

LIA AKHALADZE

Doctor of history, Professor of Sokhumi State University (Georgia)

GEORGIAN MONUMENTS OF MATERIAL CULTURE-ABKHAZIA
(A BRIEF OVERVIEW)

DOI: 10.52340/isj.2022.25.14

Geographic scope of the toponym “Abkhazia” has been changing for centuries. Foreign sources mentioned first Western Georgia under this name and later they referred to the whole country. The territory of modern Abkhazia used to cover the Abkhaz duchy (saeristavo), the Tskhumi duchy and a part of the Odishi duchy in the United Kingdom of Georgia. As a result of disintegration of Georgia in the 15th century current territory of Abkhazia first belonged to the kingdom of Imereti, then the Odishi Principality and later from the 17th c. it became a part of the Abkhazian Principality. Thus, the medieval Georgian cultural centers existing on the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia originally belonged first to the Odishi duchy (saeristavo) and later it became a part of the Odishi Principality. These cultural and educational centers have left indelible mark in the history of spiritual development of the Georgian population.

At the current stage of the study of the Georgian cultural heritage, numerous and diverse material culture of Abkhazian region could be generally divided into four basic groups: I. Architectural Monuments; II. Monuments of Ancient Writing; III. Religious Items; IV. Material obtained from Archaeological Excavations;

The given classification is conditional although at present it actually reflects some general image of material culture monuments of Abkhazia.[1]

I. Architectural Monuments represent the most numerous group of the Abkhazian material culture and their number is approximately over one hundred. In spite of the fact that most of these monuments appear to be damaged today they have their own history of development. The architectural buildings in turn compose two most numerous subgroups of material culture of Abkhazia: a) Monuments of church architecture; b) monuments of secular purpose. Monastic complexes, cathedrals, small churches and temples belong to the first group; the second group unites fortresses, bridges, watchtowers, palaces of

civil and large clerical feudal nobles, etc.

It is well-known that ancient architecture is a good reflection of the creative potential of national culture. Naturally, it is not limited only within own borders but it also subsists on the topics from outside world. Borrowing foreign culture experience without taking into consideration pagan traditions can turn into mere superficial imitation. The secured medieval monuments on the territory of Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia with refined pagan forms and diverse decorative components are distinguished among architectural monuments of Georgia. The oldest pagan religious monuments of the region are churches and monastic complexes of Bichvinta, Bedia, Mokvi, Ilori, Likhni, Dranda, Gagra, Bzipi, Tselikari, Gudava, Lashkendari etc.[2]. One can assume that Abkhazia, like other regions of Georgia, abounds with Christian church buildings of different purpose.

From the monuments of secular purpose both ancient remnants of fortification constructions used for defense, like fortresses, citadels, watchtowers, bridges, etc. and palaces and constructions of large feudal nobles have survived. Although, nowadays, most of these monuments are found in the form of ruins, they have preserved their historical value and still attract and impress viewers.

For many centuries the most significant function of defense at the northwest border of Georgia were performed by Anakopia Fortress, Bagrati fortress at Sokhumi, Sokhumi Acropolis, Kelasuri Barrier, fortresses of Bzipi, Gagra, Anukhvi, Kodori, Lidzavi, Chkhalta, Amtkeli, Khashupse, Mtshishta, Bichvinta, Azanta, Kodori, Durifshi, Likhni and Satamashia, etc. Their number exceeds 110 in the current territory of Abkhazia.

Among secular and clerical palaces of large feudal nobles the ruins of palaces in Likhni, Merkheuli, Bedia, Anukhvi and Tsebelda should be distinguished. They belonged to feudal families of the Sharvashidze, Marshania, Zhvanisdze and Basilidze.

One of the outstanding ancient bridges of Georgia is the Tamari Bridge near Sokhumi upon the Besleti river. This type of bridges is characteristic for Georgia in the 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th centuries, and they have remained in Kartli, Adjara, Samtskhe-Javakheti regions and the historical Tao-Klarjeti. The bridge is unique for the old Asomtavruli inscription on its arch that mentions the first king of the United Georgia, king Bagrat III Bagrationi (978-1014). Despite this inscription, local people call this bridge by the name of the Georgian queen- King Tamar (1184-1213).

II. Monuments of Ancient Writing make up one of the most numerous group in cultural heritage of Abkhazia, that for its part is subdivided into two groups: 1. Epigraphic Monuments, 2. Manuscripts (written on soft material); 3. Numismatic material with preserved inscriptions.[3].

1. Epigraphic monuments are presented by lapidary scripts (deep carvings on the stones), embossing (inscriptions on icons, crosses, and various ecclesiastical items) and fresco paintings. We come across epigraphic monuments, inscriptions in Georgian, Greek, Latin and Ottoman (in the Arabic alphabet). Among them are over 100 Georgian inscriptions [4]. There are more than thirty Greek inscriptions [5]. According to Kh. Bghazhba, there are six Ottoman inscriptions [6] and three Latin inscriptions. The chronology of Georgian inscriptions of historical significance belongs to the 8th and 9th centuries. Greek inscriptions are mainly from the 9th c., although we come across Greek graffiti of the 11th c. as well. Especially Anakopia Fortress is rich with Greek inscriptions.

Ottoman Turkish inscriptions mainly belong to the 16-18th centuries and according to latest research their number is seven; we also have tomb epitaphs of several Abkhazian noblemen of the 19th c. According to the Abkhazian linguist Kh. Bghazhba the Ottoman Turkish writing on the territory of Abkhazia could not gain in popularity and these inscriptions can be only fragmentary found in certain tomb epitaphs of some graves. The Ottoman Turkish inscriptions are mainly found in Sokhumi and its vicinity, although we have inscriptions in the villages of Tchala (Tchlou) and Jirkhva as well. The oldest Ottoman Turkish inscription in Abkhazia is found in the epitaph of some Mehmed that is dated from 1598. Next inscription chronologically dated to 1785 is an epitaph of Mehmed Emin and the building inscription of Sokhumi fortress found recently in scientific studies, telling the story

of Sokhumi fortress restoration of the 18th century. Although as a result of the Russian-Turkish War the Ottomans took away the inscription and saved it in Sultan's palace in Istanbul, the similar tile inscription was again found by Abkhaz archaeologists at Sokhumi fortress.

