetes Kreuz mit in Holz geschnittenen Szenen aus dem Leben Jesu im Zentrum der Kirche (Abb. 5). 1901 hat Natroev noch ein ebenso monumentales Holzkreuz gesehen, das laut einer Inschrift im Jahre 1725 durch König Teimuraz II. und dann noch einmal 1751 durch dessen Vezir Davit Avalishvili eine neue Silberbekleidung erhalten hatte.<sup>39</sup> Von einer Umkleidung des Kreuzes ist im Übrigen schon im 14. Kapitel der *Bekehrung* die Rede. Dort heißt es, eine Frau habe »die Umkleidung des Kreuzes beschädigt«, weil sie von einem bösen Geist geplagt gewesen sei.<sup>40</sup> Ob unter dieser »Umkleidung« allerdings eine Metallbekleidung oder ein Tuch zu verstehen ist, ist dem georgischen Wortlaut nicht zu entnehmen, beides ist denkbar und schließt sich nicht aus.<sup>41</sup>

Vor dem Hintergrund der in der *Bekehrung* erzählten »greifbaren« Lichtvision verdienen in diesem Kontext die in Svanetien erhaltenen, mit getriebenen Goldplatten beschlagenen großen Kreuze des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts Beachtung, die von Michele Bacci als »Echoes of Golgotha« gedeutet wurden und sich zweifellos auf Jvari beziehen.<sup>42</sup> Ihre goldenen Oberflächen reflektieren das natürliche und künstliche Licht in der Kirche, wie Bacci zu Recht hervorgehoben hat. Ein schönes Beispiel ist die kleine Kirche Lagurka; auf einem Hügel in einer Flusslandschaft gelegen, ist sie auch topomimetisch auf Jvari bezogen.<sup>43</sup> Materialikonographisch mögen die Goldkreuze damit nicht nur auf Golgatha selbst, sondern insbesondere auch auf das in der *Bekehrung* genannte Lichtkreuz antworten. Die Goldkreuze könnten selbst als Darstellungen dieser materialisierten Staurophanie von Mzcheta, also als Abbilder des Jvari-Kreuzes zu verstehen sein. Zeitlich folgen sie jedenfalls um wenig der Ausbildung der *Mokcevat Kartlisay*, die wohl erst im späten 8. oder 9. Jahrhundert abgeschlossen war, und der Verbreitung der Erzählungen zur Kreuzesvision. Lerner vermutet, dass die beiden Erzählungen zur Kreuzaufrichtung in der *Bekehrung* erst im 10. Jahrhundert hinzugefügt wurden und selbst jüngeren Datums sind als der Rest der Kompilation.<sup>44</sup> Sicher scheint jedenfalls, dass die älteste Schicht der Legendentradition um die Christianisierung Georgiens nur den Schauplatz von Svetitskhoveli, den königlichen Palast und seinen Garten, also die Ebene von Mzcheta, und die Lichtsäule kennt und noch nicht Jvari als Ort der Aufstellung des Kreuzes, wie auch immer von diesem berichtet wird. Wann genau diese »Besetzung« des Hügels stattgefunden hat, ist schwer zu sagen. Wir kommen darauf zurück.

Die Idee einer Lichtkreuzvision bzw. -erscheinung selbst passt hingegen gut ins 4. Jahrhundert; ja, man könnte sogar sagen, dass das Jahrhundert der Christianisierung auch jenes der Kreuzesvisionen war und die Ansiedelung der Vision von Mzcheta in die Zeit König Mirians damit durchaus folgerichtig, ungeachtet der Frage, wann dies tatsächlich geschehen ist. Neben Eusebios und Kyrill von Jerusalem weiß auch Gregor von Nazianz von einer Staurophanie zu berichten: Von Wirbelwind, Feuer und Erdbeben begleitet, erschien das Lichtkreuz am Himmel als Zeichen des Sieges über die Gottlosen, als Julianus Apostata versuchte, den jüdischen Tempel wieder aufzubauen.<sup>45</sup> Dies soll am 19. Mai 363 geschehen sein. Gegenüber den anderen drei genannten Staurophanien des 4. Jahrhunderts weist diejenige in Mzcheta jedoch eine Besonderheit auf – sie »materialisiert« sich nicht nur gleichsam selbst, sondern sie wandert auch (in umgekehrter Reihenfolge): Denn das Kreuz selbst wich, so Priester Jacob in der *Bekehrung*, »ganz allmählich [...] zur Seite der Aragva hin und hielt über einem Felsen Hügel«,<sup>46</sup> mit anderen Worten jenem Hügel, der zum georgischen Golgatha werden soll: Jvari. Während im 14. Kapitel der Ort dem König im Traum mitgeteilt worden ist, lässt die *Bekehrung* im Bericht davor das Lichtkreuz in einer Art Performanz gewissermaßen selbst die Sakraltopographie Mzchetas bestimmen.<sup>47</sup> Von Interesse dabei ist, dass ihre »Agentin« die hl. Nino ist, während der Traum des Königs in dem anderen Bericht eine Antwort auf die ankommenden griechischen Priester ist, die ihn auf die Notwendigkeit der Errichtung eines Kreuzes hinweisen.

In der *Bekehrung* werden damit nicht nur zwei unterschiedliche Versionen der Kreuzgenese, sondern auch zwei Weisen seiner miraculösen Verortung angeboten.

Eine dritte Version offerierte Moses von Choren. In seiner Version der Geschichte erfolgte die Ortswahl aufgrund der weiten Sichtbarkeit, und im 11. Jahrhundert gibt Leonti Mroveli im *Leben Kartlis* schließlich noch einmal die Version des Priesters Jacob wieder. Diese Pluralität und Heterogenität der Berichte ist an und für sich für Legendentraktionen typisch. Damit stellt sich aber auch die schwierige Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Ort und Erzählung. Gab es ein präexistentes Heiligtum auf dem Berg, das die Bildung einer neuen, christlichen Legende motivierte, oder stellt die große Kreuzkirche von Jvari umgekehrt die Monumentalisierung einer erzählten Geschichte dar (unabhängig von ihrem Wahrheitsgehalt)?

Naheliegender mag scheinen, im Hügel der Jvari-Kirche jenen Ort zu vermuten, an dem Parnavas, der erste König Kartliens, den großen Götzen Armaz aufgestellt haben soll.<sup>48</sup> Dies war aber gerade nicht der Fall. Der Berg des Armaz lag rechts der Kura, also dem Jvari-Hügel gegenüber, dort wo sich auch die antike Hauptstadt Armazi befand (Abb. 3, Nr. 2).<sup>49</sup> Während weder die *Bekehrung* noch das *Leben Kartlis* den Aufstellungsort des Armaz allzu klar benennen, wiewohl von jenem der Kreuzaufrichtung unterscheiden,<sup>50</sup> wird in der Geschichte der Armenier des Moses von Choren präziser der Ort des Götzen und seines Tempels jenseits der mächtigen Kura dem Ort des Kreuzes auf einem Hügel, der von der Stadt durch einen schmalen Fluss (dem Aragwi) getrennt war, gegenübergestellt.<sup>51</sup> Das »verehrungswürdige« Kreuz besetzte jedenfalls einen neuen, in der Sakraltopographie Mzchetas bis dato noch nicht (oder nicht nachweisbar) okkupierten Berg, der sich landschaftlich eindrucksvoll oberhalb des Zusammenflusses erhebt. Die Frage nach der gegenseitigen Bedingtheit von Ort und Erzählung ist damit freilich nicht beantwortet. Zu bedenken ist aber, dass keines der Dokumente, die von der Kreuzesvision und der Kreuzaufrichtung auf dem Jvari-Hügel berichten, sicher vor das 8./9. Jahrhundert datiert werden kann. Damit wäre der Jvari-Bau selbst, gemäß seiner Datierung ins späte 6./7. Jahrhundert, das älteste erhaltene Zeugnis. Dies öffnet einen Fragehorizont, der über diesen Beitrag hinausführt, denn dafür müsste eine Untersuchung des Baus selbst mit eingeschlossen werden.<sup>52</sup> Verschiedene Szenarien sind denkbar: Wenn die Umstände der Stiftung und Errichtung des Baus in einer späteren Zeit in den Hintergrund treten, kann eine legendarische Neubegründung sie bzw. diesen Ort näher an die konstantinische Zeit rücken und ihn gleichsam zu einem Monument der Konversion Georgiens machen. Die Legende setzt dann den Bau voraus, der sich gleichwohl einem königlichen Siegeszeichen im Rekurs auf Konstantin verdanken kann, ohne Zweifel mit Blick auf eine jerusalemische Kreuzaufrichtung auf einem Berg. Vorarbeit leisten die Jagdlegenden um Mirian bei Rufinus und anderen frühen Kirchenhistorikern, man vergleiche die Legenden um König Abgar von Edessa ebendort, welche in der Zeit des Lebens Jesu spielen. Nach der anderen Seite gibt es legendarische Ex-post-Begründungen für christliche Sakralbauten durchaus, man denke an das Schneewunder, welches die Ortswahl der päpstlichen Basilika Santa Maria Maggiore erklärt, gerade weil sie nicht auf ein Grab (*intra muros* im 5. Jahrhundert ja undenkbar) oder einen Tempel auf dem Esquilin zurückgeht. Diese Traditionslücke schließt die Erzählung vom wunderbaren Schneefall am 5. August und datiert damit die Kirche um 80 Jahre früher, als sie tatsächlich errichtet wurde, also in die spätkonstantinische Zeit. Für



5 Jvari, Kirche des Hl. Kreuzes, Innenansicht mit einer Rekonstruktion des Kreuzes

Jvari kann man sich ein komplexes Zusammenspiel von Monumentalisierung und Narrativierung des Ortes vorstellen, die sich zu einer dichten Tradition verbinden, aber zugleich Spielraum für das Fortarbeiten der Legenden lassen.

In der *Bekehrung Kartliens* ist im Teil des Priesters Jacob von weiteren wandernden Lichterscheinungen die Rede, nämlich führenden Sternen, die dem Stern von Bethlehem verwandt sind. Dieser war vor den Sterndeutern hergezogen bis zu dem Ort, an dem das Kind war, wo er stehen blieb (Mt 2,9). In der *Bekehrung* hingegen heißt es:

Und bei Tagesanbruch, zur Zeit der Morgenröte, gingen zwei Sterne von ihm [dem Kreuz] aus; einer ging nach Osten und einer nach Westen [...]. Die Heilige aber sprach zum König und zum ganzen Volk: »Schickt Männer über die hohen Berge nach Osten bis zum Berg von Kachetien, und nach Westen, soweit sich dein Königreich erstreckt. Und wenn die Morgenröte aufleuchtet, sollen sie sehen, wo jene [Sterne] stehenblieben, und eben dort errichtet diese beiden Kreuze [...].« Am folgenden Tag kamen die vom Westen, die auf den Bergen gestanden hatten, zu denen der Berg Kualta-Tavi gehört. Und sie berichteten dem König: »Der Stern verweilte auf den Bergen von Txoti und er stieg hinab nach Ergw und Kaspi und blieb an einer Stelle und wurde langsam unsichtbar.« Ebenso kamen sie vom Osten und sagten: »Wir sahen den Stern von hier kommen und er verweilte beim Dorf Bod im Lande Kachetien.«<sup>53</sup>

Gregor von Nazianz hat die Besonderheit des Sterns von Bethlehem in einer Weise erklärt, die analog auch für die Sterne von Mzcheta gilt. Der Stern von Bethlehem sei nicht irgendeiner von all denen gewesen, »wofür die Astrologen Kündler sind«, sondern er sei ein Fremder gewesen und nicht zuvor erschienen: »Abgesondert von den Vielen, die sie normalerweise beobachten, sahen sie ihn, als er neu aufscheinend herumlief im Bereich der unteren Luftschicht von Osten her zum Land der Hebräer hin [...].«<sup>54</sup> Während der Stern von Bethlehem zu Christus hinführt, gehen jene in Mzcheta von seinem Zeichen aus. In beiden Fällen aber durchwandern die »fremden«, weil weder im Fixsternhimmel noch Planetensystem verankerten Sterne<sup>55</sup> ein Gebiet und markieren einen Ort, der mit Christus in Verbindung steht. »Es war zu dieser Zeit, als den Astrologen zugleich die Pläne ihrer Kunst verfielen«, schreibt Gregor von Nazianz weiter.<sup>56</sup> Es sind die Sterndeuter, die Christus zuallererst erkennen, wodurch zugleich ihre pagane Praxis entmachtet wird. Die Sterne verbindet also weiterhin, dass sie jeweils im Kontext von Erkenntnis und Bekehrung stehen.

Bemerkenswert an den Ereignissen in Mzcheta ist, dass die wandernden Sterne ein Territorium markieren, das durch die Aufstellung von Kreuzen abgesteckt wird. Die *Bekehrung* schildert gewissermaßen einen Akt der Territorialisierung und verortet die Grenzen eines christlichen Landes sehr konkret (im Westen soweit sich das Königreich erstreckt) – genannt werden die Berge Kualta-Tavi und Txoti sowie die Orte Ergw und Kaspi –, das in Innerkartlien etwa 30 km nordwestlich von Mzcheta liegt. Im Osten ist es der »Berg von Kachetien« und das »Dorf Bod im Lande Kachetien«. Der später noch einmal im Text genannte Ort, wiederum Bod oder Bodisi genannt, solle der Stadt der Könige (wohl Mzcheta) nicht den Vorrang streitig machen, weshalb das Kreuz nicht dort, sondern in der kachetischen Stadt Uzharma aufzustellen sei. Der Text in der *Bekehrung* beschreibt also eine Konkurrenz zwischen Mzcheta und Bod, die eher auf den historischen Kontext der Abfassungszeit verweisen dürfte denn auf

eine Gegebenheit in der Geschichte der Kreuzesaufstellung. Wie Plontke-Lüning annimmt, könnte es sich bei Bod oder Bodisi um das Kloster Bodbe handeln, den Ort, an dem die hl. Nino der Legende nach begraben ist und König Mirian III. ein kleines Kloster errichtet haben soll.<sup>57</sup> Die heutige Kirche des Klosters dürfte im 9. Jahrhundert erbaut worden sein, ein Hinweis darauf, dass das Kloster in dieser Zeit an Bedeutung gewann. Später bemächtigten sich die Könige von Kachetien des Klosters und nutzten die Klosterkirche als Krönungskirche.

Im Jahre 645 fielen die Araber in Iberien ein, 736 wurde das Emirat von Tbilissi gegründet, das offiziell bis 1080 weiterbestand und dem Mzcheta im 8. Jahrhundert unterstand. Kachetien, das ursprünglich zu Iberien gehörte, bildete sich in der zweiten Hälfte des 8. und frühen 9. Jahrhunderts als eigenständiges Fürstentum heraus.<sup>58</sup> 842 gelang es Bagrat Kuropalat Innerkartlien vom Emirat zurückzuerobern, bis in die 860er Jahre gehörte Mzcheta dann zu Tao-Klarjeti, danach zu Egrisi-Abchasien.<sup>59</sup> Um 900 war Kartlien mit Mzcheta selbstständig, wenn auch nur für wenige Jahre (894–904). Danach fiel es wieder an Abchasien, dann wieder an das Emirat (nach 914), an Tao-Klarjeti und erneut an Abchasien (nach 924).<sup>60</sup> Betrachtet man die Territorientwicklung Georgiens vom 8. bis ins 10. Jahrhundert, wird deutlich, dass die Passage der Kreuzerscheinung mit ihren wandernden Sternen sich gut in eine Zeit der Ausbildung konkurrierender Herrschaftsgebiete, die um die Dominanz in Innerkartlien kämpften, fügt, was nicht heißt, dass sie nicht frühere Legenden fortschreibt.<sup>61</sup>

Es dürfte in diesem Sinne kein Zufall sein, dass sich die ältesten erhaltenen Versionen der *Bekehrung* zum einen auf dem Sinai und zum anderen im Kloster Satberd, einem Kloster in Tao-Klarjeti, erhalten haben. Im 9. Jahrhundert entstand auf dem Sinai eine Kolonie georgischer Mönche, die im 10. Jahrhundert noch an Größe und Bedeutung gewann. Die beiden Handschriften des Sinai mit der *Bekehrung Kartliens* (N Sin 48 und N Sin 50) entstammen beide, wie der Satberd-Codex, dem 10. Jahrhundert und enthalten ihrerseits unterschiedliche Redaktionen. Da der wohl älteste Codex N Sin 50 auch schon die Version des Priesters Jacob enthält, könnte diese ins 9. Jahrhundert oder noch früher zu datieren sein.<sup>62</sup> Im Kolophon von N Sin 50 nennt sich der Stifter, der vielleicht auch mit einem der Schreiber der Handschrift identisch ist: »Iovane, jadis Arsusa«, ein Name, der, wie Aleksidzé dargelegt hat, auf eine Herkunft aus Kartlien schließen lässt.<sup>63</sup> Es sind die Zeit und das Umfeld des ebenso kartwelischen Mönches Ioane Zosime, in denen die Abschriften der *Bekehrung* entstehen: Um 920 geboren, war Ioane Zosime zunächst Mönch im Kloster Satberd, um von dort nach Mar Saba und schließlich auf den Sinai zu gehen. Bekannt ist er für seine religiösen, hymnographischen und chronographischen Schriften und Preisungen der georgischen Sprache, er kopierte, kompilierte und kollationierte Texte und band Bücher.<sup>64</sup>

## Die Heilige und der König in der Landschaft

Im Vorausgehenden haben wir uns auf die ›Lichtspiele‹, zunächst der Säule im königlichen Garten von Mzcheta und dann der mannigfachen Erscheinungen des Kreuzes um den Berg Jvari, konzentriert und dabei ihre topographischen bzw. szenographischen Dynamiken in den Blick genommen. Dies ist gewiss der zentrale Aspekt der *Mokcevoy Kartlisay* in ihrer referierten Überlieferung. Liest man diesen Text nicht in Hinsicht auf die unterschiedlichen, chronologischen Schichten, die in seinen Kapiteln ko-präsent sind, sondern im Zusammenhang, fällt die multiperspektivische und vielstimmige Erzählweise auf, die von der Königsliste am Anfang bis zur Erzählung Ninos auf dem Totenbett, der Geschichte ihrer Jugend und Ankunft in Mzcheta zum Bericht des Priesters und späteren Bischofs Jacob und schließlich dem Brief reicht, den König Mirian in seiner Todesstunde an Salome von Uzarma schreibt. Diese ›Stimmen‹ bieten nicht nur unterschiedliche Versionen wie etwa bei der Aufrichtung des Jvari-Kreuzes, sondern erweisen sich auch als komplementäres und über die Kapitel verteiltes, sich in Schritten enthüllendes Berichten der miraculösen Konversion Georgiens zum Christentum. Die Struktur ist binär, ihre Protagonisten sind die Heilige und der König: Es kommt insofern Nino und Mirian zu, an der Schwelle zum Tod zu sprechen oder zu schreiben. Die ausgreifende hagiographische Erzählung Ninos, der Fremden und Gefangenen (Sklavin), verschränkt sich mit der Geschichte des Königs, schreibt sich ein oder bricht ein in die Genealogie der georgischen Könige. Es ist von daher nur logisch, wenn beiden die Aufrichtung des Kreuzes bzw. die Ortswahl für dieselbe zugeschrieben und letztere jeweils wunderbar begründet wird (Traum des Königs, Auffindung des Ortes durch Nino). Es gehört zugleich zur Schönheit und zum Reichtum dieser multiplen Erzählung, dass sie zahlreiche andere Akteure und Personen kennt, die Begleiterin Ninos, das Paar im Gärtnerhäuschen, die Königin, einen persischen Magier, die Juden Mzchetas, die Zimmerleute, die Adligen und das Volk, den Priester, das kranke Kind usw., sowie zugleich einen Blick in die Ferne öffnet auf Jerusalem, Rom, Armenien, auf Helena und Konstantin, der die nach Georgien reisenden griechischen Priester aussendet. Es sind ja sie, welche den König und das Volk über die Notwendigkeit der Aufrichtung eines Kreuzes unterrichten, welches dann durch ein multisensorielles Naturspektakel sondergleichen göttlich beglaubigt wird: Das beschriebene Feuerwerk des Lichtkreuzes (dreimal heller als die Sonne) ist begleitet von Sternenkronen und Engelreigen sowie von einem freudigen Beben der Erde, dem Bersten von Felsen und der Verbreitung von Schwaden von Wohlgeruch; die alttestamentarischen Szenarien der *terribilità* der sinaitischen Theophanien (bzw. beim Tod Christi am Kreuz) werden hier zum freudigen Ereignis, das gleichwohl die Atmosphäre der biblischen Ereignisse evoziert.

Doch zurück zu Nino und Mirian: Wir sehen sie in Natur, Stadt und Landschaft, ebenso getrennt wie in ihren Begegnungen. Sie ›bespielen‹ dieselbe Topographie in unterschiedlicher Weise, die sich solcherart verdichtet und neu markiert und konfiguriert wird. Dabei gibt es viele topische Aspekte: den jagenden König, der sich verirrt, die eremitenhafte Heilige in den Brombeersträuchern mit dem mit ihren Haaren

zusammengebundenen Weinrebenkreuz (einer der wichtigsten Reliquien Georgiens). Auch die Zerstörung der Idole gehört dazu, und einmal mehr gibt es zwei Versionen: Der Sturz sei geschehen durch die Wirkungsmacht des Gebets Ninos bzw. bei der Aufrichtung des Kreuzes von Jvari durch den König und die griechischen Priester. Erstere ist von besonderem Interesse in unserem Kontext, denn sie führt zurück zur Begründung der kartlischen Monarchie durch den schon erwähnten König Parnavas: Er soll die georgische Schrift und Sprache eingeführt haben und die Festungsstadt auf dem Berg über der Kura errichtet haben, in der sich offenbar das Heiligtum des Gottes Armaz befand, welches dann das Gebet Ninos einstürzen ließ.<sup>65</sup>

In Leonti Mrovelis *Leben Kartlis* (11. Jahrhundert) findet sich eine legendarische Vita des Parnavas (3. Jahrhundert v. Chr.), die ihrerseits auf älteren Traditionen beruht und in einigen Motiven mit der Erzählung Jacobs über die Kreuzesvision Ähnlichkeiten aufweist.<sup>66</sup> Unter politischem und militärischem Druck plante der König zu fliehen. In der Nacht träumte er, in einem »menschenleeren Haus« eingesperrt zu sein, als durch das Fenster ein Sonnenstrahl fiel, der ihn selbst erfasste und durch das Fenster hindurch auf ein Feld hinaustrug. Von dort sah er die »Sonne tief unten« stehen, streckte seine Hand aus, rieb einen Tropfen vom Gesicht der Sonne und wärmte damit sein Gesicht.<sup>67</sup> Es ist zuallererst das Motiv eines Lichtes als Agens, das wir sowohl in dem den König ergreifenden Lichtstrahl als auch im über den Fluss wandernden Lichtkreuz vorfinden, ferner der Akt des Ins-Licht-Greifens, der in beiden Fällen nicht zu einer Verbrennung, sondern einer paradoxalen Überwindung natürlicher Gesetzmäßigkeiten führt: Während in der *Bekehrung* das »durch ein Wunder des Himmels erschienene [...] Kreuz [...] mit Menschenhänden« ergriffen zu werden scheint (jedenfalls in einer möglichen Deutung der Legende), nimmt Parnavas einen Tropfen aus dem Gesicht der Sonne, mit dem er sich wärmen kann. Daraufhin geht der König im Traum zur Jagd (hier begegnen wir neuerlich dem herrscherlichen Jagdmotiv, das sich auch in der *Bekehrung* findet) und schießt einen Pfeil auf einen Hirsch, der verwundet bis zu einem Felsen weiterläuft. Am Fuß des Felsens findet der König den Eingang einer Höhle mit einem »unermesslichen Schatz, Gold und Silber bzw. goldenes und silbernes Gerät in unvorstellbarer Menge«<sup>68</sup>. Erinnern mag diese Höhle an jene *Syrische Schatzhöhle*, die dem Autor des *Lebens des Parnavas* vielleicht bekannt gewesen ist.<sup>69</sup> In sie hatte Adam Gold, Myrrhe und Weihrauch gelegt, die er aus dem Paradies mitgenommen haben soll und die später von den Magiern nach Bethlehem gebracht wurden.<sup>70</sup> Adam soll außerdem selbst in dieser Schatzhöhle bestattet gewesen sein, bevor ihn seine Nachkommen nach Golgatha überführten.<sup>71</sup> Das goldene Gerät im Traum des Königs lässt aber auch an das Goldene Vlies denken, das Fell des Chrysomallos, dessen legendärer Ort das an Gold so reiche Kolchis zwischen Kartlien und der Schwarzmeerküste ist. Parnavas jedenfalls gelang durch den Schatzfund (der sich dann außerhalb des Traums manifestierte) die Sicherung des Reiches. Er wurde schließlich begraben vor dem Götzen Armaz, an jenem Ort, den Nino als den Ort der alten Stadt auf dem Berg versteht.<sup>72</sup>

Damit nochmals zurück zur *Bekehrung*: Die Ankunft Ninos in Mzcheta findet zur Zeit eines religiösen Festes und einer Handelsmesse statt. König Mirian erscheint selbst ausgestattet wie ein Götze inmitten des auf alle Weisen geschmückten Volkes,

dass es Nino zum Erschrecken findet. Sie steigt auf den Berg des Armaz und sieht das Götterbild in Gestalt der Statue eines Mannes aus Kupfer mit Goldhelm und -kette, mit Beryll und Onyx bestückt, er hält ein blitzendes Schwert, das sich bewegt, und ist flankiert von einer goldenen und einer silbernen Statue. Es sind diese Idole mit ihrem falschen Licht und Glanz, die Ninos Gebet zerschmettert oder zermalmt und die Mauern den Berg hinabstürzen lässt unter dem Aufbäumen der Elemente (dem negativen Gegenbild jenes beschriebenen, noch kommenden bei der Kreuzaufrichtung), worauf sich die Heilige in einem Felsspalt (wie einst Moses und Elias am Sinai) verbirgt, um dann einen Beryll zu finden (wohl das Auge des Idols) und sich in die Wälder zurückzuziehen. Schließlich am äußersten Punkt eines Felsplateaus angelangt, wo die Burgmauern endeten, ritzt sie am Fuß einer prächtigen Akazie das Kreuzzeichen ein. All dies geschieht nicht zufällig am Tag des Festes der Verklärung Christi. Nach drei Tagen steigt Nino in die Stadt Mzcheta hinunter, und ihr Konversionswerk wie ihre Wundertätigkeit nehmen ihren Fortgang.

Es wäre natürlich spannend, die vorchristliche Topographie um Mzcheta gemäß den Legenden in Rekurs auf archäologische Evidenz gegenzulesen. Kein Zweifel, dass die Festung von Armazi eine bedeutende Anlage und die Akropolis der Stadt war und einen Königspalast besaß, ebenso dass ihr Bedeutungsverlust als Siedlung mit der gegenläufigen Tendenz der Handelsstadt Mzcheta in der Ebene sie in einen primär religiösen Kultort und *lieu de mémoire* von Kartli verwandelte. Bezeugt ist zwar auch eine Festung auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite des Flusses, für Jvari mit seinem Kreuzheiligtum gibt es dagegen keine toponyme Tradition oder, soweit uns bekannt, keine in diesem Kontext aussagekräftigen archäologischen Funde, die in die pagane Zeit zurückreichen.<sup>73</sup> Man macht sich nicht zum Legendengläubigen, wenn man eine Umpolung der Landschaft im Prozess der Christianisierung und folgenden Monumentalisierung in Kartli unter christlichen Vorzeichen am Werk sieht. Diese arbeitet die Legende aus und mag auch selbst ein Agens in diesem Prozess gewesen sein. Die Überlieferung der Legende im 10./11. Jahrhundert zusammen mit anderen Geschichtswerken fällt in die Zeit der Neuerrichtung der Kirche in Svetitskhoveli (im frühen 11. Jahrhundert), und all dies ist bekanntlich im Horizont der Einigungsbestrebungen christlich-georgischer Herrscher zu verstehen, wofür Svetitskhoveli gleichsam als Ortsikone mit ihrem Jerusalembezug, dem Gewand Christi und der Geschichte Ninos einsteht. Es wäre in diesem Zusammenhang auch von Interesse, die anderen Kirchen und Klöster in der Landschaft um Mzcheta, die mit Letzterer verbunden sind und ebenso topomimetische Bezüge zu Jerusalem aufweisen, miteinzubeziehen, etwa das Kloster Samtavro über dem Brombeerbusch oder die Kirche Ninos unterhalb von Armazi, also auf der Jvari gegenüberliegenden Seite der Kura (Abb. 3, Nr. 19 und 10).

All diese Fragen und Themen sollten hier nicht verfolgt werden, wir bewegten uns mit unserer Untersuchung vielmehr gleichsam im Inneren der Erzählungen, insbesondere der ›Bekehrung‹, mit besonderem Augenmerk auf der dort geschilderten Rolle Ninos als Illuminatrix in der ›Erleuchtung‹ Kartlis. Aus dieser Perspektive erscheint die ›Umpolung‹ der Landschaft als souveräner Akt in all seinen dargelegten Deutungen. Die Zerstörung Armazis und seiner Idole in der alten Befestigung

offeriert hier nicht einen Ort für eine Superposition, sondern ist Anlass für eine Verschiebung, und deren Dreh- und Angelpunkt ist die Zeder bzw. umlichtete Säule im Garten des Königs, gewachsen am Grab der Sidonia mit dem Gewand Christi. In der Kreuzerscheinung in der Legende wird, wie dargelegt, auch die Wahl Jvaris von diesem heiligen Ort her durch eine Verschiebung (des Lichtkreuzes) erklärt. Jvari wird damit gleichsam von oben herab aus dem Licht ›begründet‹, während es im Garten selbst über Grab und Wurzel des Baums zunächst von unten her geschieht oder eben doch beides zusammenkommt im Motiv der sich wieder auf die Wurzel herablassenden lichtumflorten Säule. Damit offeriert die Legende, natürlich aus der und für die Sicht ex-post, eine Erklärung der wiederum bipolaren Beziehung der beiden monumentalen Heiligtümer von Mzcheta: Svetitskhoveli und Kreuzkirche von Jvari. Dass sich auf diesem Hügel zugleich die Tränen-Quelle Ninos befindet, die ihrerseits zum Pilgerort wird, zeigt die differenzierte Sakraltopographie der Landschaft, die sich in einer Pilgerkarte darstellen lässt (Abb. 3).

