



The Cultural Heritage of
GEORGIA

Abkhazeti
Shida Kartli

Georgian Arts and Culture Center
Tbilisi 2008

ABKHAZETI



Over the centuries, the ancient nation of Georgia, located at the crossroads of the European and Asian civilizations, has created its own cultural identity, well known to international scholarship. Georgia's advantageous geographical position has not only been a key factor in the development of the nation's civilization and culture, but has also brought invasions and other challenges at many times in Georgia's history.

The current exhibit displays a wide range of the cultural and artistic achievements of the Georgian people. They were created over the centuries in the parts of historical Georgian territories - Abkhazeti and Shida (inner) Kartli - the territories most recently victimized by an unprovoked external assault.

As the exhibition focuses on historic Georgia, we are using the traditional regional names of Abkhazeti rather than *Abkhazia*, the modern Russian translation of it, and Shida (inner) Kartli - the part of which during the period of the Soviet Union was framed by the boundaries of the South Ossetian Autonomous District.

Due to the exhibition's limited format, we are unable to present more than a modest number of the several hundred existing monuments of the Georgian cultural heritage located throughout the territories of Abkhazeti and Shida Kartli. However, we graciously hope that the display will enable visitors to experience a full understanding and awareness of the unity of the Georgian cultural identity, one which is equally generously represented in all of the nation's historical territories.

Maka Dvalishvili
Project Director

Shida Kartli is among Georgia's most important and culturally rich regions, likewise Abkhazeti, also known for its spectacular scenery. Many unique landmarks are located on these two Georgian territories, adding to their historical-cultural importance.

Fortunately, in 2006-2008 the Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports, in collaboration with the Georgian Historical Monuments Protection and Survival Fund, within the framework of the "Preservation of Cultural Heritage" program has undertaken rehabilitation work on a number of monuments. Among these were the important churches of Tsirkoli and Eredvi, Dzelitskhoveli and Mtavarangelozi (The Church of the Archangels) in Kheiti, as well as the Episcopal Palace in Nikozi, and other significant sites.

This Catalog presents an essential - if only modest - part of this rich and outstanding heritage.

Dr. Nikoloz Vacheishvili
Minister of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia

SHIDA KARTLI

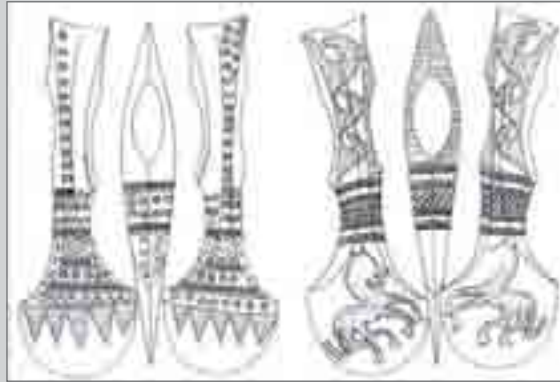
GEORGIA

ABKHAZETI

Historical Overview

Today the name Abkhazeti refers to the extreme northwestern region of Georgia, the region where during the Soviet period the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazeti was located. Together with the Georgians, the Abkhazs are the only aboriginal inhabitants of the Georgia's territory. The Abkhazs were densely settled in two from the existing six administrative regions of the Autonomous Republic: in Gudauta and Ochamchire. The Abkhazs formed 17% of the Autonomous Republic's total population.

The name Abkhazeti (*Abkhazia* is the Russian form and is also used in European languages) derives from original Georgian name of this region; the formation parallels that of *Ossetia*, which originated from Georgian *Oseti*. The Georgian suffix "eti" is still maintained in it. (It should be noted that most European languages use a double s (ss), resulting in Ossetia). The Abkhazs refer to themselves to as *Aphsuas* and to their homeland as to *Aphsni*. In the 19th and 20th centuries, before the occupation of Georgia by Soviet Russia, the toponym Abkhazeti (Abkhazia) was referred only to the northern part of present-day Abkhazeti; the southern part was called *Samurzakano*. In the medieval East, Arabic and Persian records show that the names "Abkhaz" and "Georgian" were used as synonyms. Georgians were often called Abkhazians and, similarly, Georgia was frequently referred to as "Abkhazeti."



Absils and Abazgs - the tribes considered by some scholars as ancestors of modern Abkhazs (Apsuas) - are first mentioned in 1st- and 2nd-century Greek and Latin records. Named as Absiloi and Abazgoi, they are mentioned as the residents of the territories of Abkhazeti together with the Misimians - authentic Georgian (Svan) tribes.

In 4th and 5th centuries the land settled by the Absils and Abazgs formed part of newly established Georgian kingdom of Egrisi (referred to as Lazika in Byzantine records). In the 7th century Emperor Heraclius occupied Abazgia, part of the Kingdom of Lazika and appointed a Byzantine governor there. In the 740s, Leon the Abazgian, liberated his region from Byzantine domination and became a vassal of the eristav (the governor) of Kartli. His descendent Leon II occupied all western Georgia; he moved his residence from Anakopia to Kutaisi and obtained the title of *King of the Abkhazs*. King Leon II entirely freed the newly established West Georgian kingdom from Byzantine domination, both political and ecclesiastical. In the 10th century the Catholicos (Archbishop) of Abkhazeti, with his residence in Bichvinta, became a dependent of the Catholicos - Patriarch of Georgia. Moreover, the Byzantine Greek-language liturgy, used throughout the whole of western Georgia, was replaced by a Georgian-language liturgy. The earliest Georgian inscriptions from western Georgia are found in the Gudauta area of Abkhazeti.

The kings of Abkhazeti were among the most active leaders in the establishment of the united Georgian kingdom of the 9th and 10th centuries. The first king of "United Georgia" was Bagrat III (975-1014), who inherited the title of king of Abkhazeti from his mother's line; in 975 he was inaugurated as a King of Abkhazeti. Later he obtained the title of "King of the Abkhazs, Kartvels, Rans and Kakhs."

During the period of the united Georgian kingdom two administrative entities existed on the territory of current Abkhazeti, the principalities of Tskhumi (Sokhumi) and Abkhazeti; they were integral parts of the Georgian kingdom, as were Odishi, Guria, Svaneti, Kartli, Kakheti and other regions. After the 16th century and the break-up of unified Georgia into parts, Abkhazeti joined the kingdom of Imereti. Later, due to the internal and external political turmoil (including Ottoman expansion) the king of Imereti lost control of Abkhazeti. The rulers of Abkhazeti then became primarily vassals of the rulers of Odishi, but later (at the end of 17th century) Abkhazeti, while officially remaining a vassal of the kingdom of Imereti, became an independent entity.

In the mid 16th century, given further Ottoman expansion, the See of the Catholicos was transferred from Bichvinta to the Church of St. George of Gelati Monastery, where the famous Bichvinta icon of the Virgin Mary, with its 14-line Georgian inscription of the Catholicos Evdemon Chkhetidze, was created.

In the late 19th century the Russian authorities made the population living in the lowlands of Abkhazeti leave their homeland and exiled them to Turkey. The native population continued to exist only in the mountains.

David Muskhelishvili, Iulon Gagoshidze

Introduction to Ancient Period

Archaeological remains dating to various periods of human development over the past 1.8 million years have been discovered on Georgian territory. In fact, intensive human settlement dates back approximately 300,000 years to the Acheulian period. Thereafter, from that era on, the steady development of society can be traced in all regions of country, including Abkhazeti and Shida Kartli (South Ossetia)

On Abkhazian territory the oldest monuments reflecting the development of primitive humans belong to the Acheulian and subsequent periods. Sites have been found both on the coastal and mountainous areas of Abkhazeti (sites such as Iashtkhva, Birtskha, Kvachara, Apincha, Kistriki, Mahcara and others). A new stage in development began after appearance of metal-working in Georgia. Especially significant is the Colchian culture of the 2nd and 1st millennia BC, which extended throughout western Georgia. Noteworthy monuments of this and the following period include Pichori, Ochamchire, Tsebelda, Merkheuli, Tsiteli Shukura, Kulanurkhva, Eshera, and Sokhumi. Especially significant is the 300-year period (6th to 4th centuries BC) during which Colchis - from its northernmost point in Abkhazeti to its southernmost near Gonio-Absaros (south of modern Batumi) - existed not only as political state but rather as a unified highly developed cultural and economic system. This unity is visible in ceramic and metal artifacts. The fact that during the past century the first Archeological Museum in Georgia was founded with the initiative of the Georgian Historical Society in Abkhazeti, namely in Bichvinta is of a great importance. Vakhtang Licheli



Pre-Christian and Early Christian Architecture and Artifacts

From the archaeological viewpoint Abkhazeti is inseparable from other Georgian territories; as throughout all archaeological epochs it formed a part of single culture, extending over the territory of the whole of western Georgia, though the culture does exhibit minor differences within some local areas in the region. Hence the history of Abkhazeti is an integral part of the whole body of Georgian history.

Abkhazeti's most striking examples of Bronze Age sites include dolmens, the 3rd-2nd millennium BC burial sites (also used, but less frequently, in the 1st millennium BC) built of gigantic stones. Similar structures are found on the coastal areas of France and Spain, in North Africa, India and Japan... to the north of the Greater Caucasus range and in the southern regions of Georgia such as Tsalka-Trialeti and Javakheti. However, the closest parallels to the archaeological artifacts of the Abkhazeti dolmens are found at the other western Georgian sites dating to the same period.

The cultural integrity of Abkhazeti with the rest of Georgia is especially evident in the period from the 12th to the 7th century BC, when Abkhazeti was one of the important centers of the so-called Colchian culture. This culture's typical monuments are found at many sites throughout Abkhazeti, including Kulanurkhva, Mugudzirkhva, Achandara, Eshera, Sokhumis Mta and Primorskoe, among others.

In the 6th to 4th centuries BC the territory of Abkhazeti was a part of the kingdom of Colchis. This was the period when the early Greek colonists were founding settlements on the region's Black Sea coast. These entities soon became cities - important trading and craft centers. Dioscurias, located on what is the site of modern Sokhumi (Tskhumi in ancient Georgian) was among these centers. According to the Greek ge-



ABKHAZETI



ographer Strabo, Dioscurias was a place where people speaking 70 different languages gathered for trading purposes.

The 5th-century BC marble stela found in the coastal area of Sokhumi, depicting a young man and a woman, once stood in the cemetery of Dioscurias. The remains of ceramic workshops have been discovered; these were where the Dioscurian amphorae with stamps, were produced.

In the 2nd century AD the Romans renamed Dioscurias: it became Sebastopolis. The remains of the city, part of which is on the shore while part has sunk below the waterline, are mainly the 2nd- to 4th-century AD fortifications. The 6th-century cultural stratum is also present, mainly yields fragments of imported glass vessels, red-varnished pottery and amphorae.

Gienos, located where Ochamchire now stands, appears to have been another important city of the Classical and Hellenistic periods.

Despite the fact that according to Greek literary sources the city of Pitiunt (Bichvinta) already existed in the 2nd century BC on the Abkhazeti coast, the earliest archaeological material so far discovered at Bichvinta dates only to the 2nd to 4th centuries AD. The Roman fortress - a *castellum* adorned with a mosaic floor - and the *coenobium* (separate 'colony') for veterans - are among the most fascinating examples. The discovery of 4th- to 6th-century churches is another noteworthy fact. The floor of the earliest church was adorned with a marvelous mosaic. The cemetery, which has been excavated, dates to 2nd to 4th centuries. The imported glass vessels, the Roman red-varnished ceramics, imported amphorae and the abundance of coins that have been dis-

covered serve as evidence of the vibrant trading and cultural-political life in Pitiunt-Bichvinta. Stratophilus - the bishop of Bichvinta - participated in the First Ecumenical Council, convened at Nicaea in 325.

The ancient trade route that passed through the Kodori River gorge, connecting Abkhazeti with eastern Georgia, through Svaneti and Racha was a prerequisite element in the emergence of important 4th- to 8th-century settlements in these regions.

Iulon Gagoshidze, Joni Apakidze

Medieval Art

The architectural heritage of Abkhazeti bears evidence of the pivotal historical events. Even if one is not aware that Bichvinta used to be called "Pitiunt," it is readily apparent that the plan of its 5th-century basilica (showing similarity with the Constantinopolitan churches) and fragments of its Syrian-Palestinian-type floor mosaics, one understands immediately: this was a Hellenic-Roman city, where Greek was spoken both by the Greeks and the local population. This Roman and subsequently the Byzantine influence was quite strong, particularly until the mid-8th century, when Georgia's Black Sea coast was politically and ecclesiastically subject to Constantinople, and until the Western Georgian kingdom was founded under the leadership of the Eristavs of Abkhazeti. Its capital was Kutaisi. This influence explains why the 8th-century church at Dranda is still quite Byzantine, although certain traits testify to the influence of the Georgian environment. Later, in Bichvinta, in the late 10th century, masons skilled in Byzantine construction techniques and modes built a domed Church of the Virgin, but in general the architectural design followed the Georgian tradition. Likewise, Anakopia fortress, the strongest in Abkhazeti, shows great affinity with Byzantine-style fortified structures.

However, even during direct Byzantine rule, apart from the "Greek," a local "Georgian" element existed and developed. As early as the 6th century, next to the Byzantine fortress built in the reign of Justinian the Great, and constructed with it, a so-called "three-churched basilica" (a design widely recognised as Georgian) was built in Gagra; the immediate analogy of this church is in Kakheti, Georgia's

easternmost province. Architectural links with this region can also be seen in other churches in Abkhazeti, for example, Abaanta (7th century), Ambara (8th to 9th centuries), and Kiach-Aba (9th century). Similar to other churches in Abkhazia, they bear differing regional traits (indicative of the "Abkhazian architectural school") - in proportions, certain compositional solutions, etc. - but, on the whole, they follow the same artistic and historical development that is discernible in the churches of the same typology in eastern and southern Georgia. Signs of certain interregional exchange can also be traced - the architect of Ambara church used the 8th-century Church of the Virgin (in Gurjaani, Kakheti) as a model in the design of the first-floor gallery. Likewise the plan of Kiach-Aba church shows great similarity with that of the 9th-century Nedzvi monastic church, located in Tori, on the southern border of Kartli.