It should be noted that together with the 18th century inscriptions we also have two 19th c. Ottoman inscriptions of Abkhazian noblemen. They are tomb epitaphs of Bartal Bei Marshania (Fig.24) and Hassan Bei Shervashidze (Fig.25) (Kh. Bghazhba. From the History of Writings of Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 1967). Thus, we can observe that most Ottoman monuments of epigraphy are presented by tomb epitaphs, though we have a couple of inscriptions of building type that refer to Sokhumi fortress restoration processes.

Some three Latin inscriptions are found on the territory of Abkhazia that are dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The chronology of Georgian inscriptions of historical significance belongs to the 8-19th centuries. Greek inscriptions are mainly of the 9th century although we find some 11th century monuments of epigraphy too. Ottoman inscriptions are dated back to the 16-18th and 10th centuries and Latin inscriptions are dated back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

From the three Latin inscriptions on the territory of Abkhazia, one was discovered in the 90s of the 19th c. that mentions the Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-138) and his serviceman Flavius Ariane. The inscription tells us the story of building a fortification construction in Sokhumi initiated by Flavius Ariane. It is a well-known fact that at behest of the Emperor, Flavius Ariane carried out inspection inventory of Roman garrison in the North-Eastern Black Sea region. Apart from the inventory, the Roman serviceman also restored castles and fortresses in Trapesund, Apsaros, Pazisi and Sebastopolis. The Latin inscriptions of Sokhumi fortress demonstrate this fact of Sebastopolis fort building and repair work (the similar inscription is kept in Trabzon too). The inscription belongs to the II century AD, specifically 117-138 years.

The second Latin inscription was found in Bichvinta which fragments have preserved just only three graphemes "leg". Majority of researches consider that this inscription meant "legion" or "legionary". It may be dated as early as the II century AD, in particular 117-138 years.

The third inscription was found in 2011 during the excavations of Sokhumi fortress and it mentions the Roman Emperor Valerianus. The Emperor lived in

the III c. AD, in 253-260. In 260 he was taken prisoner by Persians and died in captivity. Thus, the inscription dates back to 253-260.

In accordance with the content of all the three inscriptions we can assume that Sebastopolis or Tskhumi/Sokhumi was a strong point for the Roman Empire of the II-III centuries AD. Roman garrison was based there that conditioned the Emperor Hadrian's decision to consign his serviceman Ariane Falvius to Sebastopolis fortress for fortification operations. Even in the III-IV centuries when Sebastopolis was under Lazika kingdom Rome still retained its military garrisons there.

It should be noted that information about the monuments of Abkhazian material culture was saved by catholic missionaries, in particular, in the works of Theatine monks, Cristoforo Castelli, Archangelo Lamberti and others. Castelli's album and Lamberti's essays "Description of Samegrelo" include some significant amount of valuable information about those churches and monasteries and episcopal cathedrals which have preserved their fragments or their parts have been destroyed or turned into ruins.

2. Next group of monuments of writing culture are **Manuscripts**. They are only in Georgian and they have been copied in Georgian scripts in Abkhazia, at Bichvinta, Mokvi and Bedia cultural and educational centers. One should distinguish the 12th c. Bichvinta and the 13th c. Mokvi Otkhtavi (the four gospels) decorated with unique miniatures, the 16th c. Bichvinta Iadgari (collection of religious hymns), the 17th c. century Bedia Gulam (collection of religious books, gospels and epistles), the 16th c. Mokvi Omopori (chasuble) and 10th c. sofa of Abkhazian kings.

The most important centers of Georgian culture, Mokvi, Bedia, Bichvinta, Ilori, Likhni, Tsebelda, Tsarche, etc. had been creating such cultural values for centuries that not only Georgians but also Abkhazians should be proud of. These centers of Christian culture had store rooms for old books where original Georgian written works were created, religious books were translated from Greek into Georgian and new manuscripts were composed. The unique manuscripts of these book store rooms that have been preserved to present days are a precious depository of the Georgian manuscripts that is very important for development of Georgian written culture. Today they are kept in the Georgian National Center for Manuscripts in Tbilisi.

We should also mention the written manuscripts of the Egrisi-Abkhazian Kingdom (the Abkhazs'

kingdom) of the 8th to 10th centuries which were ordered by Abkhaz kings and their names are mentioned in building inscriptions. About 20 epigraphic monuments and one historical chronicle—"The Sofa of Abkhaz Kings" have been preserved to present days. All of them, except for one Greek inscription) are written in old Georgian script.[7].

It is remarkable that most of the inscriptions of "Abkhaz Kings" are found beyond the borders of modern Abkhazia, in other regions of historical kingdom of Egrisi-Abkhazia ('Abkhazs' kingdom'), specifically, in Samegrelo, Kartli, Imereti and Javakheti.

3. Numerous Numismatic samples are found on the territory of Abkhazia, that are basically discovered in the area of Sokhumi, in Anakopia fortress (Iveria Mountain), Likhni, etc. Most coins have Georgian and Byzantine legends. According to the inscriptions on the Georgian coins, they belong to the Georgian kings Bagrat IV (1027-1072), George II (1072-1089), David IV, the Builder (1089-1125). Moreover, silver money has also been discovered that was called "Tskhumuri Tetri" by local population and "Sebastopolis Aspra" by Genoan people. In ancient Georgia Sokhumi was called Tskhumi and in Latin sources, like the Romans called, it is mentioned as Sebastopolis. Tskhumuri Tetri was minted by Odishi Major Eristavi who was also Mandaturtukhutsesi of Georgian Royal Court, Vamek I Dadiami (1384-1396) under the King's permission in Tskhumi Mint. The number of coins that have survived till present exceeds 50, but if we take into consideration that a large part of the treasure discovered in 1927 in Sokhumi has disappeared, their number could have been larger.