Die angesprochene bipolare Beziehung und zugleich Verbindung von Kreuzkirche und Svetitskhoveli rückt auch jene der beiden zeichenhaften Dinge aus Holz ins Licht: die Säule und das Kreuz. Allein schon der salomonische Referenzrahmen der Zedern und die Kreuzlegende zeigen die Nähe von Säule und Kreuz, auch die Tatsache, dass der Baum über dem Gewand Christi wächst, das jener unter dem Kreuz abgelegt hatte. Die Säule ist ein einzelner Gegenstand, aus dem Baum geschnitten, die einzige, die eine solche ›Trägheit‹ und Resistenz an den Tag legt. Ihre lichtvolle Erhebung und Rückkehr an ihren Ursprungsort macht sie zur zentralen, vertikalen Achse Kartlis. Beim Kreuz ist die Dynamik des Zusammenspiels von Ding und Zeichen eine andere. Auch hier handelt es sich zunächst um ein Einzelding oder vielmehr eines von dreien. Die Schwierigkeit liegt unter anderem, wie dargelegt, bei den unterschiedlichen Versionen. Sie stimmen darin überein, dass ein Kreuz bzw. drei Kreuze aus dem Holz eines ausgezeichneten Baumes geschaffen werden, eines blatttragenden Baumes mitten im Winter, der noch lange die Blätter hielt, als er gefällt wurde. Nach dem Brief des Mirian handelt es sich um einen Baum, zu dem er bei der Jagd im Wald gelangt, keine Menschenhand habe ihn je berührt, und nach dem Bericht der Jäger flüchteten sich verwundete Hirsche zu ihm, um von seinen Samen zu fressen, wodurch sie dem Tod entgingen. Jacobus seinerseits weiß um diesen Baum, der seinem Bericht zufolge am Südportal der Kirche in Mzcheta aufgestellt wurde, um über einen Monat nicht zu welken. Wir haben seine Erzählung von der Schaffung dreier Kreuze, ihrer Aufstellung in der Kirche und die nächtlichen Wunder oben vorgestellt. In jedem Fall sind diese menschengeschaffenen Kreuze der Ausgangspunkt für die Lichterscheinungen, und es sind just diese drei Kreuze, welche gemäß der miraculösen, nächtlichen Sternenwanderung eingesetzt werden, das Territorium Kartlis zu markieren. Das Kreuz ist ja allemal Zeichen (z. B. Siegeszeichen oder *tropaion*), es fügt der vertikalen Achse eine horizontale hinzu, indiziert eine kosmische oder eben territoriale Ausdehnung, welche dann im Wunder manifest wird. Es ist symptomatisch, dass im Unterschied zur Säule, welche himmlisches Licht umstrahlt, die Kreuze in den Erscheinungen gleichsam vervielfältigt werden, im Sinne von Urbild und Abbild, dies gleichsam als Legitimation der Objektform

geschieht, aus welcher sich ihre Bedeutung ja begründet. Zugleich sind die drei Kreuze aber auch materiell ausgezeichnet, sind heilige Objekte, geschnitten aus dem Holz des Zauberbaums. Vor allem das Jvari-Kreuz soll ja »individualisiert« werden, ist wunderwirkend und heilbringend. Dazu gehört sein besonderes Holz ebenso wie seine Aufstellung durch Nino oder seine Errichtung gemäß dem Traum des Königs. Ausgegangen, wie wir gesehen haben, vom Ort der Lichtsäule, migriert das Kreuz in die nahe Ferne über den Berg Jvari. Die faszinierende Passage bei Jacobus, das »durch ein Wunder des Himmels erschienene verehrungswürdige Kreuz von Mcxeta«<sup>74</sup> sei von Menschenhand ergriffen und von Nino geleitet zunächst zu ihrer Quelle und dann nach Jvari gebracht worden, ließe sich auch so verstehen, dass dieses ausgezeichnete Kreuz in Mzcheta in der Himmelserscheinung »überhört« gezeigt wurde (wiederum als »Abbild« wie in der Erscheinung vor dem König) und just jenes mittlere der drei aus dem Wunderbaum geschaffenen Kreuze meint, welches dann nach Jvari gebracht wird. Man muss sich nicht zwischen diesen beiden Lektüren entscheiden, weil in Wahrheit diese Ebenen verschmelzen. Nach der einen wird das hochverehrte Monumentalkreuz von Jvari aus der Sakraltopographie Mzchetas begründet: Der Wunderbaum wird aus den unwegsamen, felsigen Wäldern nach Mzcheta gebracht, das dort hergestellte Kreuz wiederum nach Jvari in einer Inversion der Richtung. Das bindet es an Svetitskhoveli rück und gibt ihm zugleich einen partikularen Status. Nach der anderen wird es in den Lichterscheinungen himmlisch beglaubigt und überhört, damit zugleich mit dem jerusalemischen Kreuz wie dem göttlichen Siegeszeichen eins. Wenn man das Kreuz von Jvari berührt, »greift« man sozusagen nach der miraculösen Kraft und göttlichen Gnade (bzw. wird von ihr ergriffen), die aus christlicher Sicht eine einzige gemeinsame Quelle haben.

Dies schließt natürlich nicht aus, dass in den in der *Bekehrung Kartlis* zusammengeführten Erzählungen pagane Traditionen fortleben oder umgedeutet werden; Nino beklagt sich ja über die Menschen Mzchetas, die zu Steinen, Bäumen oder getriebenem Metall beten. Wichtiger Protagonist der Erzählungen sind in der Tat die Bäume bzw. das Holz: die Zeder im Garten des Königs, der Akazienbaum, unter dem Nino das Kreuzzeichen einritz, der im Winter blatttragende Baum, auch er an entlegenem Ort, wie schon jener, zu dem König Parnavas gelangte, und andere mehr, auch Ninos Brombeersträucher am Stadtrand seien genannt. Zu Recht hat man als Referenzrahmen auf die Tradition der Verehrung von heiligen Bäumen in dieser Region verwiesen. Das Aufgebot an Feuer und Licht lässt seinerseits an zoroastrische Kulte denken, die wohl lange nach dem Beginn der Christianisierung fortlebten.<sup>75</sup>

Die frühe Islamisierung der Region hat dann die Emphase auf Jvari und Svetitskhoveli als Ursprung und Inbegriff eines christlich-georgischen Territoriums noch forciert. Gerade dadurch, dass das 20 km entfernte Tbilissi zur Hauptstadt avancierte und Mzcheta an politischer Bedeutung verlor, wird es zur sakralen Landschaftsikone Georgiens. Diese später auch stark national geprägte Inanspruchnahme Mzchetas darf aber nicht darüber hinwegtäuschen, dass die *Bekehrung Kartlis* wie die Geschichte der Könige von einer großen kulturellen und ethnischen Vielfalt sprechen. Nino ist eine geflüchtete Sklavin aus Kappadokien, König Mirian ist väterlicherseits Perser (wie Parnavas mütterlicherseits), er gelangt durch eine Teilung des persischen

Herrschaftsgebietes nach Mzcheta (alles gemäß der Legende). Ebenso Königin Nana und natürlich der konvertierte Magier, das Gewand Christi wird von einem Juden nach Mzcheta gebracht, wo es eine große jüdische Bevölkerungsgruppe gibt, es wird im Grab seiner Schwester Sidonia beigesetzt usw. Jene diversen Gruppen und das Land mit seinen Wunderbäumen, stürzenden Idolen, heiligen Quellen und neu besetzten Bergen sind Protagonisten und »Bühne« der meteorologischen wie auch der die Erscheinungsformen der Natur überschreitenden Lichtspiele bzw. materiellen Manifestationen des Lichtes der *Bekehrung*.<sup>76</sup>

### Anmerkungen

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- 1 Van Esbroeck 1998; Gagoshidze 2012, S. 47–61; Mgaloblishvili 2014, S. 59–66; Bacci 2016, S. 210–213; <http://patriarchate.ge/geo/mcxeta-meore-jerusalimi>.
  - 2 Siehe auch Gagoshidze 2012, S. 49.
  - 3 Mgaloblishvili 2014, S. 61 f.
  - 4 Dies zwischen dem 5. und 10. Jahrhundert; Mgaloblishvili/Gagoshidze 1998, S. 45; Plontke-Lüning 2007, S. 316; Mgaloblishvili 2014, S. 59.
  - 5 Eine Ausnahme stellt Michele Baccis Aufsatz zu den Kreuzen von Svaneti dar, in dem auch die Lichtvision von Jvari angesprochen wird; vgl. Bacci 2016, S. 215; siehe hierzu auch unten die Anm. 42 und 43.
  - 6 Rufinus von Aquileia [1849], Buch 1, Kapitel 10, De conversione gentis Iberorum per captivam facta, ca. 480–482.
  - 7 Socrates Scholasticus [1995], I, Kapitel 20,7–20, S. 63–65.
  - 8 Bei Sozomenos war es nicht der Sohn des Königs, sondern ein Junge des Landes, der geheilt wurde, dann aber auch die Frau des Königs Nana wie bei Sokrates. Außerdem ist es hier die dritte Säule, die sich nicht bewegen lässt; vgl. Sozomenos [2004], 2. Buch, Kapitel 7, S. 225–231.
  - 9 Siehe Gigolashvili et al. 2007, S. 199–201; Mgaloblishvili 2014, S. 59.
  - 10 Vgl. Rapp 2003, S. 102 f.; Plontke-Lüning 2007, S. 86 f. Zu den Sinai-Fragmenten, die ins frühe 10. Jahrhundert zu datieren sein dürften, siehe auch von Lilienfeld 1994, S. 227 f.; Alexidzé 2001; Rapp 2003, S. 248.
  - 11 Von Lilienfeld datiert den Text in seiner Endredaktion ins 8./9. Jahrhundert, vgl. von Lilienfeld 1994, S. 233. Lerner ist hingegen der Ansicht, dass die Erweiterung der Chronik in der Bekehrung erst im späten 9. oder gar frühen 10. Jahrhundert erfolgt ist, vgl. The Conversion of Kart'li and The life of St. Nino [2004], S. 27.
  - 12 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokceyay Kartlisay [1975], S. 324.
  - 13 Siehe auch van Esbroeck 1998, S. 71.
  - 14 Johannes Moschos [1860]. Siehe auch Krönung 2014, Nr. 205, S. 222. Für weitere Beispiele von Feuersäulen siehe ebd., s. v. »Feuersäule«; Plontke-Lüning 2007, S. 157 f.
  - 15 In der Übersetzung von Partsch heißt es »Sommeranfang«; Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokceyay Kartlisay [1975], S. 328. Hierbei

- dürfte es sich aber um einen Übersetzungsfehler handeln. Lerner übersetzt dieselbe Stelle mit »at the eve of summer«, siehe Lerner 2004, S. 182.
- 16 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokcevey Kartlisay [1975], S. 328.
- 17 Mgaloblishvili/Gagoshidze 1998, S. 44 f.; Gagoshidze 2012, S. 58.
- 18 Auch das georgische *Sinai-Lektionar* der Universitätsbibliothek Graz (Ms. 2058/1, 7. Jh.) enthält Lektionen, die sich auf das Fest der Kreuzerscheinung am 7. Mai beziehen (so Mt 24,29–35). Gemeint scheint aber das Fest der Kreuzerscheinung in Jerusalem, siehe Sima 1995, S. 19. Vgl. demgegenüber Mgalobishvili 2014, S. 64
- 19 Cyrillus Hierosolymitanus [1888]; siehe auch die Edition in Bihain 1973, S. 264–296. Die älteste Kopie des Briefes datiert ins 8./9. Jahrhundert (Sinai, gr. 493), siehe ebd., S. 268. Das Jahr der Erscheinung wird in dem Brief allerdings nicht genannt und ist umstritten.
- 20 Sima 1995, S. 2.
- 21 Siehe hierzu Vogt 1949, S. 604, aber auch Sima 1995, S. 3.
- 22 Bihain 1973, S. 287.
- 23 Vgl. Groß-Albenhausen 2005/2010, S. 324. Siehe auch Vogt 1949, S. 598, 601.
- 24 Kyrill von Jerusalem hatte den Kaiser zur Erklärung der Vision auf Matthäus verwiesen: »Danach wird das Zeichen des Menschensohnes am Himmel erscheinen« (Mt 24,30).
- 25 Offb 12,1.
- 26 Eusebius von Caesarea [2007], I, 28,2, S. 182 f.
- 27 Eusebius von Caesarea [2007], I, 29–30, S. 184 f.
- 28 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokcevey Kartlisay [1975], S. 329; in der englischen Übersetzung von Lerner 2004 lautet die Passage: »The Venerable Cross of Mc'xet'a, revealed in the heavenly vision, we erected by human Hands«, The Conversion of K'art'li and The life of St. Nino [2004], S. 184; in Georgisch: »ხორღ ესე სანწარუდგან მცხეთისა მუენებური პატოსანი ჯუბი მცხეთისა აღვიპყარო ვერითა კაცობრივითა და მივედით ბორცუსა მან ქუეში, [...]«; der Text des Satberd-Codex ist auf dem TITUS-Server der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt a. M. online zugänglich: <http://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/cauc/ageo/satberd/satbe.htm?satbe316.htm> (konsultiert am 12. Juni 2017).
- 29 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokcevey Kartlisay [1975], S. 330. Alexander Sima konnte aufzeigen, wie in den Texten nach Kyrill die ursprünglich eschatologische Deutung des Kreuzes am Himmel zunehmend von einer Deutung als Siegeszeichen abgelöst wurde, vgl. Sima 1995, S. 9.
- 30 Im Übrigen wird in der georgischen Version des Briefes Kyrills von Jerusalem nicht Konstantius, sondern Konstantinus genannt, vgl. Sima 1995, S. 7.
- 31 Siehe hierzu auch The Conversion of K'art'li and The life of St. Nino [2004], S. 25 f.
- 32 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokcevey Kartlisay [1975], S. 331.
- 33 So jüngst Bacci 2016, S. 210.
- 34 Zur Datierung der Geschichte Armeniens ins 8. Jahrhundert siehe Rapp 2003, S. 104; Garsoian 2003/2004, S. 29–48; Plontke-Lüning 2007, S. 90. Maartem van Lint 2012, S. 187, insbes. Anm. 26.
- 35 Plontke-Lüning schreibt: »Zur Last der Beweise für eine Abfassung des gesamten Werkes um 870 – u. a. die Herabwürdigung der im 4.–5. Jh. an der Spitze des armenischen Adels stehenden Mamikoniden zugunsten der seit dem 8. Jh. auf Kosten eben der Mamikoniden aufsteigenden Bagratiden – kommen noch deutliche Anzeichen bewußter Fälschungen bzw. Umwertungen der Ereignisse des 4.–5. Jh.s, so daß Movses nur mit größter Vorsicht zu verwenden ist«, siehe Plontke-Lüning 2007, S. 90. Siehe ebenso Rapp 2014, S. 169, der das Werk etwas früher datiert: »Later, in the eighth century Movsēs Xorenac'i celebrated the rival Bagratid clan, his patrons, in the first known comprehensive history of the Armenians. So as to argument Bagratid power and to certify the authoritativeness of his impressive antiquarian work«.
- 36 »Now blessed Nunē sought out trustworthy men and sent them to Saint Gregory, [asking] what he might command her to do from then on, [...]. She received a command to destroy the idols [...] and to set up the honorable sign of the cross [...]. So straightway she destroyed the image of Aramazd, god of thunder, which stood outside the city; between the city and the image flowed the powerful river [Kura]; zitiert nach Moses Khorenats'i [1978], S. 239.

- 37 Siehe Moses Khorenats'i [1978], S. 240. In der deutschen Übersetzung heißt es: »[...] und es erschien ein Licht in der Form des hölzernen Kreuzes nach Gestalt und Mass und zwar über diesem mit zwölf Sternen stehend«, zitiert nach Moses von Chorene [1869], S. 147.
- 38 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokcevey Kartlisay [1975], S. 331.
- 39 Plontke-Lüning 2007, Katalogband, S. 204; Tumanishvili/Khundadze 2008, S. 33.
- 40 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokcevey Kartlisay [1975], S. 333.
- 41 Die Übersetzung von Lerner suggeriert, dass es sich um ein Tuchgewebe gehandelt haben könnte: »And she suffered from such torments that she leaned on the Revered Cross and tore the garments with which the cross was wrapped«, The Conversion of K'art'li and The life of St. Nino [2004], S. 188. Die Konsistenz der »Umkleidung« geht aber aus dem Georgischen nicht eindeutig hervor: »დუდაკაცი ვინმე იყო მარადის გუემური სურთა უკეთურთა, და ეგოდენ/გუემად მოიღო, რაჟამს პატოსანსა ჯუბისა შეამთხვევედ, სამოსელსა ჯუბისანსა მოაპებდნ«, für diese Erkenntnis danken wir Ekaterina Gedevanishvili. Für die Textilität der Umkleidung könnte jedoch die entsprechende Passage in der späteren *Kartlis Tskhovreba* sprechen, die die Geschichte zwar ganz anders wiedergibt, aber das Motiv eines beschädigten Tuchgewebes in diesem Kontext kennt, dort nämlich zerreißt die besessene Frau ihr eigenes Kleid: »Danach war eine Frau, die wurde beständig von einem bösen Geist geplagt, in solchem Maße, daß er ihr seit acht Jahren Kraft und Verstand genommen hatte, so daß sie ihr Kleid zu zerreißen pflegte«, zitiert aus: Das Leben Kartlis [1985], S. 179. Ein wohl einem solchen Zweck dienendes iranisches/islamisches Textil befindet sich im Svaneti Museum for History and Ethnography (Mestia), wo wir es bei der Forschungsreise mit Barbara Schellewald u. a. 2010 besichtigen konnten. Siehe: <http://photothek.khi.fi.it/documents/obj/07653144>. Davon unabhängig haben Finbarr Barry Flood und Irina Koshoridze das Textil in mehreren Vorträgen diskutiert.
- 42 Bacci 2016. Siehe auch Mgaloblishvili 2014, S. 64 f.
- 43 Ebd., S. 208 mit Abb. 1 und 2. Vgl. auch die Abbildungen <http://photothek.khi.fi.it/documents/obj/07964298>; <http://photothek.khi.fi.it/documents/obj/07964299>.
- 44 Siehe The Conversion of K'art'li and The life of St. Nino [2004], S. 27. Man darf aber wohl davon ausgehen, dass zumindest der Bericht des Priesters Jacob noch ins 9. Jahrhundert datiert, da er auch im Codex N Sin 50 überliefert ist, ein Fragment, das selbst ins frühe 10. Jahrhundert datiert. Zu diesem Codex siehe Alexidzé 2001, S. 9, der wiederum die Bekehrung insgesamt für noch älter hält.
- 45 Vogt 1949, S. 595; Brändle 1998, S. 113.
- 46 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokcevey Kartlisay [1975], S. 328 f.
- 47 Kiknadze ist unseres Wissens der einzige, dem diese Besonderheit bisher aufgefallen ist und der nicht ausschließlich vom Kreuz der Heiligen Nino spricht. Für Kiknadze ist damit »die Kreuzkirche von Mzcheta der materielle Ausdruck des geistigen Kreuzes«, siehe Kiknadze 1984, S. 230.
- 48 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokcevey Kartlisay [1975], S. 291 f.: »Und er errichtete eine Mauer an der Seite nach dem Wasser zu, und sie wurde Armaz genannt«. In den eingangs genannten Quellen des 5. Jahrhunderts ist dagegen nichts von Götzen oder Kirchen auf Bergen zu lesen.
- 49 Siehe hierzu The Conversion of K'art'li and The life of St. Nino [2004], S. 100.
- 50 Die *Bekehrung* spezifiziert den Ort des Götzen nur insofern, als es sich um einen Bergvorsprung an einem Wasser handelte und Parnavas außerdem »an der Seite nach dem Wasser« eine Mauer errichtete, der er denselben Namen gab. Im Leben des Parnavas in der *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, dem »Leben Kartlis«, das auch eine in eine durchgehende Erzählung überführte Version der *Bekehrung* enthält, heißt es hingegen lediglich, Parnavas liege vor dem Götzen Armaz begraben; siehe Das Leben Kartlis [1985], S. 77.
- 51 Siehe hierzu Moses Khorenats'i [1978], S. 239 mit Fußnote.
- 52 Zur Frage der Datierung des Baus siehe Machabeli 1998, S. 85; Plontke-Lüning 2007, Katalogband, S. 203–212; Tumanishvili/Khundadze 2008, S. 13. Wichtiger Anhaltspunkt für eine Datierung der Kirche ins späte 6. Jahrhundert ist eine Inschrift auf

- dem Postament einer Stele, die Stephanos Patrikios nennt; siehe Aleksidsé 2010, S. 367. Für Hinweise danken wir Ekaterina Gedevanishvili und Nino Simonishvili.
- 53 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokcevey Kartlisay [1975], S. 328 f.
- 54 Gregor von Nazianz [2009], Vers 56–62.
- 55 Gregor von Nazianz [2009], Kommentar von Andreas Schwab, S. 118.
- 56 Ebd., Vers 63.
- 57 Plontke-Lüning 2007, S. 208.
- 58 Fähnrich 2010, S. 152 f., 157.
- 59 Ebd., S. 156, 170.
- 60 Fähnrich 2010, S. 157.
- 61 Eine Apsisfenster-Arkade in Tamala, das westlich von Tbilissi zwischen Bordschomi und Ninozminda liegt, könnte, wie Annegret Plontke-Lüning vorgeschlagen hat, das älteste bildliche Zeugnis dieser Version von der Kreuzesvision in Mzcheta sein, auch wenn es vielleicht nicht ins 6. oder frühe 7. Jahrhundert datiert, siehe Plontke-Lüning 2007, Katalog, S. 306.
- 62 Aleksidsé geht davon aus, dass die Bekehrung insgesamt älter ist; Aleksidsé 2001, S. 9. Allerdings spricht die Heterogenität der Teile auch für ein allmähliches Anwachsen der Kompilation.
- 63 Ebd., S. 18 f.
- 64 Rapp 2003, S. 437 f.
- 65 Vgl. etwa Das Leben Kartlis [1985], S. 76 f.
- 66 Es fehlt im Leben Kartlis die Variante, in der Mirian das Kreuz fertigen ließ.
- 67 Das Leben Kartlis [1985], S. 71.
- 68 Ebd.
- 69 Zu den Ähnlichkeiten zwischen dem Leben der Könige und der Syrischen Schatzhöhle siehe auch Rapp 2003, S. 125–127. Zur georgischen Version der Schatzhöhle siehe außerdem Toepel 2006, S. 17–19.
- 70 Toepel 2006, S. 170.
- 71 Ebd., S. 179, siehe außerdem Ruzer 2012, S. 38, 43.
- 72 Das Leben Kartlis [1985], S. 77.
- 73 Für seine freundliche Auskunft danken wir Iulon Gagoshidze, für die Vermittlung Ekaterina Gedevanishvili.
- 74 Die Bekehrung Georgiens Mokcevey Kartlisay [1975], S. 329.
- 75 Plontke-Lüning 2007, S. 158; noch unter Stepanoz I (590–627) und Stepanoz II (637/642–650) zeigten georgische Münzen das Bild eines Kreuzes über einem zoroastrischen Feueraltar; siehe Machabeli 1998, S. 85.
- 76 Wie viel dieser Beitrag den Licht-Studien von Barbara Schellewald verdankt, versteht sich von selbst. Interessant wäre die Frage, wie die Ästhetiken der hier beschriebenen luminösen Out-Door-Phänomene mit weitgespanntem Himmelsraum, strahlenden Himmelskörpern sowie Lichtobjekten mit unterschiedlichem ontologischem Status (umlichtete Säule, aus Licht sich gestaltendes Kreuz, Blitz, Sterne und Sonne) wiederum in Innenräumen übersetzt oder evokiert werden (goldummanteltes Monumentalkreuz in Kuppelraum, Mosaik und Malerei etc.) oder umgekehrt bzw. wie überhaupt Licht in Landschaft und Sakralraum unterschiedlich oder vergleichbar gestaltet und gedeutet wird bzw. auf den Schwellen zwischen beiden sich manifestiert. Es geht dabei immer auch um die Temporalität, spezifische Enargeia und das Flackern des Lichts, medial wie materiell. Vgl. u. a. Schellewald 2016, bzw. dies. 2012.

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## Abbildungsnachweis

## Einleitung

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## Vardzia - the Church of the Dormition

The Vardzia complex stretches across five hundred meters of the cliff face comprising nineteen tiers of caves. Vardzia is the largest rock-cut monastery in Georgia among the survived ones. The Catholicon of the monastery is the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin distinguished by its huge size and location. It presents a simple hall space with the barrel vault and the broad apse at the east end. There are additional chambers to the north, west and south, all of which have entrances to the church. The church is completely covered by wall painting. The frescoes of the Vardzia church presents the earliest example of the decoration of so called the "epoch of Queen Tamar"; Consequently, it presents the earliest surviving portrait of the Queen Tamar. Since the Queen is presented here crowned but unmarried, the wall painting of the Vardzia can be dated by the 80 s of 12<sup>th</sup> century (Tamar was crowned as coruler with Giorgi III in 1178 and she was married in 1186 her first husband Iuri Bogolubski). The portrait of the Donors is presented on the Northern wall of the Church, following the well-established tradition of the location of the Donor's portraits in Georgia. The composition shows the King Giorgi III in prayer before the enthroned Virgin and Child. The King is followed by Tamar, who holds the model of the church in her hands. The Georgian sources tells that Vardzia monastery was begun by king Giorgi III and then was completed by his daughter. Both Donators wear imperial dress surmounted by loroi. Both are crowned by similar crowns. What attracts a special attention is the portrait of the local peodal Rati Surameli presented on the western part of the northern wall, the latter is presented in Georgian costume and he is lacking the nimbus. According to E.Eastmond ,this choice reflects the superiority of the Royal family and reinforce the privileged status of the royal family setting them apart from the rest of the society. At the same time the design of the Royal portrait stresses Tamar's blood right to the throne and legitimacy of her authority. She is named as " King of the Kings of all East, daughter of Giorgi", while the portrait of

Giorgi bears an inscription: “King of Kings of all East , Giorgi, son of Demetre , King of the Kings”. The angel passing a symbol of power and divine approval from the Virgin to the king further reinforces the legitimacy of the rulership of this royal dynasty. This special accent can be linked to the historical reality concerning the reigning of the king Giorgi III and the crowning of the Queen Tamar ( E.Eastmond focuses here on two counts: the legacy of reigning of Giorgi III himself and the hindrance caused by attitudes to the gender of Queen Tamar).

The figure of the Saint included in the Royal portrait attracts a special attention. According to the recent studies of Nino Chikladze, the Saint is identified as St. Evrenius of Trabzon, the patron saint of the Trabzon Empire. Though the appearance and inclusion of this less popular Saint by that time is surprising. St.Evgenius became especially popular only after the establishing of the Trabzon Empire. And his special cult emerges namely in that context - as the major patron Saint of newly established Empire. Thus, Nino Chikladze explains his appearance as the reflection of the political will and participation of the Georgian Kingdom in the history of the founding the Trabzon Empire. The design of the Royal portrait obviously shows the political target and plans of our Kingdom.

The huge number of the individual Saints attracts a special attention in Vardzia programme. The holy Warriors and female Saints prevail here. The leading role of the military Saints echoes the military function of this foundation. The Holy warriors are presenting as the individual Saints (for Example Rati Surameli's portrait) as well as a part of the scenes of Coronation of the Saints by Christ. What is unusual here, is the location of these scenes - they are represented on the jambs of the windows of the Southern Wall. The summit of the jambs presents the image of Christ placing the crowns on the Holy warriors. The placing of the images on the window walls is the iconographic tradition widely spread in Georgia and even is characterized as the “local” tradition of the Georgian Church decoration. The church of the Dormition is comparatively poorly illuminated – hence the scene of the Saints Receiving Crowns from the Saviour, represented in the illuminated splays of the windows,

in *contre-jour*, creating a special accent in the whole decoration. It must be noted, that these figures are much bigger compared to those of narrative compositions, creating a tectonic accent in the overall system of decoration. Apart from its scale, significance of the compositions is increased by the shape of the jambs – wide, diagonally directed surfaces. The half-figure of the Saviour with outstretched hands presented on the soffits of the window, as if ‘entering’ from ‘outside’, puts the crowns on the Saints represented on the ‘sloped’ surfaces – these representative scenes adjusted to the window splay give a palpable impression of the animating of the scene. Thus, the composition of Coronation of the Saints creates, so to speak, the impression of “breakthrough” to the integrity of the inner space of the church – displaying a kind of “pathways” demonstrating the unity of the internal and external spaces.

In Vardzia St Nino’s earliest identified fresco portrait can be found - St. Nino is presented on the South pilaster and she faces the portrait of queen Tamar. Splendid image of St Catherine attracts a special attention.

The Apse of the church represents a monumental image of the Virgin and child flanked by the figures of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. The traditional images of the Apse in Georgian church decoration (Deesis or Maesta Domini) is substituted by the huge image of the Virgin characteristic for the epoch of the queen Tamar. The lower register of the apse represents twelve figures of the church fathers holding the scrolls represented as co-participants of the divine liturgy. The scenes of Christological cycle are presented clockwise. The cycle opens by the scene of the Annunciation located on the Southern slope of the arch. Here appears Nativity, Presentation to the Temple, Baptism, Transfiguration, raising of Lazarus, Entry into Jerusalem, Last supper, Washing of the feet, Crucifixion, Anastasis Pentecost and Dormition. The scenes are enriched by iconographic details inspired by hymnography enriching the symbolic context of the scenes (for example the representation of the ladder in the scene of the Annunciation, visualizing one of the most frequently spread metaphor of Virgin as One who unites the Heaven and Earth and etc.)

The image of Mandylion catches a special attention thanks to its scale and location. The Holy Face is appears on the tympanum here and presents one of the most important

images of the whole programme of the Vardzia decoration. The placement of the Mandylion above the doorways certainly reflects the Eddesian practise of placing the Mandylion above the city gate. Grabar emphasizes the salvific meaning of such location. In Vardzia this message is emphasized by the episode of the Salvation placed alongside the Holy Face- i.e the Resurrection and the scene of the chaining of Satan, which implies the idea of triumph as well. It is noteworthy that the Communion of St.Mary of Egyptian is presented above the Holy Face. ( in the intrados of the arch of the tympanum arch); both St. Mary and St. Zosimus are presented in frontal, “iconic” pose. The location of the Holy Face next to the scene of the Communion of St.Mery gives an additional meaning to the incarnation icon. In this context the Mandylion is strongly associated to the Eucharist. It is perceived as an offering, the communion bread itself. If we recall the theological disputes which took place around the issue of sacrifice in 12<sup>th</sup> century Byzantium, this interpretation of the Holy image proves to be absolutely obvious. Moreover, it echoes the local disputes among the Georgian and Armenian churches -the counter to Armenian Monophysitism, the major rival confession to Greek Orthodoxy in Georgia. This centuries-old theological opposition between neighbors grew especially fervent during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when most Caucasian lands were brought under Georgia’s control. The impact of this dispute upon Georgian culture can be traced throughout the centuries, but it was especially strong during the period under consideration. One of the most actual question of disputes was the different liturgical practice of communion rooted in the difference of Christological dogma. Thus, the Icon of Incarnation alongside the scene of the Communion presents an argumentative image against the teaching of “*mia phys* - the Mandylion, a historical portrait of Christ – or so to say image –argument itself, visualizing the dogma of the Incarnation and the sacrifice.

The Souther Nartex of the Vardzia church is dominated by the theme of the Last Judgment, thus fulfilling the lack of this theme in the main space of the church. The apse of the narthex presents the traditional scene of the Sanctuary programs in Georgia – the Deesis, while the vault of the church presents the huge image of Glorification of the cross, scene that has a long history and tradition in Georgian visual art. Vardzian image presents one of the most beautiful and refined images of this theme in Georgian wall painting reflecting its proximity to the traditions of so called artistic school of “ Tao –Klarjeti”. Obviously the wall paintings of the Vardzia is

executed later than the murals of the main space. These murals are dated back to turn of the 12 – 13<sup>th</sup> cc in special literature. The huge image of the Last Judgment is enriched here by the scenes of the life of St. Stephen the Proto –Martyr and the huge image of the Martyrdom of forty Sebastians representing in a very prominent place.



## Literary School and Manuscript Heritage of Tao-Klarjeti

In the paper those politic and historic realities are outlined due to which Tao-Klarjeti literary school was founded. It also discusses the issues of reshaping of *vain and fruitless desert* into a *fruitful land* – i.e. impressive monastic center and literary school, which was a result of the very close co-operation of clerical and secular authorities. Tao-Klarjeti literary school has its share in determination of elinophilic character of the Georgian translated literature, translation method and ideology. Iviron and Athonite translating-literary school were originated from Tao-Klarjeti literary school. Moreover, for centuries, it was nourishing Georgian Monastic and Cultural centers of Mount Athos, Black Mountain and other monasteries abroad with not only material means (parchment, money...) but also well-educated monks skilled in manuscript production.

Analyzing manuscripts, their colophons and translated and original literary works created in Tao-Klarjeti literary school aims and agendas of the School were identified. It was also established that these aims and agendas were changing from time to time regarding the needs of the country and nation.

Based on the same sources educational system of Tao-Klarjeti was reconstructed, which was preparing skilful scribes and copyists educated in theology, liturgy and scripture.

Besides the above-mentioned, also the following issues were discussed: how scriptoria and monastic libraries were organized in Tao-Klarjeti, how exemplars were selected and gained and how newly copied manuscripts were donated to the libraries of (sometimes newly established) monasteries.

## Georgian Illustrated Manuscripts from Tao-Klarjeti

Georgian manuscripts copied and illustrated in Tao-Klarjeti are the earliest examples of Georgian book art. Therefore, the major features which connect Georgian miniature painting with Oriental Christian or Byzantine world were revealed in their artistic aesthetics as well as the unique character of their decor.

The first illustrated Georgian manuscript connected with the Tao-Klarjeti scriptorium is of 9th century. In Adyshi Gospel of 897 according to the early Christian artistic tradition, illustrated pages are assembled at the beginning of the gospel text. The portraits of the Evangelist confirm the existence of old artistic model and represent the so-called “mixed” iconographic type of the writers (standing and seating).