Direct links with Kartli are also seen in the stone ornamentation of the Bzipi fortress church (very late 9th or very early 10th century). This testifies to the fact that churches with a dome supported by four pillars, a typology widespread in all Orthodox Christian countries from the 10th century onward, were introduced in Abkhazeti from eastern Georgia, where the type had been known since the 7th century. It is all the more important that leading 10th-century monuments in Abkhazeti are built on the same plan - the Church of St Simeon the Canaanite, erected in the middle of Anakopia; the Likhne church, with the palace-site close to it (until 1864 the residence of the rulers of Abkhazeti); and Mokvi cathedral, distinguished by its exceptionally impressive inner space, built in the 960s by Leon, King of Abkhazeti. Elements "imported" from Byzantium can easily be found in all these churches, but Georgian "artistic language" is still leading here, even to a greater extent than in above-mentioned Bichvinta. The "Georgian" provenance of Bedia cathedral, built in 990s as his burial church by Bagrat III, the first king of the united Georgian kingdom, would have been even more striking - its preserved ornamentation and reliefs carved in stone show the closest affinity to the 10th-century architectural sculpture of Tao. From the 11th century onward, similar to the examples found all over Georgia, architectural decoration elaborated in Tao-Klarjeti was widespread in Abkhazeti; consider the vivid example of the 11th-century Church of St George at Ilori, one of the most remarkable sacred places in western Georgia.



In Abkhazeti, as in Kakheti and Shavshet-Klarjeti, little is left from the times of David the Builder and Queen Tamar - although the 11th century Besleti bridge, is still well preserved. In late 13th or early 14th century Bedia cathedral was re-built and richly adorned with ornamentation and murals. This painting bears traits of the so-called "Paleologan style," common to the entire Orthodox Christian world in the 14th to 15th centuries. The 14th-century murals of Likhne church are one more superb example of the same style, revealing the art of a supposedly Constantinopolitan painter who participated in the painting of the church - it is noteworthy that Vamek Dadiani, ruler of neighboring Samegrelo, is also known to have invited the painter Cyr Manuel Eugenicos from the Byzantine capital to adorn the church at Tsalenjikha.

From the 15th century onward, unceasing wars with the domestic and foreign enemies, demographic changes and the expansion of Islam resulted in extremely unfavorable conditions for the development of art in this part of Georgia, although some renovation work and even mural decorations were undertaken in the 16th century. The mass deportation of the Abkhaz people by the Russian imperial authorities in 1860s and 1870s was a certain culmination of succeeding dramatic events and a landmark in the history of the entire region. Starting from this period, the construction of ecclesiastical and public buildings or urban residential quarters had mainly moved into the hands of foreigners; the vast monastic complex built in the "Russian-Byzantine style" for the Russian monks in Anakopia and the renaming the place as "New Athos" can be quoted as an eloquent symbol of this situation. The vernacular architecture of the local population is discernible in the style of rural dwellings, which shows all those typological variations that are found all over western Georgia, starting from the wickerwork *patskha* and including the so-called *odasakhli*. In this respect also, as in the mode of everyday life and musical folklore, Abkhazeti, together with Racha, Imereti, Guria, Ajara and Samegrelo, forms inseparable part of the so-to-say "Colchian" world.



Such is the truthful "story" told by the material heritage. Some might not like it, but alteration of the past will give birth to nothing but falsehood, resulting in the distortion of the future.

Dimitri Tumanishvili

BICHVINTA

The Church of the Virgin

The Church of the Virgin in Bichvinta (the name derives from Pitsunda and its earlier form of Pitiunt, an ancient city in northwest Abkhazeti) is one of Georgia's most important architectural landmarks. Ecclesiastical tradition holds that the St. Andrew the Apostle preached in Bichvinta in the 1st century, hence the Bichvinta episcopal see was referred to as the "See of St. Andrew." By the late 3rd to early 4th century, Bichvinta had become a significant ecclesiastical center: Stratophilus, Bishop of Bichvinta, participated in the First Ecumenical Council, convened in Nicaea in 325. The present domed cathedral was built in the 10th and 11th centuries. Until the mid-16th century, Bichvinta was the ecclesiastical center of western Georgia; then Gelati assumed this position. Bichvinta became abandoned in the 17th century; it was struck by lightning and severely damaged in the 18th, but in the first half of the 19th century, in keeping with the orders of the Russian Emperor, the church was repaired, the shape of the dome roofing was altered, and the church's faades were plastered and whitewashed. During the restoration work headed by Prof. Vakhtang Tsintsadze in 1960s the church was again restored and regained its authentic design.

The Bichvinta Floor Mosaic, 4th to 5th century

During the archaeological excavations in 1952, the ruins of a 4th-century three-aisled basilica were discovered on Cape Bichvinta. The floor of the basilica was embellished with a 5th-century mosaic floor. It had been made by local craftsmen who used tesserae made from the local white, carnelian-red, yellow, and black stone. A Greek inscription included in the ornamentation mentions the donor - Oreli.

In the middle of the apse was a large monogram - Christ adorned with the *alpha* and *omega* signs. The monogram is encircled by a wide band of interwoven acanthus leaves. To the left of the monogram is depicted a flowering plant twig with blossoms and birds. The composition is enhanced by geometric ornamentation. Overall, the mosaic has a decorative character. Minor areas, formed by interlacings, bear mosaic images of birds and fish. At the entrance to the apse a fountain with birds on its both sides is depicted. Various parts of the church also have mosaic images of stags and small deer. The artistic character of the mosaic shows an affinity with mosaic work found in Syria and Palestine. At present, the surviving parts of the Bichvinta mosaic are housed in the Georgian National Museum.

The Icon of the Virgin, 1568 AD

The famous Bichvinta golden icon of the Virgin Mary measures 15.5 by 12.7 in. (39.5 by 32.3 cm). The icon bears an image of the Virgin standing with the Child, who is holding a scroll in His left hand and offering a blessing with His right hand. The central image is flanked by images arranged in two tiers - Archangels Michael and Gabriel (upper tier), St. John the Baptist and St. John Chrysostom (lower tier). They are accompanied by explanatory *asomtavruli* inscriptions placed on the icon's ornamented frame. The icon is richly adorned with precious stones; its reverse side is covered with a silver plaque, bearing an image of the Cross with an *asomtavruli* inscription on its arms. A noteworthy *asomtavruli* inscription placed on the back of the icon states that in 1586 Eudemon Chkhetidze, "Catholicos of the entire North and Abkhazeti," had commissioned the triptych of the Virgin, the "main icon" which was made of gold and adorned with precious stones, while the wings were made of silver. *The mtavars* of Odishi - Mamia and Leon Dadiani - are also mentioned in the inscription.

Later on, when the residence of Catholicos was moved from Bichvinta to Gelati, this icon, together with other objects, was moved there. Today the central panel of the triptych icon (of which the wings are lost) is exhibited in the Treasury of Georgian National Museum.

The Processional Cross, 1565 AD

The processional cross made of gold and gilded silver and adorned with precious stones was made by the master craftsman Mamne, in about 1565. Eudemon Chkhetidze, Catholicos of Abkhazeti, donated the cross to Bichvinta Cathedral. The assemblage contains the cross, the reliquary and the handle. This particular example belongs to the group of crosses widespread in Georgia in the 10th and 11th centuries. The widening arms of the cross have medallions at their extremities. The facing side of the cross bears carved images of the crucified Christ, the Virgin, St. John Evangelist, Archangel Gabriel, and St. Nicolas.

The reliquary bears an image of the Virgin with the Child and the images of the Apostles Peter and Paul, Archangels Michael and Gabriel, Apostles St. Andrew and Simon the Canaanite (the first Christian preachers in Georgia), St. John Baptist, St. John Chrysostom and St. Fathers - Grigol and Basil the Great. Explanatory *asomtavruli* inscriptions accompany the images. They name the donors to the church: King Bagrat III of Imereti (1510-1565), Queen Martha and their son Giorgi II (1565-1585); the rulers of Odishi - Mamia III Dadiani (1512-1532) and his son Leon I Dadiani (1532-1572); the donor of the cross - Eudemon Chkhetidze, Catholicos of Abkhazeti, the master craftsmen Mamne and his spouse Ulumpia. The cross is kept in the Georgian National Museum.

The Gospel, 12th century

The 12th-century Gospels contain 230 pages, 12.2 by 9.9 inches (31 by 23 cm). It is written on paper in *nuskhuri* script, in two columns. The Bichvinta codex has a chased cover, donated by the local rulers, the Shervashidzes "for the bliss and supplication of the sinful soul." The manuscript is illuminated with images of the Evangelists and with headpieces and decorated initials. The Gospels are now in the Kekelidze Institute of Georgian Manuscripts.



BICHVINTA

ANCIENT CITY OF GREAT PITIUNT

When in the 1st century the Apostle St. Andrew the Apostle first preached in the ruins of Bichvinta in the 1st century AD, the Bichvinta Episcopate was referred to as the "See of St. Andrew."



DRANDA

The Church of the Virgin, 8th century

The Church of the Virgin in the village of Dranda, in Abkhazeti's Gulripshi district, is built of brick and rubble. On one hand, based on its plan, proportions and building technique, the church shows affinity with examples of Byzantine architecture; however, on the other hand, the church reveals a resemblance to the architecture of the Holy Cross church in Mtskheta and its type in general. The historian Vakhushti Bagrationi stated that large and beautiful domed church was located in Dranda, which was also the site of the residence of the bishop, who governed the territory between Kodori and Anakopia.

In 1773, during the Ottoman invasion, Dranda church was burnt down and destroyed. In 1871, services were again begun in the church. In 1900, the Russian Synod initiated restoration of the church; however, the roofing of the dome was significantly changed and during the same period some of the church's antiquities were lost. In the 1970s the church was restored.

GAGRA

The Basilica, 6th century

The Basilica was built in the center of the fortress located within Gagra. The 6th-century church was built of roughly hewn squared stone blocks, showing close affinity to the so-called three-churched basilica plan widespread in Georgia in the 6th to 10th centuries. There are many churches of this type in eastern Georgia.

BZIPI

The Complex 9th to 10th century

Bzipi village, located on the right bank of the Bzipi River, is the site of a 9th to 10th century architectural complex comprising a palace and a church within an encircling enclosure. Bzipi fortress consists of two parts; the church is located in the upper part, while the old road crossed the courtyard of the lower part. Rectangular and semicircular towers, buttresses and a porch were embodied in the fortress enclosure; all were built using well-hewn squared limestone blocks. The 9th-century Bzipi fortress church is a domed structure of the "cross-in-square" type, with three projecting apses. Its walls are faced with hewn stone; its doors and windows are adorned with ornaments. To the east of the church, the remains of an older church are visible.

TSEBELDA

The Chancel Barrier, 7th- to 8th-century

The 7th- to 8th-century fragments of the carved stone chancel-barrier, discovered in Tsebelda church in the 19th century, are among best surviving examples of medieval Georgian art. Two blocks of stone that have survived from the chancel-barrier are unrivaled examples for the entire Christian world; they bear an unprecedented number of Old and New Testament scenes. Judging by the mode and technique of execution, the Tsebelda plaques show close affinity with chancel-barrier decorations in other regions of Georgia. At present the Tsebelda chancel-barrier fragments are housed in the Georgian National Museum.

The Icon of Saint Catherine, 11th century

The repoussé-work icon depicting St. Catherine, with an explanatory inscription: "Saint Catherine" on both sides of her nimbus, was discovered in the 1880s. A two-line *asomtavruli* inscription on the edge of the lower frame mentions the donor of the icon - the noblewoman Mary. Based on the stylistic and palaeographic peculiarities of the icon, it is considered to be an outstanding example of 11th-century Georgian metalwork. The icon is in the Georgian National Museum.

The Inscription on the Church of Saint George, 12th to 13th century

The square stone plaque bearing an *asomtavruli* inscription was discovered during the archaeological excavations in the Church of St. George at Tsebelda. The inscription, dating from the 12th-13th centuries, was made by the donor of the church, and tells about its construction.

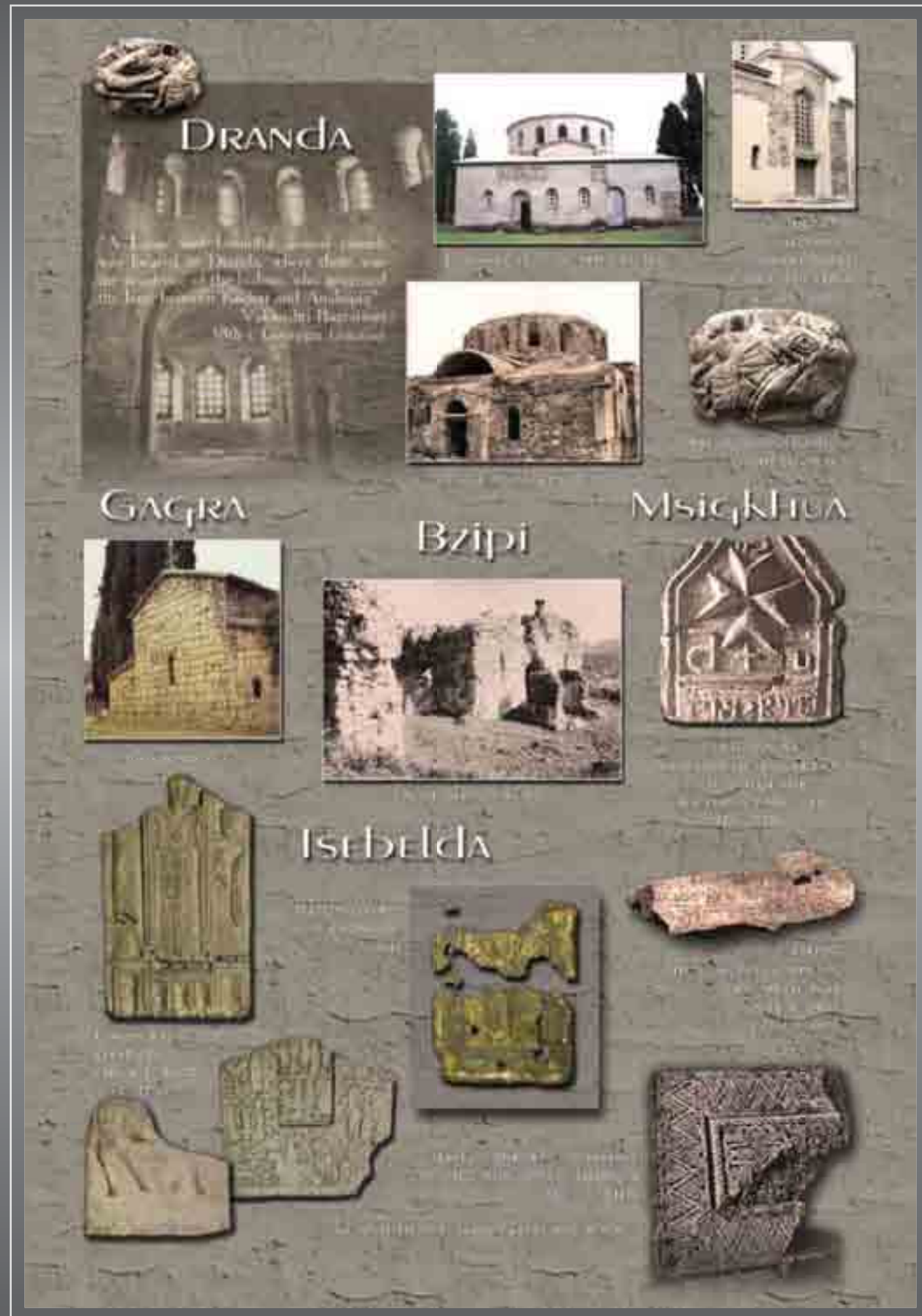
The Inscription of Mikael, 10th to 11th century

The ornamental stone plaque - a fragment of a chancel-barrier - was discovered in the 1880s, in the ruins of the Church of St. Theodore in village of Tsebelda. The one-line *asomtavruli* inscription: "Saint Theodore, have mercy upon Mikael," is carved in the center of the plaque, among the rosettes. The inscription dates back to the 10th-11th centuries.