The Byzantine coins were minted by the name of Justinian I, Constantin Monomachus (1042-1055), Constantine Doukas (1059-1067), Romanos IV Diogene (1067-1071) and others. Their amount reaches approximately 30 and they are found together with coins under Georgian kings: Bagrat IV, Giorgi II, David the Builder in Sokhumi, Likhni, etc. It seems that together with the Georgian money the Byzantine money was in circulation in Abkhazia as well as in other parts of Georgia.

III. Church items. The most prominent pieces are the Bedia Golden Chalice, the Ilori Silver Chalice, Tsebelda Icons of St. Catherine, John the Baptist and St. Andrew the Apostle, Liturgical Fan of Giorgi II king of Abkhazs, the Icon of Leon III king of Abkhazs and the icon donated by David VI the Narim to Ilori

cathedral, the Bichvinta Holy Virgin Icon and a processional cross of Evdemon Chkhetidze who was a Catholicon of Abkhazia, the Tryptich ordered by Mokvi archbishop Andrea Sakvarelidze and donated to Mokvi cathedral, Mokvi processional cross of Eptime Sakvarelidze- Catholicon of Abkhazia, the Icon of Bedia archbishop Kirile Zhuamidze donated to Ilori St. George Cathedral, icons of Odishl Eristavi Eristavi (head of principality) and other noblemen that were donated to Ilori St. George, and Bichvinta Holy Virgin Cathedrals donated by the nobleman Levan II Dadiani. All the above-mentioned monuments have curved inscriptions in old Georgian Asomtavruli script that tell us about church donors and authors of the monuments or represent memorial inscriptions [8].

As for the abound and diverse material discovered as a result of archaeological excavations we have separately grouped monuments of the Stone, Bronze and Iron Age and also monuments of the Middle Ages.

We offer a brief overview of the most important monuments of the material culture of Abkhazia.

I. Gagra Basilica. Town Gagra, VI c. One of the oldest examples of the early middle centuries Georgian architecture is an early Christian Basilica located in the center of the ruins of the old fortress on the territory of Gagra. The cathedral is built of roughly processed stone quadras and it represents the oldest example of three-nave basilicas that were common for the 6th to 8th centuries Georgia. According to the technical characteristics this basilica resembles architecture of basilicas erected at this period in eastern Georgia. The walls inside basilica are replaced by columns that witness the restoration procedures in the following centuries. Neither inner interior nor outer façade have preserved any inscriptions to present days. From the standpoint of art critics it is important to study the relief cross depicted at the arched column of the church. The church dates to the 6th century.

Gagra fortress is located in the district of Gagra, in the outskirts of the town of Gagra and belongs to the 5th and 6th centuries. One can see famous Gagra Basilica Cathedral that has been well preserved inside the fortress. The fortress was restored in the Middle Ages.

II. Gantiadi Basilica, Gagra municipality, VI-VII c. The remains of the cathedral are located on the sea coast in the north-west part of Gagra. The cathedral is a three-nave basilica. It is constructed with middle sized straight limestone quadras and flat bricks of

different size. Some marble fragments dated from the 6th to 7th centuries were found in the cathedral. There is a consideration that this is the very cathedral that a Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (527-565) erected for the Abazg tribe-the ancestors of Abkhazs upon their conversion to Christianity. A fragment of white marble discovered in the basilica remains with the inscription in Asomtavruli that implies "Abazgia". The tomb seems to belong to a prominent clerical or secular representative of Abkhazia and dates back to the 6th c.

III. Dranda Church of the Holy Mother of God Gulripshi municipality, village Dranda, VIII c. The church is built from brick and cobblestone and it represents a wonderful architectural piece that differs from Georgian church building by its style, though we can come across similar constructions of the same period in different historical regions of Georgia. In the 6-7th centuries Byzantine similar four-apsed and cross-domed church constructions were widely spread but Dranda church architect had, supposedly, borrowed some elements from Georgian architects too, specifically, like the Mtskheta Jvari church, here they have used semicircular niches above the altar bounded by small arches[9].

The 18th century Georgian historian Vakhushti Bagrationi writes: There is a big and marvelous domed church in Dranda. It was presided by an archbishop who controlled the country placed between Anakopia and Kodori".

During invasion of Ottomans in 1737 the church was burnt down, the dome was completely destroyed and frescos were damaged. The church service was renewed in Dranda church again in 1871. In 1900 the dome of Dranda church was uplifted and restored on the initiative of Russian Synod but, at the same time, all the precious things and marble tombstones disappeared from the church.

The image of Lord at the dome arch, fresco of Michael the Archangel above western gates and the Annunciation scene with the fragment of kneeling Holy mother that has been well preserved in the church[10].

This church represents combination of Georgian and Byzantine architecture. No inscriptions have been preserved.

IV. Msighkhva Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel, Gudauta municipality, VIII-IX c. The cathedral is located near the village Sanapiro, 3 km from the Black Sea coast at the Tskuara river on an

elevated hill called Msighkhva Mountain. According to the Abkhazian historian A.Katsia, the cathedral represents a piece of Georgian art of the 8-9th c. that had perfectly decorated facades. Samples of the oldest Georgian script of the territory of Western Georgia-the Asomtavruli script, were discovered in the cathedral (a total of 46 inscriptions). The inscription says that the cathedral from the beginning was named after St. Michael the Archangel.

V. New Athos Cathedral of Simon the Kananaïos , Gudauta municipality, IX-X c. In the vicinity of Sokhumi, on the Mount Iveria is located the New Athos Cathedral of Simon the Kananaïos that represents a piece of Georgian architecture. Its primary building dates back to the 7-8th centuries and present-day construction belongs to the 9-10th c.

According to ancient Georgian and foreign annalists, Apostles of Christ-Simon the Kananaïos who came from the land of Canaan together with Andrew the First-called, were the first preachers of Christianity on the territory of South and Western Georgia (including territory of Abkhazia).

According to Great Church Fathers in 55 AD a Jesus's disciple, Simon the Kananaïos was crucified like Jesus and was buried in New Athos at the bank of the Psirtskhi river. There is another version that says that he was buried in Nikopsia- on the north border of historical Georgia. The Georgian Chronicles ("Kartlis Tskhovreba) mentions: "Simon the Kananaïos was buried in the town of Nokops that is situated in Abkhazia".