The most impressive composition here is a sanctuary with a sort of dome (Ciborium). It seems that this page ends Christ’s terrestrial way of life, as described in New Testament and there for, looks like symbolic indication of the “Holy Sepulchre“, built by Constantine the Great.

The late antique traditions are shown in artistic peculiarities of the miniatures, light, bright (pink, green, blue) palette, to certain extent in pictorial rendering of figures, in refined, subtle and tidy manner of execution, accentuation of the content by color, gradation of main tone, combination of the local color - all these are main trends of the miniatures from this book.

Painter Theodor of Jruchil Gospel (H-1660) represents quite different manner of illumination. The principle of illustration offered by him outstrips from the artistic demands of the epoch. Effigies of the Evangelists represent the close connection with late antique cultural world: their figures, expression, complicated garments, decorative elements of the architectural backgrounds, cockleshell-shaped lunettes. In this case such structure reminds us the theatrical scenery.

Alongside with conventional artistic forms, this manuscript includes first topical scenes from the gospel text: the evangelists are coupled with healing scenes: St.Matthew with iconic representation of the Virgin with child, St.Mark with blind healing, St.Luke with evil spirit and St.John with cure of paralytic scenes.

Copied and illustrated at Shatberdi monastery these manuscripts show the different approach to the illumination and reveal an existence of old artistic tradition.

Early Georgian illuminated manuscripts manifested great impact of East Christian book art. Influences of Syriac artistic traditions are reflected in the forms and decorations of the Canon tables, in the iconography of the portraits of Evangelists and in the forms and the methods of distribution of the Crosses in the text of Georgian Gospel-books.

Syriac influences were deep and strong from the beginning, covering all elements of book decoration. Traces of these influences are clearly distinguished.

Paper will examine the use of Syriac artistic peculiarities (starting from the Rabbula Gospel) on the Georgian manuscripts. Two groups of Georgian manuscripts will be investigated: manuscripts from Tao-Klarjeti artistic school of the 9-10th centuries and manuscripts from the Black Mountain (Antioch) of the 11th century.

The paper focused on the study of characteristic features of the Syriac manuscripts (Rabbula Gospel, Bibl.Nat.Syr. 30, 40, 41, 341,355, 356, Berlin, Preuss.Bibl.Sachau 220, 332 and etc.) reflecting different principles and aspects of decoration and will show the similarities and influences with the Georgian codices (Adyshi, Jruchi, Berti Gospels, A-98, A-484, S-962 and others). Paper presents iconographic and artistic analysis of the decor and iconographic variations used in both Syriac and Georgian manuscripts.

Historical background and cultural interactions between these two regions will be also discussed

To this scriptorium is also connected liturgical book of chants (S-425). The authors’ eastern appearances, their block-shape figures, variegated colors and water-color effects are characteristic for this artistic school.

The resemble features are represented in coupled series of Tskarostavi Gospels (A-98): in spite of primitive rendering Tao-Klarjetian features are obvious: eastern types, importance of line, transparent water-colors.

Eventually, the scribes began to use the cinnabar and the letters became decorative bearing some elements of ornamentation. Among the decorated manuscripts the gospels stand out by their specific ornamentations. Location of some elements of *dǰcor* depend on the context of the text, therefore the succession of distribution in the ornamentation of the gospels is almost fixed.

In case of artistic decoration capital letters (Initials) occupy an important position. Till X century contours of capital letters looked like the text letters: they were written by ink, only a bit larger. Stylization of the capital letter at first took place in the IX century.

Our paper was to represent why the artists used this graphical style to adorn only the Spiritual books (like Synaxarion, Chants and etc.) and chose "Byzantinised", graceful miniatures to decorate gospel books.

Among the illustrated manuscripts of the XI century Mestia Gospel should be noted. Copied at the Oshki monastery the codex is the best model of the Tao-Klarjetian artistic school.

One of the Canon tables reflects our attention with its unusual execution in the form of domed church. Plausibly painter was inspired with the architectural splendor of Oshki church.

In the XII century the decorations became richer and more solemn.

Canon Tables occupy a special place in the *dǰcor* of manuscripts illustrated in Tao-Klarjeti which are the most traditional element in the formation of artistic structure of Gospels.

The method of creation, development and formation of the artistic images of the system of canon tables starts in the early Middle centuries and, together with the letter of its author, Eusebius of Caesarea, became an indispensable part of Christian book arts. The series of canon tables made it easier to find identical extracts of the Gospel text during the liturgical year. The canon tables created in early middle ages acquired decorative character together with their practical function. In many cases they became the most decorative illustrations, carrying the symbolic meaning.

In the process of the decoration of Tao-Klarjeti manuscripts the letter by Eusebius of Caesarea did not play a particularly important role in the process of the manuscript illustration and the artists only presented the series of vaults. Eusebius of Caesarea allotted 10 pages to the canon tables and its original variant has not reached us.

Editing reforms carried out in the 10<sup>th</sup> century changed the original format of manuscripts. The canon tables were arranged on 10 pages and together with the letter of Eusebius of Caesarea the number of them reached 12. The Syrian (16-19) and Latin (12-16) systems changes accordingly. Only the Armenian system retained its original, a 10- page form. It is difficult to determine the regularity regarding the number of canon tables in the manuscripts from Tao-Klarjeti of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are arranged on 5-8 pages (Adishi, Jruchi). The shape of the canon tables is also worth mentioning: if earlier single, double or threepart systems were frequent (Adishi, Jruchi, Berti, Tskarostavi), from the 11<sup>th</sup> century the framing in the shape of triumphal arch appears. However, this change was gradual and it appeared in a final shape in Mestia Gospel canon tables.

This paper will present the artistic evolution of the canon table system in Tao-Klarjeti manuscripts and also, iconographic or stylistic tendencies typical of this artistic school in the context of Georgian, Byzantine, Greek, Syrian or other contexts of Eastern Christian book paintings.

The development line of canon tables revealed in Adishi, Jruchi, Tskharostavi, Mestia Gospels, their gradual modification which appeared in the final form in the *dǰcor* of Mestia Gospel will also be discussed in the paper.

Artistic development of Georgian Canon table systems reveals that the editing or artistic changes, appearing in the Byzantine manuscripts at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, are reflected in Georgian codes. Modified shape, general structure, introduction of entablatures and renewed ornamental repertoire are obvious illustrations of this opinion.

The goal of the paper was to reveal and characterize artistic specificity of the canon table series found in the manuscripts from Tao-Klarjeti, describe their aesthetics and the influence of cultural connections regarding the development of this *dǰcor* in Georgian tradition.

Fleur Devdariani  
Georgian Miniature: Key Stages of Development

In my present lecture I will talk about key stages of development of the Georgian miniature. Although this Seasonal School is dedicated to Tao-Klarjeti I decided not to limit myself only to Tao-Klarjeti group of manuscripts but present in general outline the other illuminated codices, which are very important and interesting for the study of the history of art of not only Georgia, but also Byzantium and in general, of the East Christian world. All these handwritten books are created in the different times and therefore they present artistic tasks and peculiarities of their solutions on the different stages of development of the Georgian miniature.

All the statements you will hear today are delivered by two prominent Georgian scientists, Rene Shmerling and Gaiane Alibegashvili. I also used the works of the notable Georgian scholar, member of this Kekelidze Center of Manuscripts, Elene Matchavariani. I also want to outline valuable contribution of Nino Kavtaria, young promising scientist of Center of Manuscripts to the study of the manuscripts copied in the scriptorium of the Black Mountain and especially to the research of manuscript of Alaverdi Gospels.

According to the surviving evidence, Georgian miniature tradition spans the period from the 9<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Foundation of monasteries as early as the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century attests to the role Christianity played in shaping ideology and culture in Georgia. Monasteries, which served as centres of literary activity, contributed to the advancement of Georgian writing and miniature painting. None of the extant manuscripts dated to the period earlier than the 9<sup>th</sup> century, including 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century fragmented texts of the palimpsests, is illustrated. However, these early manuscripts stand out for their brilliant calligraphy. The majority of these early manuscripts are large codices remarkable for the delicate refinement of the *asomtavruli* (majuscule) letters in which they are rendered. The pattern of arrangement of a text and blank spaces around it in these manuscripts is highly impressive. The artistic effect is based on the division of texts in clearly separated lines, the steady rhythm created by a regular succession of letters, as well as the use of ink of varying intensity creating an effect of gentle transition from dark to light brown tones and enlivening the yellowish surface of the parchment. Until the late 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> century, Georgian manuscript pages were illustrated sparingly. Despite the use of bright red in titles, capitals and tale pieces, these miniatures create an impression of monochrome paintings.

It was not until the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, or more precisely, the 970s, that the artistic appearance of Georgian manuscripts began to change. Cinnabar became widely used along with decorative elements, such as initials and later headpieces, becoming more and more common. At that stage headpieces in manuscripts copied in Georgia, notably the collections of hymns by Modrekili, were still shaped as narrow, horizontally elongated rectangles.

My presentation is dedicated to miniature painting, a main element of text decoration. Illustrating the content, it is a central, indivisible part of a manuscript page defining its artistic and compositional image.

Of the surviving manuscripts, only two codices are illustrated, namely the Adishi Gospels copied in 897 and Jruchi 1 Gospels, the text of the latter having been inscribed in 936, and the miniatures executed in 940. The miniatures of both manuscripts are stylistically akin to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century works and demonstrate the diversity of models used by Georgian artists.

The miniatures in the Adishi manuscript are located at the beginning of the text. On the verso of the folio is depicted a quadripholium, while the next five folios bear canon tables. These are followed by two miniatures, one of which features an evangelist standing on two feet and another – a sitting evangelist. The miniatures terminate in a separately depicted ciborium, also referred to as *tempietto*.

Another manuscript, Jruchi I, is the only surviving manuscript to have the illustrations of the scenes of Christ Healing Miracles (Healing of the Blind Man, Healing of the Obsessed Man and Healing of the Paralyzed Man) united into a single cycle. No other Georgian or foreign manuscript provides these scenes grouped into one cycle. Given that such scenes are absent in manuscript illustrations before the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it becomes obvious that the models available to Georgian artists belonged to the period earlier than the 5<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. Late Antiquity, when the Healing scenes were more relevant due to their symbolic essence (the theme of Salvation) and responded to the vital interests of the time.

These miniatures are highly remarkable not only for their thematic composition, but also due to the principle of their distribution in the codex. The title page of the Gospels, as in the Adishi Gospels, is topped by a quadripholium. The next seven pages are taken up by the canon tables. Yet unlike other illuminated Georgian manuscripts, the remaining eight miniatures are located close to the text. Compositions are distributed according to individual Gospels. Each Gospel has two miniatures in the beginning, on the verso and the recto of the folio respectively: the Gospel of Matthew features Matthew the Evangelist and an icon-like image of the Virgin and Child; the Gospel by Mark the Evangelist shows Mark and the Healing of the Blind Man; the Gospel by Luke is supplemented with the image of Luke the Evangelist and the Healing of the Paralyzed Man, while the Gospel by John presents the image of John and the Healing of the Possessed Man. Each thematic composition contains only two characters: Christ and the sick man. The background is neutral, i.e. the point of action is not marked. Yet it appears that in the prototype the background of the figures was spatial. Other differences are also apparent, which allows us to believe that these Georgian miniatures deviate from their prototype of Late Antiquity to conform with the principles of medieval worldview. For example, free postures of the figures and their natural movement rendered with the knowledge of the anatomy of the human body co-exist with the petrified movements, lack of proportion, and angularity of drapery folds.

Prompted by a new artistic spirit, the revision of the characteristics inherent in the prototype also entailed the changing of a colour palette. This is evidenced by thick layers of paint applied to specific sections of the background and figures. These features set them apart from the Jruchi I miniatures characterized by light, lively and refined patterns, which still retained the linearity that most probably characterized the prototype dating from Late Antiquity.

It is remarkable that Christ and John are presented as young men. Also noteworthy are other details, such as a columned portico, an arcade supported by columns framing the compositions, ornamental motifs, curled leaves at the bottom of the arch. These elements can be found in the manuscripts containing Caesarian text-type with canon tables.

It thus appears that compared with the Adishi illustrations, the Jruchi I miniatures display a closer kinship with the Near East art which, in its turn, takes roots in the Hellenistic art of Late Antiquity.

Now regarding the artistic schools.

It is very rarely that Georgian artists provide notes regarding the place of manuscript inscription, due to which manuscripts dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> through the 11<sup>th</sup> century cannot be assigned to the places of their origin. It remains unknown whether they were produced in central regions of Georgia, such as Kartli and Kakheti, or in western Georgia. Yet the intensive efforts aiming at producing national art evidenced in different regions of Georgia throughout the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries makes it plausible to assume the presence of local painting schools.

There is, however, a group of manuscripts from that period that can be attributed to the place of origin thanks to the colophons provided in them. They were copied in South Georgia and are referred to as *Tao-Klarjeti group* according to the name of the region. The aforementioned Adishi and Jruchi I illustrated manuscripts made at Shatberdi are affiliated with this group. Other surviving manuscripts of this group are not supplemented with thematic miniatures. Yet they are typical examples of illuminated manuscripts, providing remarkable evidence regarding the manner of execution of decorative elements such as initials, headpieces and canon tables.

These manuscripts are characterized by a preference for graphical treatment. A thin, transparent layer of paint is applied to the outlines made by thin lines. The use of a multi-layer painting technique is relatively rare. Non-painted sections, i.e. the natural tonality of parchment, equally important as painted sections, are highly notable. Non-painted sections in the decoration of initials are sometimes covered with parallel lines or colored and black dots. In general, the initials in these manuscripts differ from Byzantine ones. Canon table ornaments, the motifs of which show an obvious affinity with the ornaments of Georgian architecture, are noteworthy. The peculiarity of decorative adornment of these illustrations is also defined by a clear, bright tonal coloring, such as blue, red, light green and yellow. All of these indicate the

adoption of a creative approach by the master that led to the shaping of an original artistic image of the Tao-Klarjeti manuscripts.

The specific nature of the manuscripts making up the *Tao-Klarjeti group* is obvious when comparing them with the Georgian manuscripts produced in the religious centers abroad.

As is known, the late 10<sup>th</sup> century saw the establishment of close political and cultural ties between Georgia and Byzantium. It is quite natural that with the growing influence of Byzantium over the Near East, Byzantine cultural achievements became a model for the entire Christendom, including Georgia, which sought to adopt these achievements. Georgian monasteries were founded in Constantinople, in Mount Athos and Black Mountain. Georgian monks closely worked with Greek monks, benefitted from the best educational opportunities available at the time and adopted major cultural achievements of Byzantium. There is a close stylistic similarity between Georgian and Byzantine miniatures in terms of the manner of execution. Judging by the quality of illustrations, it is apparent that Georgian artists had fully mastered the technique of manuscript decoration.

The trend for the approximation to Byzantine culture encouraged the production of illustrated manuscripts and separate miniatures. In addition to that, Georgian aristocracy and high-ranking clergy commissioned lavishly adorned manuscripts in Byzantine style. Byzantine influence is obvious in codices which repeat certain patterns of manuscript illumination, as well as types of ornament, color palettes, iconographic models, and a multi-layer painting technique, e.g. Codex A-1 decorated with headpieces, canon tables and initials, copied in 1030; a collection of works by Gregory the Theologian; Gospel H-1704 copied in Mount Athos in the 980s, and the Alaverdi Gospels inscribed and illustrated in 1054 in the Calippo Monastery, also close to Antioch. This latter manuscript is embellished with headpieces, canon tables and the figures of evangelists. At the end it has the Epistle of Abgar and five miniatures illustrating the text. The title page, like the Adishi and Jruchi I title pages, features a cross, which, in this case, is erected on a postament.

Copied and illustrated in the Monastery of Khora in Constantinople, a Minor Synaxarion A-648 is a remarkable manuscript reflecting an intensive creative collaboration between Georgian and Byzantine artists. The manuscript was inscribed and decorated by a Georgian artist, Basil son of Malush, who was also responsible for the decoration of the collection of works by Gregory the Theologian A-1, as well as two manuscripts of Minor Nomocanon, A-96 and S-143. In 1028, he also copied part of another codex containing works by Gregory the Theologian. Of these manuscripts only a Minor Synaxarion is illustrated with miniatures, which are highly remarkable for their artistic quality. Gaiane Alibegashvili, whose research focuses on miniature art, attributed the miniatures of this manuscript to Greek artists. The scholar saw a stylistic resemblance between these and other Greek manuscripts illustrated with miniatures in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> century, notably with the illustrations of the Menologion of Basil II.

Almost all miniatures of the Synaxarion, be it the scenes from the Gospels or the lives of saints (*vitae*), employ compositional patterns that are canonical in the Byzantine art of the time, i.e.

the late 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century. The compositions in the Synaxarion also reveal the trend towards a generalized rendering of the main idea. This is indicated by a minimum number of characters, prevalence of abstract golden backgrounds, as well as the laconic rendering of landscape and architectural elements. For example, the composition of the erection of the cross presents three strictly frontal figures giving no indication of action. The movement of deacons and the symmetrical location on both sides of the high priest creates an atmosphere of festivity, while in the same scene of the Menologion by Basil II the movement and gestures of the figures, notably of Empress Helena Pointing to the True Cross, create an impression of action.

Judging by the picturesque articulation of colorful surfaces through the alteration of highlights and shadows and the use of conventional 'reflexes' (the clothes worn by the Holy Women), the works retain artistic features typical of Late Antiquity, which were commonly used in Byzantine art of the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> century.

The other two manuscripts – the Pentecostarion A-734 and a collection of works by Gregory the Theologian A-109 – were created in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the early 13<sup>th</sup> century respectively, i.e. during the heyday of the Georgian kingdom. Along with the willingness to adopt the achievements of Byzantine art, the illustrations of the manuscripts demonstrate a high level of cultural development as well as the creativity of Georgian artists. Despite a wide chronological gap between the miniatures of these manuscripts, both display the same pattern of rendering plots, i.e. generalization and a respective focus on dogmatic meaning. Monumentality, inherent to generalization, is characteristic of an overall system employed in the decoration of both manuscripts – full-page miniatures appear like frontispieces serving to introduce the text. Early attempts of generalized rendering, as mentioned above, are apparent already in the miniatures of the Synaxarion. The trend reached its maturity in Byzantine manuscripts of the 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> century. The illustrations of the two manuscripts reflect this very tendency. It is also to be noted that both the Pentecostarion and a collection of works by Gregory the Theologian are the most typical liturgical collections illustrated according to this principle. Close examination of the miniatures of the two chronologically distant manuscripts revealed several stylistic features, such as the preference for linear treatment, application of unbroken colour spots and the use of moderate colour palette despite a variety of tones, which, as believed by scholars, are directly associated with the national tradition.

The Pentecostarion was illustrated by seven miniatures corresponding to the themes of the composition. The miniatures, kept in the repository of manuscripts (A-743) date from the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The text of the manuscript is now lost. The content of the compositions is related to the readings from the Gospels for the Sunday liturgies and the holy feasts throughout the period from Easter to Pentecost. An iconographic analysis showed that the artist followed extended compositional models. Yet he did not include narrative elements related to the time and action, such as people and an angel in the scene of the Healing of the Paralyzed Man, Healing of the Blind at Siloam, two phases of action in both scenes; citizens, a pitcher and a bucket in the scene of a Samaritan woman and the cosmos and hetimasia in the Pentecost. Thus the Pentecostarion miniatures were designed to demonstrate the main idea of the theme in a laconic, generalized form rather than provide its narrative illustration.

The miniatures of the manuscript A-734 are distinguished by their high level of artistic execution. It is apparent that the artist was fully aware of a multi-layered painting technique, which he adapted to his own artistic preference. Shadows and highlights are painted in thin layers, without disturbing the uniformity of colour spots. An overall impression is created by locally applied colour spots and angular patterns marking drapery folds, sections of buildings, etc. Linear treatment and expressiveness are typical characteristics of the national stylistic repertoire. Not limited to miniature painting, these features are visible in mural paintings dating from different periods.

Another typically Georgian illustrated religious manuscript is a collection of Homilies by Gregory Nazianzenus 109, dated to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Containing 16 liturgical homilies, the collection is decorated with 13 miniatures. The thematic composition of the miniatures includes full-figure saints standing separately – compositions and scenes from the Gospels related to the Homilies. The miniatures are not framed. The impression of framing is, in some cases, created by geometricized architectural forms and horizontal lines marking the ground. However, even in the case of the presence of these elements, the figures are represented in direct contact with the clean surface of the page their laconic silhouettes being clearly visible against such backgrounds.

Equally noteworthy is a compositional solution: a limited number of characters, their large size, strict gestures and minimum number of attributes marking the site of action add an air of monumentality and festivity to the miniatures. Each miniature precedes a homily providing a generalized rendering of its content. For example, let us consider the miniature that precedes a sermon on the Plague of Hail. The centre features the frontal figures of man and woman, their importance highlighted by large size and gracious movements. In contrast, two small male figures are represented in the right and left edges of the composition, both shown in a bending position to express humility. The entire composition appears strict and hieratic. The sharp contrast between the central and secondary characters indicates the lack of artist's intention to provide a straightforward rendering of the theme. He rather attempted to convey the essence of a few opening sentences of the sermon through a laconic compositional formula. The trend of creating generalized, laconic compositions, evident in this and two previous manuscripts, is dictated by the liturgical function of these codices.

Of the Georgian decorated manuscripts especially remarkable are three richly illustrated Gospels, whose artistic and historic importance is not limited to Georgian art. They play a significant role in the study of the art of Eastern Christendom. These are the Gelati Gospels Q 902 (early half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century), Jruchi Gospels H-1667 (late 12<sup>th</sup> century) and Mokvi Gospels Q-908 (1330). All of the manuscripts is rich in miniatures. However, a different system of illustration is employed in each case. More specifically, each Gospel of the Gelati and Jruchi manuscripts is provided with detailed illustrations forming independent cycles. They differ sharply from the system of illustration used in the Mokvi Gospels. The manuscript has 157 miniatures, of which 98 illustrate the Gospel of Matthew. The other three Gospels include only

those scenes that are not present in the Gospel of Matthew. Thus the illustrations of each of the four Mokvi Gospels are conceived as an integral cycle.

Each of the mentioned Gospels is a remarkable work of its time reflecting its artistic trends, be it linear-decorative treatment or the approaches inherent in Palaeologan art.

I will draw your attention to the miniatures adorning only one Gospel, namely the Jruchi 2 miniatures. The place of inscribing and illustrating the manuscript remains unclear. Neither do we have any records regarding a commissioner. The manuscript is dated to the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, when Georgian culture reached its zenith under Queen Tamar. It was the time when the stylistic features defining the original character of the Jruchi 2 miniatures became especially pronounced. This is indicated by an increased dynamism and outstanding expressiveness, features that originated in earlier locally produced works and evolved into typical characteristics of national art. Lack of accuracy in rendering frame borders, placement of figures on margins, latitude in rendering postures and the movement of waving drapery, as well as the presence of a tree bending towards a main character create an internal tension and a sense of dramatism. Equally characteristic is plasticity and refined decorativeness, especially evident in the sophisticated rendering of a calligraphic line.

The Jruchi 2 miniatures are some of the most remarkable works of their time, which defines their special importance in the history of Georgian art. None of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century Georgian manuscripts, except Jruchi 2, has reflected the artistic trends of the time with such intensity. Its numerous manuscripts also provide invaluable evidence for the study of specific issues relating to the illustration of Gospels.

As an illustration, I would like to draw your attention to one of the Jruchi 2 miniatures, namely the scene of the Crucifixion provided in the Gospel According to Matthew (65v, Matthew 27,54). Distinguished by a highly expressive composition, it is especially noteworthy for the rare iconographic redaction it offers. The text of the Gospel regarding the Crucifixion is illustrated so as to highlight its dogmatic essence rather than provide a detailed historical rendering. Of note are three figures depicted on the margin, marking a symbolic reference to the replacement of a synagogue by a new Christian church. The image of a kneeling woman turned to the Lord in supplication, with a hand of an angel on her shoulder as a sign of protection, personifies the Church. With a hand movement, the angel throws away the figure to the margin, whose only a small part of the back and leg are visible. This female figure represents a synagogue, which, according to the movement, is running away.

Irene Giviashvili

Phoka, St Ninos Church

1033-1048

In the province of Javakheti (municipality of Ninotsminda), on the south bank of the Paravani lake, in the village of Phoka stands a single naved church. Abandoned for a long time, the church lost its roof and some upper parts of eastern and south walls but was restored in the last ten years, and a convent was established even before. The convent of Phoka is very strong and famous with its hard-working nuns, which is understandable if we take into account the hard weather conditions they have to cope with.

On our arrival in mid-September, when the weather was sunny and warm in Tbilisi, Phoka met us with its usual harsh climate, cold, windy and foggy. Built-in a massive sandstones of a dark yellowish colour, church looked gloomy and shiny at the same time.

The size of the church is 14.8X13.1 m, 16,7m tall.

The church is a single naved, elongated to the west-east axis, it has a large apse on the east, with one central window and two large niches on the sides. The space of hall is rendered with four pairs of pilasters, that project from the walls in double steps to hold lower arches over the longitudinal walls and the upper ones for the vault. It has two windows on the south and no windows on the west or north. The only entrance is also from the south, which is typical for the Georgian churches. The interior has never been plastered and the quality masonry creates its powerful and monumental look.

Facades are left plain, gable roof creates the shape of the rectangular structure. No porches or annexes ever existed. Decoration is concentrated at the door and window openings. The huge stone of south door tympanum (3.87X1.27m) has a rather unusual distribution of ornamentation. It is divided into seven vertical sections, where the centre is curved with the massive cross, set into the ornamental background, the most lateral sections are largest and are left plain, another pair of sections (more narrow) are cut in floral ornamentations that come with the geometric periodicity, and the sections on the sides of the central cross are used for the inscriptions (discussed later).

The two windows on the south facade have been also decorated with the combination of the floral and geometric ornamentations, on contrary to the tympanum, that has no frame and does not come out the wall surface, the window moldings are projecting from the wall surface. This is done in a more elaborated manner on the eastern facade, where the single window molding with its curved top has a large stone rectangular frame.

Architecture of Phoka church belongs to the type of hall churches, that were popular during the centuries in Georgia. Its proportions, rendering of the inner space and the decoration is typical to the regions of Javajketi and Trialeti. But the quality of architecture and its decoration distinguishes Phoka from the similar monuments, and the reason stands in its history that can be learned from the inscriptions and not only.

From the Georgian Chronicles, we know that St Nino, to whom is addressed the conversion of Kartli into Christianity, on the way to Mtskheta, made a break in the village of Phoka. Therefore the affiliation/consecration of the church to St. Nino is logical.

Inscriptions, on the facades, are of great importance. In three inscriptions curved in asomtavruli we read:

1. „Jesus Christ, the son and the voice of the divine glorify Ioane Okropiri, bishop of Kartli in both of his lives, amen“;
2. „Jesus glorify Bagrat Curopalates“;

3. *„In the name of God, I Bavriel was worthy to built this church and I worked as mason of Ioane Okropiri, the bishop of Kartli“.*

Phoka inscriptions are important as they give the date of its construction. It mentions the King Bagrat IV Curopalates (1027-1072); it also indicates, that the church was built by the initiative of the Bishop Ioane V (1033-1049). We learn also the name of the builder, Bavriel, which presumably indicates the place of his origin, the village of Bavra, is relatively close to Phoka. Also, the fact, that Phoka is related to St Nino, makes it as much important place, that church is built with the initiative of the bishop himself.

These are the reasons, that with its artistic and building qualities, Phoka church stands as an outstanding example of medieval Georgian architecture.

## **Irene Giviashvili** **Tao-Klarjeti in the architecture of Tbilisi**

We walk down Tbilisi to find at what level Tao-Klarjeti has inspired architects of 20th c Tbilisi.

**Tbilisi State University: coat of arms.** It was developed by Dimitri Shevardnadze through the consultations with Ivane Javakhishvili served as the basis for creating the university coat of arms. Its sketch was approved by the 4th meeting of the Council of Professors of the Tbilisi State University on February 5, 1918. The seal bears the ornamentation that is a copy of the ornamental spandrel of the Ishkani King Gurgens church tympanum decoration. Inhabited scroll represents a symbol of paradise, where all zoomorphic figures, are moving towards the grape, as a symbol of life, wealth and knowledge. Bringing the symbol from Ishkani to University, itself had largely a symbolic meaning. Ishani, once being a strong spiritual and educational center, became a model for the newly established center of education- Tbilisi State University.

**Wine factory N 1,** stand on the junction of Melikishvili and Petriashvili streets. Was built in 1894-1896 by the architect Aleksander Ozerov. This specific building does not show exact and direct connection with the architecture of Tao-Klarjeti, but it has its roots in medieval Georgian architecture, in general. Facade of the factory is nothing but a church facade, with its triparted gabled roofs, articulated with the blind arcade, typical for the Georgian churches since 11th c. even more, its decoration inside or outside resembles the motives of medieval church ornamentation, as interlaced crosses, rosettes, floral and geometrical ornaments, typical for the medieval churches. This factory is one of the earliest buildings in Georgia, where the motives of sacred buildings were transferred in civic architecture.

**The National Library** was planned and built by the architects Anatoly Kalgin and Heinrich Hrinevski. The first plan was made in 1912 and the building construction took place 1913-16. the facade decoration and stonework was executed by the masons' Neophyte, Vladimir, and Lavrenti Agladze. It stands on Gudiashvili street, N 3, which is parallel to Rustaveli avenue. Library building is one of the best examples of 20th c secular architecture, where the traditional, especially church architectural motives were used to create a modern building. Its long arched gallery across the Gudiashvili Street facade resembles the open spaces that usually surrounded churches. Twin windows and ornamented trefoil hangings are another indication of church architecture. With these and other features, this building is considered as one of the turning points in defining the architectural tendencies of Georgia in the early-mid 20th century. But the most important detail in our case is a large double window facing from the „tower“ facade. This double window topped with a massive eyebrow includes a bust of King David IV. The structure of the window and its decoration is a copy of one from Oshki, the difference is that in Oshki there is the bust of St Simeon the Stylite and here of a King. It is worth to mention that Anatoly Kalgin was a member of Takaishvilis field surveys in historic North-eastern provinces, where he studies monuments of Tao-Klarjeti. He visited Oshki and historic province of Tao in 1917. We can assume, that the window and its decoration were done after his visit to the medieval monastic site, which worked as an inspiration for him. Another important connection to the medieval architecture of Tao was made recently. The entrance floor of the library was covered with the replica of the 11th c floor from Ishkani church.

**National Museum** building standing on Rustaveli avenue N3 has changed its facade in 1929-1930 by the architect Nikolay Severov. Severov was largely involved in studying the medieval architectural monuments, measurements and drawings of many churches were made by him. It's no surprise, that when redesigning the facade of the Museum building, Severov recalled architectural elements of the churches. He was largely inspired by the images of the churches of Tao, especially of Oshki, at that time available from the photos of Takaishvili.

**Academy of Science**, built-in 1953-1958, is located on N 52 Rustaveli Avenue. Architects were Michel Ckhikvadze and Konstantine Ckheidze. Originally it was constructed as a house of miners. It's a typical monumental building of Stalin's epoch, but like other buildings of this time, it brings alive some „national“ architectural motives. In this building most striking are the two massive columns creating the porch of the building. These columns were inspired by the massive columns of Oshki. The refined masonry and the cladding of the facades with the evenly cut yellowish sandstone, typical of medieval Georgian church architecture, is another resemblance where the tradition roots come from.

## ICONS AS SYMBOLS OF POWER IN MEDIEVAL GEORGIA

For centuries in the Byzantine world, miracle-working icons were one of the focal points of Christian piety with multiple religious, cultural and ideological meanings. Icons with the power to perform miracles concentrated in Constantinople were closely associated with ruling authorities and mainly housed in monasteries, churches and chapels linked to imperial families<sup>1</sup>.