MSIGKHUA

The Church of the Archangel Michael, 8th to 9th century

The Church of the Archangel Michael is located in the Gudauta district, 1.8 miles (3 km) from the Black Sea, in the gorge of the Tskuara River, on a hill called Mount Msigkhua. Preserved on the walls of the 8th- to 9th-century church are the oldest samples of *asomtavruli* inscriptions (in total 46 inscriptions) in western Georgia. The inscriptions clearly confirm that the church was consecrated to the Archangel Michael at the time of its construction.



BEDIA

MONASTIC COMPLEX
999 AD



ILORI

THE CHURCH OF SAINT GEORGE
11TH



BEDIA

The Monastery Complex, 999 AD

Bedia monastic complex is located 25 km (15.5 miles) from Ochamchire, in Abkhazeti. It stands in the center of the village of Bedia, founded as an episcopal see in by Bagrat III, who rule in Abkhazeti from 975, and who between 1008-1014 was the first king of the united Georgian kingdom. The complex comprises the main church of the Virgin (rebuilt between 13th and 14th centuries and again in the 16th), the medieval Episcopal Palace and 13th- to 14th-century bell-tower. Three layers of mural painting dating to the 10th to the 11th, the 13th to the 14th century are preserved in the church interior. In its entirety, the complex is among the most important landmarks of Georgian architecture. The faades of Bedia church, its interior murals and liturgical objects have preserved lapidary, fresco and incised inscriptions in the *Asomtavruli* script, providing information about the construction, renovation and restoration of the church. Of these inscriptions, 11 are fully legible while others are only partly so. The inscriptions mention the names of donors, architects and masons. Explanatory inscriptions in *asomtavruli* script are preserved in the fresco images of the saints. Over the centuries, Bedia episcopal see was one of the most significant ecclesiastic, cultural and educational centers of western Georgia. King David the Builder (1089-1125) had bestowed the honorary rank of *Bediel-Alaverdeli* (Archbishop of Bedia and Alaverdi) on Simeon, Archbishop of Bedia, as a symbol of the unity of Georgia and the Georgian Church. Combining Bedia with Alaverdi also emphasized the unity of the most significant ecclesiastical centers of western and eastern Georgia. Archbishop Anton Zhuanisdze had established a rich library in the Bedia monastery, where old manuscripts were preserved and theological treatises were translated. The Bedia monastic complex is a symbol of the unity of Georgia. Bagrat III and his mother, Queen Gurandukht, are buried in Bedia.

The Chalice, 999 AD

Among the most significant liturgical objects belonging to the church in Bedia is a chalice, an outstanding sample of Georgian metalwork. This round vessel, 12.5 cm (5 in.) in height; 14 cm (5.5 in.) in diameter, is made from a single pure-gold sheet. Its surface is articulated into 12 segments with arched framing, bearing images of the saints. At the midpoint of one side is the enthroned Savior; opposite is the Virgin and Child. All images, except that of the Virgin, have explanatory inscriptions. A one-line *asomtavruli* inscription running along the upper edge of the chalice states that King Bagrat III and his mother Queen Gurandukht donated the chalice to Bedia church, which they had had ordered to be built. The chalice is dated to 999. Its base was still preserved as late as the 19th century; then it became lost, together with its inscription. The *asomtavruli* inscription incised on the base of chalice, which confirms it was made of pure gold, was added by the order of Germane Chkhetidze, Metropolitan of Bedia, in the 16th century. It seems most probably that the initial base was lost quite early. The stem and upper part of the chalice are at held in the Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi.

The Bedia "Gulani", 17th to 18th centuries

The manuscript has 960 pages, 45.5 by 33.5 cm. (17.9 by 13.1 in) in size. Germane Chkhetidze, Metropolitan of Bedia, was the donor. The book was written on paper in the 17th-18th centuries in the *nuskhuri* (ecclesiastical) script, in two columns, in beautiful handwriting. The three scribes who copied out the work were Ambrosi Kargareli, Svimon Evprateli and Gabriel Lomsadze; they used black ink for the text, but marked the titles in cinnabar. At present the Bedia "Gulani" is kept at Tbilisi Kekelidze Institute of Georgian Manuscripts.

ILORI

The Church of Saint George, 11th century

The Church of St. George is located in the village of Ilori, 3 km (1.8 miles) from Ochamchire. It was built in the first quarter of the 11th century and was one of the most significant ecclesiastical centers of western Georgia. As stated by Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi (the leading 18th-century Georgian historian), "On the edge of the sea . . . there is the Church of St. George in Ilori . . . domeless, small, rich and adorned." Ilori church is a hall-type vaulted structure, with annexes on the north, south and west built of hewn stone. Its refined proportions and the quality of execution are characteristic of Georgian architecture of that period. At present five lapidary Georgian inscriptions are preserved on the faades of the Ilori church. In the 17th century Levan II Dadiani, *mtavari* (sovereign) of Odishi, renovated the church and in 1736 the Ottoman invaders burned it down. As evidenced by Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi, the blaze destroyed church's old mural decorations (the present murals date to 1950s).

The Icon of Saint George, 16th century

The St. George triptych in Ilori church is made of silver and is adorned with a chain and bears images of Sts. Theodore and Demetrius on its wings; the central image represents St. George standing in full length military garb; to his right Kirile Zhuanisdze, Archbishop of Bedia, is depicted, appealing in prayer to St. George. An explanatory *asomtavruli* inscription accompanies each image. Apart from these, the triptych also has a 15-line *asomtavruli* inscription narrating the donation of the icon to the Ilori church by Archbishop Kirile Zhuanisdze. Two other historical persons - George III Dadiani, ruler of Odishi from 1572 to 1582 and his wife Queen Tamar - are also mentioned in the inscription. The subject matter - St. George and the "miracle-working" ox - is quite original in Christian art. It derives from Georgian reality, being linked with the ritual performed in Ilori on the feast day of St. George. At present the icon is kept in the Zugdidi Historical and Ethnographic Museum.

The Chalice

In late 19th century a silver chalice was found in the Church of Saint George in Ilori. The chalice stem, similar to that of the Bedia chalice stem, is articulated into eight arched segments with figures placed on each. An image of the Enthroned Savior with His right hand upraised in blessing and holding an open Gospel in His left hand is represented in the central arch. The Savior is flanked by the images of the adoring Archangels Michael and Gabriel, represented in the side arches, holding liturgical objects in their hands. The front side of the chalice stem bears a one-line *asomtavruli* inscription, a supplication to the Savior. The whereabouts of the chalice are currently unknown.

MOKVI

The Cathedral, 957-967 AD

Mokvi cathedral, a splendid monument of the Georgian architecture, is located 15 km. from the Ochamchire regional centre. It is a “cross-in-square” domed church with chapels from the south and north and a narthex from the west. According to Georgian historical sources, Leon III (957- 967), King of Abkhazs “built a church in Mokvi and made it an Episcopal See”. Mokvi was a significant centre of the Georgian culture, where manuscripts were copied and ancient codices were renovated. Georgian literary sources also preserved names of the bishops of Mokvi, who contributed enormously to the development to the Georgian culture. Among Mokvi antiquities the famous Mokvi Gospel, commissioned by Daniel Mokveli (Bishop of Mokvi) in 1300 is of a special importance. Mokvi church was also rich in epigraphic monuments. However, at present only an inscription on Mokvi bell-tower is preserved, which mentions Gregory, Bishop of Mokvi. The Mokvi fresco inscription: “Was painted in the times of the Emperor Alex Comnenus and David, King of Abkhazs” evidenced in 1659 by Dositheos Patriarch of Jerusalem, indicates that Mokvi church was substantially renovated and painted in the reign of David the Builder. These murals as well as accompanying inscription seemed to be destroyed over the centuries, or were, probably, lost in 1850s, during the renovation of the damaged church facing. In 1980s, fragments of the 15th century murals were discovered here.

The Processional Cross, 16th to 17th centuries

The front of 16th-17th century silver processional cross bears an image of crucified Christ in the centre, the Virgin and Saint John in the medallions and Archangel Gabriel in the upper part. Georgian *asomtavruli* inscription mentioning the donor - Eptvime Sakvarelidze, Catholicos of Abkhazeti (1578-1611) is made on its back. Another inscription on one of the knobs of slightly earlier silver plated wooden handle of the cross mentions the name of the donor - Evdemon Chkhtidze, who is known to be the predecessor of Eptvime Sakvarelidze. Cross handle and cover of the reliquary are adorned with floral ornamentation, which follows the pattern found in 16th century western Georgian repousse work.

The Icon of the Virgin, 17 th century

According to Georgian *asomtavruli* inscription the silver triptych of the Virgin is donated to the Mokvi church of the Virgin by Andria Sakvarelidze, Bishop of Mokvi, who was active in the Mokvi cathedral in the 50-60ies of the 17th century. At present the icon is kept at the Zugdidi Historical and Ethnographic Museum.

The Gospels, 1300 AD

Mokvi Gospels is written on a parchment, in *nuskhuri* script, in two columns. It contains 329 pages (30 x 23,5 cm.). The manuscript is commissioned in 1300 by Daniel, Bishop of Mokvi and donated to the Mokvi church of the Virgin. The manuscript executed by the master Eprem is adorned with the cannon tables, headpieces, initial letters and 157 miniatures. On one of the miniatures, the donor - Daniel, Bishop of Mokvi - is represented kneeling in a prayer before the Virgin standing with the Child. Miniatures of the Mokvi Gospels are painted on gold, which is a unique case. At present Mokvi Gospels is kept at Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts of Georgia.

LIKHNI

The Church of the Dormition, 10th century

The 10th century Church of the Dormition is located in the centre of the village Likhni, on the Black Sea costal lowland. This is a cross-domed structure with three projecting apses and large open arched porches from the west, north and south. Entire interior of the church and its porches are painted with 10th-11th century and 14th century murals.

Likhni church is rich in epigraphic monuments. Among these is an inscription of 1066 narrating about the apparition of a comet. The same historic event is also noted in the chronicle of the Kiev principedom and one of the Chinese chronicles. The fresco inscriptions in Georgian *asomtavruli* and *mkhedruli* (secular) scripts, which tell about various historic events, mention high ranking secular persons: kings of the united Georgian kingdom - Bagrat IV, George II and the representatives of clergy: Vache Protohyspatharios and Hypatos, *Mtsignobartukhutsesi* (Chancellor) and *Chkondideli* (Archbishop of Chkondidi).

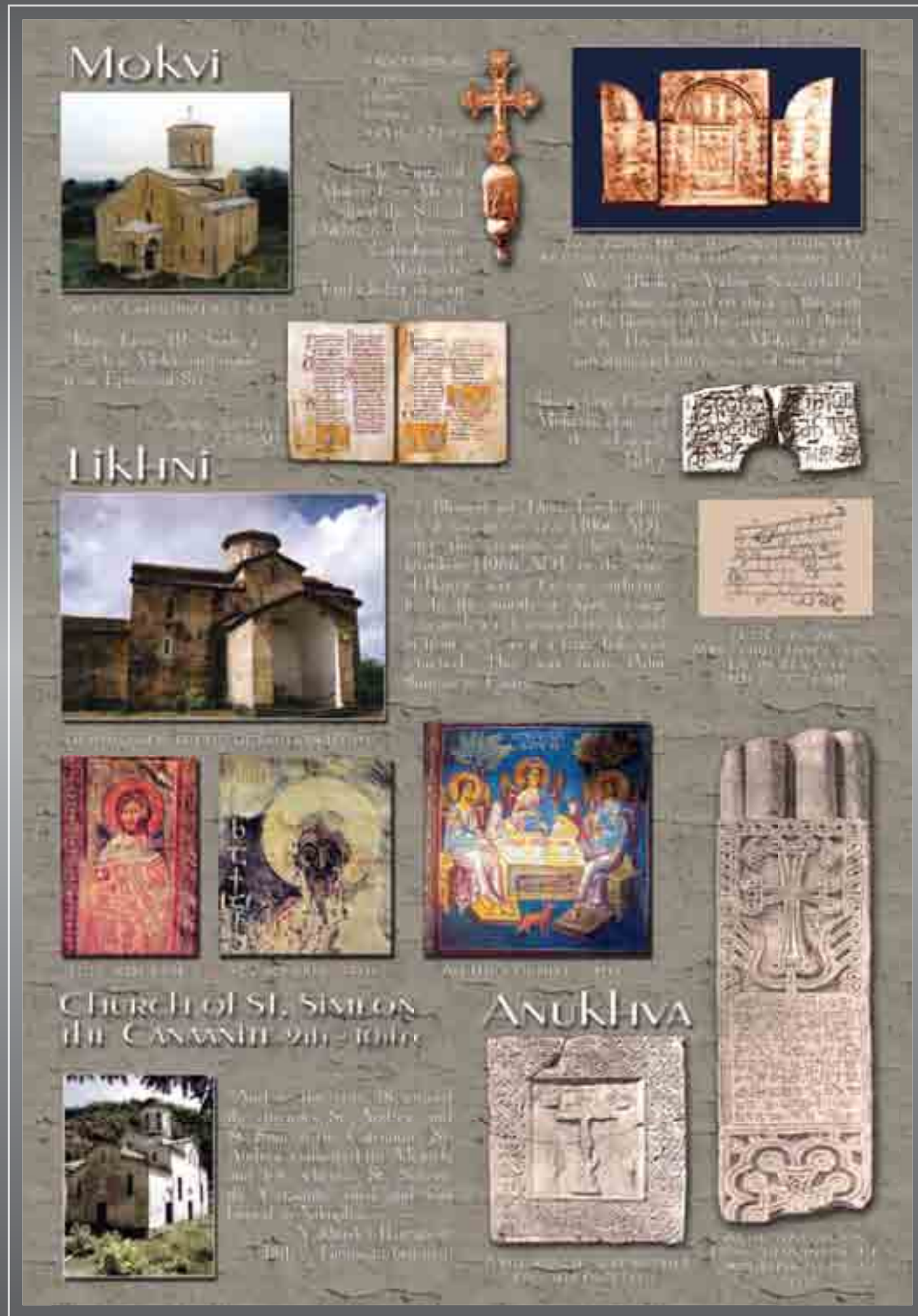
ANUKHVA

The column with the Inscription, 11th century

As early as the 19th century Russian archaeologist Countess Praskovya Uvarova had recorded ruins of a large church in the village Anukhva, Gudauta district. The architectural peculiarities and character of the highly artistic ornamentation of the church shows affinity with the southern Georgian churches. Georgian *asomtavruli* inscriptions discernible in the ruins of the Anukhva church tell about its construction, its donors and its restoration over the time. 11th century inscription carved on a column shows that the donor was the local nobleman Giorgi Basilidze, who together with his three brothers - Tevdore, Demetre and Merkile - had built Anukhva church and erected the cross in prayer for the souls of his family members.