In the 4th c. a small church was built on the tomb of the Apostle in New Athos that should have been made of wood. But later it was replaced by a white stone church that was restored for several times including the 19th century. The church frescos have not survived. From the architectural decorations we could distinguish relief images of Christian symbols of fish, lion and cross. No Georgian or Greek inscriptions are legible.

VI.Chkhortoli Hall Church, village Chkortoli, Ochamchire municipality, IX-X c. The village Chkortoli is located 26 km from Gali center, at the north-west end of Samurzakhano lowland between the rivers Okhoje and Okumistskali. Two churches have survived on this territory, one is 19-20th in the central part of the village, built by the local noblemen and "Christianity Restoration Society". Another church is a hull church in the north-west part, 5 km away from the village at depth of Jukhu at the tributary of the

Okhoje river at the left bank of the river on the slope of a steep hill.

The Chkhortoli hall church incurved in rectangular apses belongs to the group that forms an analogue with works of architecture from other regions of Georgia in composition design and other components of architecture. Hall churches of early middle centuries (from 5th to 10th centuries) can be found in all parts of Georgia, in particular, Eredvi, Kheiti, Disevi, Kusireti, Lashkendari, Ilori churches.

The Chkhortoli hall church is a transitional monument and like other monuments of that time it lacks sculptures and carvings. The travertine, proper forms of design used for inner and outer surface, the quality of construction works which is focused on fresh details of space features, all these elements indicate the time and period of the church building. It organically constitutes a part of Georgian architecture evolution, being precisely within common Georgian national church construction lines and exposing common creative pursuit and directions of Georgian architecture. Judging by the stylistic characteristics and analogues of the church it, apparently, must have been built in the period of Konstantine "the King of Abkhazs" (893-922).

VII. Bzipi Church, Bzipi gorge, Gudauta municipality. IX-X c. In the village Bzipi, on the right bank of the river Bzipi, on a lofty hill, one can see an architectural complex of the 9-10th c. surrounded by a fence with a fortress and a church inside. The fortress on its own consisted of two parts: in the upper part was the church and downside the yard passed an old caravan road.

The church of Bzipi fortress is cross-vaulted and belongs to the category of "embedded cross" with three protruded apses. It dates back to the 9-10th centuries. The walls with dressed stone facing have remained in the whole upper part and even having no dome still greatly impress viewers. The doors and windows of the church are decorated with ornaments characteristic for the Georgian church architecture. To the east of the Bzipi church one can see another remnants of even older church.

The Bzipi fortress, Bzipi gorge, Gudauta municipality, IX-X c. It is situated on the right bank of the river Bzipi. The fortress played a significant role in the defense system of the United Georgia. It barred the way to very important roads towards the North Caucasus. The fortress fence is made of well-processed limestone quadras, supplied with four –

angled and semicircular towers, straining arches and a gate.

VIII. Bichvinta Cathedral of the Holy Mother of God, Bichvinta hamlet, Gagra municipality, X-XI c. Bichvinta Cathedral of the Holy Mother of God is one of the most prominent works of Georgian architecture which is situated in the north-west part of Abkhazia, on the territory of present Bichvinta and within area of the ancient town-Great Pitiunta. The name Pitiunt-Bichvinta is related to the name of the local relict pine. This place played an important role in spreading Christianity in western Georgia.

Primary building of the church is connected with the name of Andrew the First-Called that was preaching Christ in these places in the I century AD and he is supposed to have built a church in this place. For many centuries archbishop cathedral referred to as 'St. Andrew's church' had been functioning there. Present domical church belongs to the architectural monuments of the 10-11th centuries. At the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 4th centuries Bichvinta appeared to be an important center of the clerical world that is testified by attendance of Bichvinta archbishop Stratophil at the World Religious Meeting. For many centuries Bichvinta was a base for religious center of western Georgia that after invasion of the Mtiulis (Mountain people) in the middle of the 15th c. was relocated to Gelati. In the 17th century the church was abandoned and was not functioning. In the 18th c. it was struck by lightning and was heavily damaged. In the 30s of the 19th century the Russian Emperor ordered to restore the cathedral. They changed the shape of the dome, they plastered and whitened the façade that resulted into complete transformation of the building and distortion of the primary image. In the 1960s on recommendation of the academician G.Chubinashvili restoration work was undertaken in the cathedral and the plasters were removed from the façade, the dome regained its initial appearance, the roof was replaced, the yard was cleaned and the cathedral returned to its initial condition. Today the Bichvinta Cathedral of the Holy Mother of God represents one of the most valuable cult monuments.

According to some Russian sources, at the beginning of the 19th c. when the Russian troops entered Bichvinta and cleaned their way to the cathedral, at the altar they found open a manuscript of the Medieval Bible written in Georgian.

Among other valuable written manuscripts of Bichvinta we should distinguish several Greek

inscriptions, the Bichvinta Georgian Bible of the 12th c. that is decorated with ornaments and painted miniatures, the 16th c. Georgian Iadgari (collection of religious hymns) and Bichvinta Icon of Mother of God (16th c.).

The Bichvinta Holy Virgin Icon with inscription of Evdemon Chkhetidze (1568). In 1568 "The Catholicon of the whole North and Abkhazia" Evdemon Chkhetidze got the Tryptich Icon of Bichvinta Holy Virgin carved, having the "head part" of the icon embossed in gold and the other setting was made of silver. The icon was placed in Bichvinta Cathedral of the Holy Mother of God. Later when the residence of the catholicon was moved to Gelati the Bichvinta Icon was taken there together with other items. Georgian inscription on the backside of the icon tells us the history of its origin. The inscription mentions the Catholicon of Abkhazia Evdemon Chkhetidze, Odishi noblemen Mamia and Levan Dadiani. From the Tryptich Icon only the "head part" has survived to our days and the setting does not exist anymore. The icon is kept in the Georgian National Museum.