Among surviving Georgian medieval icons are numerous replicas of widely venerated miraculous images of Christ and the Virgin which were directly or indirectly associated with Byzantine emperors and their families. Medieval Georgian icons together with written sources give us significant testimonies concerning cult and importance of Constantinopolitan miracle-working images in spiritual and political life of medieval Georgia<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Numerous publications discuss diverse aspects of miracle-working icons, among them must be noted: C. MANGO, *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople*, Copenhagen, 1959 (= MANGO, *The Brazen House*); K. WEITZMANN, *The Mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos (Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illuminations)*, Chicago, 1971, p. 225-247 (= WEITZMANN, *The Mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos*); N. PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO, *Icons in Liturgy*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 45 (1991), p. 45-58 (= PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO, *Icons in Liturgy*); A. LIDOV (ed.), *Miracle-working Icon in Byzantium and Old Rus*, Moscow, 1996; H. BELTING, *Image et culte, une histoire de l'art avant l'époque de l'art*, Paris, 1998, esp. chapter 11 (= BELTING, *Image et culte*); A. WEYL CARR, *Court Culture and Cult Icons in Middle Byzantine Constantinople*, in H. MAGUIRE (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, Washington, DC, 1997, p. 81-100 (= WEYL CARR, *Court Culture and Cult Icons*); H. KESSLER, G. WOLF (ed.), *The Holy Face and Paradox of Representation, Papers from a Colloquium at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spelman*, Florence, 1996, Bologna, 1998 (= *The Holy Face*). M. VASSILAKI (ed.), *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Exhibition Catalogue, Benaki Museum), Athens, 2000, esp. A. LIDOV, *Miracle-Working Icons of the Mother of God*, p. 47-57 (= *Mother of God*); G. MORELLO – G. WOLF, (ed.), *Il Volto di Cristo*, Milano, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> On this subject see N. CHICHINADZE, კონსტანტინეპოლის სასწაულომოქმედი სახეები და XI-XIV სს. ქართული ხატწერა, I ნაკვეთი [*Constantinopolitan Miracle-working Images and XI-XIV cc. Georgian Icon Painting*, part 1], in საქართველოს სიძველენი [*Georgian Antiquities*], 4-5 (2003), p. 131-147. N. CHICHINADZE, კონსტანტინეპოლის სასწაულომოქმედი სახეები და XI-XIV სს. ქართული ხატწერა, ნაკვეთი II, [*Constantinopolitan Miracle-working Images and XI-XIV cc. Georgian Icon Painting*, part 2], in საქართველოს სიძველენი [*Georgian Antiquities*], 6 (2004), p. 73-89.

*The icon of Ancha or Anchiskhati triptych (Pl. 1)*

This article aims to demonstrate that Constantinopolitan "icon-relics", especially those associated to imperial families, were viewed by Georgian rulers as instrumental religious and ideological devices for promoting their royal power and authority within and beyond the country. It seems quite logical to start the discussion with the Holy Face of Edessa, or Mandylion, image of Christ "not made by human hand" (*acheiropoietos*), cornerstone of Christian devotional images, as this was one of the most important relics for the whole Christendom. The icon of Ancha or Anchiskhati, a replica of the *acheiropoietos* image of Christ, one of the major relics of Georgian church, is the earliest preserved copy of sacred relic with the miraculously imprinted face of Christ during his earthly life. Anchiskhati is a complex icon constituting from parts of various historical periods: the painted image dates back to sixth and seventh centuries and its precious metal frame was ordered in the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth centuries, (more precisely between 1284-1207). A *repoussé* inscription executed in old Georgian uncial script *asomtavruli* states that Ioanne Rkinaeli, the bishop of Ancha, adorned the icon "by order of Queen Tamar and with her donations"<sup>3</sup>. The *repoussé* frame has vine-scroll foliate ornamentation with holy images inserted. In the central part of upper frame is a Hetoimasia accompanied by half-figures of the frontal lorate Archangels depicted in the corners with labarums in their hands, on the vertical frames the Virgin and St. John the Baptist are depicted in full-length in slightly  $\frac{3}{4}$  views in attitudes of prayer. The lower border bears half-figures of St. Peter, St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist.

Later, about 1308-1334, a triptych had been created for the venerable image. The reverse of the wings were reveted in the seventeenth century, while in the eighteenth century the setting of the icon was renewed and precious stones added. The *repoussé* figure of Christ is a work of the nineteenth century<sup>4</sup>.

Unfortunately, the history of Ancha icon before Bishop Ioane embellished it is quite obscure, but it is significant that during the reign of Queen Tamar, when the Georgian kingdom reached its climax, the image gained a special importance and significant steps for promotion of its cult have been made. Apart from being one of the main relics of the

<sup>3</sup> SH. AMIRANASHVILI, *ბეჟა ოპიზარი*, [Beqa Opizari], Tbilisi, 1956, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> T. SAKVARELIDZE, *XIV-XIX საუკუნეების ქართული ოქრომჭედლობა* [Georgian Repoussé of the 14th-19th c.], v. 1, Tbilisi 1987, p. 9-25.

whole Christendom, the Mandyliion of Edessa has a special meaning for Georgians. The enhancement of the cult of the Mandyliion lies in local tradition. The veneration of the Holy Face of Edessa has a long history in Georgia and, according to the tradition, it goes back to Apostolic times (see Ioanne of Ancha "Hymn of Anchiskhati", Paraclesis of the Holy Icon of Ancha)<sup>5</sup>. Another version claims that a *keramion* – a tile with a miraculously imprinted Mandyliion – was brought to Georgia in the sixth century by one of the so-called 13 Syrian fathers, Anton of Martkopi<sup>6</sup>.

A recently discovered tenth century Georgian manuscript from Sinai ("The Deeds of St. Ioane of Zedazeni", N/Sin. 50) is an additional textual document connecting the appearance of *acheiropoitos* images of Christ with disciples accompanying another Syrian Father, Ioane of Zedazeni<sup>7</sup>. At first sight this information contradicts the version relating the appearance of the Holy Face in Georgia to the Apostle Andrew, but from the historical perspective of the Georgian church such version it quite understandable. The Georgian Church in the early stage of its history was closely linked to the Eastern Christian world, while from the ninth or tenth century it turned towards Byzantium. It is not surprising that the establishment of cult of the Mandyliion in Georgia is ascribed to Syrian Fathers who introduced eastern monasticism in the country and thus, the direct link with Syria becomes strongly pronounced. The date of the Sinaitic text is quite important as well as it corresponds to the

<sup>5</sup> S. KUBANEISHVILI (ed.), *ძველი ქართული ლიტერატურის ქრესტომათა* [Ancient Georgian Literature Reader], v.1, Tbilisi, 1964, p. 382-283 (= Ancient Georgian Literature Reader); *ქართულ ხელნაწერთა აღწერილობა* [Description of Georgian manuscripts], Coll. A.II, Tbilisi, 1986, p. 80; see also Z. SKHIRTLADZE, *Canonizing the Apocrypha: The Abgar Cycle in the Alaverdi and Gelati Gospels*, in *The Holy Face*, p. 71 (= SKHIRTLADZE, *Canonizing the Apocrypha*).

<sup>6</sup> This version could be found in the following Georgian written sources: interpolation of uncertain date in the eleventh century Georgian chronicle of historian *Juansher*; "Chant on Christ's Incarnation" of Saba Synkelos, second half of the twelfth century (?); "Canticle on the Icon not-made by Human Hand" of Arseni Bulmaisimisdze, second quarter of thirteenth century; sixteenth century "Historian"; seventeenth century "Vita of St. Anton" of Martkopi; cfr S. KAUKHCHISHVILI (ed.), *ქართლის ცხოვრება* [Life of Kartli], v. 1, Tbilisi, 1955, p. 212-214; *Ancient Georgian Literature Reader*, p. 392. See also Z. ALEKSIDZE, *მანდილიონი და კერამიონი ძველ ქართულ მწერლობაში* [The Mandyliion and the Keramion in Ancient Georgian Literature], in *Academia*, 1 (2001), p. 10-11 (= ALEKSIDZE, *The Mandyliion and the Keramion*).

<sup>7</sup> The text refers to "Theodosios of Urhai (Edessa) – a servant-monk and deacon of the Mandyliion" and "Ezderios of Nabuk (Hierapolis), servant of Keramion". We read that they decided to decorate their churches in Samthavisi and Rekha with the *acheiropoietos* image, but images miraculously appeared through Divine intervention (ALEKSIDZE, *The Mandyliion and the Keramion*, p. 13).

transfer of the Mandylion to Constantinople. This event renewed the interest in the relic and served as an important stimulus for the Georgian author to claim that the cult of the Mandylion has deep historical roots in Georgia. The “Deeds” could also be perceived as a reflection of increasing national self-consciousness of Georgians coinciding to the process of unification of the country starting by the end of the tenth century.

The Anchiskhati *repoussé* frame’s design gives us some additional clues for the interpretation of the embellished image. The message of the Anchiskhati frame becomes more explicit if we compare it with the frame of the Genoa icon, where ten *repoussé* narrative scenes reproduce the history of the Mandylion. On the much earlier tenth century lateral wings of the painted triptych from St. Catherine’s monastery at Mount Sinai with the now lost central image of the Mandylion we see again story of this relic: King Abgar with the Mandylion on the right wing and the apostle Thaddaeus on the left one<sup>8</sup>. The Anchiskhati frame as well as other metalwork parts – top and lateral wings of the triptych – does not contain any visual references to the story of the Edessa relic. Instead, the frame displays an imagery that usually accompanies the images of Christ Pantocrator<sup>9</sup>, while on the inner parts of the lateral wings seven scenes from the *Dodecaorthon* are executed in *repoussé*: the Ascension on the semicircular top, the Annunciation, Nativity and Baptism on the left wing and the Transfiguration, Crucifixion and Anastasis on the right. Such diversity in programs could be explained by different approaches to the interpretation of the image. The Genoa icon frame, like the Sinai triptych wings, refers to the history of a concrete relic, while the Ancha icon revetment gives to this image more general meaning and broadens its significance. The icon of Ancha could be perceived as an icon of Incarnation and a manifestation of the Orthodox teaching. Such interpretation is in accord with the text of the “Hymn of Anchiskhati” written by Bishop Ioanne of Ancha. A liturgical canon in acrostic (saying: “The horrible Ancha Icon is praised by Ioane of Ancha”) eloquently praises

<sup>8</sup> WEITZMANN, *The Mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos*, figs. 211-212, p. 242-246.

<sup>9</sup> See image of Christ from Mgvimevi, late 10th c., enframed with Hetoimasia flanked by the Virgin and St. John the Baptist on the upper frame and Apostles, Evangelists on vertical frames, on the lower border are Saint Warriors; Tzageri icon, early 11th c., frame imagery consist from the Archangels, the Virgin and St. John; on Tzalenjikha icon, early 11th c., the central image of Christ is accompanied by enamel medallions constituting a Deesis on the upper border, enamel medallions with Sts. Peter and Paul and St. Warriors are also preserved on the vertical and lower borders. Г.Н. ЧУБИНАШВИЛИ, *Грузинское чеканное искусство* [G.N. CHUBINASHVILI, *Georgian Metalwork*], Tbilisi, 1959, p. 592-598, 182-190, 579-584 (= ЧУБИНАШВИЛИ, *Грузинское чеканное искусство*).

Anchiskhati and its miraculous power. Ioane claims that the Apostle Andrew brought the image from Hieropolis to Klarjeti (a southern Georgian province)<sup>10</sup>. According to the text the Anchiskhati performs innumerable miracles and is a strong defense against enemies, who “like ferocious lions menace us, horrible icon defeat them ...as you are our power and strength”<sup>11</sup>. Anchiskhati is called “an icon of the Incarnation”. The whole text is based on the orthodox teaching about images. The Hymn comprises doctrinal meaning of veneration of images and quotes words of Basil the Great that veneration offered to an image goes to its prototype<sup>12</sup>.

The enhancement of the Holy Face from Ancha with precious *repoussé* framing by royal order, as well as the creation of the hymn dedicated to it, were significant steps acknowledging the icon's privileged status. The special role reserved to Anchiskhati will be understandable if we cast our glance to the history of its prototype: the Holy Face of Edessa. The image of Christ “not made by human hands” miraculously created by the incarnated Logos for curing King Abgar, the ruler of the kingdom of Osroene, and its miraculous imprint on the tile – *keramion* – were kept in Edessa and Hierapolis respectively. The Holy Mandylion, re-discovered in 544 thanks to the efforts of the Byzantine Emperor Romanos I, was in the palace chapel of the Virgin of the Pharos from 944 until 1267. Then, after the Fourth Crusades, King Luis IX took it as booty to Paris and placed it in Saint Chapel, a specially built royal chapel for relics brought from East Christian centers. As further manifestation of royal patronage is a fact that for the celebration of the anniversary of the transfer of the relic to Constantinople

<sup>10</sup> *Ancient Georgian Literature Reader*, p. 382-283.

<sup>11</sup> Apart from literary sources Georgian medieval art gives striking examples of a highly developed cult of the Holy Face of Edessa – one of the earliest preserved images is the fresco in the Telovani church, 8th c., extended cycle of miniatures illustrating Abgarus' Epistle apocryphal text in the 11th c. Alaverdi and Gelati Gospels. From the late 12th-early 13th cc. the Mandylion is placed in semantically important places in church interiors – in the lunette of the main entrance in Vardzia, in apses, above altars – in the Ascension church in Ozaani, in the murals of Qobair, both dated back to late 12th-early 13th cc., Dmanisi Sion, 1213-1223, church in Kazreti, Sts. Archangels' church, Tangili, both early 13th c. etc. SKHIRTADZE, *Canonizing the Apocrypha*, p. 73-74; E. ПРИВАЛОВА, *Роспись Тимотесубани* [E. PRIVALOVA, *Timotesubani Murals*], Tbilisi, 1984, p. 95, fig. 39; ИДЕМ, *Роспись церкви Вознесения в Озаани* [*Murals of Ascension church in Ozaani*], in *Ars Georgica*, 9 (1987), p.126, fig. 1; T. VELMANS, *L'art médiéval de l'orient chrétien*, Sofia, 2002, pls. 115, 177; K. MIKELADZE, *ძმანისის სიონის მონატიულობა* [*The Murals of Sioni Church in Dmanisi*], in *საქართველოს სიძველეები* [*Georgian Antiquities*], 7-8 (2005), fig. 1.

<sup>12</sup> The same idea is revealed in Arseni Bulmaisimidze's canticle, see SKHIRTADZE, *Canonizing the Apocrypha*, p. 74, note 17.

Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos ordered, or composed, a special sermon praising this event. In 968, the *keramion* also appeared in Constantinople and were placed in the Pharos Chapel with the Mandy-lion. These relics were *palladia* of Constantinople protecting both the city and the ruling dynasty<sup>13</sup>.

While talking about association of the Mandy-lion to royal authority one should also take into consideration the important visual evidence of the before mentioned the tenth century triptych lateral wing from Sinai's St. Catherine's monastery depicting the story of the Mandy-lion. King Abgar is dressed as a Byzantine emperor and as K. Weitzmann illustrates he has the clearly pronounced facial features of Constantine Porphyrogenetos<sup>14</sup>.

Starting from King Abgar, certain inheritance in royal patronage can be traced in the history of the veneration of Mandy-lion. To the Byzantine Emperors Romanus I and Constantine Porphyrogenetos, who greatly contributed to the cult of Mandy-lion, should be also added the Georgian ruler Queen Tamar. The embellishment of the Mandy-lion icon of Ancha by her order continues this "tradition" and at the same time acquires additional locally rooted significance. It is notable that on August 16, when the Orthodox Church commemorates the transfer of this relic to the Byzantine capital, the Georgian Church celebrates the Anchiskhati Feast.

#### *The Tzageri icon (Pl. 2)*

Another icon evoking Byzantine miracle-working image is the Tzageri icon of Christ. The precious metal *repoussé* revetment of Christ "Pantocrator" with a supplicatory inscription bearing the name of the Georgian ruler King Bagrat dates to the early eleventh century (87 × 57 cm, gilt silver, Georgian National Museum, Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, original painted parts are missing, while an inserted painted face is of the nineteenth century). The inscription executed in *repoussé* on the right inner strap connecting the frame and the "field" of the icon says: "Saviour of all [born] creatures, glorify with your glory the divinely crowned powerful Bagrat king of the Abkhazians and Kourou-palat of the entire East. Amen"<sup>15</sup>. King Bagrat is identified with Bagrat

<sup>13</sup> A. CAMERON, *The Mandy-lion and Byzantine Iconoclasm*, in *The Holy Face*, p. 34-35.

<sup>14</sup> WEITZMANN, *The Mandy-lion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos*, fig. 227-229, p. 242-246.

<sup>15</sup> ЧУБИНАШВИЛИ, *Грузинское чеканное искусство*, p. 189.

III (975-1074) who received the title Kouropalat in 1001<sup>16</sup>. The carpet-like ornamental field and the frame with additional images inserted in the ornamental pattern (three medallions with frontal busts of angels are placed in the centre and corners of the upper border; the Virgin and John the Baptist depicted in three-quarter view are placed on the left and right vertical borders respectively; the lower border is missing), a double rowed foliate motive, give a restricted splendour to the Tzageri icon.

Representational image of Christ Pantocrator perceived as manifestation of Chalcedonian doctrine was closely associated with Byzantine rulers. Conceptual reading of this image gives space for various interpretations. The idea of Byzantine emperor's ruling as reflection of Christ Almighty power was one of them. Thus, it is quite understandable that icons of Christ were often in the possession of imperial families and their monastic foundations<sup>17</sup>.

As it is well illustrated in numerous publications, archetypes for the iconography of blessing Christ with the Gospel in his left hand were Constantinopolitan images of Christ, Chalkites and Antiphonites associated with the Byzantine court. Christ Almighty, the visual formula of rulership, was in accord with Byzantine imperial ideology. Taking into consideration the specific orientation of Byzantine political theory claiming that the authority of emperor derives from Christ, choosing of the image of blessing Christ for the icon associated to Georgian ruler becomes more understandable. The image of Christ decorating the imperial palace gate, or vestibule, of Chalke has a particular meaning in Byzantine history and functioned as a symbol of victory of Orthodoxy.

A miraculous icon of Christ Antiphonites from the Chalkoprateia church of the Virgin is another image with an imperial connotation. The history of the miracle-working icon of Christ Antiphonites, placed in

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 182-190, figs. 99, 100, and p. 579-584, figs. 80, 81.

<sup>17</sup> Christ Pantocrator is often displayed on Byzantine coins (gold *solidi* of Justinian II after 691, gold *nomisma* of Michael III, between 843-856, gold *histamenon* of Basil II and Constantine VII, between 1001-1005, gold *hyperpyron* of Manuel I, 1143-1180, etc.) and objects of Constantinopolitan provenance commissioned or possessed by rulers (i.e. metal cross of Justin I, encaustic icon of Christ from Sinai St. Catherine's monastery, 6th-7th cc., which is suggested to be Justinian II donation to the monastery, Leon VI jasper cameo, etc.). Ph. GRIERSON, *Byzantine Coinage*, Washington DC, 1999, p. 34-35, 9, 10, figs. 9, 11, 14-15, 62-64; K. WEITZMANN, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai. The icons, v. I: From the 6th to the 10th Century*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1973, p. 15; H. EVANS (ed.), *Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, *Exhibition Catalogue*, New York, 1997, cat. N, 126, p. 175-176; Icon of Christ was venerated in Pantocrator monastery founded by John Comnenos (1118-1143), Alexios I was miraculously cured by Christ Chalkites, see WEYL CARR, *Court Culture and Cult Icons*, p. 83, note 17.

Tetrapyllon, goes back to Constantine's time and is linked with the Empress Zoe (1041-1042)<sup>18</sup>.

Although these images of Christ have not survived to our days, Byzantine coins and church murals give us an idea about their appearance. Apart from general typological similarities, the Tzageri icon displays some iconographic elements characteristic to these Constantinopolitan images. The wearing of the *himation*, the blessing hand held in front of the chest, the manner of holding of the closed Gospels find parallels with Christ Chalketes depicted on the lead seal of John Pentechnes from the Dumbarton Oaks collection, eleventh and twelfth centuries, and with the silver scyphate medallion from the Photiades Bei collection, twelfth and thirteenth centuries<sup>19</sup>. Arms clasped to the body, a gesture of the blessing right hand raised in front of the breast depicted with palm facing viewers, the closed Gospel book supported by its lower edge, are also seen on Christ Antiphonites depicted on coins of Zoe, Anonymous Folles, Nicephoros Folli, the now lost mosaic of the Dormition church, Nicea, eleventh century, and the Virgin tou Arakou church fresco, Lagoudera, Cyprus, 1192<sup>20</sup>.

The Byzantine title of the Georgian king stressed in the inscription indicates that the chosen iconographic type of Christ Pantocrator could have a special meaning correlated to the Byzantine idea of sovereignty. The mentioned iconographic details of the Tzageri icon support this suggestion and allow us to suppose that its prototype was the venerable miraculous Byzantine court icon of Christ.

<sup>18</sup> This icon was an object of particular devotion of the Empress Zoe – she had an icon foretelling the future –, this image is depicted on her coins. She also founded a church of Christ Antiphonites, which later served as her burial place. From the typicon of the Empress Irina Doukaina Komnena for the convent of the Mother of God Kecharitoumene (1110-1116) we know that the convent possessed an icon of Christ Antiphonetes. Further testimonies of the involvement of Constantinople icons of Christ in “royal realm” and in miraculous curing are performed by Christ Chalketes. The veil hanging in front of Christ Chalketes cured Alexios I and Alexius Comnenos, grandson of John II. MANGO, *Brazen House*, p. 132-133, 142-146; A. KAZHDAN (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, New York – Oxford, 1991, v. I, p. 439; J. THOMAS – A. CONSTANTINIDES HERO (ed.), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents. A complete translation of the Surviving Founders' Typicas and testaments (Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 35)*, Washington, D.C., 2000, v. 2, p. 715 (= *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*).

<sup>19</sup> MANGO, *Brazen House*, p. 132, 137, figs. 17, 22.

<sup>20</sup> A. BELLINGER – PH. GRIERSON, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks and the Whitteore Collection*, v. III, part I, Washington, D.C., 1973, p. 162, table 16, pl. LVIII, 1, pl. LX, pl. LXX, 9; C. MANGO, *Brazen House*, p. 147, fig. 24; A. KATZONIS, *The Responding Icon*, in L. SAFRAN (ed.), *Heaven on Earth: Art and Church in Byzantium*, Pennsylvania, 1998, fig. 3.19. See also the Episkopi church mural in Mani, around 1200, N. DRANDAKI, *Byzantine Churches of Mani*, Athens, 1995, p. 182, ph. 35, pl. 36.

*The Khakhuli triptych* (Pl. 3)

The miraculous tenth century Khakhuli enamel image of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa also has a special ideological meaning<sup>21</sup>. Only the enameled face and palms survive. Scholars suggested that the rest of the icon was executed in *repoussé*. The Virgin was depicted slightly turned to her left with her hands in the gesture of supplication (the reconstruction of their position is still disputable). In the early twelfth century, the image was moved from Khakhuli monastery in South Georgia to Gelati – the royal monastery founded in 1106 by the illustrious King David IV called the “Builder” (1189-1125). According to the anonymous historian of the chronicle of David the Builder, the king donated to monastery lands, holy relics, icons, liturgical objects. Among the royal donations were “thrones of the great Khosroan kings, candlesticks and colorful chandeliers, and also crowns and vessels captured from Arab kings”<sup>22</sup>. According to the will of David IV, we read, he donated to the Khakhuli icon of the Virgin “golden coins of Constantine Cvatas, rubies, precious stones and pearls”<sup>23</sup>. After the death of David the “Builder” his son Demetre I (1125-1154) created a lavishly adorned mount-case for the icon: a triptych sheathed in gilt silver and gold *repoussé* revetment encrusted with numerous enamels, precious stones and gems supplied with extensive inscription. The importance of this image is underlined in the dedicatory *repoussé* inscription executed in Georgian *Asomtavruli* script. The creation of the precious mount-case for the Virgin icon is compared to the workmanship of the Biblical Bezaleel, who embellished the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 31)<sup>24</sup>. An inscription also refers to the common descent of the Virgin and the Bagratids from the Prophet David (the Georgian royal dynasty of Bagratids claimed that they descended from Biblical house of David). Thus, the inscription gives new dimension to the image and establishes additional links between Georgian rulers and the Theotokos.

<sup>21</sup> Sh. AMIRANASHVILI, *ბახულის კარელი [Khakhuli Triptych]*, Tbilisi, 1972; T. PAPAMASTORAKIS, *Re-deconstructing the Khakhuli Triptych*, in *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaologikes Hetaireias*, 23 (2002), p. 225-255 (= PAPAMASTORAKIS, *Re-deconstructing the Khakhuli Triptych*); for a complete bibliography see L. KHUSKIVADZE, *Medieval cloisonné Enamels at Georgian State museum of Fine Arts*, Tbilisi, 1984, p. 30 (= KHUSKIVADZE, *Medieval cloisonné Enamels*).

<sup>22</sup> David the Builder’s Historian, *ცხოვრება მეფეთ-მეფისა დავითისი, (The Life of the King of Kings David)*, in S. KAUKHCHISHVILI (ed.), *Life of Kartli*, Tbilisi, 1955, p. 330 (= *David the Builder’s Historian*).

<sup>23</sup> A. BAQRADZE – R. TVARADZE (ed.), *Georgian Literature*, v. 2, Tbilisi, 1987, p.214

<sup>24</sup> AMIRANASHVILI, *Beqa Opizari*, p. 39. For the inscription see also PAPAMASTORAKIS, *Redeconstructing the Khakhuli Triptych*, p. 226.

Iconographic features of the Khakhuli Virgin demonstrate close affinities to the highly venerated Constantinople Mariological icon of Hagiosoritissa, housed in the Hagia Soros (Holy Reliquary) of Chalkoprateia in Constantinople, where the precious Christian relic, a girdle of the Virgin, was housed. There was an attempt to identify the Khakhuli Virgin as a replica of another Constantinopolitan icon, Khemeutissa (*khemeute* has various meanings – cast, enamelled, etc.), which slightly differs from the Hagiosoritissa<sup>25</sup>. This title accompanies an image of the Virgin – one of the five miracle-working images of Constantinople on the painted icon from Sinai<sup>26</sup>. It is important to know that the painter and donor of the Sinai icon was a Georgian monk-priest Ioane Tokhabi. The icon of the Virgin Chemeutissa is mentioned only once in Constantine Porphyrogenetos' *De Ceremoniis*. Constantine mentions that Chemeutissa was in Constantinople, in the church of St. Demetrios, next to the Theotokos Pharos Great Palace chapel. We do not have enough material in order to support this version. Whatever was an archetype of the icon, it is undeniable that the Khakhuli Virgin is a replica of a highly venerated miraculous icon kept in the Byzantine capital.

Richly decorated mount-case for icon displays numerous enamels, jewellery from wide span of time from the eighth and ninth centuries until the eighteenth century. The Khakhuli triptych is an excellent example of gift-giving practice to the miracle-working images widespread in the Eastern Christian world. Among the donations to the icon are splendid Byzantine and Georgian medieval enamels with a wide range of iconographic repertoire. Here we see images of Christ, various types of the Virgin, Holy Apostles, Saints, symbolic images, ornamental embellishment, historical persons, etc. Treasures displayed on the icon include dissembled precious objects: crosses, reliquaries, crowns and so on. Taken from their original context these objects are transformed and re-arranged on the central part and wings of triptych. The splendour of the sophisticated and refined golden *repoussé* vegetal ornamentation together with multicoloured glittering enamels creates mystical setting for the main image, which could be conceived as a radiation of heavenly grace and divine glory.

<sup>25</sup> For this subject and related bibliography see *Mother of God*, p. 147-149, pl. 90.

<sup>26</sup> G. SOTIRIOU – M. SOTIRIOU,  *Icônes du Mont Sinai*, 2 v., Athens, 1956-1958, v. I, fig. 125, II, 146-47; G. GALAVARIS – D. MOURIKI, *Icons*, in M. MANAFIS (ed.), *Sinai. Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, Athens, 1990, p. 384, note 23; CH. BALTOYANNI, *The Mother of God in Portable Icons*, in *Mother of God*, p. 144, 147, pls. 85, 87, 88 (= BALTOYANNI, *The Mother of God in Portable Icons*); A. WEYL CARR, *Icons as Objects of Pilgrimage in Middle Byzantine Constantinople*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 56, 2002, 76-93, fig. 1, 2, 6;

Spiritual and ideological message of the icon could be interpreted in variety of ways, but the main idea is the glorification of the central image of the Mother of God supplicating for mankind. If we turn to local church tradition, we will see that in the tenth century Georgian church started promoting the idea that Georgia was an *appanage* of the Virgin and the country was under her special protection. The idea of special patronage of the Virgin synchronizes to the unification of Georgian kingdom and the construction of a strong consolidated political unit. David the IV established the monastery of Gelati as “a second Jerusalem and a new Athens” claiming its leading political and cultural role<sup>27</sup>. Transferring the Virgin’s miracle-working image from the Khakhuli monastery to Gelati gave additional grace and spiritual importance to the monastery. The exceptional status of the icon is illustrated by the further practice of royal donations. After the victory in the battle of Shamkori in 1195, queen Tamar “donated the banner of the Chaliph to the great monastery for the Khakhuli icon of the Virgin as her grand-grandfather did”<sup>28</sup>. This act acknowledged heavenly assistance and support for royal deeds, and divine intervention in the battle of the Georgian kings against the enemies.

*The Khobi icon of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa (Pl. 4)*

An icon with supplicatory inscription of the Georgian king Leon from Khobi displays the same iconographic type of the Virgin (55 × 43 cm, painting of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, gilt silver, *cloisonné* enamel, Georgian National Museum, Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts)<sup>29</sup>. Unluckily the original painting of the icon is lost – the *repoussé* covering depicts the Virgin in half-length, turned to the right, with her head slightly inclined and with her hands in traditional gesture of prayer. A Georgian inscription beneath the figure of the Virgin, executed in *Asomtavruli*, says: “Christ, most-holy Mother of God, intercede before Christ for the soul of King Leon”<sup>30</sup>. The person mentioned in the inscription is identified as Leon III (957-967) and it is assumed that the icon created for the salvation of the king’s soul must have been executed after his death, about 970. The features of the metal relief of this icon, which should be considered as an example of the court art, reveal

<sup>27</sup> *David the Builder’s Historian*, p. 330-331.

<sup>28</sup> ისტორიანი და აზმანი შარავანდედთანი [*Historian of queen Tamar, Life of Kartli*], v. 2, Tbilisi, 1959, p. 74-75.

<sup>29</sup> CHUBINASHVILI, *Грузинское чеканное искусство*, p. 573-79, ph. 63-65, 425.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 575.

advanced artistic tendencies of its time. The character of the embossing demonstrates the important achievements in the depiction of the plasticity of the figure. At the same time, the icon attracts by the particular decorative effect of the ornamental frame, where ten enamel medallions with holy images (Deesis on the upper border is accompanied by images of the apostles Peter, Paul, Andrew, Evangelists Mathew, Mark and Luke, St. Gregory the Theologian) are inserted<sup>31</sup>. The reverse of the icon is covered with silver revetment. The decoration of this side of the icon constitutes the cross of Golgotha erected on a four-stepped base with the sigla IC XC NIKA. The inscription on the reverse of the icon states that the back was reveted with silver during the reign of David Narin (1245-1293) by Bedan Dadiani, Eristavi and Mandartuktutzesi (a high dignitary in the Medieval Georgia responsible for internal affairs) and his wife Khvashak<sup>32</sup>.

The depiction of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa on the icon, which is linked with the eschatological theme of the Deesis, created (or reveted) for the redemption of the soul of the Georgian king might be explained by the special relationship between this popular icon and services connected to the dead. As it has been suggested, the icon of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa had a funerary character. Moreover, there is a theory, which identifies *signon tes presbeias* mentioned in the description of the memorial service in the typicon of the Pantocrator monastery (1136) with the Hagiosoritissa icon<sup>33</sup>. This suggestion is strengthened by the frescoes of Sopočani (1260-1265) where the funeral procession of the first Serbian king Stefan Nemanja is accompanied by an icon of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa<sup>34</sup>. It seems quite likely that the lavishly adorned icon of Khobi with the supplication for the soul of King Leon had certain connection with specific funerary or commemorative services. Another document, the typicon of the Kosmosoteira Monastery (1152), indirectly supports this hypothesis. The founder of the monastery, Sebastokrator Isaac Komnenos, "framed with ornament of gold and silver" the icon of the Virgin Kosmosoteira from Rhaidestos. According to Isaac's will he wished this icon, which was sent to him down from heaven, together with the icon of Christ, to be set on his tomb, where "... it should remain resting throughout all times... to mediate for my wretched soul"<sup>35</sup>. It is true that we do not know what iconographic type of the

<sup>31</sup> KHUSKIVADZE, *Medieval cloisonné Enamels*, N112-121, p. 84-85.