The Plaque with the Crucifixion 11th century

The grey stone plaque bearing the image of Crucifixion is a fragment of the chancel-barrier. On the central part of the plaque represented are the Crucified Saviour, the Virgin and Saint John on both sides of the cross and awing Angels. In the upper part a three-line explanatory Georgian *asomtavruli* inscription is arranged. The composition is provided with the wide ornamental framing. Anukhva chancel-barrier is dated to the 11th century.



ANAKOPIA

The Church of Saint Simeon Canaanite, 9th to 10th centuries

The church of St. Simeon Canaanite is located not far from Sokhumi, on the territory of the present New Athos, on top of the Mount Iveria. The present church dates to 9th-10th centuries. According to the ecclesiastic tradition, Saint Simeon Canaanite, who together with the Saint Apostle Andrew preached Christianity in the Black Seacoast, had received his martyrdom there and was buried in Nikopsia. From the 19th century onwards, Nikopsia was by mistake identified with Anakopia and the specific church - with the burial place of the Saint Simeon. Despite that, it seems most likely that Anakopia was still linked with the area of activity of St. Simeon Canaanite. The church was substantially renovated in 1880s (the dome was rebuilt, part of the facing was replaced), however, ancient decoration e.g. crosses, of the east windows were, for the great part, repeated.

The Fortress

Historic Anakopia, which was named New Athos in the 19th century, lies about 12.5 miles (20 km) northwest of Sukhumi, on the slopes of Mt. Iveria, also the site of the citadel or fortress of Anakopia, built at an elevation of 1150 ft (350 m) above sea level. As stated by the great 18th-century historian Vakhushti Bagrationi, "Anakopia city is [located] on the edge of the sea. . . . [It] was a fine, beautiful city built on the sea and afterwards glorified by the Bagrationi." Anakopia fortress was an inaccessible structure, surrounded by a defensive wall. Still preserved are the great walls of the fortress with their watch-towers, a defensive water channel enclosure and a furnace for firing lime. The church of Anakopia, which dates to the 7th to 8th centuries, was a significant structure within the fortress. In the 19th century, a wall which embodied several 10th- to 13th-century ornamentation and carvings of diverse provenance was erected in the ruins of the church. Up to the 780s Anakopia was the center of the principality of Abkhazeti. In 735-738, near Anakopia, the army of Mir and Archil, eristavs of Kartli, united with that of Leon I, eristav of the Abkhazs, severely defeated the Arab military leader Murvan Kru.

In the late 8th century, Leon II, eristav of the Abkhazs, declared himself king. He united all western Georgia and moved the capital of the kingdom of Abkhazeti from Anakopia to Kutaisi. After the unification of Georgia in the late 10th century, Anakopia Fortress became one of the country's most significant strongholds. George II (1072-1089) was one amongst the Georgian monarchs who renovated the fortress, where a royal army was stationed to guard the kingdom's northwest border.

In late 15th century the united Georgian kingdom disintegrated into minor feudal principalities. From that period onward, Anakopia was the residence of the eristavs of Abkhazeti and later, of the mtavars of the Abkhazs. In the 18th century Anakopia came into the hands of Turks and the mtavar of the Abkhazs moved his residence to Likhni. Later, Anakopia fell into ruin and was named "Psirtska" by Abkhazs.

BAGRATI FORTRESS

The so-called "Bagrati Fortress" is located in the southwestern part of Sokhumi, on a hill on the left bank of the Besleti River. The fortress is oval-shaped in plan and had a rectangular tower to defend the porch. The walls are well preserved. The fortress first served as the citadel of the medieval city of Tskhumi (Sokhumi). Bagrat III, king of Georgia (978-1014) renovated the structure at the end of the 10th and beginning of the 11th century, and between the 10th and 14th centuries it was a residence of the eristavs of Tskhumi. From the 16th century onward, when the city moved to the west, to the right bank of the Besleti River, the fortress lost its significance and fell into ruin.

BESLETI BRIDGE

Not far from Sokhumi, the Tamar Bridge, a single-arch structure, spans the Besleti River. Its length is 115 ft (35 m) and its width 26 ft (8 m). The bridge is built of limestone, with flat brick courses between the stone courses. The bridge is a monument of medieval Georgian architecture, and its builder had a clear understanding of the river and its flow. Though old, the bridge fully meets the requirements of modern bridge construction and can easily stand the weight of an uninterrupted sequence of 8-ton vehicles passing over it. Such a strong and technically high-quality bridge should have been built on a major trade route of political significance. Other bridges similar to Tamar's bridge are found in other regions of Georgia, namely the Rkoni River arched bridge in Kartli and the Dandalo bridge in Achara.

On its west side the Besleti bridge bears a one-line *asomtavruli* inscription: "Christ, Lord of the all, glorify in both lives the unconquerable King of Kings Bagrat". Though the inscription mentions King Bagrat, because of the great admiration given to the later Queen Tamar, the bridge was given her name. Both the bridge and its inscription date to the late 10th - early 11th centuries.

SHARVASHIDZE PALACE

In the village of Likhni, not far from the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, stand the ruins of the palace of the Sharvashidzes - *mtavars* of Abkhazeti. The two-storied structure was built of diverse materials (limestone, sandstone, brick, etc.). Several building periods are discernible in the masonry of the walls; the earliest from the 10th century and later ones from the 16th- and 17th-century showing layers built of limestone. In the 19th century the palace was transformed and considerably extended and now the palace and its church are located on the edge of a vast field - the "Likhtashta." On 26 July 1866, the anti-tsarist, anti-colonial rebellion of the Abkhazs broke out on the Likhtashta. In August 1866, during the suppression of the rebellion, General Sviatopolk-Mirsky, the Governor-General of Kutaisi, burned the palace down. Of the enormous structure, only the walls survived the fire.

BAGRATI FORTRESS

YEARS: MEDIEVAL PERIOD



"Anakopia city is located [on the edge of the sea]. . . . [It] was a fine, beautiful city built on the sea and afterwards glorified by the Bagrationi."

Vakhushti Bagrationi
11th - 12th century historian

ANAKOPIA FORTRESS

YEARS: MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The fortress was a citadel of the medieval city Tskhumi (Sokhumi) and was renovated in the late 10th century by Bagrat III, king of Georgia (978-1014).



THE SHARVASHIDZE'S PALACE IN THE VILLAGE LIKHNI

YEARS: 10th-17th



BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER BESLETI

YEARS: 10th-11th

The bridge was built of limestone, with flat brick courses between the stone courses.

SHIDA (INNER) KARTLI

Historical Overview

Shida (Inner) Kartli, with its center in city of Mtskheta, is the heartland of Georgia, the region where the statehood of Eastern Georgia originated. For this reason the early Georgian historian Leonti Mroveli, who tells the story of the descent of the “Kartvelians” from the legendary ancestor Kartlos, refers to Kartli as the very core of the country. It was the place where Kartlos settled and from there he extended his power over the



entire kingdom of Kartli. Mtskhetos, the son of Kartlos founded the capital Mtskheta, while his descendent Uplos “stayed at Mtskheta at the residence of his father Mtskhetos and governed the land from Aragvi and Tbilisi up to Tasiskari and Paravani. And he built Uplistsikhe, Urnisi, Kaspi, from Aragvi to Tasiskari and named this country Shida Kartli.”

Today, the above-mentioned territory comprises the gorge of the River Mtkvari, bordered by Tbilisi and the Aragvi River to the east; Tashiskari and the Likhi Range (which divides Eastern Georgia from Western Georgia) to the west; Lake Paravani (i.e., Javakheti) and the Trialeti range to the south; and the Greater Caucasus range to the north. This territory formed the part of ethnographic Kartli, initially named “Zena Sopeli” (“The Upper Land”) in contrast to “Kvena Sopeli” (“Lower Kartli”). Later on, when the territory of the Mtkvari River gorge (Javakheti and Artaani) and the Chorokhi River gorge (Tao-Klarjeti and Achara) were referred as to “Zemo Kartli” (i.e., “Upper Kartli”), “Zena Sopeli” (i.e., the “Upper Land”) then acquired the name Shida (Inner) Kartli. The above-mentioned extract from the historical source can serve as an evidence for this.

The fact that the original population of this region was Georgian and particularly Kartlian cannot be disputed. The historical and contemporary toponyms of these territories can serve as an additional testimony, parallel to that of the historical records. The same fact is argued by foreign historical sources: The *Armenian Geography* describes the territories in the 4th to 7th centuries as “Zena Sopeli” and mentions the toponyms “Dvani” (the village of this name still exists in Kartli), “Achabeti” (today the village of Achabeti), the gorge of the Ksani River, Tskhradzma, Gverdisdziri and “Satskheneti at the foothills of Caucasian mountains, from where the river Liakhvi originates.” In describing the occupation of Eastern Georgia by Arabs, the 9th-century Arab historian mentions the Ksani River gorge among other subjugated provinces. The majority of these toponyms still exist in the territory of Shida Kartli (today designated South Ossetia), attesting to the existence of Kartvels (Kartlians) on that territory from very ancient times.

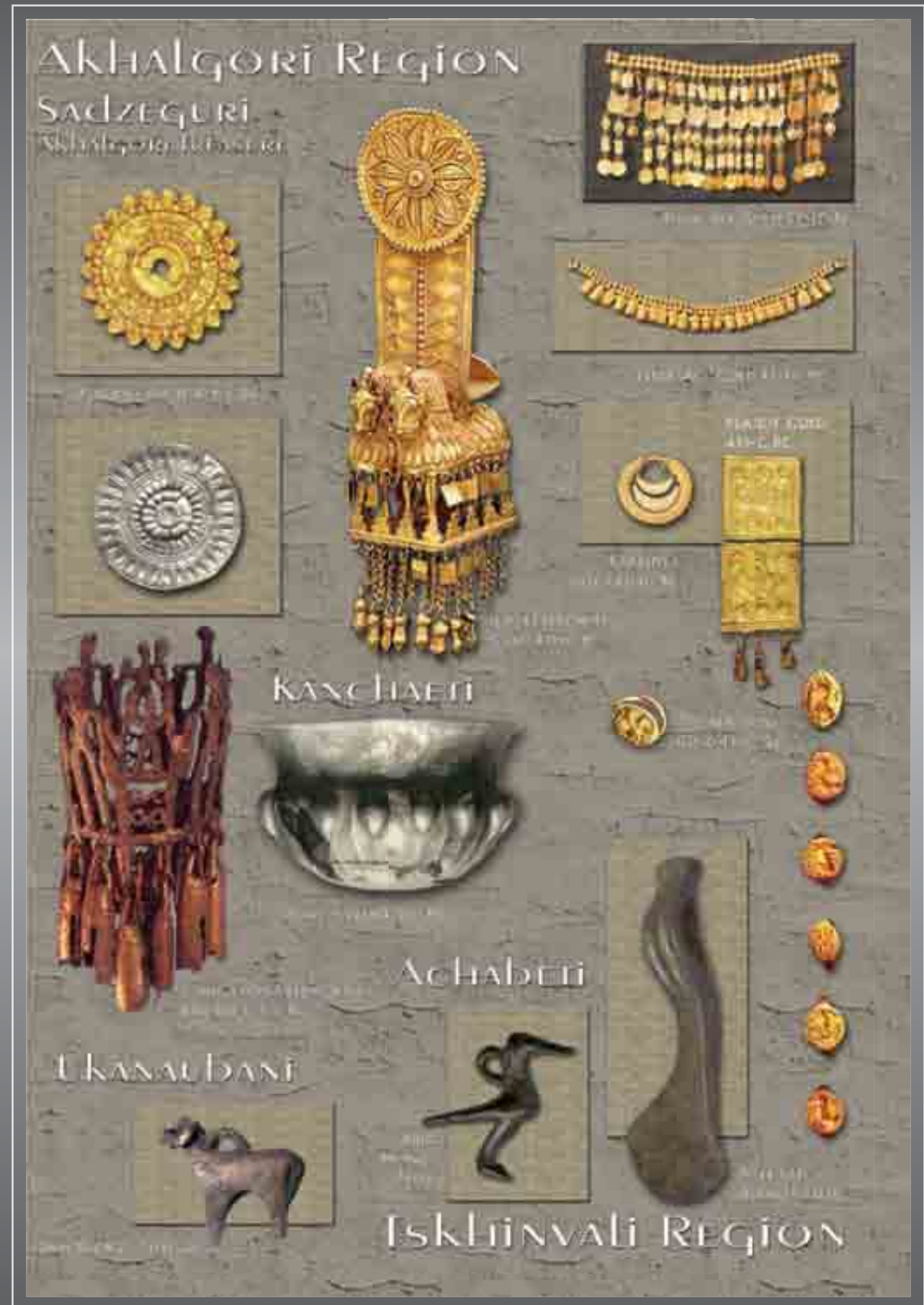
Possession of the territories of Shida Kartli, considered to be the core of Georgian statehood, was a key issue in the 9th and 10th centuries. For this reason the Ersistav-Tbelis, the rulers of Kartli, waged a continuous struggle with different rulers of various Georgian principalities, e.g., the Western Georgian kingdom of Tao-Klarjeti and, in the east, Kakheti.

The *Dzegli Eristavta*, a 14th-century historical source, which describes the history of mountainous Shida Kartli and particularly the story of the fight of the Ersistavs of Ksani against the “Dvals” - mountain tribes - makes no mention of Ossetians. This could serve as an evidence for the fact that immigration of the Ossetian people began later. In the first half of the 17th century Java was still settled only by Georgians. The 17th century is the period when the immigration of Ossetians from the north toward the territories of Shida Kartli began. This processes of immigration caused the assimilation of the Dvals with the Ossetians.