IX. Bedia Monastic Complex, Bedia, Ochamchire municipality, X-XI centuries. Bedia is a village, situated approximately 25 km away from Ochamchire. There is a monastic complex in the center of the village that represents a splendid example of Georgian architecture. The complex comprises at present the church of the Virgin, a bishop's palace and a bell-tower. According to annals, Bedia monastery complex was built at the close of the 10th century and consecrated approximately in 999 on the behest of the First King of the United Georgia, King Bagrat III Bagrationi. According to the Georgian chronicler he had 'made an Episcopacy out of it'.

The church of the Virgin, erected in the center of the monastic courtyard, is the main church of the monastery. The complex was surrounded with a fence. On its west side, around 40 meters away in the line of the fence wall, there is a bishop's palace - a two-storied palace of metropolitans of Bedia, and a doorway included a bell tower above. The church was considerably transformed on the turn of the 13th c. to the 14th cc and in the 15th c. the bell-tower is a 12-14th cc. structure, while the Episcopal palace was built in the 16th c by Anton Zhuanidze, a Georgian Metropolitan of Bedia, which is confirmed by the Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions carved on the tympan of the palace. Three layers of mural decoration

are preserved in the church interior that date back to the 10th - 11th, 13th-14th and 16th cc.

Facades of the Bedia church, its interior murals and ecclesiastic objects preserved lapidary, fresco and carved inscriptions in Georgian Asomtavruli (uncial) script, bearing evidences on the construction, renovation and restoration of the church. 11 inscriptions can be read legibly and others have only partially survived.

The inscriptions mention names of Bedia church architect Svimon Galatozokhutsesi, catholicon Nikoloz Gonglibaisdze, Metropolitans of Bedia: Sopron Gonglibaisze, Anton Bedielei (Zhuanisdze), Germane Chkhetidze, church building donors: the first king of the United Georgian Kingdom Bagrat III Bagrationi (978-1014), Likhn-Imereti King Constantine—the son of David VI Narin, Odishi ‘Queen of the Queens’ Marech and her son, Eristavt Eristavi (principality head) and Mandaturtikhutsesi Giorgi Dadiani, Queen Rodabi and her son Kakhaber etc. At the fresco images of Saints following Georgian inscriptions (in Asomtavruli script) have been preserved: St.Constantine, St.Helena, St.Basil, St.Gregory the Theologian, St.Stephen, St.Zakaria, St.Nikoloz etc.

Over the centuries, Bedia Episcopal See was one of the most significant ecclesiastical, cultural and educational center of Georgia. David the Builder awarded the Archbishop Svimenon some honorable title of Bediel Alaverdeli as a symbol of unity of Georgia and Georgian church.

The Archbishop Anton Zhuanisdze had established a rich library in the Bedia monastery, where old manuscripts were renovated and restored, theological treatises were translated and the library collection was enriched with new manuscripts. The metropolitan Germane Chkhetidze purposefully invited experienced calligraphers from South Georgia. Famous Georgian calligraphers, Gabriel Lomsanidze, Ambrosi Kargareteli and Svimeon from Euphrates (Giorgisdze), were actively working in Bedia monastery. Part of their manuscripts have reached our days.

Bedia monastic complex is a symbol of unity and indivisibility of Georgia. Bagrat III, the first king of the united Georgian kingdom and his mother, Queen Gurandukht are buried in Bedia.

Current condition of the monastery: As a result of restoration processes undertaken by Abkhazian separatist government in Bedia church, a fresco of Bagrat III Bagrationi with Georgian inscription was

demolished. The fresco dated back to 999.

The Bedia Chalice (999). Among the religious items belonging to Bedia cathedral one should distinguish the altar chalice that is a piece of the medieval Georgian goldsmithery, a liturgical vessel made of ducat gold and richly decorated. The bowl of the Bedia vessel is 14 cm high and 14 cm in diameter. The entire outer surface is framed and divided into 12 segments by a continuous arcade. The figures depicted are the enthroned Christ Pantokrator and the Virgin Hodegetria on the opposite side. Between them are standing figures of ten apostles, five on each side, holding rotuli in their hands. The inscriptions belong to two different centuries and they tell us about the history of the chalice. At the images of saints and Christ are Georgian inscriptions identifying them. The Georgian-language one line inscription just below the rim, in finely carved Asomtavruli script, mentions King Bagrat and Queen Gurandukht who donated this chalice to Bedia Cathedra.

One more inscription is connected to the chalice. In the 19th century the chalice that had golden base—a stand, was lost. The inscription on the base told the story that the golden base was made in the 17th c. at the behest of Germane Chkhetidze, Metropolitan Bishop of Bedia. The base appeared to have been lost twice, first in the 17th c. and next in the 19th c. The surviving bowl is kept in the Georgian National Museum currently.

X. Likhni Cathedral of Dormition. Likhni, Gudauta municipality, X c. The village Likhni is situated 5 km away from the center of Gudauta at the lowlands of the Black Sea Coast. In the center of the village a distinguished monument of the 10th c. Georgian architecture- the Likhni Cathedral of Dormition, is erected. It represents a cross-vault construction with three raised apses in the east. Later on they built open chapels from west, north and south sides of the church. The inner walls of the church and the chapel appeared to be completely covered with paintings. The cathedral facade is distinguished for delicate use of colors, dynamism and expressiveness of several protruding figures. The cathedral has preserved both the 10 to 11th centuries paintings and traces of later period paintings together with Georgian inscriptions. The antiquities of Likhni cathedral were initially described by a well-known French Kartvelologist Marie Brosset, who wrote down several Georgian inscriptions from the cathedral walls, including the well-known text about

appearance of a comet dated back to 1066. The story is also mentioned in works of a chronicler from Kiev principality and in a Chinese chronicle.

It is apparent, that Likhni cathedral represents a collection of epigraphic monuments since its paintings have preserved more than 17 Georgian Asomtavruli and Mkhedruli fresco inscriptions. (Fig.16) The inscriptions reveal different events, authoritative noble and religious names, explanatory inscriptions of biblical scenes and frescos of saints. The honorable names include: king Bagrat III (1027-172), Giorgi II (1072-1089); clerical authorities-Vache Protoispatar, Ipatos, Mtsignobartukhutsesi and Chkondideli, etc.