<sup>32</sup> CHUBINASHVILI, *Грузинское чеканное искусство*, p. 576.

<sup>33</sup> BALTOYANNI, *The Mother of God in Portable Icons*, p. 148-149.

<sup>34</sup> PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO, *Icons in Liturgy*, p. 55, fig. 24.

<sup>35</sup> *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, v. 2, p. 839.

Virgin was depicted on Isaac's icon, but the above-mentioned association between these two icons seems quite plausible as both images, belonging to the imperial family, were decorated with precious metal and were regarded as icons with special functions. In the light of above, the Khobi icon might be considered as an icon with emphasized spiritual need evoking a Constantinople cult-icons. Its importance is revealed as well by an additional adornment, a reverse clad in *repoussé* revetment, ordered almost three centuries later by a high dignitary.

As it has been demonstrated, Byzantine miraculous icons and their functions were not unknown to the rulers of Medieval Georgia. Surviving material leads us to suppose that the adoption of iconographic themes of miraculous Constantinople icons together with their ritual context could be retraced at least from tenth century onward. Georgian rulers by their "intervention" changed and enriched the spiritual and symbolic meaning of the venerated miraculous images. Being the objects of veneration and piety throughout the centuries, the Anchiskhati and Khakhuli icons bearing witness of royal patronage acquired an exceptional importance for the religious and political life of the nation. Certain ideological messages of the Tzageri and Khobi icons alluding to the Byzantine imperial court could be perceived as manifestation of royal ideology as well.

Enhancement of the famous miracle-working images by Georgian sovereigns contributed to the authority of the country in times of its power. The process of unification of the country that began at the end of the tenth century was successfully completed with the creation of a powerful state dominating the whole region by David the Builder. During the reign of David's inherits Georg III and Tamar, from the late twelfth to early thirteenth centuries, Georgia's authority extended far beyond its borders.

It is no accident that Georgian kings greatly contributed to the establishment of the cult of the images linked to the Byzantine capital. The process of the unification of Georgia finds its reflection in earliest replicas of Constantinople miraculous icons with its complex religious and ideological meaning. The embellishment of the icon of Anchiskhati by the queen Tamar is of particular interest as the Mandylion could be attributed to Byzantine "court images". Her reign (1189-1213) coincided with the epoch when the Fourth Crusades defeated Constantinople and on international political scene, a unified Georgia came to the fore. By linking Anchiskhati with the Apostle Andrew, Georgian ruler and church hierarchs intended to stress the power and spiritual value of the image in order to have more reasons for proclaiming Georgia's right and authority of defender of Orthodox Christianity.

The powerful country, considered itself as the main Orthodox power in the region, assumed a role as protector of Christians and main bearer of Orthodox culture. In order to "legitimize" the status of Georgia as a stronghold of Orthodox Christianity and its faithful defender, it was necessary to design an appropriate "sacral setting" for this concept. Sacred images, especially miracle-working icons, were the most powerful arguments in this policy. Famous miracle-working images – icon-relics – from the Constantinople palace chapel were most appropriate sacred objects as they had both political and religious significance and served as icons of power, linking together earthly and heavenly rulers, spiritual and political authority.

Even from this brief survey, it is clear that in Medieval Georgia, like in Byzantium, sacred images, objects of special veneration and reverence contributed to the reinforcement of royal authority and power. Rulers having the privilege to intervene in the sacred fabric of public images by embellishing them aimed to assure a strong Heavenly support of their kingship.

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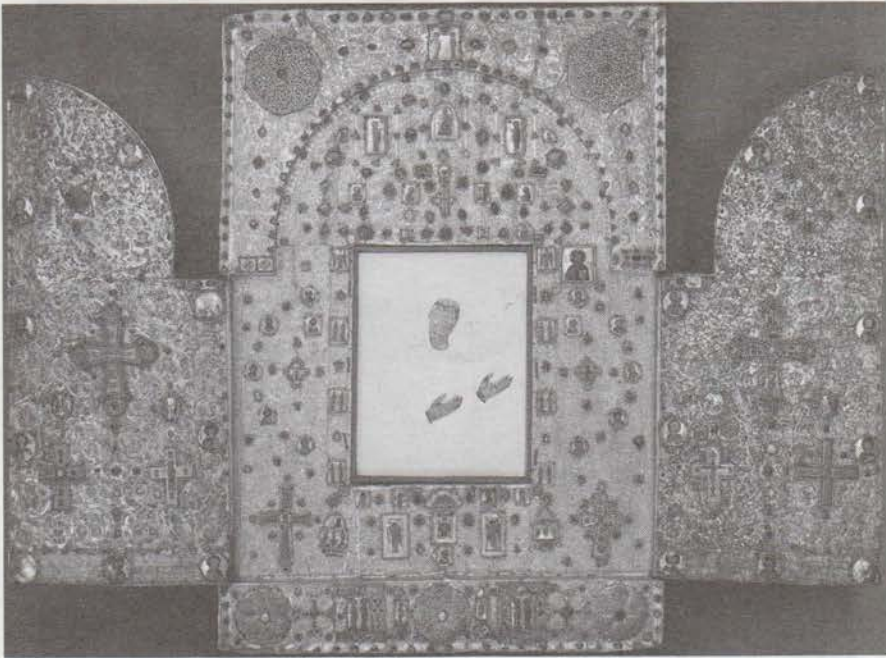
*Abstract* — The article discusses ideological aspects of the veneration of major cult icons in Medieval Georgia as miracle-working icons of Christ and the Virgin associated with Constantinople and the Byzantine Imperial Court. Considered as symbols of royal power they were actively involved in the political and spiritual life of Medieval Georgia. The increasing cult of Constantinopolitan "icon-relics" corresponds to the idea of apostolicity of Christianity in Georgia and the messianic role of Georgian language occurring in the hymnographic and historiographic literature of the 10<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> cc. The commissioning as well as the embellishment of replicas of Constantinople miraculous icons with precious metal *repoussé* covers and/or the creation of lavish icon-cases by the Georgian kings had not only a religious purpose but also a strong political background. The relic-icons were actively involved in creating of a model of a strong unified country, with the special mission of defending the Orthodox faith.



Pl. 1: The Anchiskhati triptych



Pl. 2: The Tzageri icon of Christ



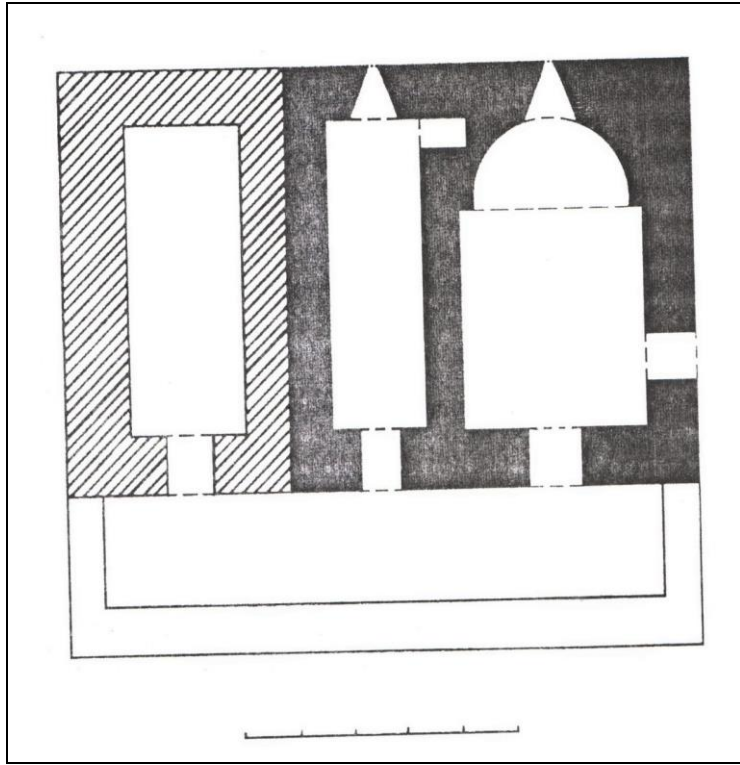
Pl. 3: The Khakhuli triptych

TAO-KLARJETI  
History and Heritage,  
Movable and Immovable  
Monuments

Plans, Sections, Drawings, Photos

# ARTANUJI CASTLE



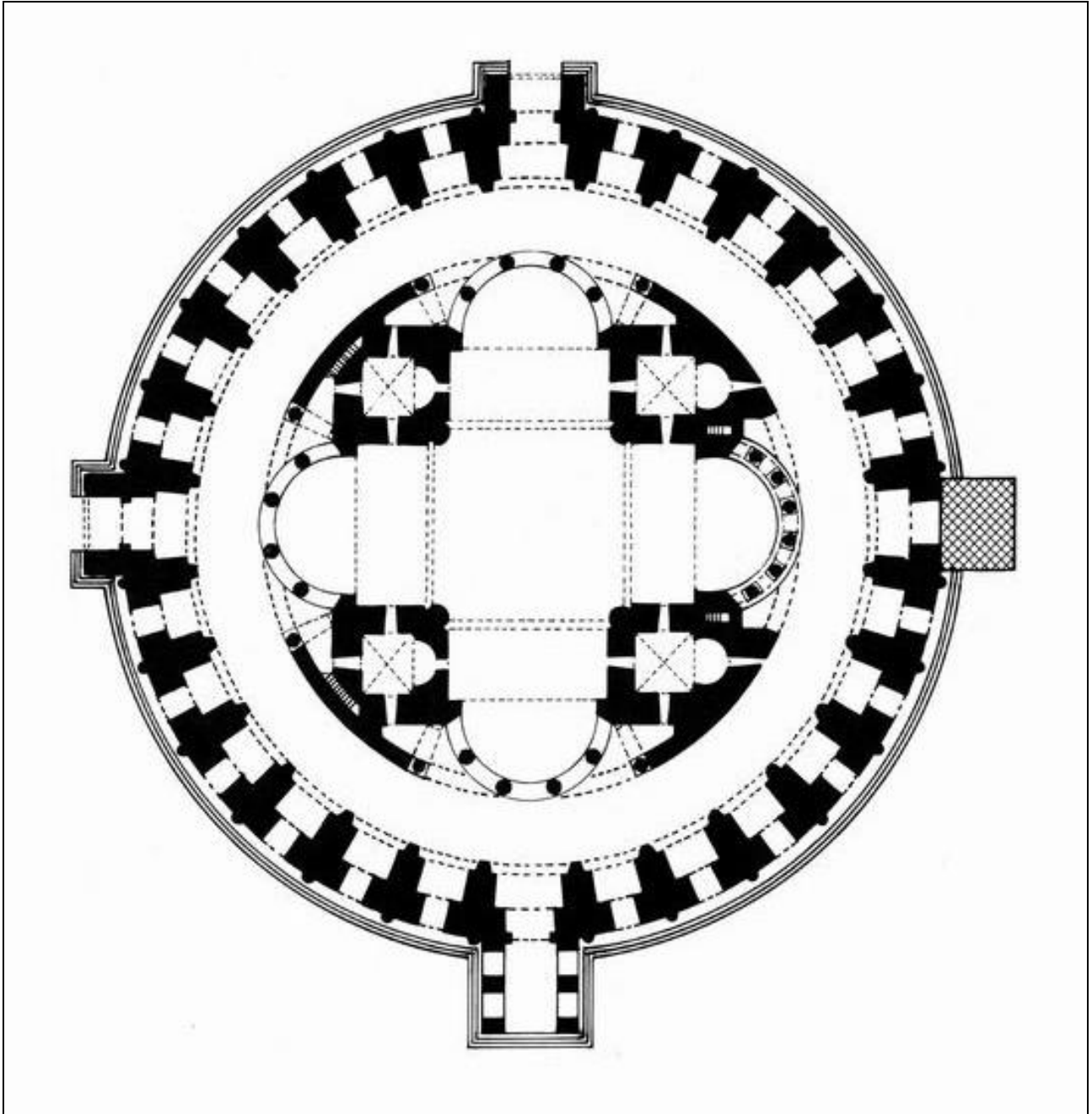


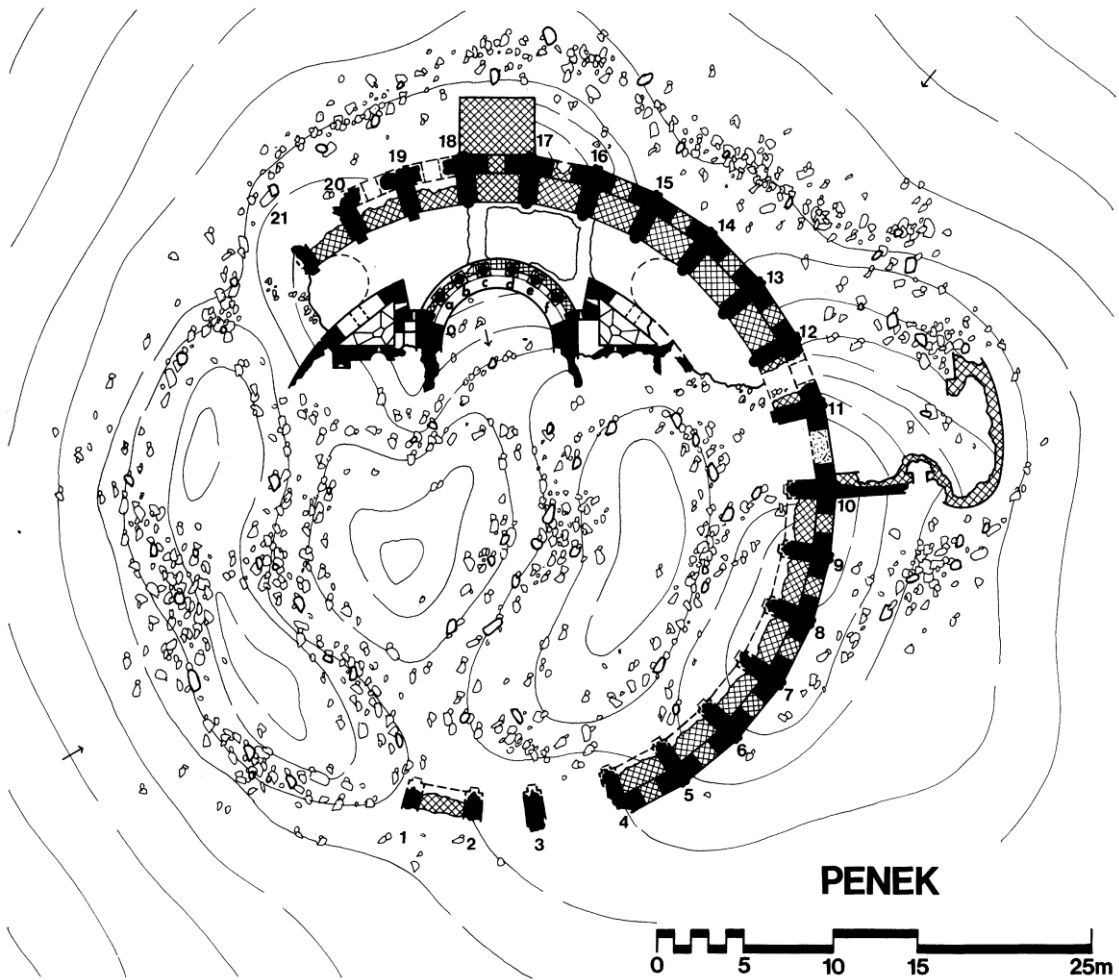
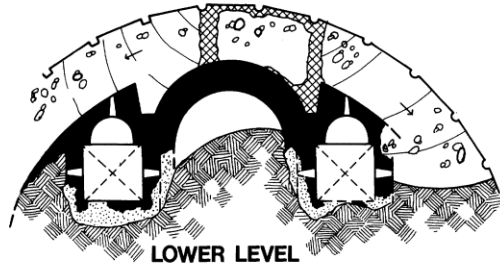
Church of St Peter and Paul



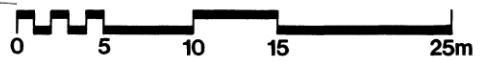
City Church

# BANA CATHEDRAL



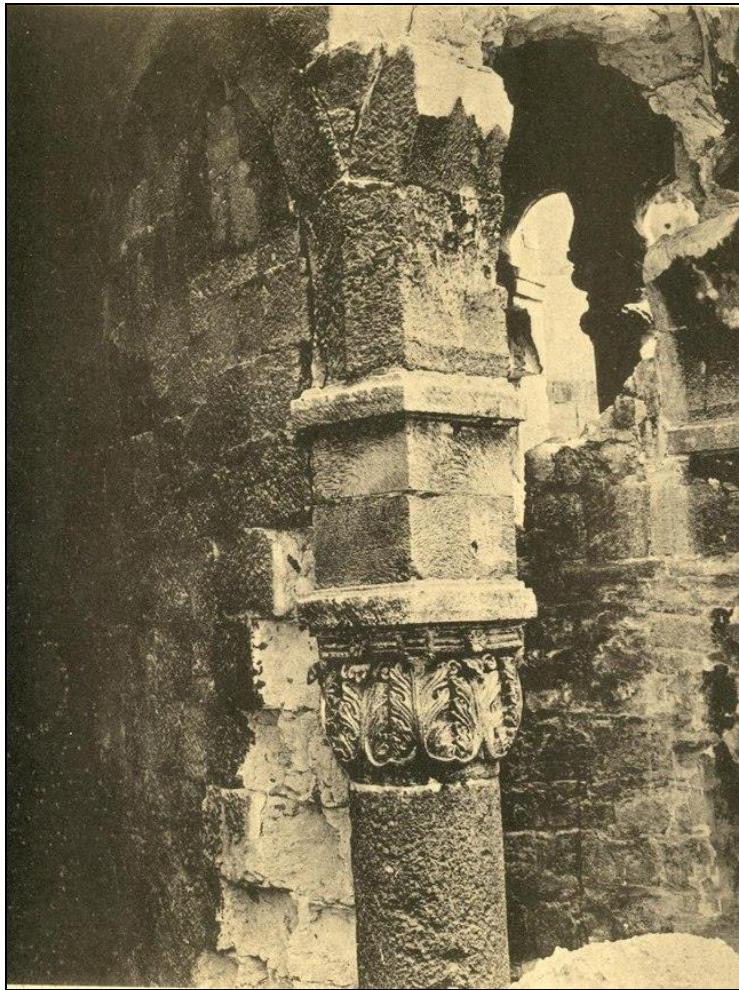


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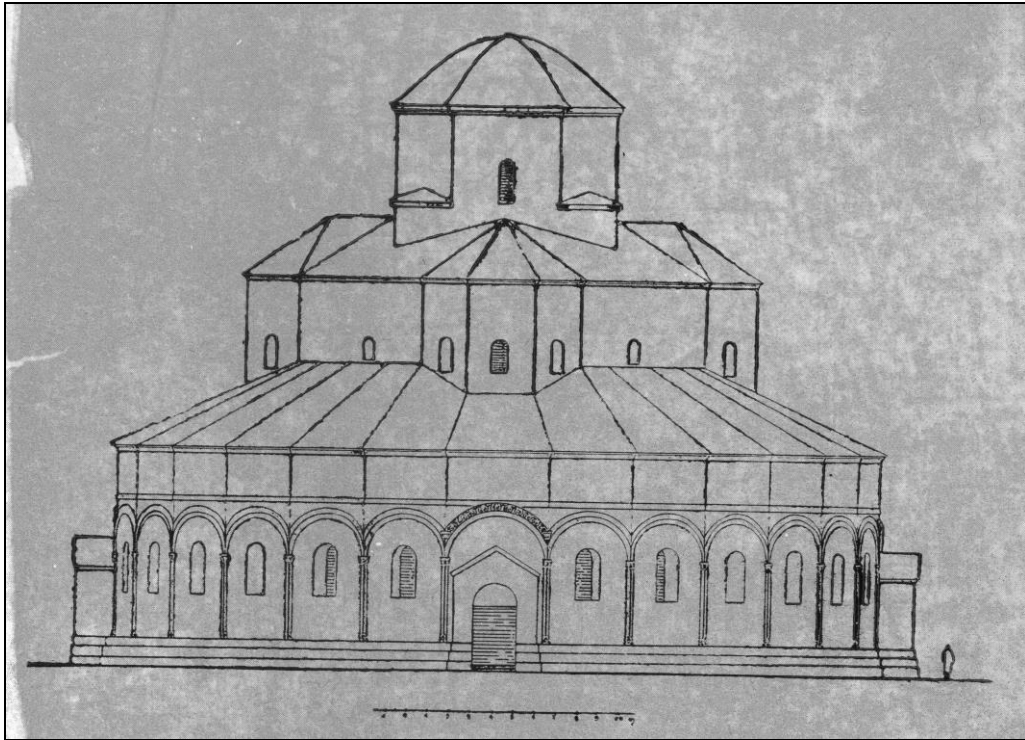




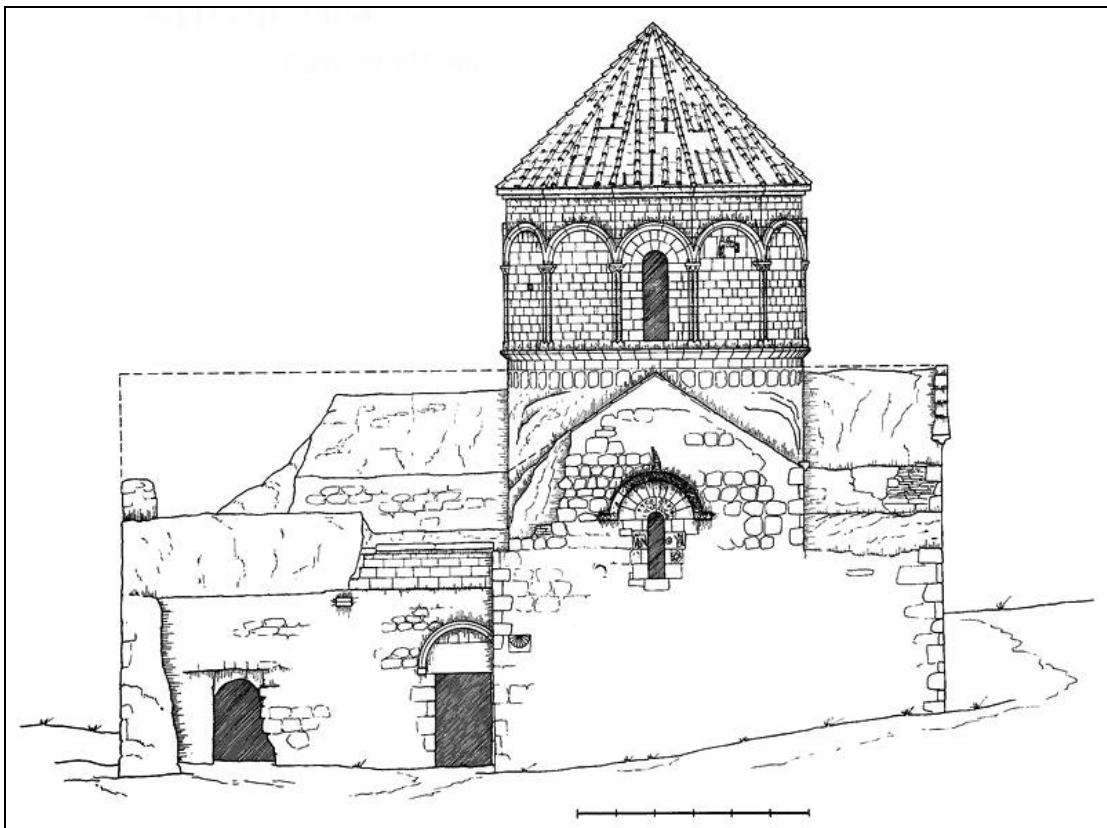
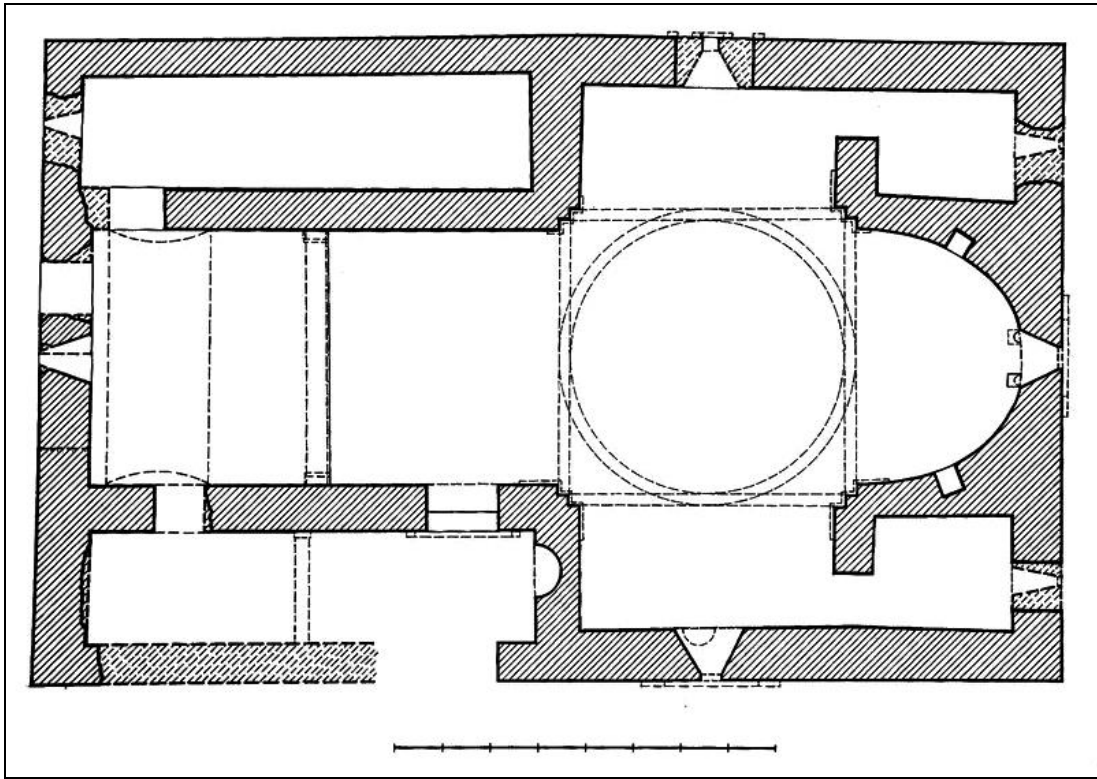


**Bana Cathedral, South Apse of Oshki Church**

## Hypothetical Reconstructions



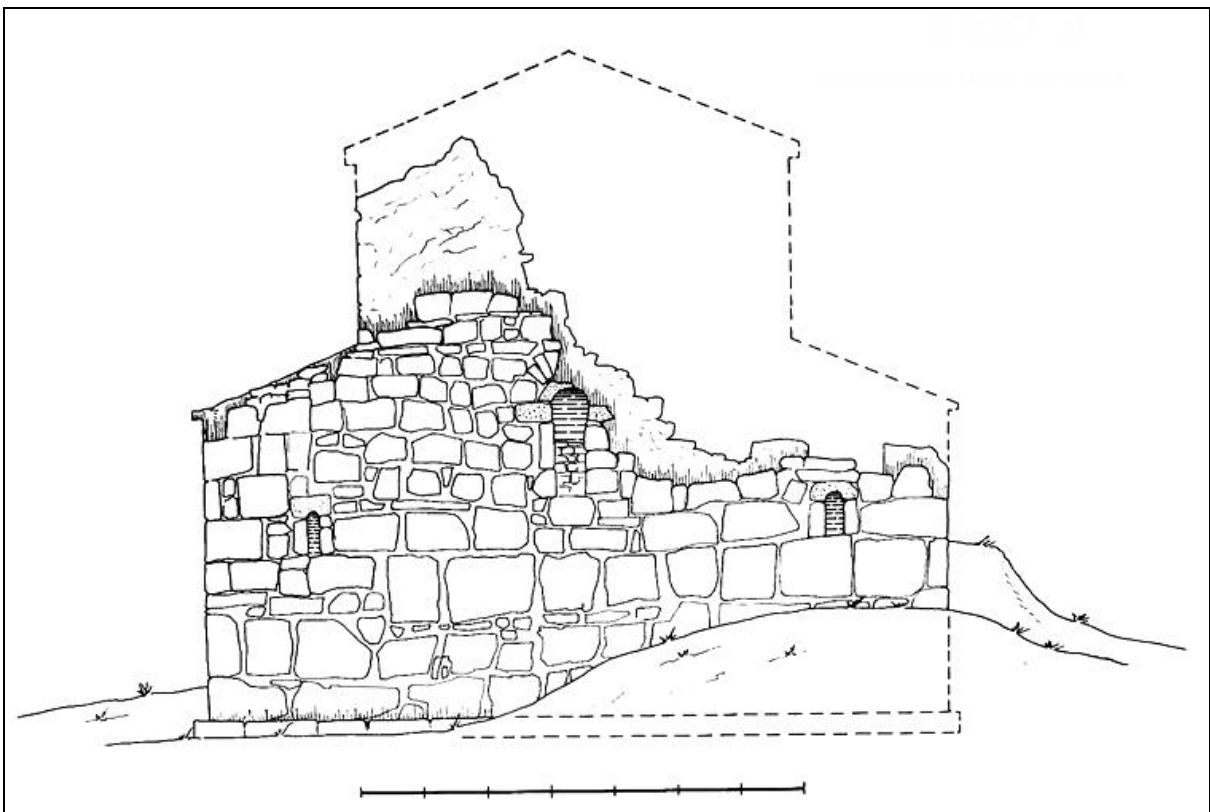
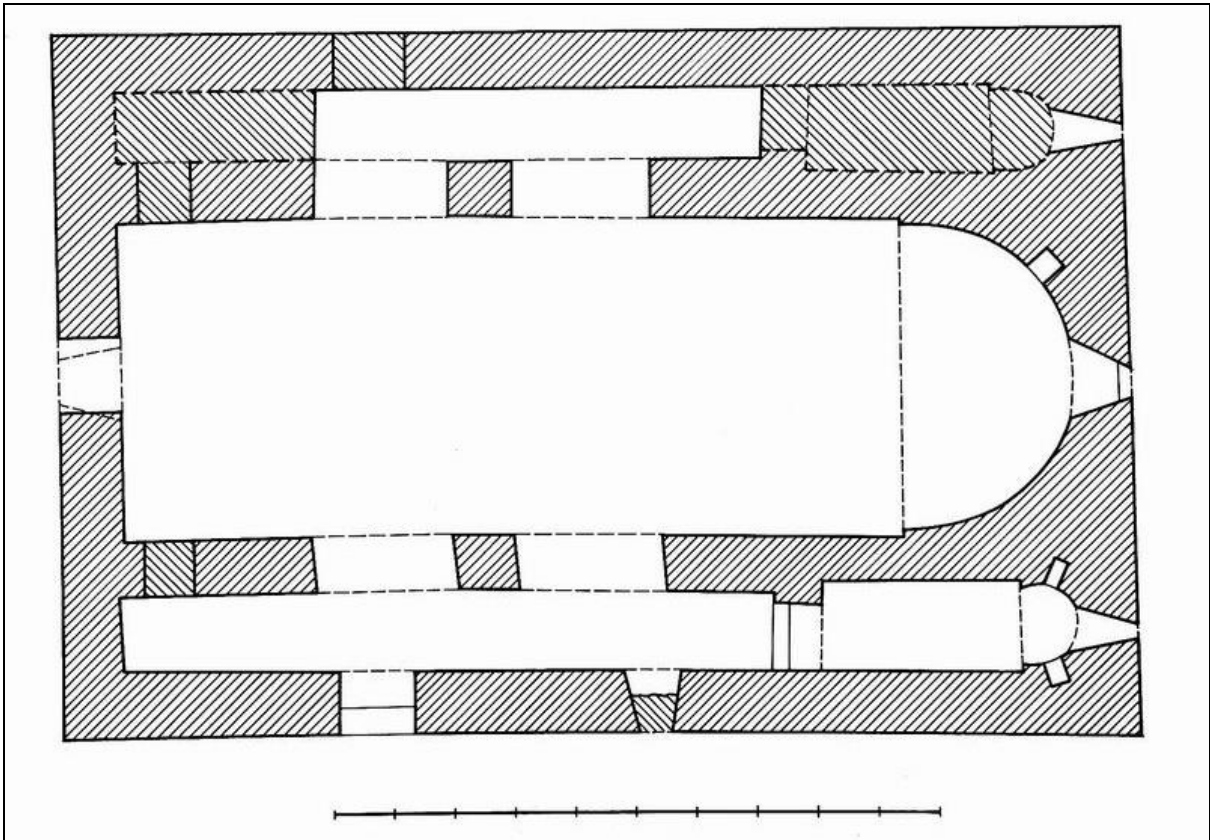
# DOLISKANA