According to historical data, in the late 18th century there were about 15,000 Ossetian residents in the mountainous area of Shida Kartli. The majority of them were servants (serfs) of the aristocratic families of the Machahbelis and the Eristavs of Ksani. In the period up to the late 19th century, alongside the Georgian population of the town of Tskhinvali, there were Armenians and Jews. The toponym Tskhinvali itself is purely Georgian and means the land of the *Rcxila* - a type of tree.

In 1918-1921, during the first Georgian democratic state, the Ossetians residing in the mountainous area of Shida Kartli were encouraged by the Bolsheviks to revolt against the government of the Republic. They rebelled three times, occupied Tskhinvali and declared Soviet rule. The government soon subjugated the rebel entity. “The Autonomous District of South Ossetia” was created after the annexation of Georgia by Soviet Russia in 1921, specifically in 1922. In addition to the mountainous area of Shida Kartli it included the territories of the plain with villages with Georgian populations. Tskhinvali was declared the capital. The intensive process of immigration of Ossetians from the mountains to Tskhinvali began immediately thereafter.

DavidM uskhelishvili



SHIDA (INNER) KARTLI

Pre-Christian Art

The foothills and the mountainous area of Shida Kartli (Inner Kartli), which was framed within the boundaries of the South Ossetian Autonomous District administrative frontiers during the period of the Soviet Union, encompasses the upper reaches of the right-hand affluents of the Mtkvari River - Ksani, Liakhvi and Phroni gorges. Shida (“Inner”) Kartli is the heart of Georgia, the central region that gave the name *Sakartvelo* to Georgia. Since the Stone Age the territory of Shida Kartli always been the spreading area of a single archeological cultures; this indicates that in each specific era a single ethnic group has lived in Shida Kartli.



The homogenous and highly developed archaeological culture of farmers and metalworkers widespread in the Shida Kartli territory, as well as throughout the Caucasus in the early Bronze Age (3rd millennium B.C.), was known as the Mtkvar-Araksian culture. Remarkable bronze artifacts have been found in the Phroni gorge, near Metekhi village, dating to the 23rd century B.C.

In the mid-Bronze Age (20th to 16th centuries B.C.) the whole of Shida Kartli was included within the greater Trialeti cultural area. Near the villages of Nuli and Kvasatali (in the Phroni gorge), settlements and burials belonging to the Trialeti culture have been excavated.

The Late Bronze and Early Iron Age (15th to 7th centuries B.C.) highlights the matter of Georgian tribes (Taokhs, Colkhs and Saspeiros) who were mentioned for the first time in Assyrian and Urartian inscriptions and in later Greek written sources. In fact, these tribes created the so-called Colchian archaeological culture, which extended throughout the West Caucasus and to the South-West (an area now within Turkey). The classical site of this culture is the Tli cemetery, situated in the upper bed of the Liakhvi River. Remains from this same culture are also found in many other points in the Liakhvi, Ksani and Phroni gorges (Natsargora near Tskhinvali, Stirphaz, Ereda, etc.).

In the 6th century B.C. the kingdom of Colchis - “The Land of the Golden Fleece” was established; In the last quarter of the 4th century Colchis was superseded by the kingdom of Kartli, which ancient Greek and Roman writers referred to as Iberia, or Caucasian Iberia. The kingdom of Kartli (Iberia) endured over the centuries and one can claim that modern Georgia, from one viewpoint, is the legal successor of that ancient Georgian state, whose political and economic center was in Shida Kartli.

The geomorphology of Caucasus - the Georgians’ ancient homeland - largely determined the places and structure of their early territorial-administrative units; these generally developed in river gorges. These gorges - *khevi* - with their mountains and plains, created self-sufficient household economic units, which, from ancient times, in each *khevi* governed the origin of small political formations, with their administrative, economic and religious centers. Thus, these *khevi* actually represent the cradles of the Georgian statehood.

The Tskhinvali Treasure (dating to the 7th century B.C.), kept in the Tskhinvali Museum, contained gold earrings, temple hangings and granulated openwork beads, absolutely identical to beadwork, found in Partskhanakanevi (West Georgia). This a clear-cut proof that here, as well as in West Georgia, the society was socially and economically mature enough for statehood.

In 1907, in the Ksani gorge, near the village of Sadzeguri, the splendid burial of a woman was found; its grave goods are worldwide known as the Akhagori Treasure. The treasure has been dated to the last quarter of the 4th century B.C. and contains brilliant examples of the toreutic work of the old Georgian goldsmiths, similar to those found in burials excavated in other places in Shida Kartli (for example, Kavtiskhevi and Takhtidziri) as well as in Imereti (Vani, Mtisdziri, Sairkhe, Itkhvisi), in Trialeti (Tsintskharo, Shavsakdara, Enageti) and other places. These burials have been dated to the 5th to 3rd century B.C. and belong to the aristocracy of that period, to the officials of the ancient Georgian states - Colchis (5th to 4th century B.C.) and Iberia (4th to 3rd century B.C.). In 1960 an additional burial was discovered in the Ksani gorge, near the village of Kanchaeti. This burial has been dated as 50 years earlier than that of the Akhagori Treasure, and is thought to have been that of a noble, in this case to a man.

The fact that the Ksani gorge, even in the beginning of the New Era, represented one of the territorial-administrative units of the kingdom of Kartli, is confirmed by the 3rd-century A.D. burial discovered in the small town of Akhagori. This burial site yielded silver vessel and gold jewelry like that found in the burials excavated in Armaziskhevi, Zghuderi, Jinali, Bori, Kldeeti, Tsikhisdziri and other places, and which belonged to Iberian officials of different levels and to their family members. The burial sites of ordinary people of this period have been excavated at several sites in the Liakhvi and Phroni gorges (Arkneti, Sokhta, Stirphaz, Monasteri, and other places), where jewelry, glass perfume bottles and Parthian and Roman coins were discovered, similar to those found in Mtskheta and Urbnisi in burials of the same period.

Medieval Art of Shida Kartli

Some scholars think that art history, like epigraphy or numismatics, is a supplementary historical discipline. This does not seem absolutely true, although there is a certain grain of truth in this assumption - works of art are definitive evidence of the past and their “testimony” is more valuable, since it can hardly be falsified or accused of partiality.

Records of this “material chronicle” are abundant in those parts of Georgia extending over the slopes of the Greater Caucasus. These regions include both so-called “South Ossetia” (now, due to the vicissitudes of fate and human perfidy, an area in dispute), which encompasses the gorges of the Mtkvari River’s northern tributaries, and also Abkhazeti (Abkhazia), which extends along the north-western coast of the Black Sea. Both regions have preserved numerous buildings that eloquently present both medieval and 19th- or early 20th-century reality.

For example, the *Chronicle of Kartli* records that King Vakhtang Gorgasali had buried St Razhden, the Georgian Church’s first martyr, in the village of Nikozi and established an episcopal see there. Nikozi is located in the Liakhvi River gorge. In fact, Nikozi not only was and still is an episcopal residence (though temporarily abolished in the 19th century by the Russian authorities), but the chancel of the *katholikon* (the “Gvtaeba” church) is doubtlessly dated to the very late 5th century or very early 6th century, and shows an affinity with Tbilisi’s “Anchiskhati” church and Urbnisi cathedral. Unceasing activity in this spiritual center is evidenced by the 9th- to 10th-century palace (restored in 2006-2008 and burned down in 2008 by the Russian invaders), located close to the elegant domed church of the Holy Archangels, built in the late 10th century by Mikel, Bishop of Nikozi, and by the considerable renovation of the “Gvtaeba” church between the 15th and 19th centuries, with its most peculiar 17th-century bell-tower.

If the 6th and 7th centuries have left almost no trace in this region, the 8th to 10th centuries were marked by intensive construction activity. Many towers, fortresses and churches of this period have survived; many of them are widely known, including the Church of the Virgin at Tsirkoli, the Church of St George at Armazi (A.D. 864), and the Church of St George at Eredvi (A.D. 906). Preserved inscriptions show that their donors were representatives of the nobility - eristavs (i.e., governors) of Kanchaeti, members of the Tbeli family (10th to early 11th centuries), the Prior of Armazi - and what is most important - “common men,” “all people,” to quote an inscription on the Church of the Savior in Tskhavati.

In those days, craftsmen of this mountainous region, according to their skills and mastery (with highly talented architects and masons among them) contributed to the creative strivings, traceable all over historic Georgia; at the same time they elaborated their own artistic modes, resulting in the establishment of local architectural schools whose influence can be seen in other provinces of Georgia - Mtiuleti (northeastern Georgia), Imereti (western Georgia), and even Tao (southwestern Georgia; now Turkish territory). In the 10th century a stone-carving workshop greatly differing from the others (conventionally called the “Kudaro school” by Prof. Natela Aladashvili) was active in Kartli; 9th- and 10th-century murals, occupying their due place among other contemporary Georgian mural decorations, are preserved in some of the churches. Examples include the painted chancel barrier in the Armazi church (Ksani gorge); fragments of murals in the Church of the Virgin in Kabeni (Ksani gorge) and in the church at Tsirkoli.

The legacy of the united Georgian kingdom can also be seen in this part of Georgia. Two most remarkable buildings can be cited - the domed churches in Tigva and Ikorta. The Church of the Holy Cross in Tigva, distinguished by its plainness among contemporary architectural styles, was built in 1152 by Tamar, “Queen of Sharvan,” and daughter of King David the Builder. Presumably this was Queen Tamar’s abode after she had taken veil; after her death she was buried in this church. The Church of the Archangels in Ikorta, built 20 years later in 1172 by the local nobility (one donor was Eristavt-Eristavi) is one of the richly decorated and ornamented churches of its period, the work of highly skilled masons. Over the centuries the Ikorta church acquired additional, memorial significance - it is the burial place of Shalva and Elizbar, eristavs of Ksani, rulers and patrons of this area, who, together with their ally Bizina Cholokashvili, became martyrs for Christianity and their motherland in the 17th century; all three are canonized saints of the Georgian Church.

Other examples of ecclesiastical architecture dating back to this “Golden Age” of Georgia are also preserved in the region, including Khopa monastery; the 8th to 9th century Church of the Virgin at Kabeni (Ksani gorge), which was extended, redecorated and repainted in this epoch; Ikorta church also had splendid mural decoration. Later, under the Mongol domination, the building and painting of churches did not cease; this is confirmed in the 13th- to 14th-century monastic church at Tiri, with its bell-tower and other structures. Some 14th- to 15th-century murals are preserved in the churches at Tskhavati and Doretkari (here, among other scenes, the Life of St Barbara is represented, quite rare in mural painting).

Building activity continued even in the period of hardship and permanent invasions that marked the 15th to 18th centuries. If numerous fortified structures responded to vital defence needs, then buildings for other purposes testify to the fortitude and resistance of Georgia to unfavorable circumstances. In the 17th century, the Eristavs of Ksani (in Akhagori), the Bagration-Davitashvilis (in Nuli), and the Palavandishvilis (in Dzagina) built palaces that beautify their environment. In the early 18th century, King Vakhtang VI even converted a tower next to the most peculiar 10th-century “Sabatsminda” church into a cosy dwelling. Religious zeal motivated local feudal lords and the gentry to erect numerous churches - not only modest single-nave chapels, but large domed churches - Tsunari church (15th century), the Church of the Virgin at Tskhinvali (1718), Kulbiti church (18th century), and the Church of St Theodore at Largvisi (1750s). Largvisi monastery is a striking example of non-surrender to fate. It was built in the 14th century by the eristavs of Ksani as a family monastery, later on, its enclosures, bell-tower and other structures, damaged by the flood or enemy invasions, were restored five times the least, while the present church is at least the third one built on this plot and one of the best among Georgian churches of its period. It is also noteworthy that the builder of the church at Kulbiti used neighbouring 8th- to 10th-century churches as his models - this reflects admiration for the past and a certain romanticism, which is also typical of the succeeding 19th century.

The 19th century brought relative peace to all of Georgia, including Shida Kartli; however, its price was too high - Georgia lost her independence and the autocephaly of the Georgian Church (which had lasted for fourteen centuries) was abolished. . . . In architecture this peaceful epoch, quite naturally, was marked by the advance of the domestic architecture. Creativity is seen in the peculiar, far from usual combinations of “Georgianised” European or Islamic-Oriental elements - in the palaces of the Eristavs and the Machabelies’ or old residential houses preserved here and there in Tskhinvali.

NIKOZI MONASTERY COMPLEX



NIKOZI

Monastery Complex, 5th to 18th century

Nikozi is one of the most ancient Episcopal Sees in the Kartli region. It is located in the Laikhvi River gorge, 1.2 miles (2 km) from Tskhinvali. According to historical sources Nikozi Cathedral and its Episcopal See were founded by King Vakhtang Gorgasali in the 5th century, on the site of a Zoroastrian temple. Nikozi is the burial place of the Persian martyr St. Razden, who, during Vakhtang's reign, adopted Christianity and was tortured by Persians. According to Vakhushti Bagrationi, the Nikozi diocese included the Caucasian range, the Ksani hills and the upper part of Racha. The founding of a diocese based on Nikozi aimed both at displacing Zoroastrianism, which was widespread in the region, and also at spreading the Christianity in the mountainous hinterlands of Kartli. The Nikozi episcopal see was abolished in about 1811.

The main church of the monastery, Nikozi Cathedral of "Gvtaeba" has changed greatly throughout the centuries. Originally it was a three-aisled basilica. The ancient light yellow stone of the original eastern facade can be still seen in the cladding of the "inscribed cross" type domed church built between the 14th and 16th centuries. Among the surviving original 5th-century part is the chain of horseshoe shape arches forming the headpiece of the eastern window.

The church walls bear inscriptions from various periods. The oldest among them is carved on the stone above the eastern window; it commemorates Archbishop Zakaria and states: "Holy Trinity have mercy upon Zakaria, the first archbishop."

Alongside the main church stands Nikozi monastery complex, including the 17th century belfry, the 9th- to 10th-century two-storied episcopal palace and the surrounding wall.

The Church of the Archangels, 10th to 11th century

At a distance of about 220 yards (200 m) from the monastery is the Church of the Archangels, standing in the Nikozi village cemetery. The 10th- to 11th-century church is built of grayish and reddish basalt. From the exterior the building looks like "croix libre" church; however, its plan is closer to the so called "Kupel Halle" type. The remaining fragments of the south, north and west entrances were adorned with columned porches. The inscriptions on the church's facade indicate that it was built by Michael, Archbishop of Nikozi. The facades and capitals of the columns were richly decorated with ornaments and images, including that of St. George slaying the dragon. There are also some images of lions and men adorning the church's dome.



ARMAZI

Church of St. George, AD 864

The Church of St. George in Shida Kartli is located on the left bank of the Lekhura River in the village of Armazi. The name of the village seems to be connected with that of the pagan idol Armaz, destroyed by St. Nino in early 4th century. In the Middle Ages, the village belonged to the Ksani River gorge district, in late Middle Ages to Saamilakhvro, while in 1459, according to a document of this period, it was within the borders of the Samtavisi eparchy.

