The Cultural Heritage of GEORGIA

Abkhazeti
Shida Kartli

Georgian Arts and Culture Center
Tbilisi 2008
THE RESTORED MONUMENTS
Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia
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
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 Achuan 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 Achuan and subsequent periods. Sites have been found both on the coastal and mountainous areas of Abkhazeti (sites such as Ishikhva, Btitskh, Kvachara, Apsina, Kistri, Machara 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 Pchori, Ochamchire, Tskhveli, Merkheuli, Taftali, Shukura, Kulaankhva, Eshera, and Sokhumis. Especially significant is the 300-year period (6th to 4th centuries BC) during which Colchis—its northernmost point in Abkhazeti to its southernmost near Goni-Apsara (south of modern Batumi)—existed not only as a 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 Bchvinta 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 coasta 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 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 Abkhazians, etc., one of the Georgian manuscripts, even to the present day, abkhazians for the central part of the 2nd millennium BC and the whole of the 1st millennium BC, are found not only in the western parts of the country, including Abkhazeti.

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