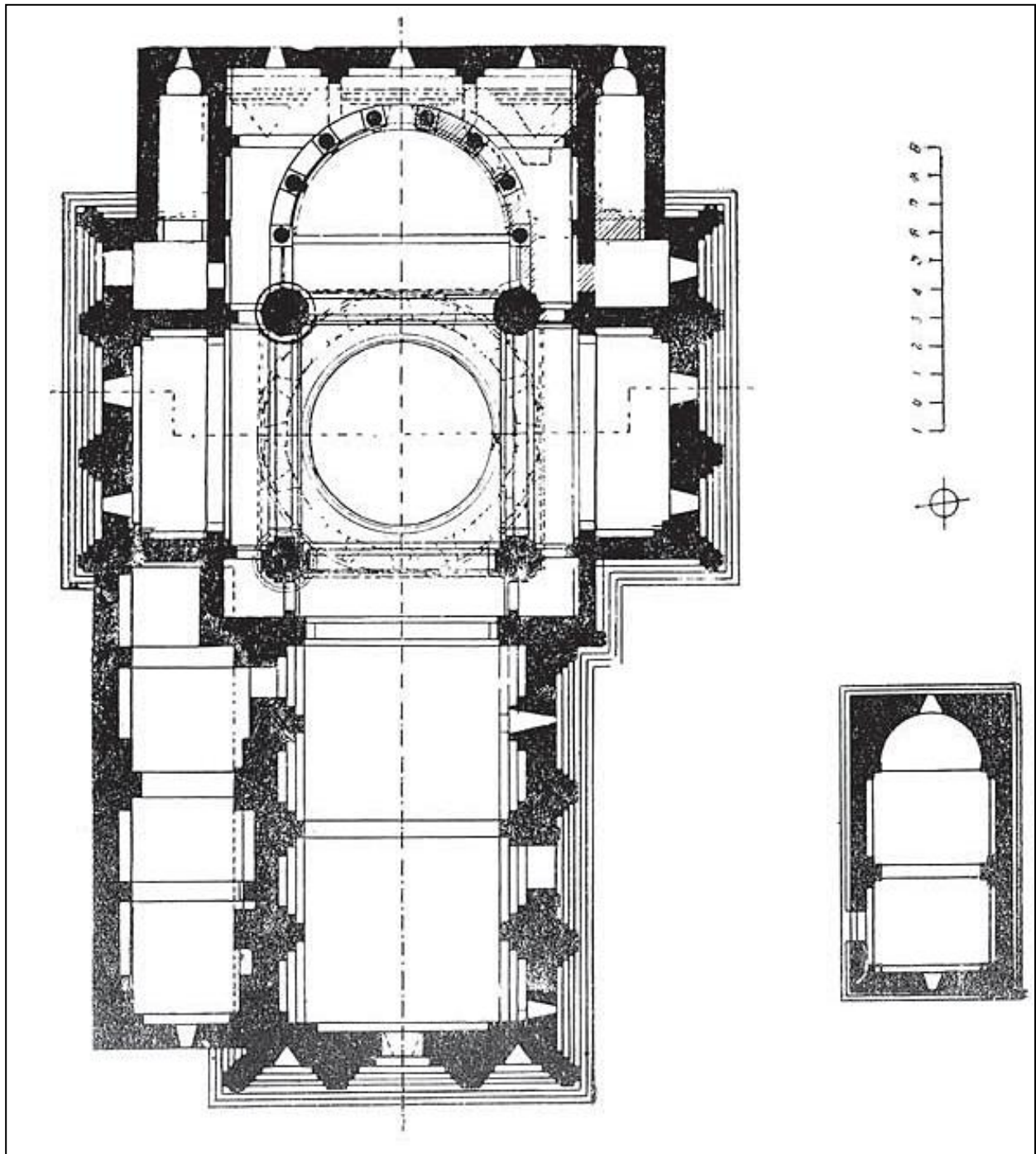




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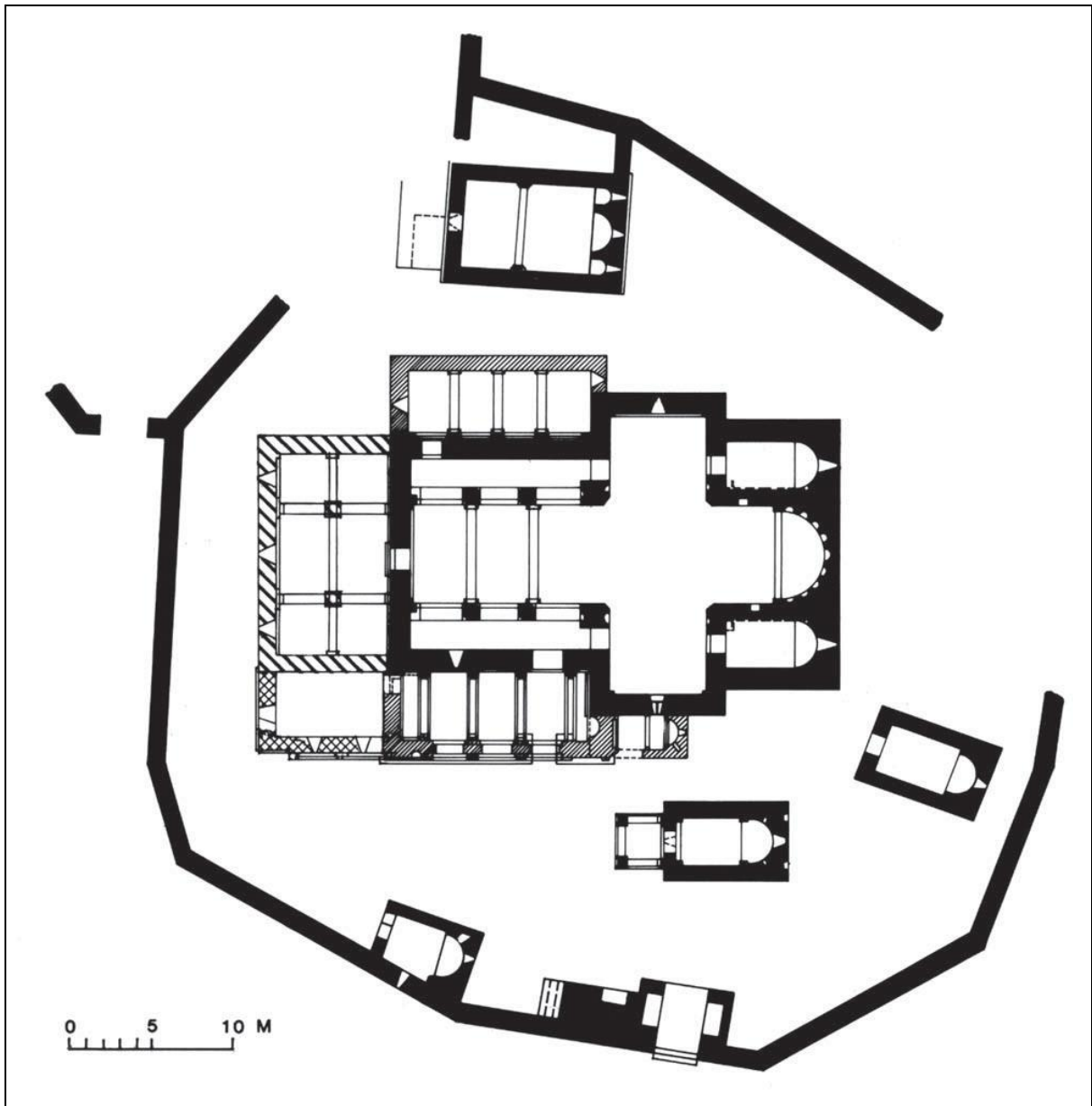
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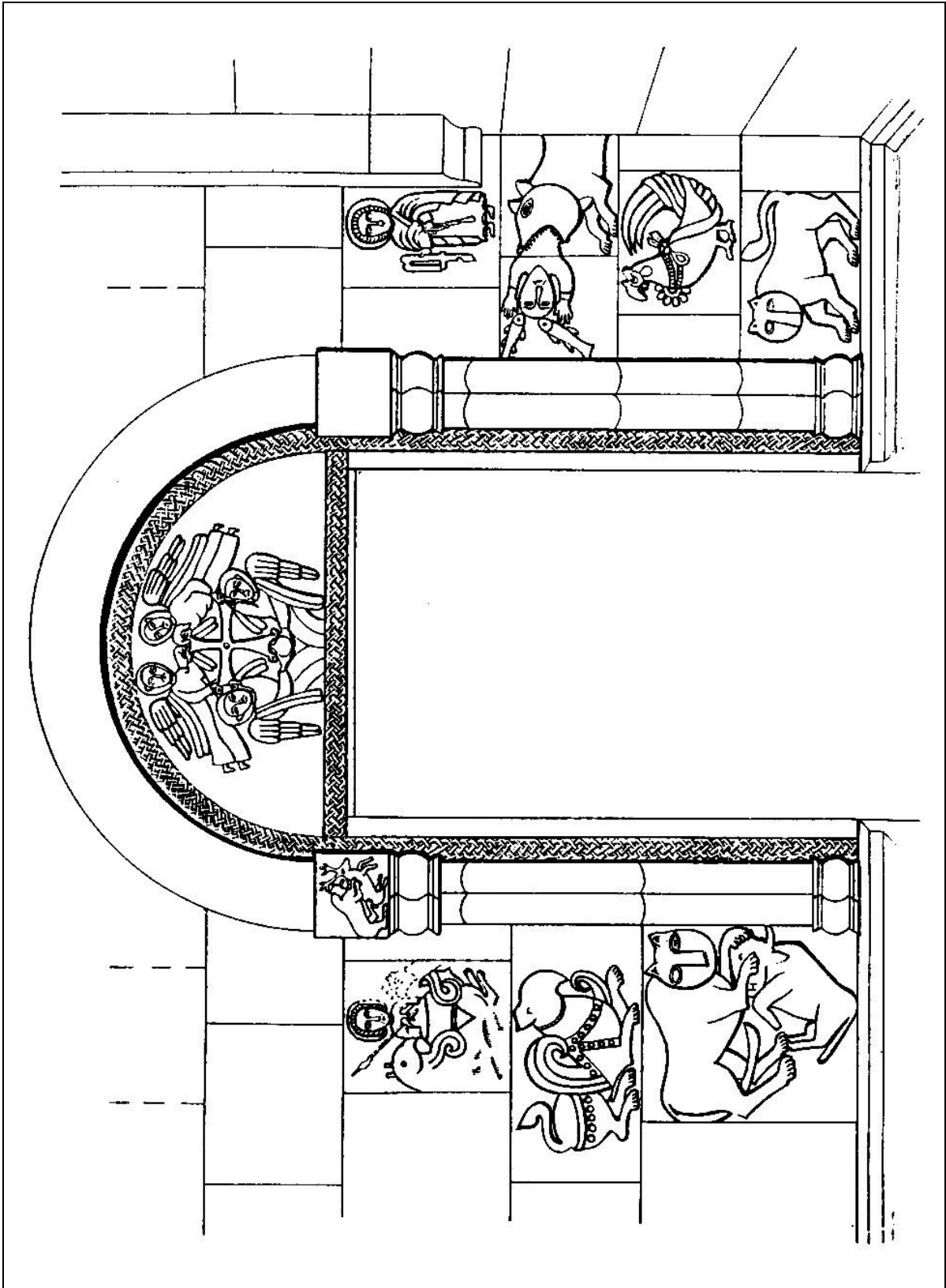




**Kutaisi Cathedral**

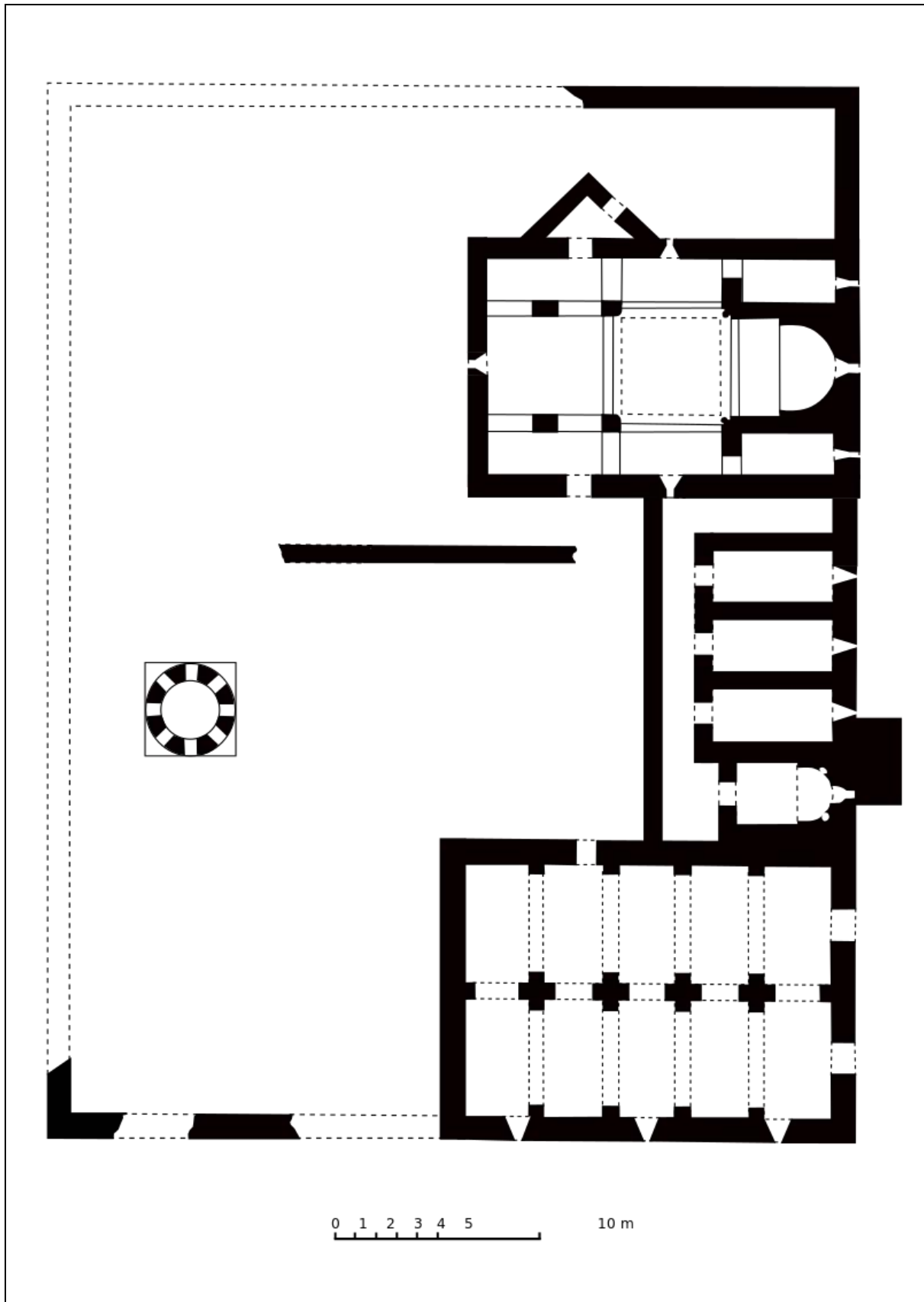
# KHAKHULI MONASTERY

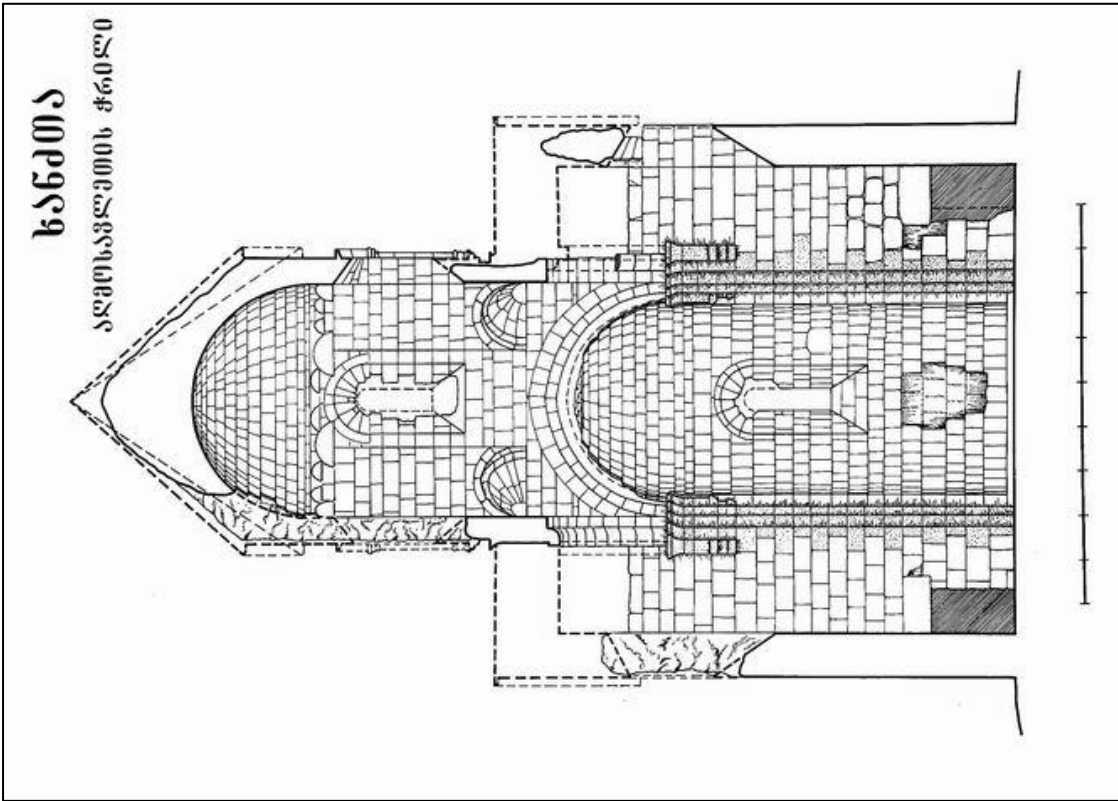
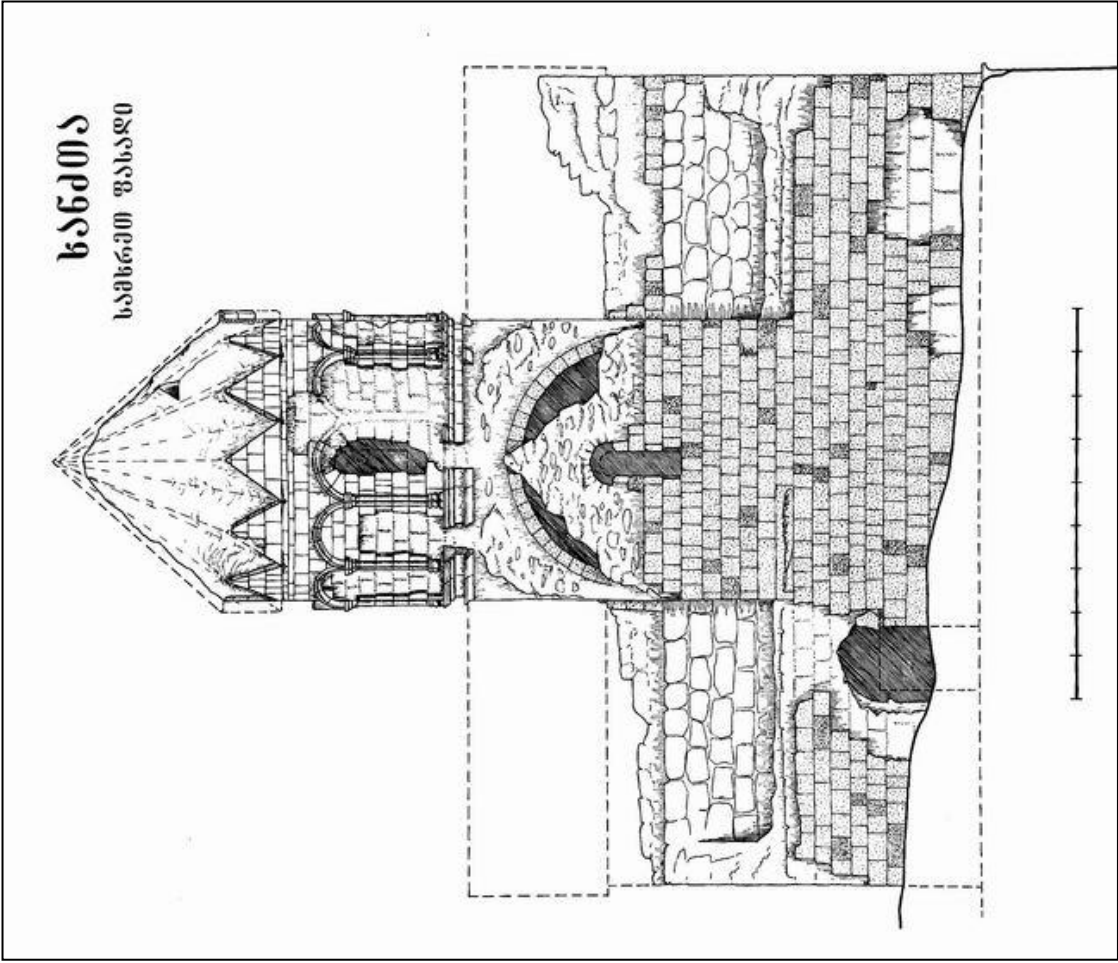




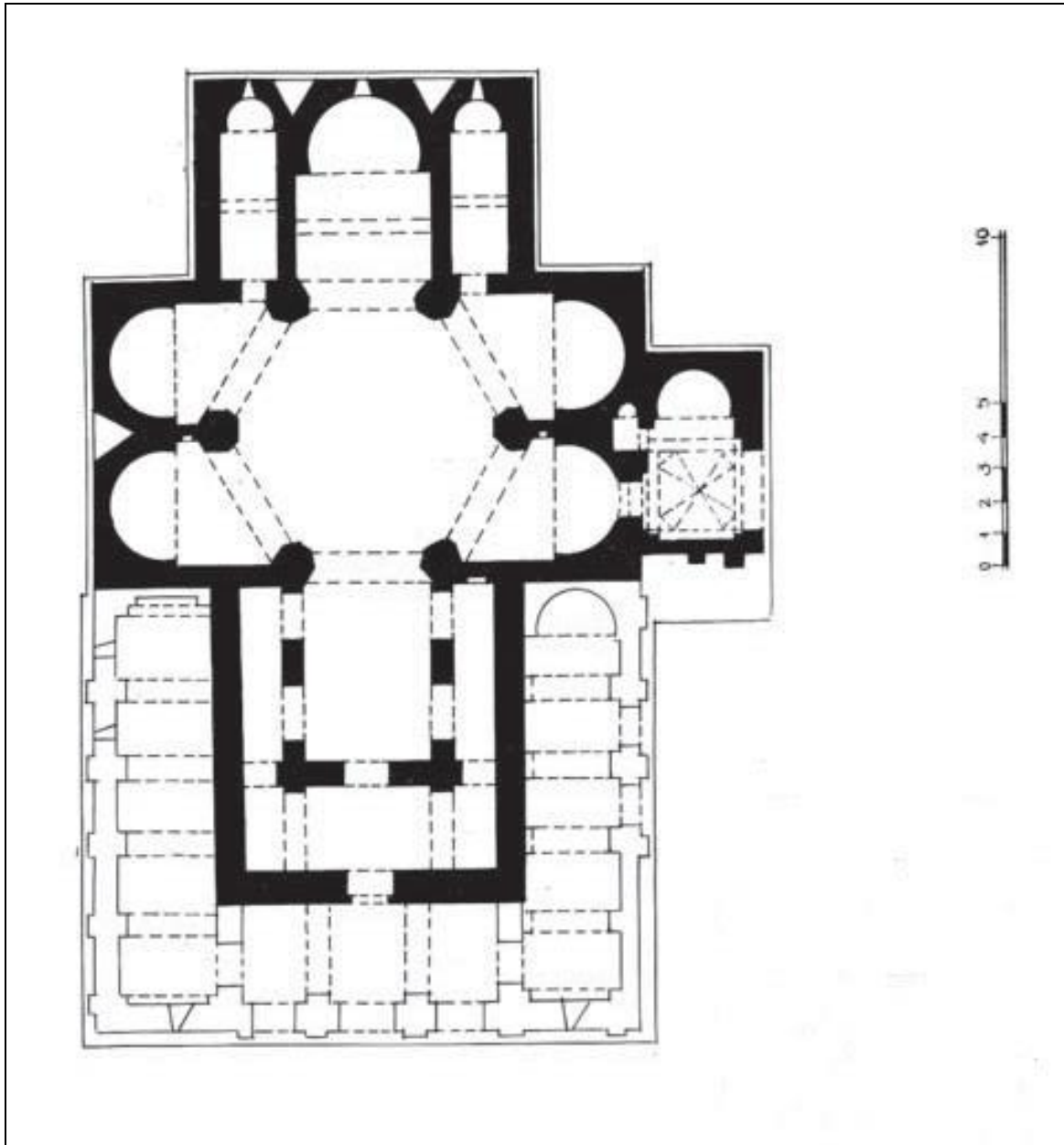


# KHANDZTA MONASTERY

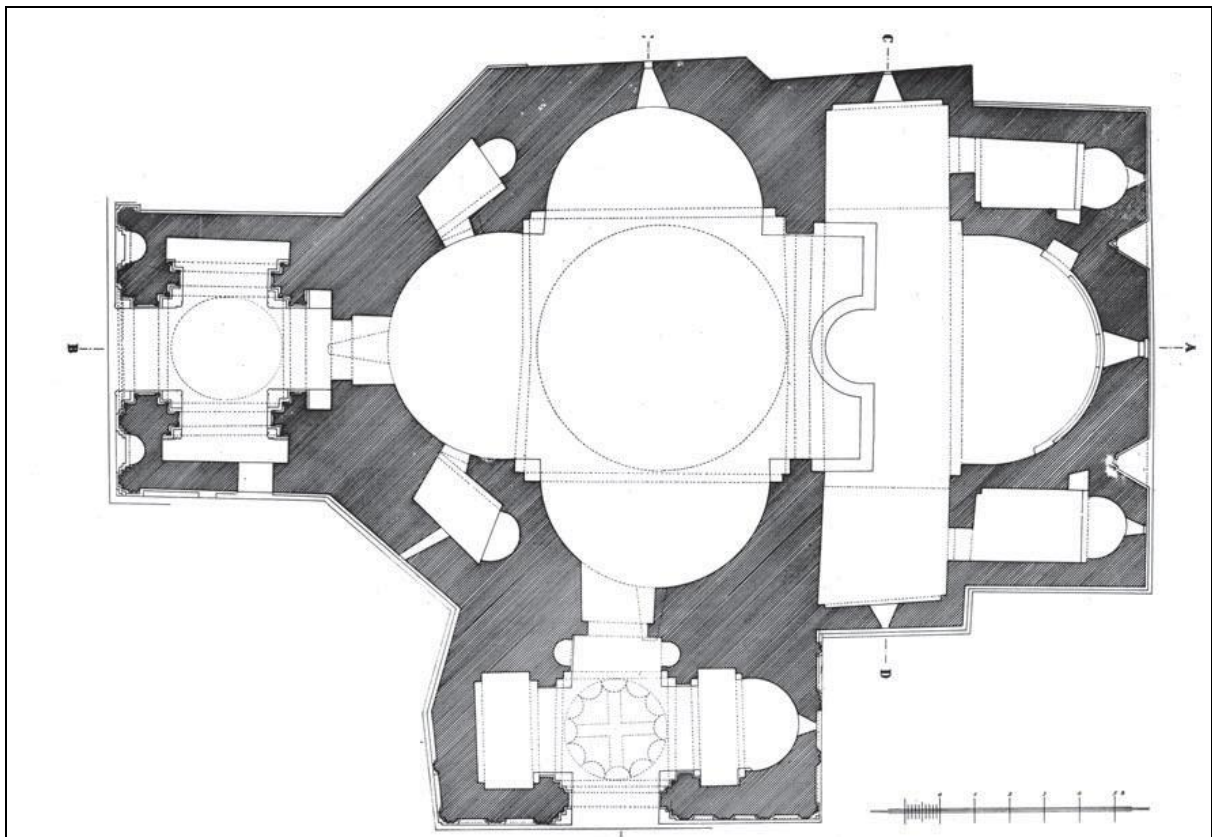
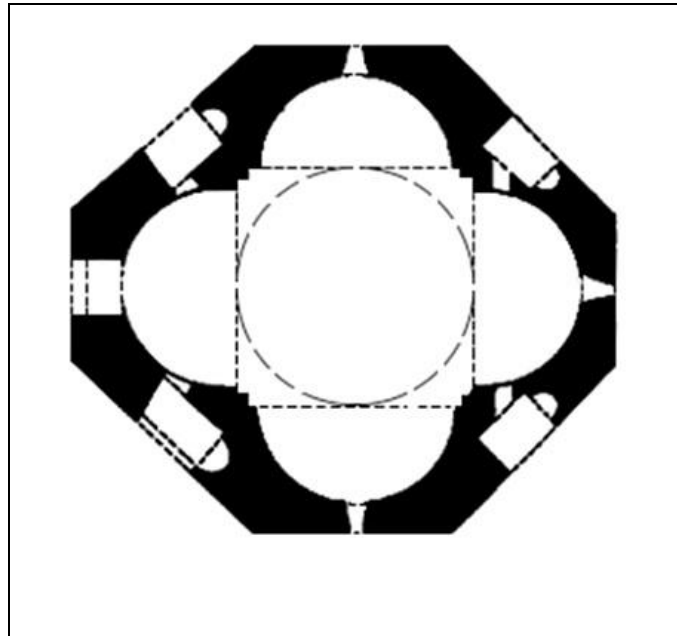




# KUMURDO CATHEDRAL



# MANGLISI CATHEDRAL

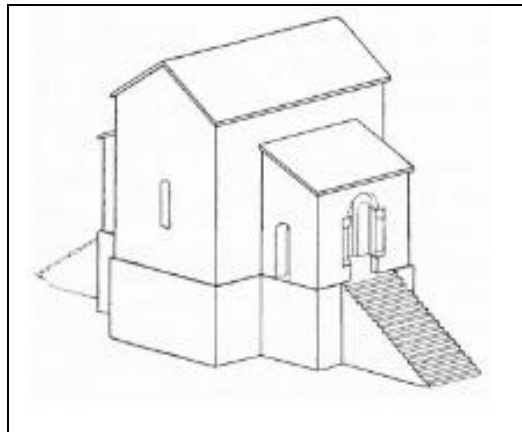
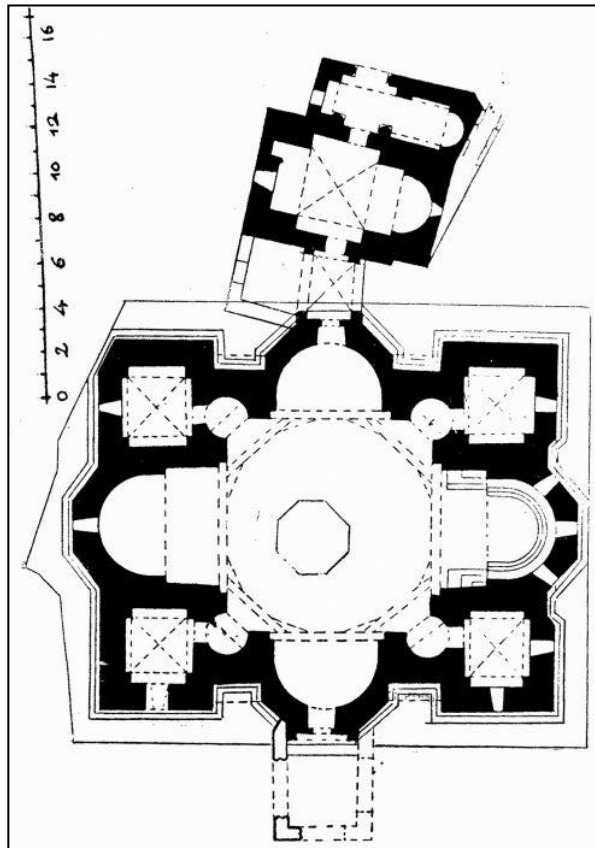