The Church of St. George in Armazi is one of the most significant monuments of the 8th- to 9th-century period. The medium-sized rectangular church has an inner dome resting upon four free-standing pillars. The dome is without drum and is covered with a double-pitched roof on the exterior. The main body of the church is built of rubble, whereas the supporting elements and corners are made of trimmed travertine.

The painting on the contemporaneous chancel barrier, which is executed in reddish colors and depicts three saints with crosses in their hands, is among the earliest examples of Georgian mural painting. The early date and the uniqueness of the composition heighten the significance of this monument both for Georgia and for the entire Orthodox Christian world. The decorative elements in the interior and on the exterior, covered with similar red paint, underline the important elements of the structure.

An inscription in *asomtavruli* script was carved on the stone below the ornamental cornice of the southern facade. It dates the building to 864 and mentions the name of the donor - Giorgi Mamasakhlisi, the feudal lord or prior of Armazi. The south-western ambulatory at the southern facade of the church was apparently added in the 10th century.

KABENI, KANCHAETI

The Monastery of the Virgin 9th century

Kabeni Monastery lies near the village Kanchaeti, on the right bank of the Kanchaetiskhevi River, a right-side tributary of the Ksani River. The monastery includes the domed church and the ruins of other secondary structures.

The main building of the monastery is a complex structure; it includes different elements from various periods. The initial rectangular domed structure was built in the 9th century. The octagonal drum of the dome still maintains its original shape, as does the southern facade of the church, which bears the row of carved horseshoe-shaped arches, covered with red paint. The painted inscription on the same wall provides the names of historical figures: Adanarse, the deceased ruler of Kartli, and Latavra, the sister of the King Ashot Kuropalate. These date the monastery to the 9th century.

The ambulatory from the south, west and north of the church were apparently built in the 10th century. Reconstruction work carried out in the 13th century noticeably changed the initial proportions and general look of the building. The original small-scale church became larger in accordance with the new style. By moving the eastern wall forward and piercing the other walls, the central space of the church and ambulatory became integrated into a single whole. Moreover, the drum of the dome was raised higher above the roof line and was given an ornamental cornice, whereas the decorative system characteristic of this period - the vertical chain of double rhombs, the ornamentally framed window and the large cross above it - was applied to the eastern facade. The fragments of wall painting that have survived belong to the same period of the 13th century.

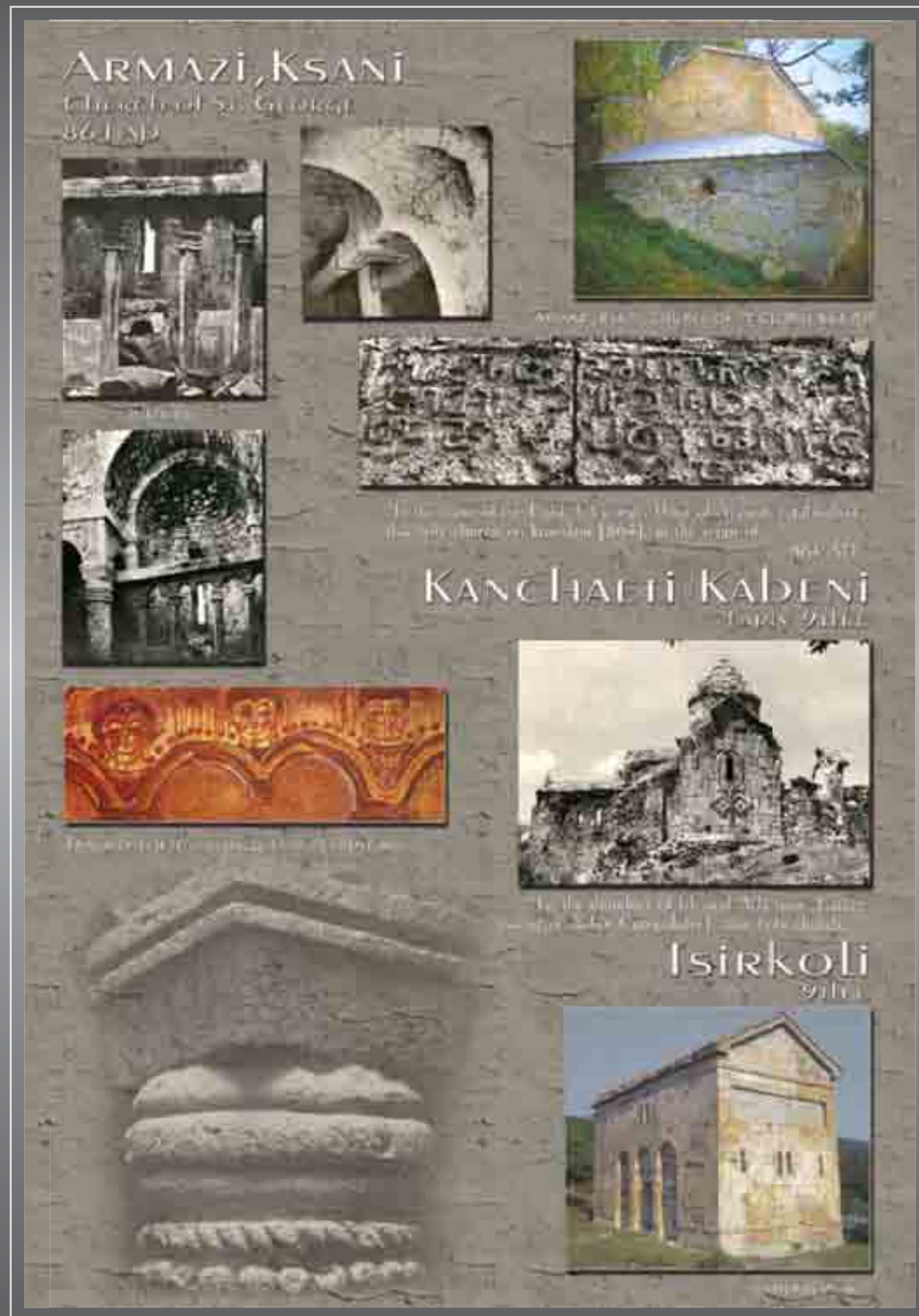
TSIRKOLI

The Church, 9th century

The church is located in the Akhlgori region, on the right bank of the Ksani River, to the northwest of the village of Tsirkoli. Some 220 yards (200 m) beyond it a fortress was built.

Tsirkoli church is one of the most important landmarks of Georgian ecclesiastic architecture. Built in the 9th century the church combines the features of domless and a domed church and reflects creative and innovative architectural tendencies. Though it has the appearance of a common single-naived building covered with a double-pitched roof, the church has an inner dome in the interior. The latter is without drum and rests upon the squinches. The western part of the interior is two-storied. Both floor open with the pair of arched openings toward the central space. Three evenly spaced arches follow the church's longitudinal walls.

The circular columns, the strong pilasters, the arch system and the dome combine to create the uniqueness of Tsirkoli church, while demonstrating the traits of the so called "Transitional Period" of Georgian Medieval architecture.



BIETI



EREDVI
Church of St. George
1006 AD



TSKHRAKARA, DODOTI



BIETI

The Church, 9th century

Bieti church is located near village of Mejriskhevi, in the gorge of one of the tributaries of the Mujuda River. Part of the church is hewn out of the rock; part is built on a long, narrow strip of rock.

The structure of the church reveals several periods of building, but the main section belongs to the 9th century. A long, narrow and now altered and damaged annex on the south is of nearly the same period, whereas the wide hall at the southern part dates to late Middle Ages. The remains of monks' cells and a refectory on nearby land confirm the existence of the monastery. The church's eastern facade bore a long inscription that was cut out and brought to Tbilisi for safekeeping in the National Museum of Georgia. An inscription, executed in *asomtavruli* script, was engraved on two stone blocks. Despite several areas of damage the inscription is readable. It provides important information on the history of the Ksani River Gorge district; it also states that Bieti church was owned (or donated) by Ioane, the son of Bakur Kanchaeli, who also possessed a residence in Kanchaeti and ruled over the territories of the Mujuda River gorge as well.

A second inscription was engraved on a smaller stone (also brought to the museum), on the sides of the carved cross. This inscription bears the names of Vache and Beshken, who presumably were also members of Kanchaeli family.

EREDVI

The Church of St. George, AD 906

Eredvi village is about 4.5 miles (7 km) from Tskhinvali, on the right bank of the Patara Liakhvi River. The church of St. George stands in the middle of the village and is surrounded by a defensive wall.

The church is one of the most unique examples of Georgian ecclesiastic architecture, and represents the triple-church basilica, a type peculiar to Georgia. Rather than have an ambulatory which runs around three sides, as it is common for the majority of churches of this type, St. George's church has an ambulatory from four sides, including the eastern facade.

The facades of the church are moderately decorated; the separate elements of the decoration emphasize the important parts of the architectural structure. The window and doors are embellished with carved stone ornamental headpieces and crosses. One of the circular columns of the only doorway on the south facade bears an important inscription which provides information on the building of the church. The latter dates to 906 AD and mentions the name of Ivane Tbeli, ruler of Kartli. The inscription, which is executed in *asomtavruli* script, states:

"In the name of Lord, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, with the help of Our Lady and St. George during the reign of Konstantine, King of Shida Kartli, who went to Hereti, evicted the Heretian king and returned peacefully, who attended the service at Alaverdi and evening prayers at Bredza, and who returned again and destroyed Vejini fortress and during the rule of Ivane Tbeli in Kartli, the Archbishop Stephan Nikozeli desired to build this church and I, Theodore Taplaisdze, thanks to the Archbishop's prayers and with the contribution of neighbors, laid the foundation of the church in the year. . . (AD 906) Chronicon."

Though the church was rebuilt several times, the general shape of the building was maintained.

DODOTI

The "Dodotis Tskhrakara" Church, 10th to 11th centuries

The "Dodotis Tskhrakara" church stands in the gorge of the Prone River, in the village Dodoti, 5 miles (8 km) from Tskhinvali. The ruins of the church lie on a hill-side above the village.

The original single-naived church was built by a member of the Tbeli family, who were lords of these territories in the 10th century. However, at the beginning of the 11th century, ambulatory were added on the northern, western and eastern sides. Today the structure exhibits severe damage: the main body of the church has collapsed, though the ambulatory survives in better condition.

The church at Dodoti is remarkable for its richly carved and ornamented stonework and for its inscriptions. Three of these were carved above the architraves and tympanums, while a long inscription providing the name of Ioane Tbeli, the church's founder, was carved in the stone at the church's southern entrance. Another inscription on the tympanum of the entrance to the ambulatory mentions the son of Kavtar Tbeli, who seems to be the donor of the ambulatory.

KVAISA

The Church of “Kvaisa-Jvari”, 2nd half of the 10th century

Kvaisa-Jvari church is situated in the mountainous part of Shida Kartli, near the village of Eredvi, on the right bank of the Jejora River, in the forest of Kvaisa village. Only the ruins of the single-naived church survive; they indicate that the church was built of coarsely trimmed stone.

The fragments littering the area around the church indicate that its façades were adorned with stone blocks carved with ornaments and figures. Among these reliefs the most remarkable are those depicting scenes of “The Flight into Egypt,” with the figures of the angel leading the Virgin with the Christ Child and Joseph into Egypt. The latter is accompanied by an incised plea for the salvation of the souls of Arsen (the donor) and his parents.

Another significant carved stone portrays the biblical scene of the Salvation of the Prophet Jonah on the left side, while the right side depicts the donor, with a model of the church in his hands. The latter can serve as a model for the reconstruction of the original Kvaisa church: the single-naived building with open arched annexes. The accuracy of such a reconstruction finds strong support in the fact that this church type was especially widespread in the neighboring areas of Kvaisa during 8th to 10th centuries.

A third important carved image shows two warriors on the sides of the Cross, which is placed in the center of the scene. They are wearing secular garments and swords hang from their belts. Two letters are carved next to one of these figures: AR, apparently short for Arsen or for the name of the depicted person mentioned in the inscription next to the scene of the Flight into Egypt.

The carved stone blocks from Kvaisa-Jvari church are among the most important specimens of Georgian medieval sculpture. Unfortunately, these blocks have become lost; the only documentation that exists of the images and inscriptions are old black-and-white photographs.

KASAGINA

The Church, 9th century

Kasagina church is located near the village of Gromula and the confluence of the Jejora River and a tributary; its site is between mountains covered with dense forests of tall trees.

The ruins of the church are filled with soil and covered with vegetation. The abandoned school next to the church was built with stones pillaged from the latter. The school’s façades are decorated with carved ornamental stones and images. There are two columns 6.5 ft (2 m) in height with decorative capitals and bases near the school. The stone of the building’s staircase has a readable inscription executed in *asomtavruli* script: “. . . God forgive the builder of this holy church. . . .” The stone was lost some time after the inscription was recorded.

Despite the serious damage the church has suffered, a reconstruction of the church’s size (52.5 by 39.3 ft/16 by 12 m) and the original design is still possible; traces of semi-circular apse can be seen on the eastern part. The remains of Kasagina church indicate it was a richly ornamented ashlar building, revealing the refined artistic skill and taste of a master architect and masons.