XI. Mokvi Cathedral of the Mother of God. Mokvi, Ochamchire municipality, X c. A splendid sample of Georgian architecture, Mokvi cathedral, is situated 15 km away from Ochamchire. It is a three-nave dome-shaped church with fourteen-sided outers dome. According to the 11th c. chronicler, 'king of Abkhazs Leon III (967-967) erected Mokvi church and made it a seat of a Bishop'.

Over the centuries, Mokvi was a significant center of the Georgian culture, where manuscripts were copied and old codices were renovated. Up to now preserved are manuscripts from the Mokvi church library, bearing names of the persons active in Mokvi. Among Mokvi antiquities of special significance and artistic value is the famous Mokvi Four Gospels, commissioned by Daniel Mokveli (Bishop of Mokvi) in 1300. The illuminated manuscript is supplemented with skillfully created decorations and illustrations. Mokvi Gospel was copied and illustrated by monk Efrem.

Mokvi cathedra, the center of such a vast cultural activity, was also rich in epigraphic monuments. However, at present, only an inscription of the 12th c. on Mokvi bell-tower is preserved which mentions Mokvi archbishop Grigol Mokveli. Among the inscriptions one is well-known that was seen by Jerusalem patriarch Dositeos in 1659. The inscription refers to king David IV the Builder (1089-1125) and Byzantine Emperor Alexios II, Komnenos (1081-118).

Mokvi church was substantially renovated and painted in the reign of David IV the Builder (1089-1125); however, no traces of these murals are left at present in the church. Presumably, there were plenty of Georgian inscriptions that were evidently damaged in the centuries to come. In 1902 T.Zhordania sorrowfully notes that "Georgian inscriptions have

vanished from the church restored, or it's better to say 'destroyed' by the last ruler of Abkhazia". Whenever they came across Georgian inscription they would erase, deprave and scribble on the walls Greek inscriptions instead.

Mokvi Episcopacy was established in the 10th c., but Mokvi, as one of the most significant center of the Georgian culture, experienced special efflorescence from the 13th c. onwards. Georgian literary sources have preserved names of the bishops of Mokvi, whose contribution to the Georgian culture is hard to undervalue, such as Grigol Mokveli, Daniel Mokveli, Abraam Mokveli, Eptvime Sakvarelidze, Pilipe Chkhetidze and others.

Icon of the Mother of God with inscription of Leon III, the king of Abkhazs . (957-967) The Icon was written at the behest of the king of Abkhazs, Leon III who ordered to depict the Mother of God in the orante posture (hands raised in prayer). Her pleading appeals to the Savior that is depicted in the right corner of the icon. In the left corner are images of Michael and Gabriel the Archangels. The painted image of the Mother of God was restored in the 19th c. The ornamented frame of the icon is decorated with enameled medallions of the saints. There is a Georgian inscription in the lower rim of the icon that bears the name of the Leon III-the king of Abkhazs (957-967).

Mokvi Icon of the Mother of God with inscription by Andrea Sakvarelidze. The silver tryptich of 50-60s of the 17th c with engraved golden image of the Mother of God holding the Child is a remarkable example of the Georgian embossing art of the Later Middle Ages. The Mother of God is painted standing in the center of the icon with John the Forerunner on the right and Saint Stephen the Deacon on the left. The icon is put into a big silver embossed tryptich setting and bears plenty of Georgian inscriptions. The most valuable inscription is made by a church donor and an Archbishop of Mokvi cathedral, Andrea Sakvarelidze. The pleading inscription tells us about the history of the icon donation to the church.

XII. Cathedral of St.George of Ilori. Village Ilori, Ochamchire municipality, 11th c. The church was built in the first quarter of the 11th century in the center of the village Ilori, 3 km away from Ochamchire. The church represents one of the most important sites and temples of West Georgian architecture. According to Vakhushti Bagrationi , ' on the edge of the sea stands a cathedral of St.George of Ilori without a dome, a small but rich and adorned

with ornaments'.

Cathedral of St. George of Ilori was built by a local feudal Giorgi Gurgenisdze that is mentioned in the inscription preserved on the church walls. According to the art expert A. Katsia, the cathedral is a hall type construction, by the proportions and refined style the church assigns to the category that clearly exposes aspirations of Georgian Medieval architecture. It's a single-nave construction with completed apses that has various wings from north, west and south. The church is made of dressed stone and it has doors from south and west and the inner interior is illuminated by six windows [11]. (A. Katsia. Monuments of the XVI century. Sokhumi. 1963)

Ilori church façade has preserved five lapidary inscription made in Georgian script and the sixth inscription has been rubbed out and only several graphemes are legible. Fresco paintings have not survived since the church, repaired and covered with ornaments by Odishi ruler Levan II Dadiani in the 17th c., was burnt down by Ottoman Turks in 1736. According to references by Vakhushti Bagrationi the ornaments were destroyed then.

If we judge by the inscriptions the cathedral was even initially named after St. Giorgi and it was built by church donors - a local feudal Giorgi Gurgenisdze, Archbishop Giorgi and priest Giorgi Kocholava, Giorgi Galatozi and a civil person Michael, etc.

Current condition of the cathedral. The church underwent restoration works executed by the de facto government of Abkhazia that resulted in severe damage to the authenticity of the church, replacing the Georgian-style dome by a Russian-style dome, both exterior and interior of the church are whitewashed in order to erase totally any Georgian sign off the facades and thus, the inscriptions are not legible anymore.

Ilori Chalice (XI century). The chalice was discovered at the end of the 19th c. in Ilori cathedral of St. George. Visually it greatly resembles the Bedia Chalice that has outer surface framed and divided into eight segments by a continuous arcade. Each arch has a figure of a saint. In the central arch the Savior's figure is engraved seated on the throne with the right blessing hand raised high above and holding the Gospel in the left hand. In the lateral arches images of Archangels - Michael and Gabriel are depicted with a chalice and a bowl in their hands [12]. The Georgian-language inscription just below the rim, is finely carved in Asomtavrul script. Current location of the Chalice is unknown.