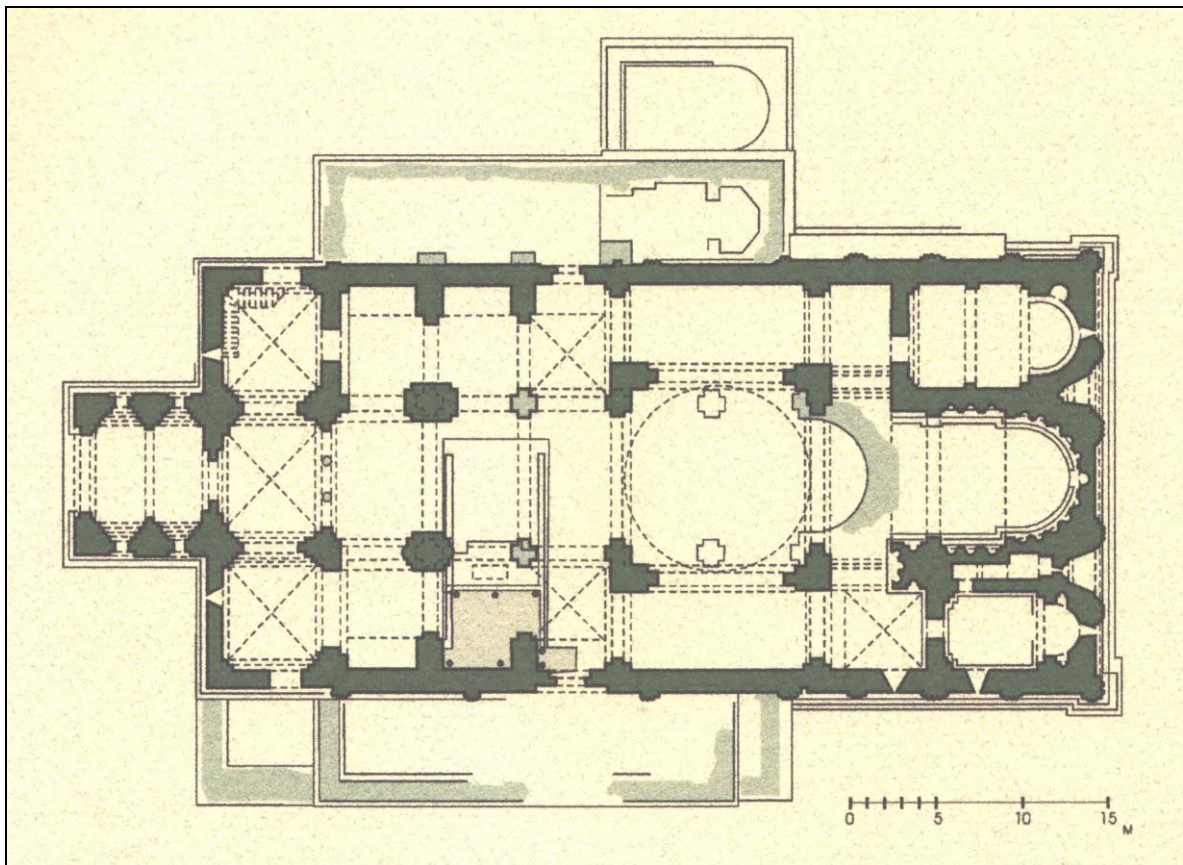
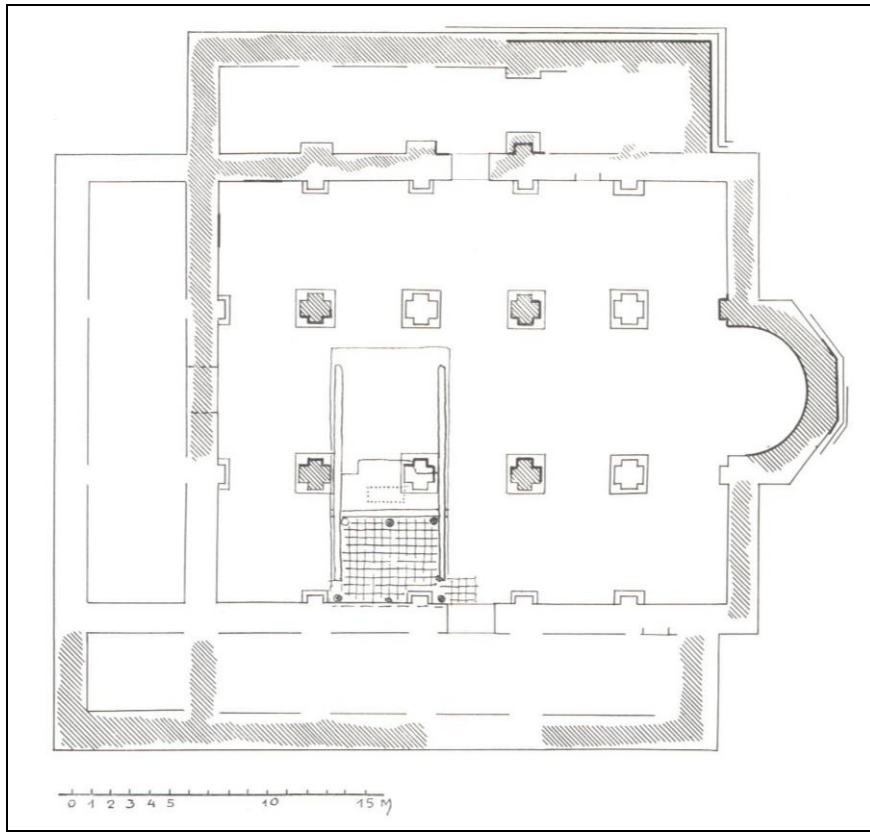


**MTSKHETA**  
**Jvari – Church of the Holy Cross**

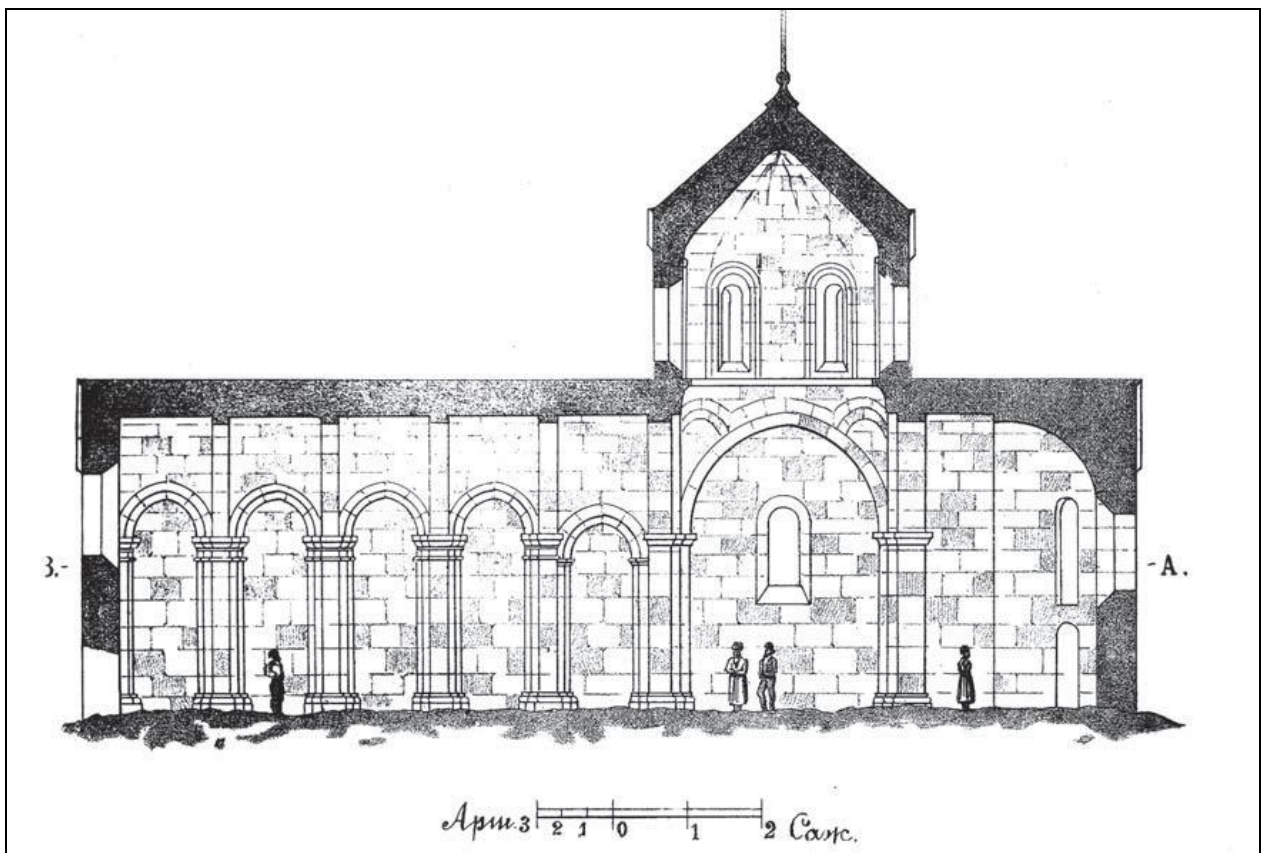
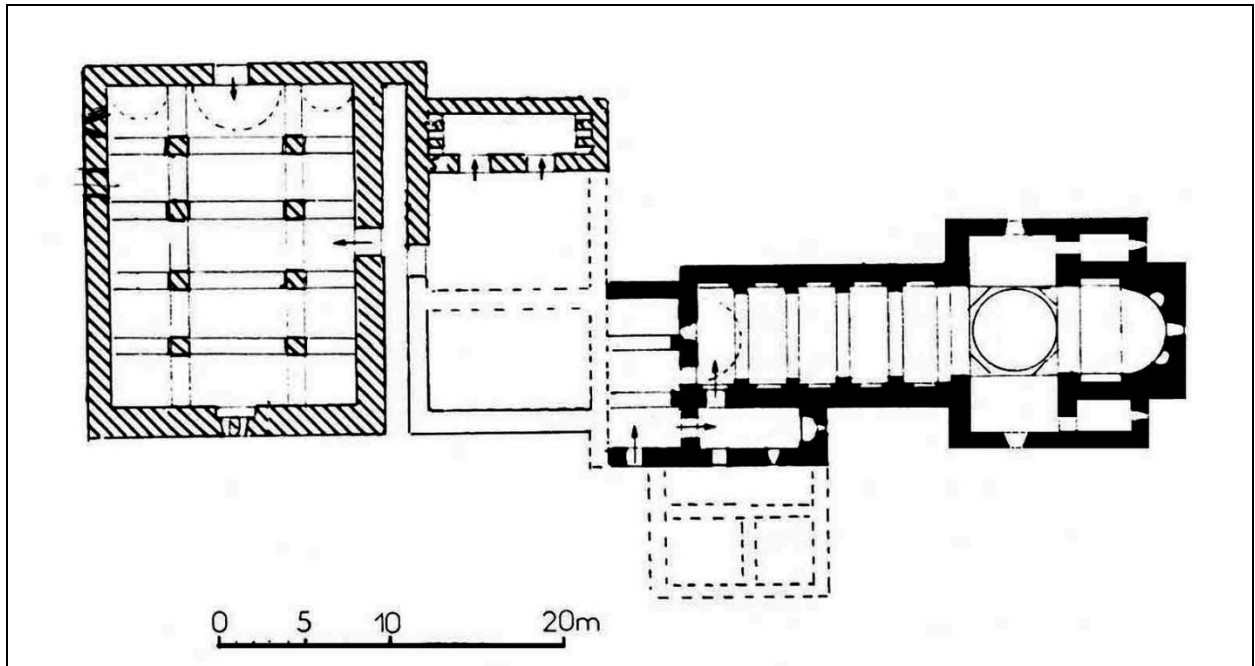


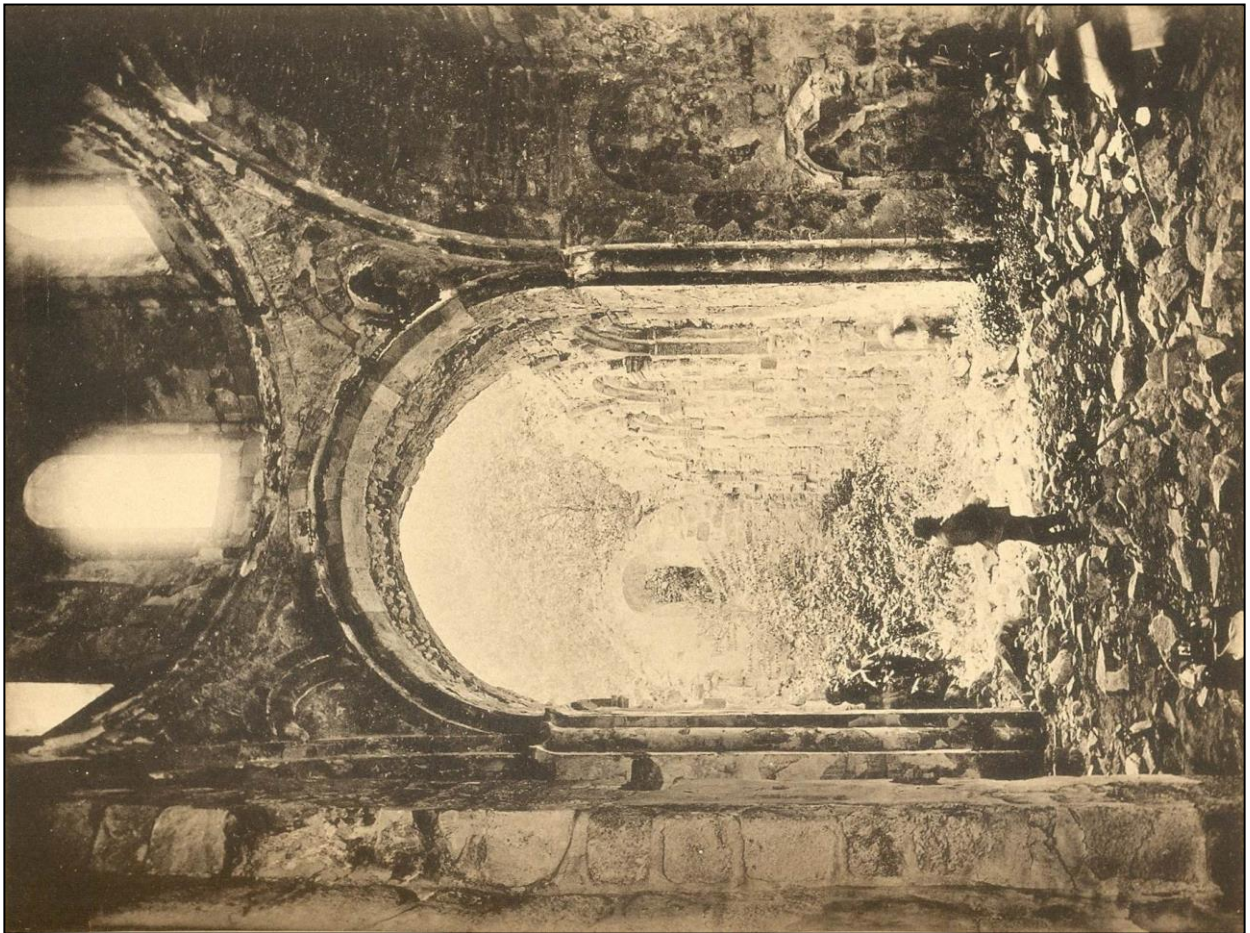
**Reconstruction of Minor Church of Jvari**

# Svetitskhoveli



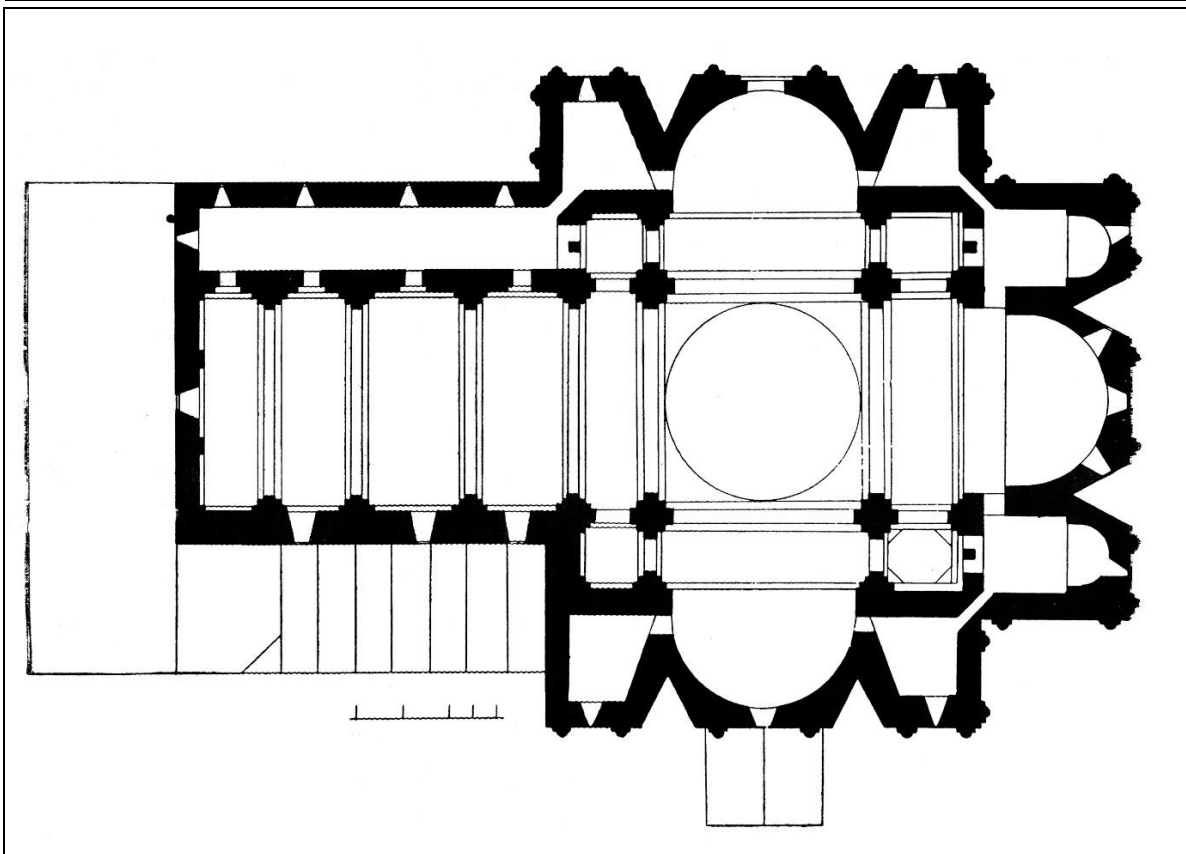
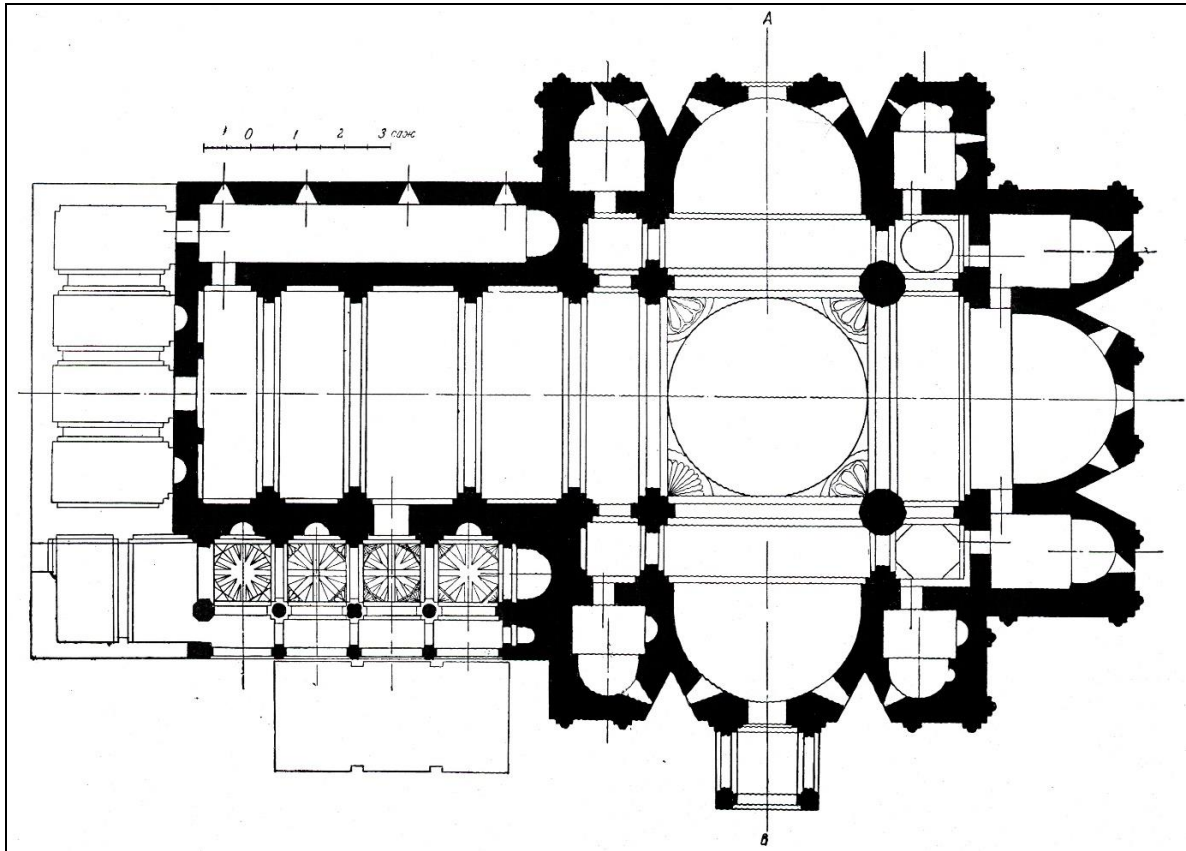
# OPIZA MONASTERY

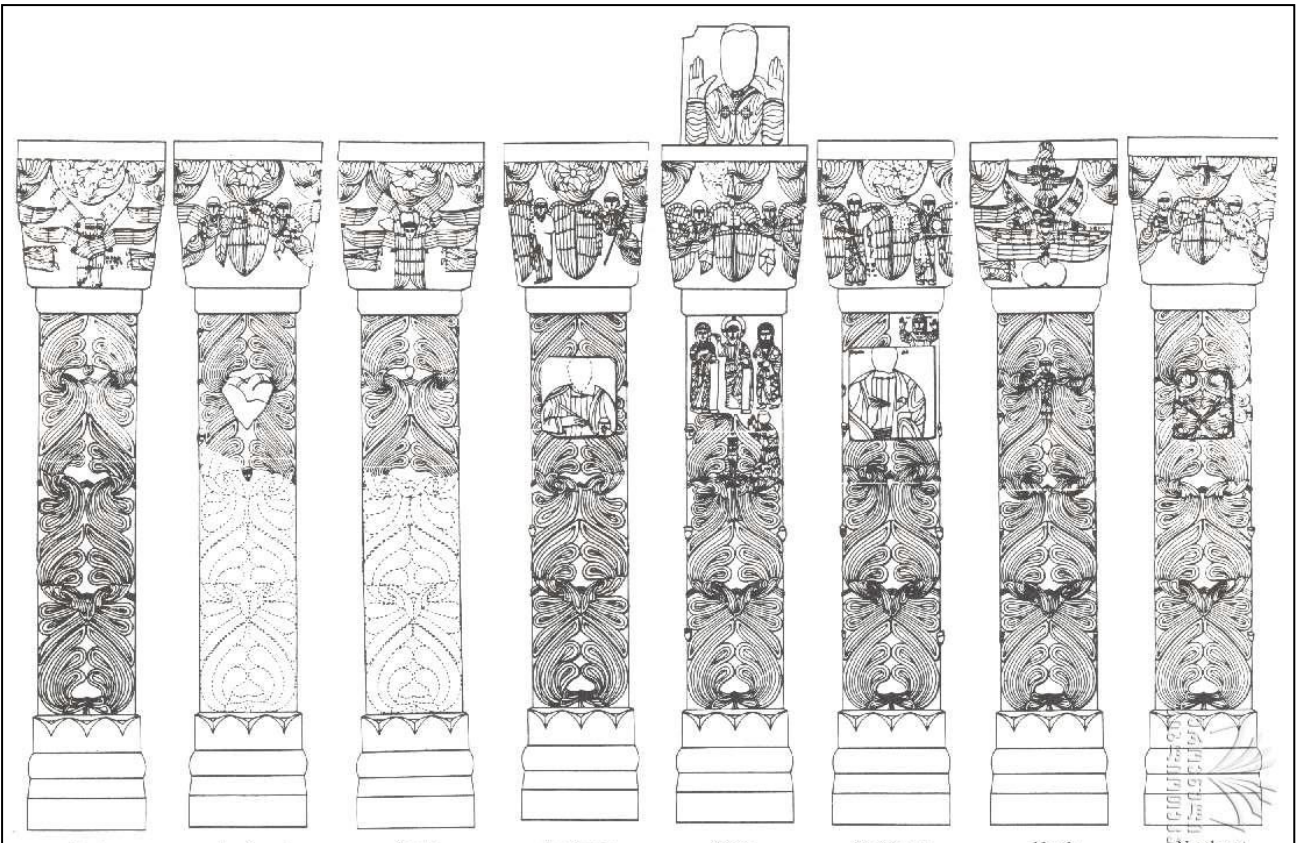
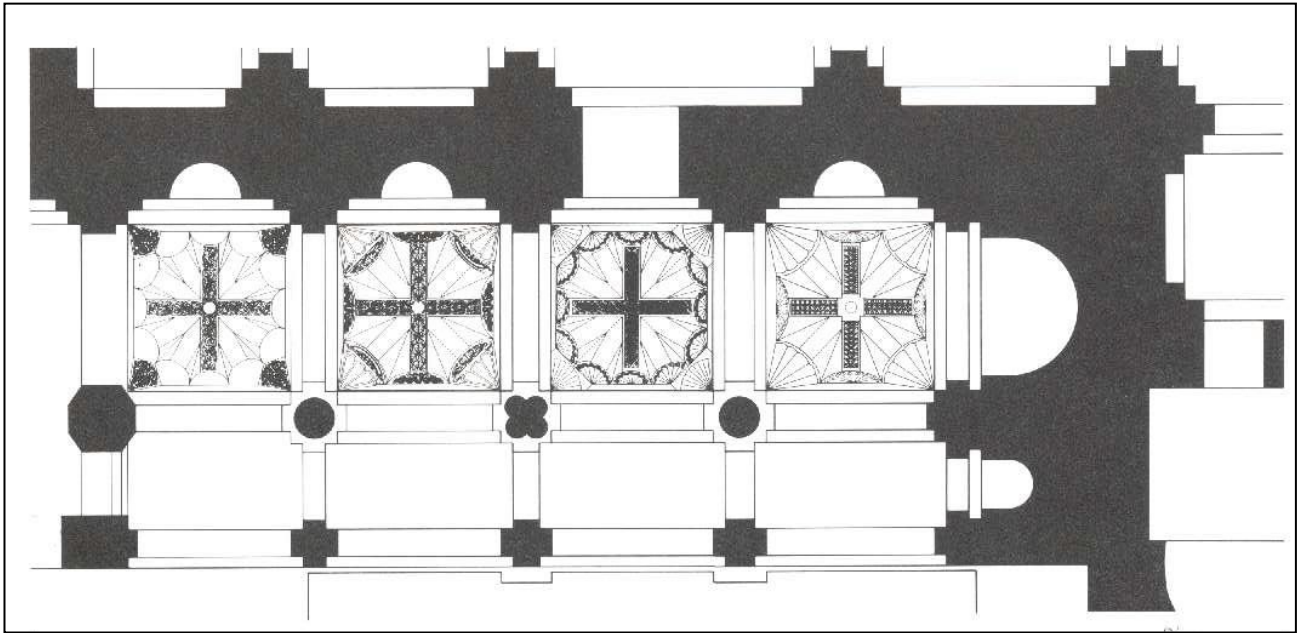