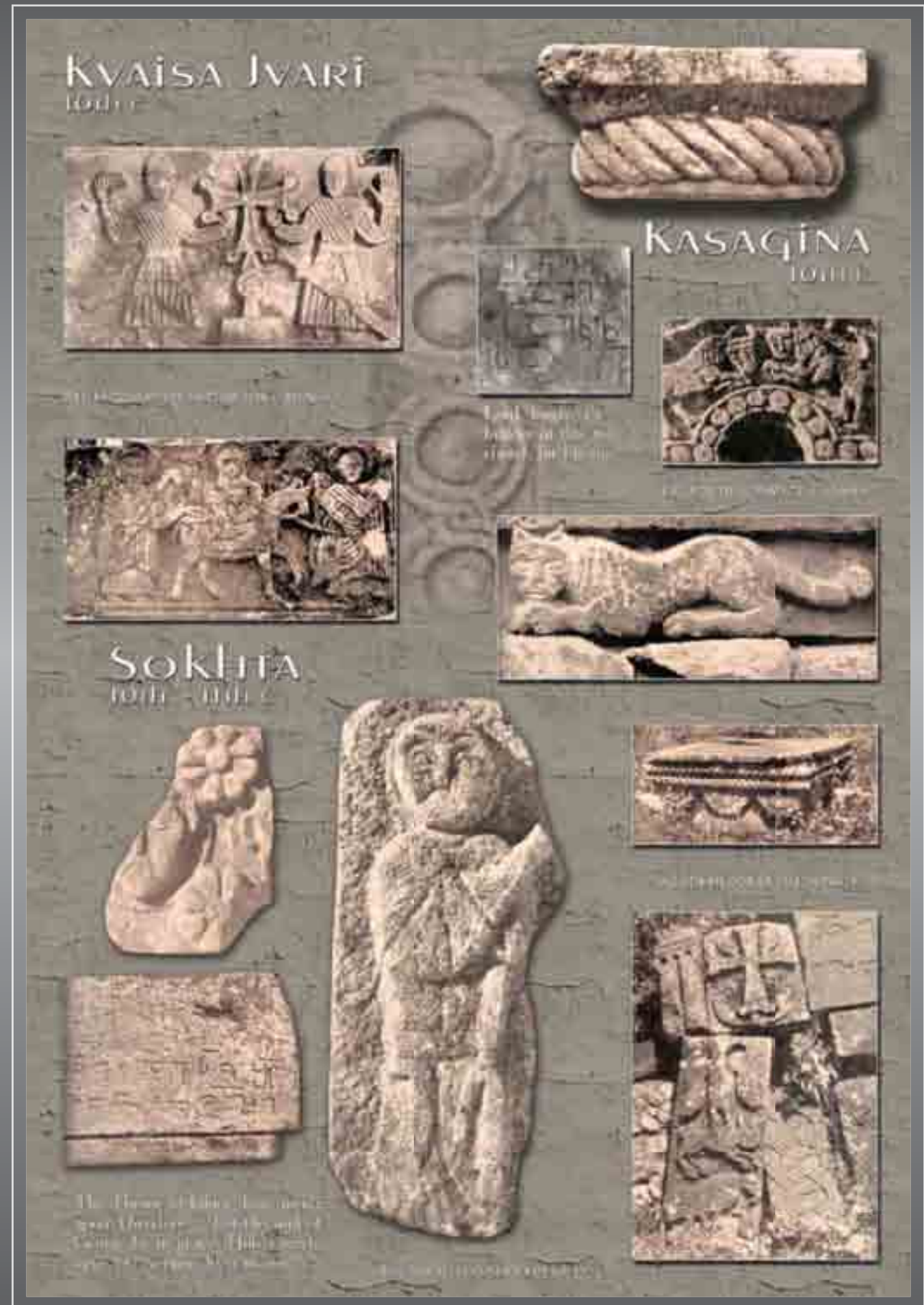
SOKHTA

The Church, 10th century

The 10th century church at Sokhta was built on the top of the hill at the confluence of the Didi Liakhvi and Patsa rivers. Only the ruins of the single-naived church survive. Built of travertine and cut stone the church was richly decorated with carvings. Some of these, such as the stone above the window depicting St. George in the medallion and the cross and other images, date to the 10th century, whereas others, such as a capital, a cross -“croix florida” and a fragment with interwoven decorative circles, must date to the 11th century. It appears that the 10th-century pieces come from the original church while the 11th-century ones probably belong to the annexes built slightly later.

One inscription on a stone conveys the plea of the “masters”: “Church of Glory, forgive Theodore . . . give rest to the soul of George. Holy Church, forgive Ivane the master.”

The carvings from Sokhta church, which belonged to the former collection of the G. Chubinashvili Institute of Georgian Art, are kept at the Georgian National Museum at present.



IKORTA

The Church of the Archangels, Tskhinvali Region, 12th century

The 12th-century Church of the Archangels at Ikorta is an important landmark of Georgian ecclesiastical architecture. The church served as a significant cultural center throughout the centuries. The inscriptions carved on its façades provide the church's date and building history: it was constructed in 1172; the donors were Eristavt-Eristav Vardan, Arsen and Chiaberi. The wall painting dates to the same period.

During the late Middle Ages Ikorta served as a burial place for the Eristavs of Ksani. Also buried here are the saints Shalva and Elizbar Eristavs and Bidzina Cholokashvili, the heroes of the Kakhetian rebellion of 1659 against Persia.

On one hand the structure of the Church of the Archangels reflects the traits of the changing style of 12th century, with its tendency toward the compact planning and integration of the space under the dome with that of the chancel. On the other hand, it continues the traditions of previous periods. The latter is clearly revealed in several features i.e. the elongated design of the western arm, common for the churches of the "Transitional Period." Thus, Ikorta's architecture combines the traits of 10th- and 11th-century architecture with the features of the spreading 12th- and 13th-century style. This mixture of old and new can also be clearly seen in the system of decoration. Some of these elements find their application in the decorative systems of the monuments of later periods; however some remain unique to the Church of the Archangels.

The church was rehabilitated several times in the 2nd half of the 14th century and also in the 19th century and again in 1961-62. The 1991 earthquake caused severe damage to the church; three-fourths of the dome collapsed and the major part of the wall painting and carved stone headpieces deteriorated. The church was completely restored by the architect M. Bochoidze between 1991 and 2003.

TIRI

The Monastery, 13th to 14th century

Tiri Monastery lies in the Didi Liakhvi River gorge, to the west of the village Kvemo Monastery, some 4.5 to 8 miles (7 to 8 km) from Tskhinvali. The monastery complex includes a 13th-century single-naved church, a 14th-century belfry, a refectory and monks' cells hewn out of the rock next to the northern façade of the church. The church's annexes were built later.

The apse of the church has a chancel-barrier, adorned with geometric ornaments. The conch of the apse has fragments of a 14th-century fresco depicting the Virgin. The belfry is two-storied; the walls of the first floor are without windows, whereas the second is open on all sides.

Tiri Monastery retains its original layout and its rich array of carved ornamentation, inscriptions and wall paintings make it one of the most important monasteries of the Didi Liakhvi River gorge. It is the burial place of the son of King Vakhtang VI.

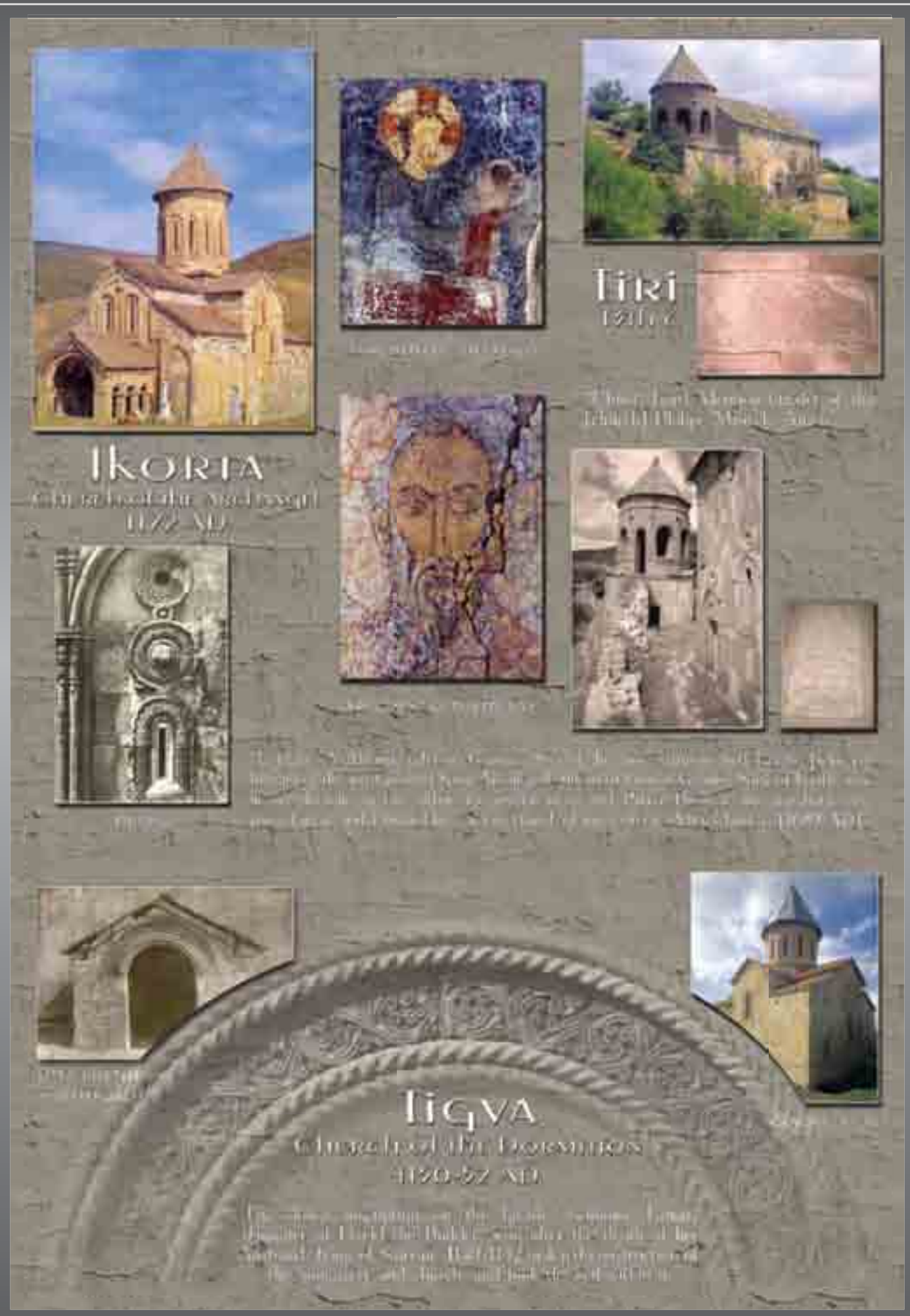
TIGVA

The Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, 1152

The village of Tigva is located in the Prone River gorge, about 1.8 miles (3 km) from the regional center of Kornisi (Znauri). The village is first mentioned in "Matiane Kartlisai" (the Chronicle of Kartli) in 10th century in connection with the King Bagrat III. The church dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin is the main building of the monastery. According to literary sources and the inscription above the church's northern entrance, it was built in 1152 by Tamar, "Queen of Shirvan," daughter of King David IV the Builder; who after the death of her husband took the veil in the same monastery.

Tigva church is remarkable for its modest but harmonious interaction of architectural forms. It belongs to the cross-domed type of church, in which the dome rests upon the corners of the walls of the apse on the east side, and upon two-free standing pillars on the west side. The church and the fragmentary remains of the adjoining monastery are enclosed within the defensive wall.

While remaining within the framework of traditional Georgian ecclesiastical architecture, Tigva church, with such peculiar features as its modest façade decoration, gallery on three sides at the west end, the west narthex with its vaulted ceiling and the open arches along the entire western façade, occupies a distinguished place among medieval Georgian monuments.



KHEITI

Sabatsminda Monastery Complex, 13th to 14th centuries

Sabatsminda Monastery is located about 1.5 miles (2.5 km) north of Tskhinvali, on the left bank of the Didi Liakhvi River. The monastery complex included the church, the residential tower, and the surrounding wall.

The 10th-century church of Sabatsminda is now in ruins; however, reconstruction in its original form is still possible. The church, built of reddish tuff, was richly decorated with carved stone ornamentation. The capitals of the columns also featured carved decoration. The church had a long, high-walled central hall, flanked with northern and southern transepts, all vaulted. The western part of the building is surrounded with the ambulatory. The western facade of the central church bears the inscription, executed in *asomtavruli* script: "Have a mercy upon Giorgi Machabeli"

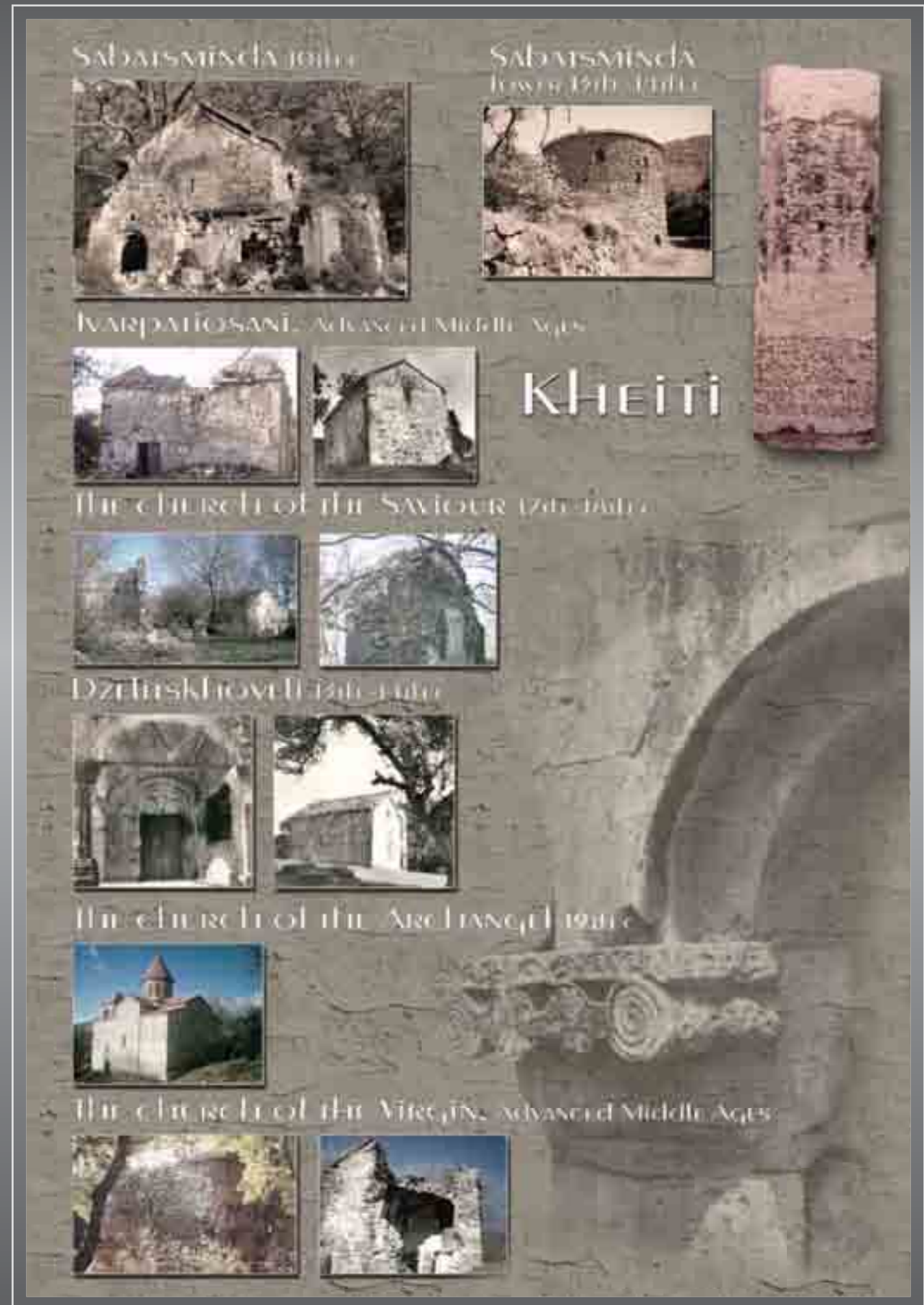
The distinguished and unusual planning and the abundance of carved ornaments place Sabatsminda church among the important Georgian architectural monuments of the 10th century.