Ilori Icon of St. George (1572-1582) represents a remarkable example of the Georgian Medieval art that according to the preserved inscription was composed at behest of Bedia archbishop Kirile Zhuanisdze and Odishi ruler Giorgi III Dadiani (1572-1582). The icon shows the first miracle of St. George.

The icon was first put in Bedia monastery but soon transferred to Ilori cathedral. This is the very place distinguished for miraculous activities of the icon of St. George like healing cripple, blind or deaf people, etc.

In 1925 Ilori Icon of St. George was stolen but later returned. In 1936 the icon got finally lost but its photo has survived.

Ilori Icon of St. George (60-70s of the 17th c.) a silver, folding, three sided icon decorated with a chain, depicting St. Theodore and Dimitri with explanatory inscription. The icon can be opened and there is an image of standing St. George dressed as a soldier and on his right Bedia Metropolitan Kirile Zhuanisdze is depicted in the pleading posture. All the images have underneath explanatory inscriptions besides this one. The icon case has Georgian inscription consisting of 15 lines that tells us the story of donating the icon to Ilori Cathedral by the Bedia Metropolitan Kirile Zhuanisdze.

Together with Kirile Zhuanisdze the story mentions secular persons, in particular, the head of municipality, head of Odishi, Giorgi Dadiani and his spouse queen Tamar. The icon is exposed in Zugdidi museum.

XIII. Anukhvi Church of Michael and Gabriel the Archangels. Village Anukhvi, Gudauta municipality, XI c. As early as the 19th c. large-sized church ruins were discovered by a Russian countess, archaeologist Praskovia Uvarova in the village of Anukhvi. Its size, harmonic combination of ornaments and their proportionality still impress viewers. The church is a wonderful example of the 11th Georgian architecture that by architectural features and skillfully adorned ornaments resembles ancient Georgian monuments from South Georgia.

The 11th and 14th c. inscription in Asomtavrul script mention the history of the church building, the church donors and restoration processes in later periods. According to one inscription the church appears to be built after Michael and Gabriel the Archangels. Beautiful Georgian limb-arrowy inscription curved out on the Anukhvi column refers to major feudal noblemen of Abkhazia of that period,

church donors: Giorgi the son of Basil, Basil himself, brothers Theodore, Demetre and Merkile that erected the cross and built the church in remembrance of family members' souls.[13].

The remarkable architectural style of Anukhvi cathedral, ornaments, carvings and forms of inscriptions are repeated in architecture of different parts of Georgia. One should distinguish the limb-arrowy inscription of Giorgi, the son of Basil that has analogues in the lapidary inscriptions of Svetistskhoveli, Samtavisi, Alaverdi, Nikortsminda and Shiomghvime cathedrals.

XIV. Besleti Church. Village Besleti in Sokhumi municipality, X-XI centuries. Besleti church is located in the village Besleti, 20 meters away from the famous Besleti arched bridge. The ruins witness of a monastic complex existing there at some time in the past. The cathedral is mostly demolished and just only few contours can be seen on the surface. A large construction at the north-east side of the church near the rock indicates to the four rooms on the ground floor connected to each other by narrow aisles. Moreover, other ruins of the building can be clearly seen and confirm that once there existed a huge monastic complex. It is obvious that the monastery belonged to a significant church center of the Middle Ages.

The Besleti Bridge. Around X-XI centuries. The Besleti Bridge is a medieval arched stone bridge at Sukhumi, also known as the Queen Tamar Bridge. Thirty-five meters in overall length and eight meters high, this single-arch bridge is built of limestone bars, facade made of dressed stone blocks with flat brick layers. According to N.Chubinshvili, the architect of this medieval Georgian monument had explored peculiarities of the river when designing this bridge. The bridge meets even the standards of modern bridge building and it can bear up to 8 tons of interminable car procession. This kind of strong and technically well-built bridge must have been constructed on the way of trade and political significance.

We have plenty of similar bridges in other regions of Georgia, in particular, an iron arched bridge in Kartli, the Dondalo bridge in Adjara, a cascade of arched bridges in the historical south Georgia (Tao Klarjeti). One the western edge of the arched bridge one can find a one-line in Asomtavruli scription, that reads :“ქ(რისტე) [მეფე(ე)ო] ყ(ოველთა)ო, [ად] იდე ორთაე ს(უ)ფ(ე)ვათა უ[ძლეველი] [მეფეთა მეფე ბაგრატ]” ‘Christ, Great Lord, please Bless the King of Kings, Insuperable Bagrat in both Worlds’ .

Despite the fact that the inscription bears the name of the king Bagrat, people called the bridge after Tamar in token of great love and respect towards her. Both the inscription and the bridge belong to the end of the 10th and beginning of the 11th century.

Current condition of the bridge: Vegetation layer has been removed from the bridge. The Georgian Asomtavruli inscription has partially survived.

XV. St.George church of Tskelikari, village Rechkho-Tskhiri, Gali municipality, XI century. The church is situated 20 km away from Gali. It was built under the name of St.George but local people call it “Tskelikari” that means “The gates of curse”. According to the Abkhazian art expert L.Sharvashidze, the church represents an outstanding example of Georgian architecture of the 11th c. Three lapidary and seven fresco inscriptions are known from scientific notes that witness about construction of the church in the 11th c. under initiative of some religious person Merkile and with contribution of local noble feudal donors. In the following centuries the church underwent alteration-restoration processes for several times. In the 17th c. one of the church donors and renovator was apparently from the Chichua family. One of the representatives is depicted on the fresco image of the church walls with the relevant Georgian inscription underneath.