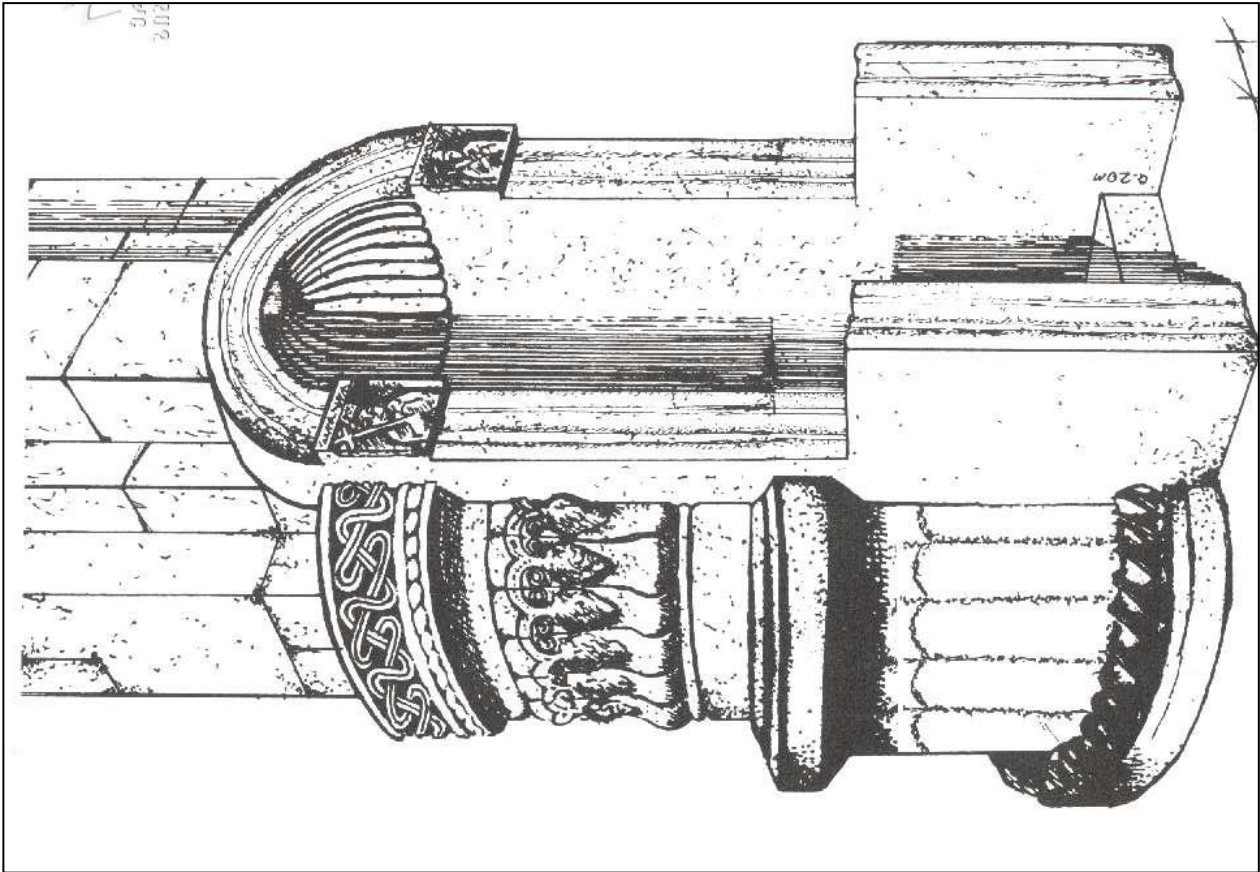




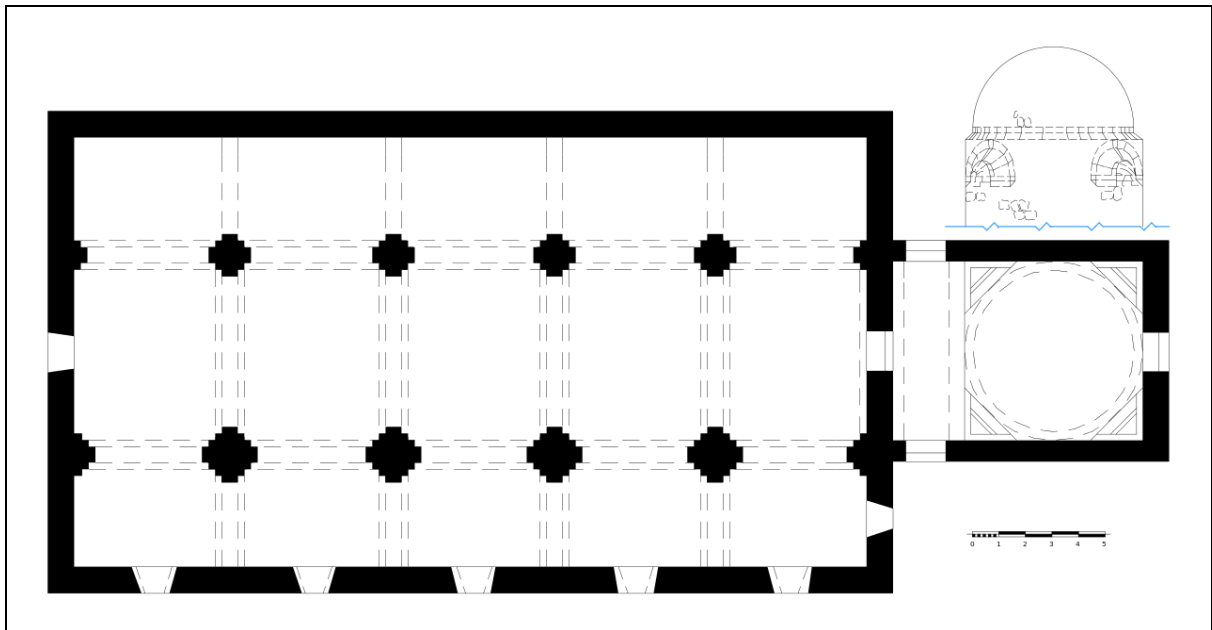
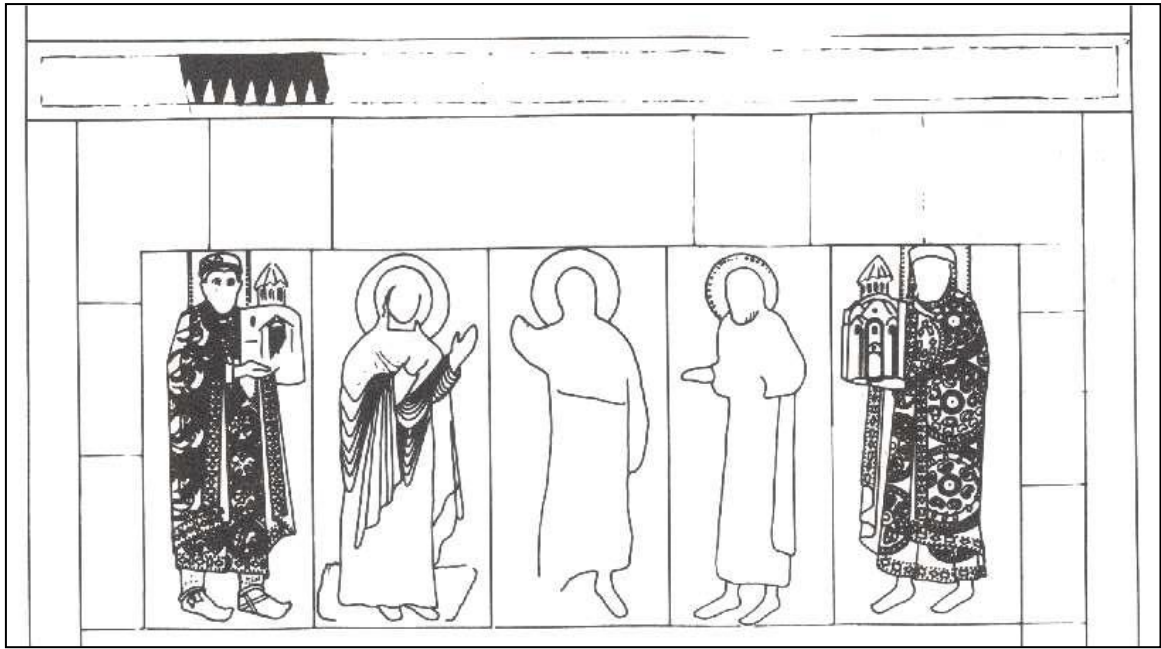
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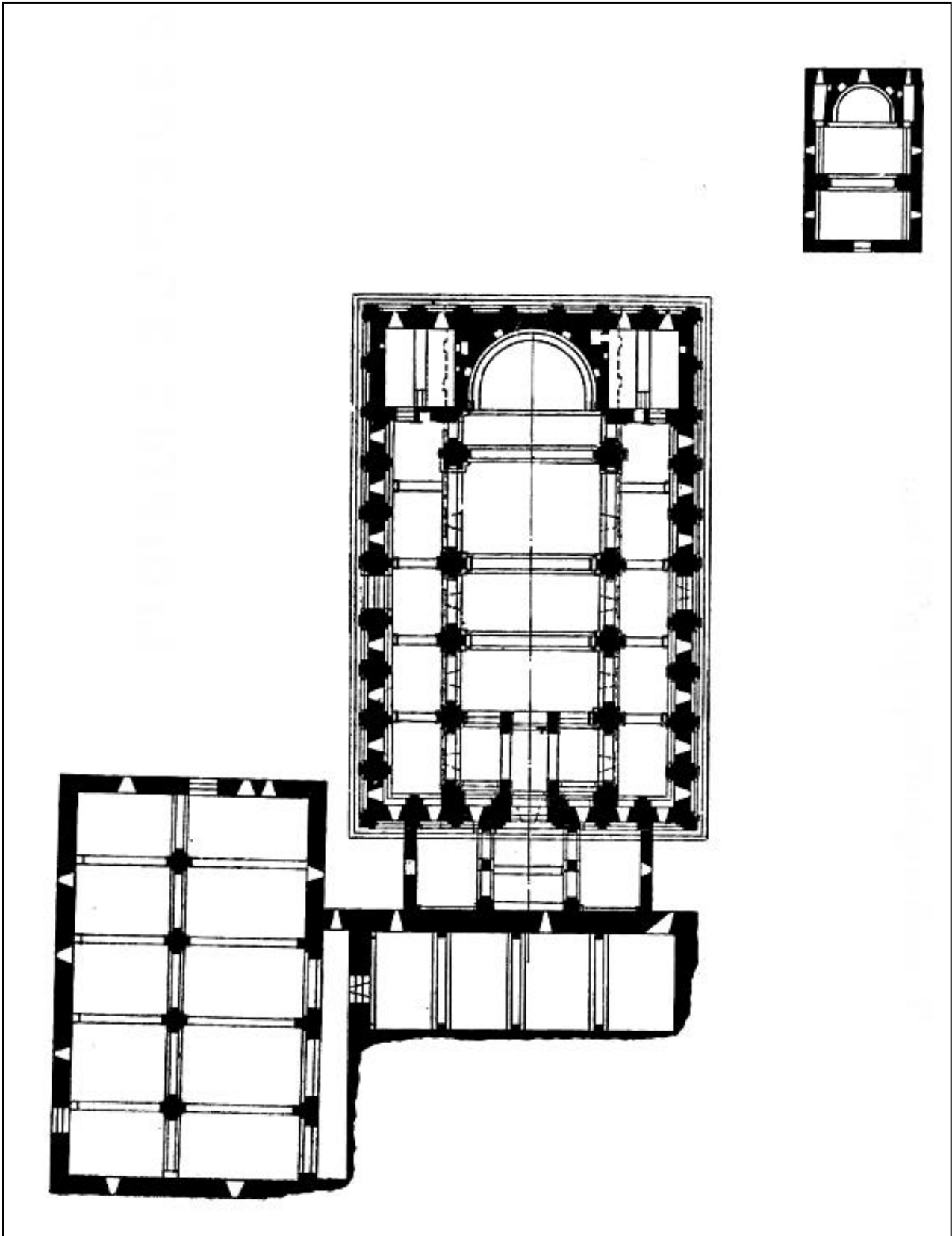


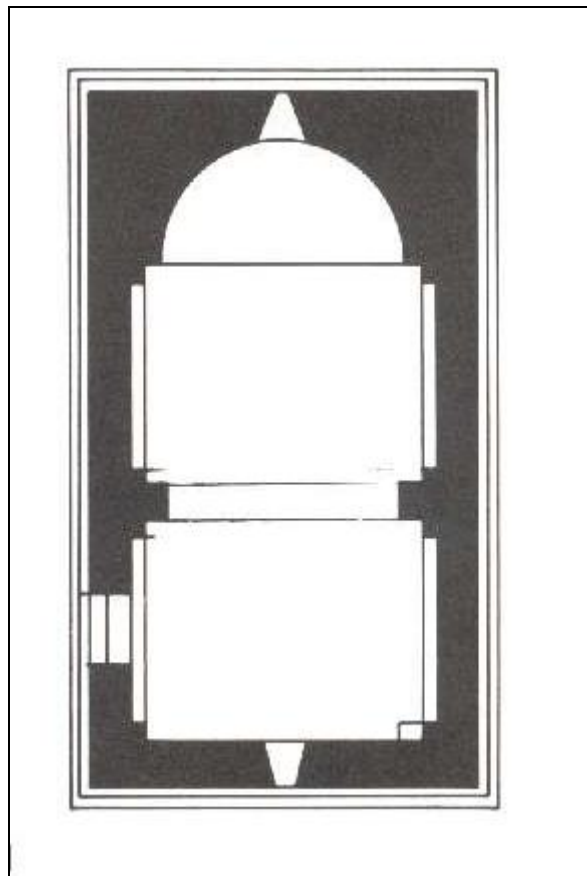
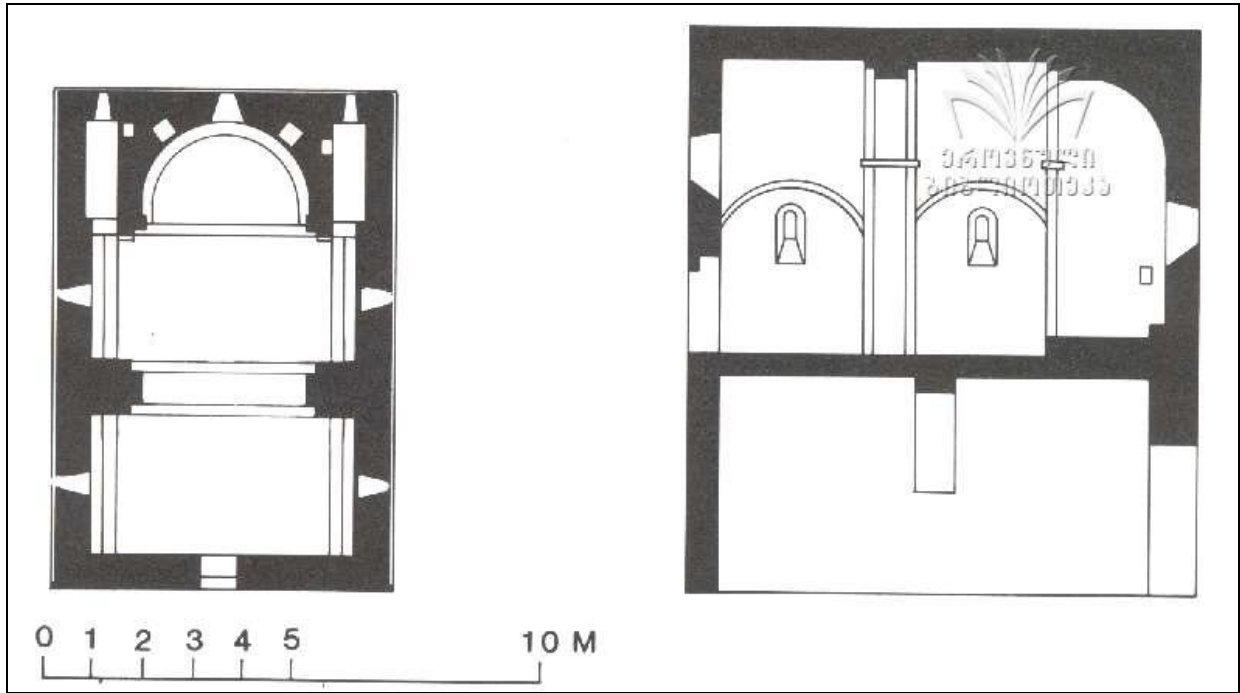


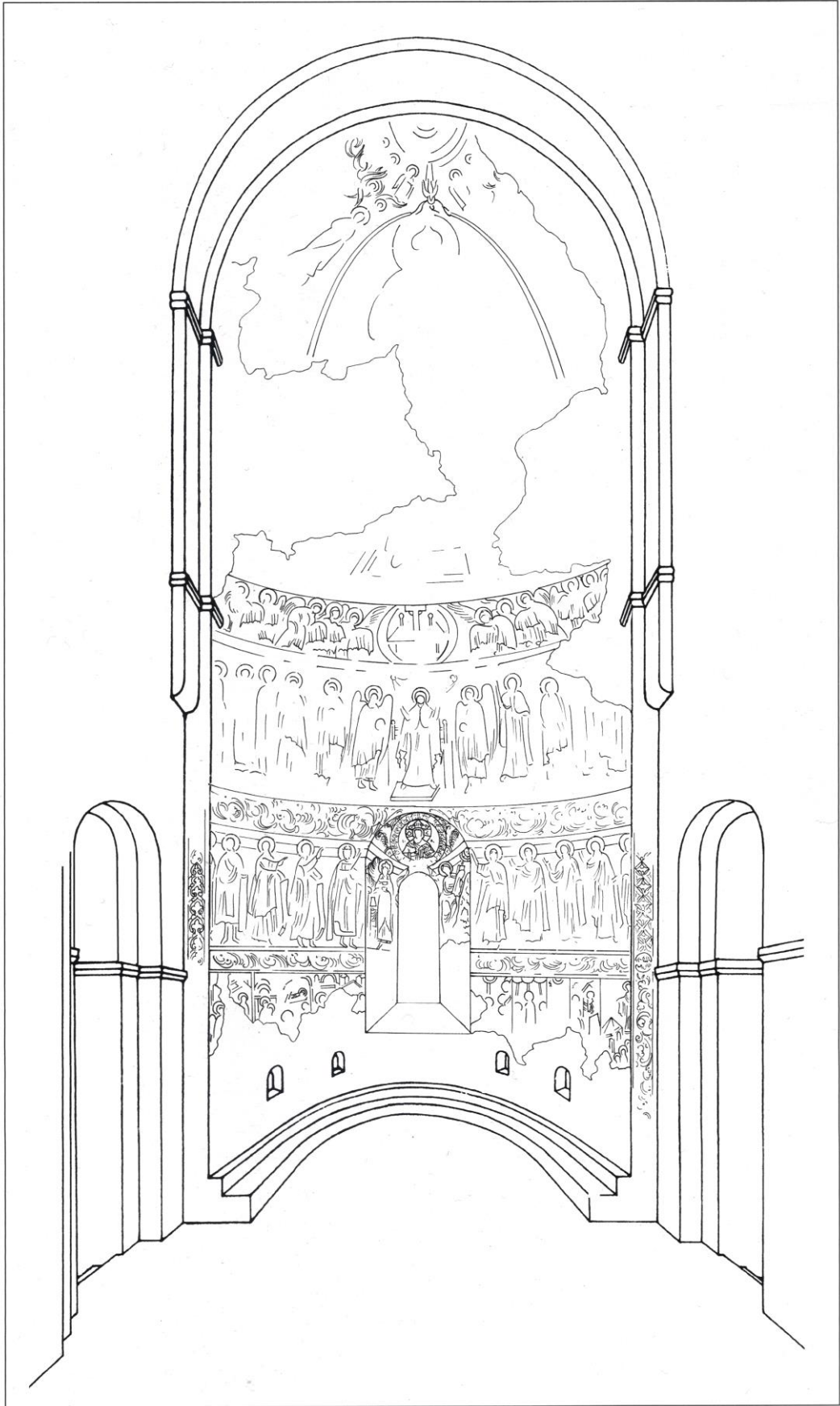


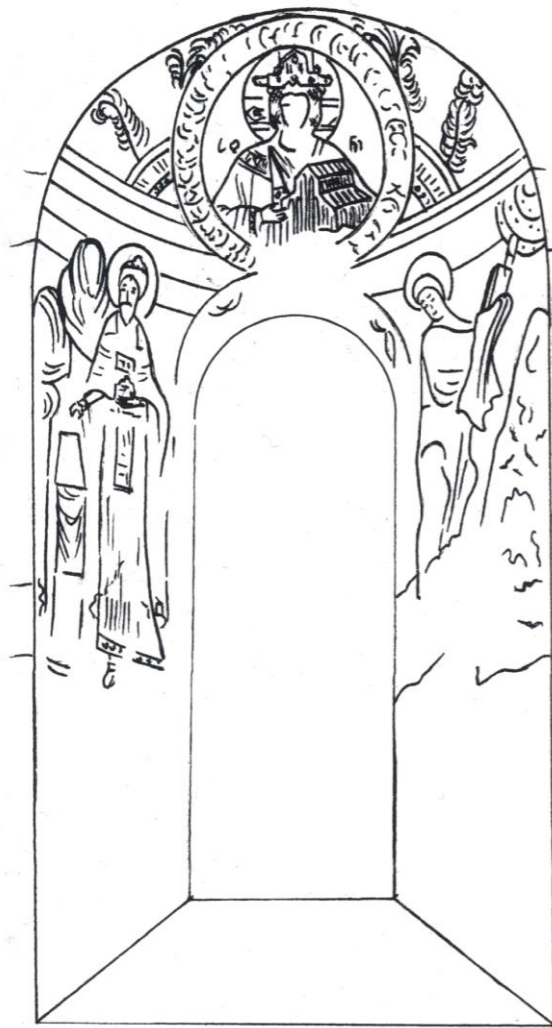


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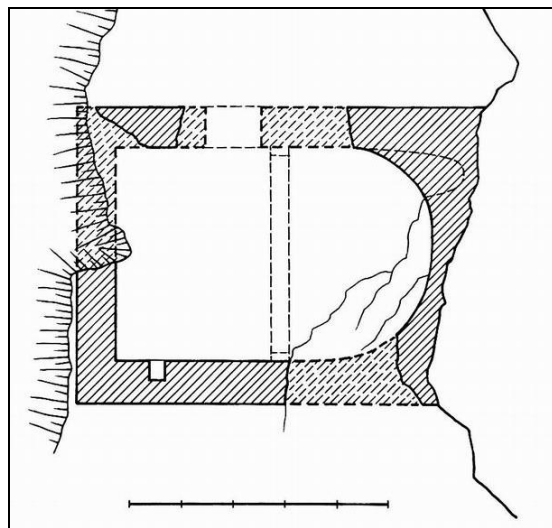
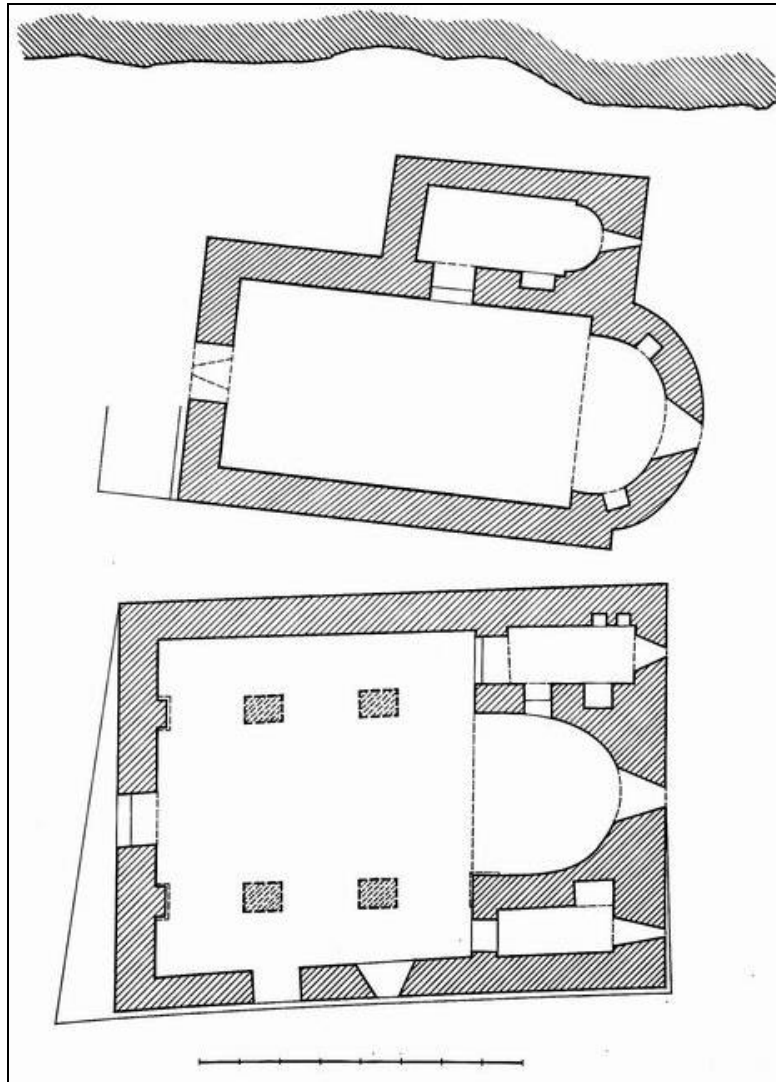




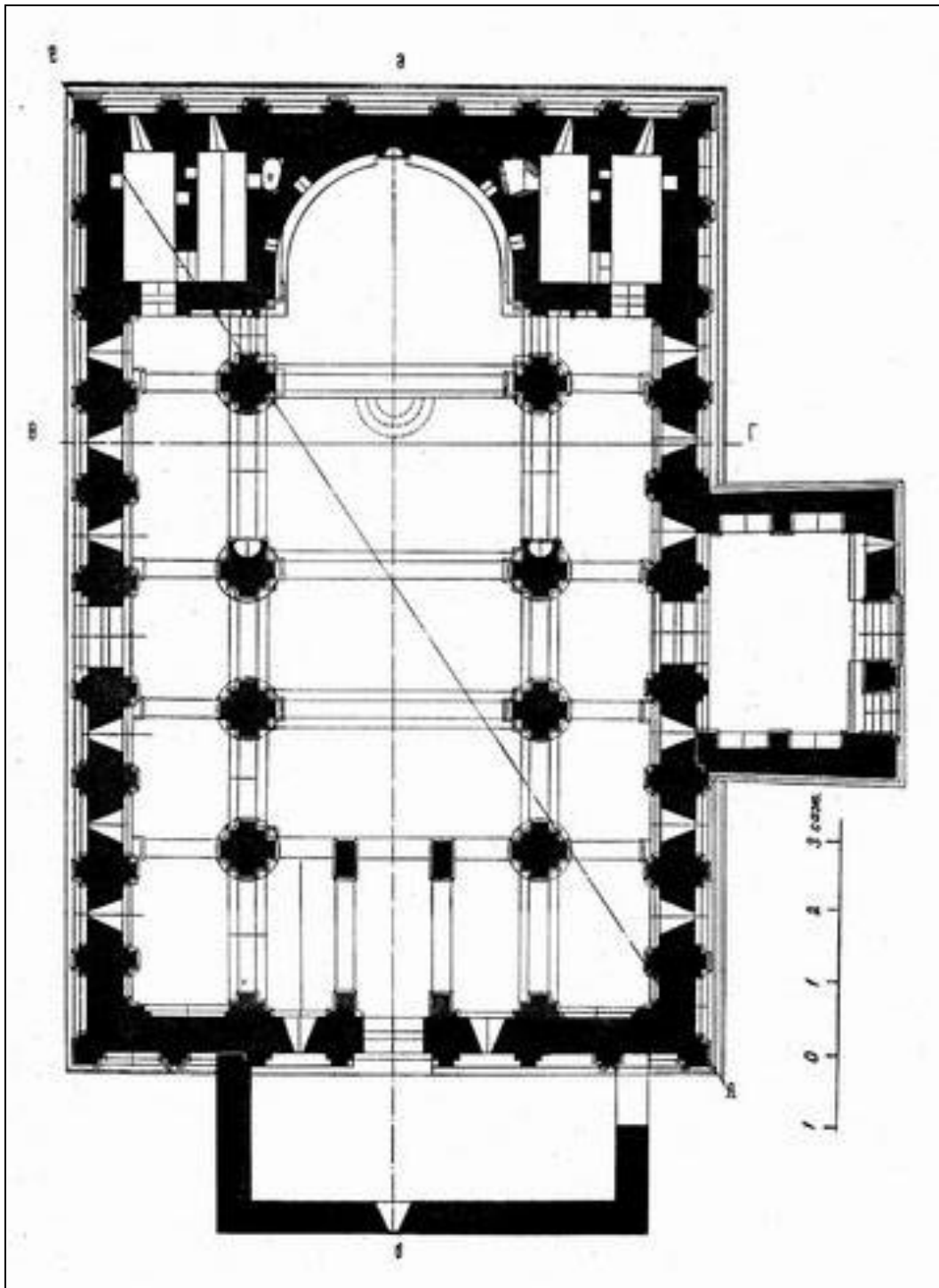




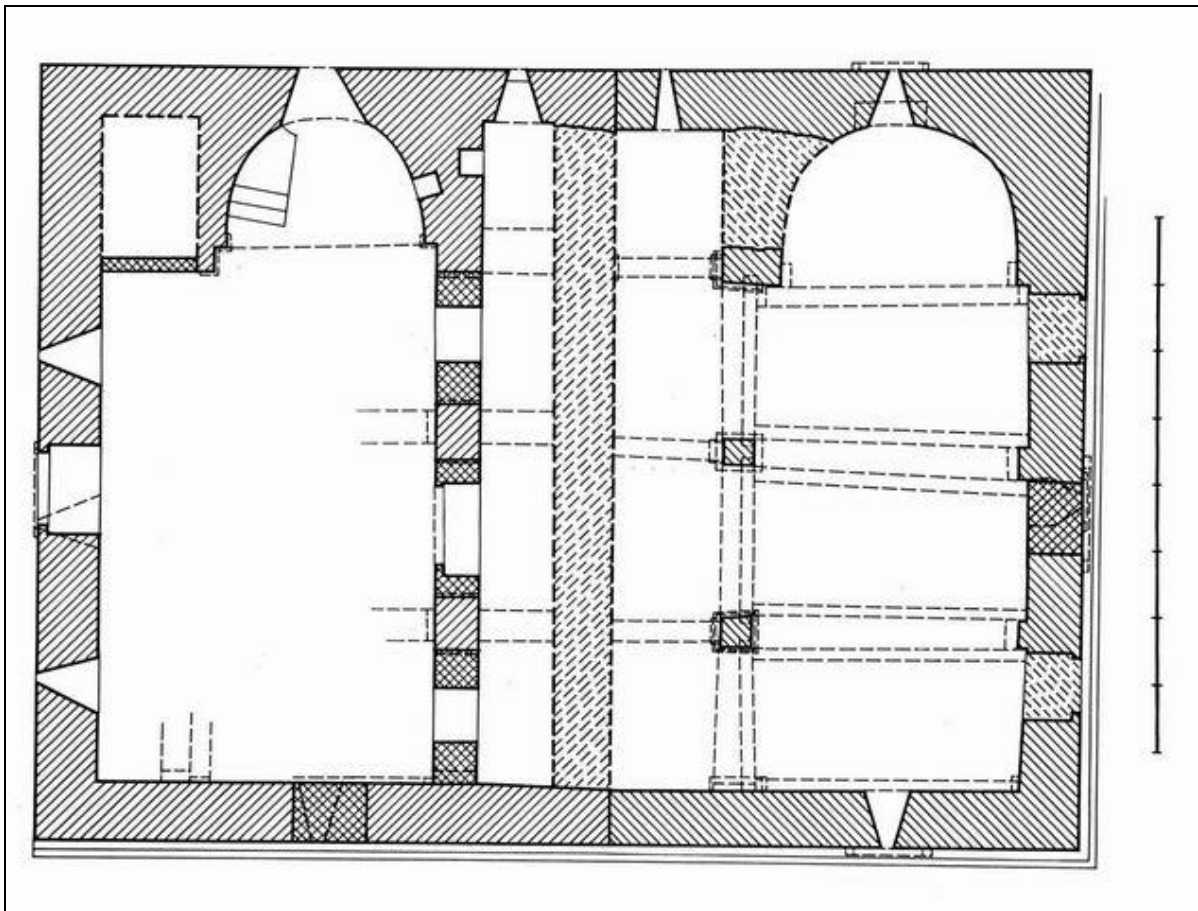
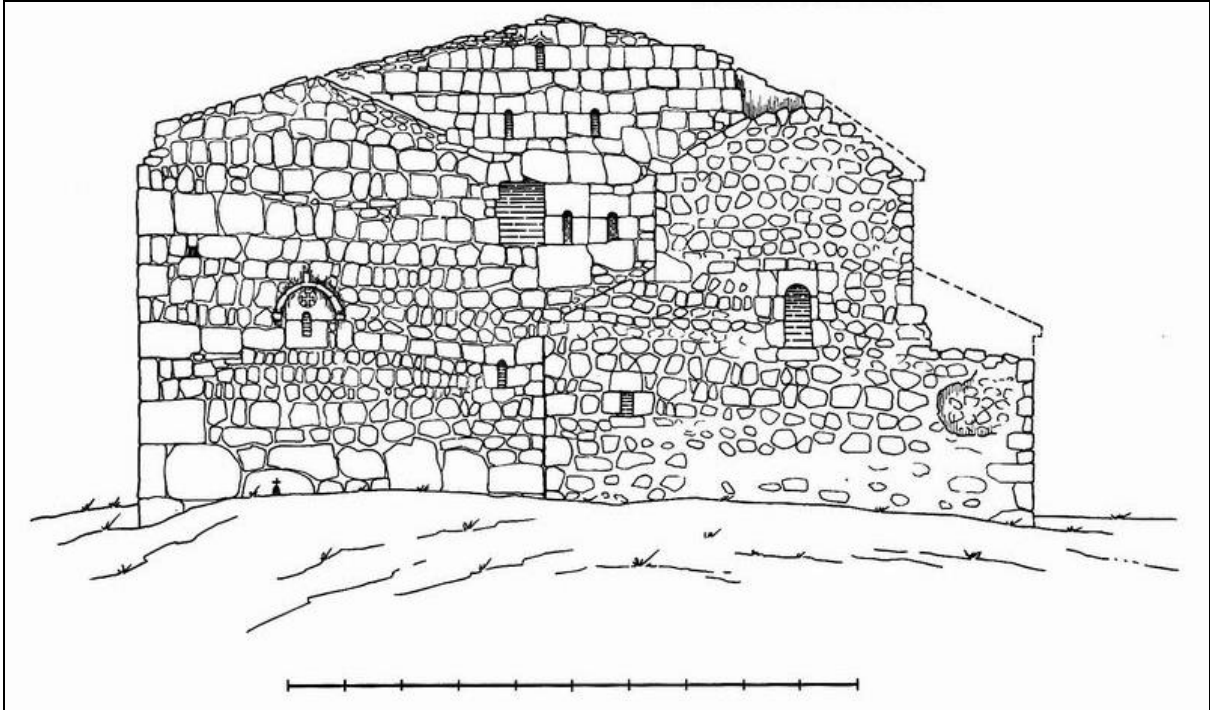
# PAREKHTA MONASTERY



# PARKHALI MONASTERY



# SATLE







# SHAVSHETI CASTLE



# TBETI CATHEDRAL