The Tower, 17th to 18th centuries

The Kheiti tower was built in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The circular building of modest height is located to the right of the entrance to Sabatsminda church. Presumably the building of the tower, which is located in the region of "Savakhtango," named after King Vakhtang VI, is somehow connected with the period when king the spent several years in the nearby village of Tiri. Hence it might have at times served as the residence of the king or members of his entourage.

Dzelitskhoveli Church, 13th and 14th centuries

The 13th- to 14th-century Dzelitskhoveli church is located in the upper part of the village of Kheiti, on a mountain slope covered by an oak forest. The large single-naved church survives in an extremely damaged condition. The fragmentary inscription remaining in the interior states that Zakaria Kurdgelashvili had the church rebuilt, with support from other people, and that he also commissioned the paintings. The original church was built of reddish ashlar; reconstruction was carried out using small- and medium-sized cut stone.



Kulbiri

18th c.



BELOTI FORTRESS

18th c.



Tskhinvali

Church of the Virgin
1718 AD



KULBITI

The Church, 18th century

The domed church of Kulbiri stands on the road linking Arbo and Dzisevi villages. The church's facade is faced with reddish ashlar, decorated with carved images, ornaments, crosses, arches, etc.

The structure of Kulbiri church follows traditional Georgian design - the arches on the dome, carved stonework, etc., although there are some new motifs, for example, the chain of small arches, the ornaments on the cornices and other features that reflect 18th-century design.

BELOTI

The Fortress, 18th century

Beloti Fortress is located in the Patara Liakhvi River gorge. The earliest structure of the complex, a church built of stone and travertine dates to the 18th century. The fortress includes four towers built in the 17th century. Three of them were circular in plan, whereas the fourth, used as a dwelling, was five-angled. It might represent part of an earlier structure.

Beloti Fortress is one of the most important such structures of 18th-century Georgia. It belonged to the Eristavs of Ksani, though at the end of the century it was transmitted to Prince Iulon. In the 19th century, after the annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire, the fortress was abandoned, and thus deteriorated.



TSKHINVALI

The Church of the Virgin, 1718 AD

The domed church of the Virgin erected in the center of Tskhinvali town dates back to 18th century. The walls of the church are built with a decorative cladding of brick and stone. Inclusion of the separate decorative elements such as recessed crosses in the cladding and the arches of the dome reflect the typical tendencies of the late Middle Ages.

The stone on the church's southern facade, next to the entrance, bears an inscription executed in *mxdreuli* script: "We the sons of Giorgi - Kaikhosro and my brother Parsadan and my son Givi - built this church for forgiveness of our sins and for the long life of our son. Everyone who will read this and (see it) please pray for the forgiveness of my father Giorgi and my mother Marekh. God forgive you as well. In the reign of Vakhtang. Chronikon 406." Thus, the inscription gives the precise date of the building - 1718.

The church's interior was plastered in apparent preparation for being painted with murals, but appears to have remained without paintings. The embellishment of the belfry (built later at the western corner of the church) incorporates features characteristic of the late Middle Ages. In addition, the widened window with the carved stone framing on the southern facade reflects the decorative tendencies characteristic of the 19th century, and presumably belongs to that period.

AKHALGORI

The remains of the Fortress Complex, 17th to 19th centuries

The remains of the fortress complex, which served as a residence of the local nobles, the eristavs of Ksani, are located in Akhlagori (the present regional center of Leningori). From the 1840s to the 19th century, the fortress was a residence of the eristavs of Ksani and thus one of the strategically important centers of Shida Kartli. Built in the Ksani River gorge, the fortress is now in ruins. The complex included three fortresses surrounded with one defensive wall that encompassed an area of about 12.5 acres (5 hectares). The only fortress that has survived intact stands at the start of the hilly ground. The surrounding rectangular wall of the latter includes two towers and encompasses an area of nearly 0.3 acres (1300 sq. m). The latter, which served as a main palace of the complex was widened and added the second floor in 19th century. The complex layout of the second floor plan reflects the traits of an earlier period, whereas the design of facades with the massive columns and the balcony above bears the traces of a novelty.

The other two fortresses are in ruins; all that remains are the small sections of walls and the basements. One of these deteriorated fortresses was built on the plain and was rectangular in plan, with corner towers. The only remaining wall indicates that the building was two-storied. Some remnants of the bath and other adjoining secondary structures survive. The third fortress complex was built near the river; only some small sections of the rectangular tower and defensive wall remain.

LARGVISI

Fortress Complex, 13th to 18th centuries

The Largvisi complex is located at the confluence of the Ksani and Churta rivers, deep in mountainous country. The fortress, which survives from the complex, includes the living tower. The ruins of the palace stand nearby. The general plan, as well as specific details such as the building material, the features of the stone cladding and the shape and arrangement of the buttresses, date the fortress to the 13th to 14th century.

The complex's domed church is built of brick; the corners, cornices, entrances and the dome are made of ashlar. The remaining sections of the facades and walls in the interior indicate that the church was plastered both inside and outside and was ornamented with carvings.

The 14th-century literary source *Eristavta Dzegli*, written and illuminated at Largvisi by Avgaroz Badasaidze, presents the history of Largvisi monastery. According to this source, the 14th-century Eristav Kuenipneveli had the monastery built. After that, it was rebuilt several times. The last known reconstruction occurred in the 15th century. In the 18th century, Eristav Shanshe erected the fortress at Largvisi, while in 1759 Eristav David and his mother Ketevan built the domed church on the site of an earlier one.

The tower is another important element of the Largvisi fortress. Its initial design has clearly been modified and an embrasure added, a feature that did not appear in Georgia until the 15th century.

The fortress' location at the meeting point of three routes raises the assumption that there was a structure on the site before the monastery was built by Eristav Kuenipneveli. In 13th to 14th centuries the local rulers built the monastery, which served as a stronghold during invasions. Eristav Shanshe and subsequent rulers of the Ksani River gorge region made Largvisi monastery their burial place. After the late 18th century, when King Erekle II subjugated the eristavs of Ksani, Largvisi lost its strategic importance.

DZAGINA

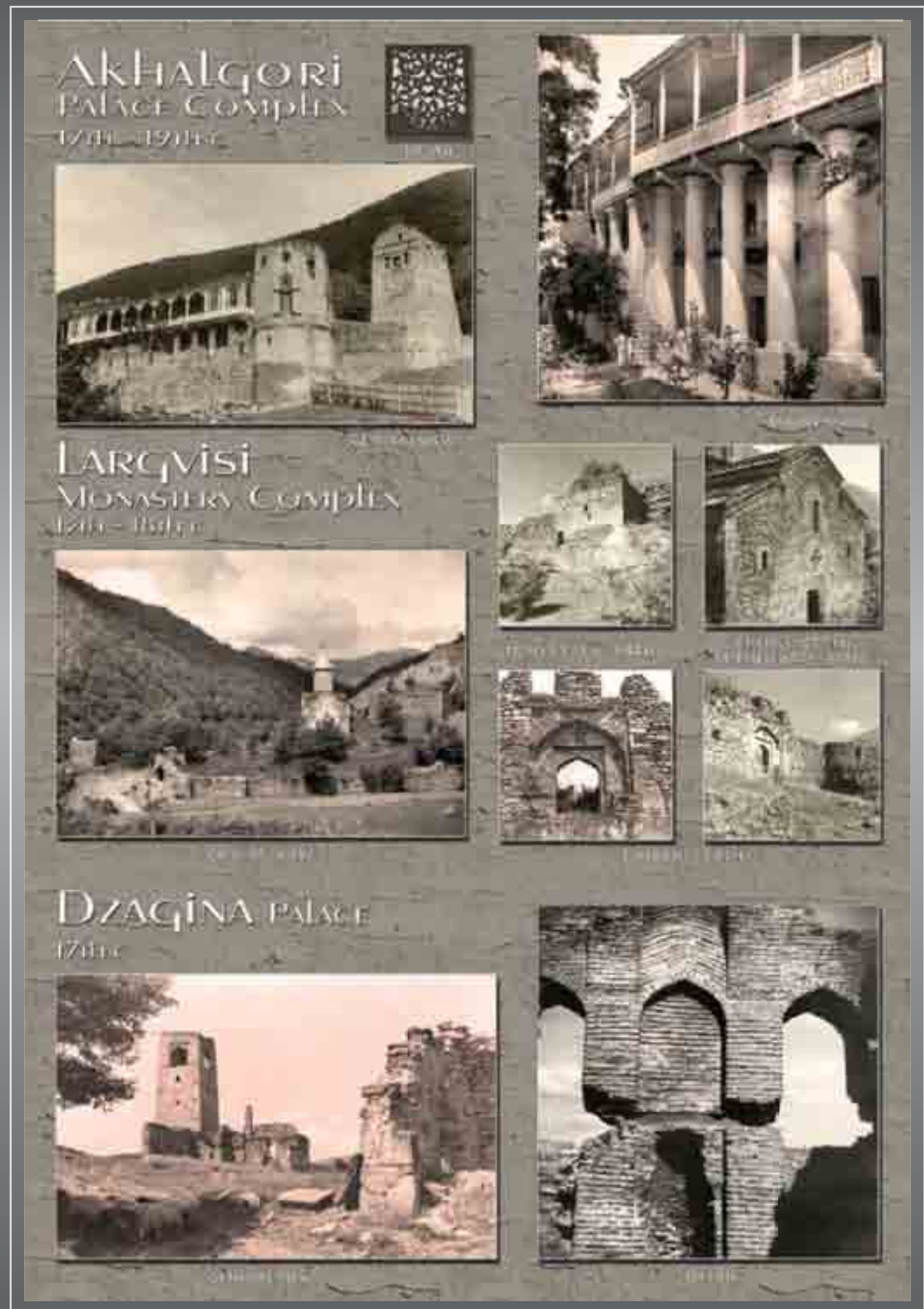
The Palace, 18th century

Near the regional center of Znauri, at the confluence of the Prone and Ojora rivers, close to the village of Dzagina, two towers were built on a hill. One, surrounded by a defensive wall, was used as a watchtower; the other was used as a dwelling but acquired a defensive function at times of invasion.

In the 17th century the local noble family of the Palavandishvilis built their residence some 650 ft (200 m) from the towers. Their palace included a church, towers, gardens, vineyards and other secondary structures. The only buildings that survived to the present are the church and the palace; this latter was built of rubble and brick and included a residential section and also defensive towers. The Dzagina fortified complex also includes a wall that encloses the towers and other structures.

The walls of the church at Dzagina, which is a single-nave building, are built of hewn stone, while the corners are constructed with light gray ashlar.

Dzagina Palace, with its wide windows, deep balcony, vaulted ceilings, arch-shaped entrances and niches, and its church and tower, combines dwelling and defensive functions; it represents the widespread type of Georgian palace of late Middle Ages.





ORGANIZERS:

Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia

Georgian Arts and Culture Center

Mika Dvalishvili - Project Director, Georgian Arts and Culture Center President

Tea Gotsiridze - Curator, Georgian Arts and Culture Center

Anna Shanashvili - Text Coordinator, Georgian Arts and Culture Center

Consultant:

Dr. Dimitri Tumanishvili - Professor of Art History, G. Chubinashvili National Center of Georgian Art History and Monuments Protection

Texts by:

Dr. David Mukhelishvili - Professor of History, Georgian National Academy of Sciences

Dr. Dimitri Tumanishvili - Professor of Art History, G. Chubinashvili National Center of Georgian Art History and Monuments Protection

Dr. Iulon Gagoashidze - Professor of Archaeology, Georgian National Museum

Dr. Vakhtang Licheli - Professor of Archaeology, I. Javakhsiani Tbilisi State University

Editor:

Peter Skinner

Design and Typesetting:

Gega Pakushvili

THE ORGANIZERS WISH TO OFFER SPECIAL THANKS TO:

G. Chubinashvili National Center of Georgian Art History and Monuments Protection

Archbishop Esais - Nibizi-Tskhumi Eparchy

Badi Gasparov - Director of Didi Lashvili Gorge Museum-Reserve

Dolona Kizaria - Professor at Indiana University

Dr. Joni Apakidze - Professor of Archaeology, Rector of Sakrebulo State University

Inga Karala - President of ICOM Georgia National Committee

Ketevan Kandelaki - Chair, UNOSAT, UNESCO Georgia

Mariam Kiladze - Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia

Maia Elvashvili - Student

Merab Bochoidze - Head of ICOMOS Georgia, Architect-Restorer

Nana Tsintsadze - Owner of Rasulon Mephiashvili and Vakhtang Tsintsadze Family Archives

Pasta Basishvili - Art Historian, Didi Lashvili Gorge Museum-Reserve

Qristine Datchia - Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia

Shalva Lejava - Head of Photo Recording Laboratory of Art and Historic Monuments

Tengiz Gabunia - Architect-Restorer, Center for the Restoration of Georgian Historical Monuments of the Georgian Patriarchy

Yelena Rukhadze - Student at Columbia University

Narrative and Photographic Sources

Georgian State Archive

Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia

Georgian Cultural Heritage, APKHAZETI, Tbilisi 2007

Photo Recording Laboratory of Art and Historic Monuments at G. Chubinashvili National Center of Georgian Art History and Monuments Protection

"Saguniani"

National Treasury of Georgia, Philip Wilson Publishers, London 1999

V. Tsintsadze - R Mephiashvili Family Archive

B. Kafun, Materials of Colchis Archaeology, Tbilisi 1949 (in Russian)

Iulon Gagoashidze, Findings from the Early Antique Period from Kama River Gorge, Tbilisi 1964 (in Georgian)

Rusulan Mephiashvili and Vakhtang Tsintsadze, Architecture of the Historical Provinces of Georgia - Mountain Slopes of Shida Kartli, Tbilisi 1975 (in Georgian)

*Front Cover: Church of St. George 906 AD, Ezevsi, Shida Kartli, Georgia (Photo by Vakhtang Tsintsadze)
Back: Icon of St. George 16th century, Ikon, Abkhazeti, Georgia*





Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia



Georgian Arts and Culture Center

7, N.Nikoladze str., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Tel.: (995 32) 931335; Fax: (995 32) 921335

gacc@gaccgeorgia.org www.gaccgeorgia.org