XVI. Tsebelda Churches, Gulripshi municipality, XI c. Tsebelda Church of St.Tevdore 11th c. In the outskirts of Tsebelda in the 19th c, the Russian archaeologist, countess Praksovia Uvarova discovered a church that later was visited by D.Bakradze. Both researchers described the inscription found in the building that read that the church was erected as a sign of reverence towards St.Tevdore. It is built of dressed and carved stones that make marvelous pieces of art. These remarkable stones fascinated many explorers in the 60-70 s of the XX century and they were particularly investigated by art experts like R.Schmerling and L.Khrushkova who according to shape parallels and analogues grounded that these pieces bore resemblance to Christian architecture of eastern and southern regions of Georgia.Present condition of the church is unknown.

Tsebelda Church of St.Andrew the Apostle . XII c. The Russian archaeologist Praskovia Uvarova found an icon of St.Andrew in the ruins of one of the churches in Tsebelda. The silver- gilt icon had a Georgian inscription that contained a story of the church building in the name of St.Andrew the Apostles

by a prominent Georgian high-ranking government official at the royal court- Abulasan, the son of Iob. According to the historical analysis of the inscription the church was erected in the last quarter of the 12th c.

Tsebelda Church of St.George. XII-XIII centuries. Ruins of a Christian church with a building detail having Georgian inscription on it was found 4km to the east of Tsebelda in 1988 by the Russian archeologist I.Voronov. The inscription mentioned origins of building the church of St. George. According to the analysis of the inscription it must have been erected in the 12-13th centuries. Present condition of the church is unknown.

Tsebelda Icon of St.Catherine, XI century. In the 80s of the 19th c. a damaged icon was found in Tsebelda that has got image of St.Catherine in full height in the center of the icon. On account of the damage of the icon only one hand of St.Catherine is seen. On both sides of the halo of St.Catherine an explanatory inscription- (წ(მოდა) ევ(ა)ტ(ე) ონჯ) “St.Catherine” is legible. Two-line Georgian Asomtavruli inscription in limb-arrowed script is carved out on the lower rim of the icon frame and it tells us about an unknown church donor – a noble lady Mary. According to art and paleographic features the icon of St.Catherine belongs to one of outstanding examples of the 11th c. Georgian art.

Tsebelda Icon of St. John the Baptist, XI century. In the ruins of an old church of Tsebelda in 80s of the 19th c. was found an icon that had silver-gilt frame. In the central part of the icon was painted an image of St. John the Baptist whose face is not visible at present. The saint is turned to the right and is standing with hands raised up in pleading. There is a Georgian inscription “saint John” in the right and left corner of the halo. Another inscription in the lower part of the icon tells us about some Saba, the son of Maleli that is embellisher of the icon and church donor. According to art and paleographic features the icon of St. John the Baptist represents a masterpiece of the 11th century Georgian embossing art.

Tsebelda Icon of St.Andrew the Apostle . The icon of St. Andrew the Apostle from Tsebelda church presents an outstanding piece of art. The icon is made of silver. Only some fragments of it have survived and it has a Georgian inscription that contains information about a prominent Georgian high-ranking government official who was Mechurchletukhutsesi and Eristavteristavi at the royal court during the reign of King Tamar- Abulasan, the son of Iob whose

ancestors were originally from Dali-Tsebelda gorge. Due to this reason Abulasan built a church after St. Andrew the Apostle and donated the icon of St. Andrew to it.

XVII. Ghumurishi churches. Gali municipality. XI century. In the mountain chain of the village Ghumurishi in 60s of the 20th c. the Abkhazian art expert L.Shervashidze discovered church ruins where an ancient Georgian Asomtavruli inscription was found during archaeological excavation. The inscription tells us about Sagdukht “the Queen of the Queens” at whose behest the church and the cross were erected. According to chronicles “the queen of queens” Sagdukht was a noble woman and the wife of Odishi eristavt eristavi (principal), who was the donor and builder of the church in Ghumurishi. Both the church and the inscription are dated from the 11th c. Current condition of the church: Only ruins have remained.

II church of Ghumurishi, XIX century. There is a basilica in the center of the village Ghumurishi, it was built in the 19th c. on the initiative of local population. There was no church service during the Soviet Union period and they used it as a storehouse of the collective farm. At the beginning of the 21st c. when people cleaned many tombs Georgian inscriptions were discovered there. The epitaphs written in Georgian Mkhedruli script mention names of the local feudal noblemen: the Emkhvari and the Anchabadze.

XVIII. Dikhazurga church. Village Dikhazurga, Gali municipality, XI century. The village Dikhazurga which was called “Didi Tsipuri” before 1952, is located in the south-east part of Abkhazian foothills on the right bank of the river Enguri. This name is mentioned in a historical novel of the Italian catholic missionary, Archangelo Lamberti and on the map of 1654 where even the church is pointed. Lamberti writes: “Tsipuria monastery was built on the valley, at the river Enguri. It is currently in the hands of our people. Two churches are joined together. One of them is named after the Holy Mother of God, and another one- after St. George”. It seems that two united churches existed in Tsipuria in late Middle Ages that were under control of catholic missionaries by the middle of the 17th c.

Now the remains of Dikhazurga church are called St. Barbare church. At the beginning of the 20th c. some peasants found two stone tiles in the ruins of the church. One of the tiles bears the image of a cross. Between the horizontal and vertical bars, on the left

is depicted an image of a man in full-length. The man is standing with hands raised in pleading posture and bent towards the cross. Above the vertical bars of the cross and in the right unit one can notice an inscription in Mkhedruli mentioning the architect of the church - Grigol Galatozukhutsesi. The inscription belongs to one of the earliest samples of the Mkhedruli script in western Georgia. Current condition of the church: Both the interior and exterior of the church are in poor condition.

XIX. Gudava Church. Gali municipality, VI-VIII, XV XVII centuries. According to ancient Greek and Byzantine chronicles, Gudava represented important religious center from ancient times. Ziganisi fortress was located there that was one of the valuable fortification points of west Georgian Lazika kingdom. In the 7 to 10th centuries one of the four archbishop episcopacies was located in Gudava. It is known that the first king of the united Georgian kingdom, Bagrat III Bagrationi (978-1014) abrogated the episcopacy in Gudava as it was a Greek religious center and restored it in Bedia.

Initially Gudava church might have been constructed in the 7-10th centuries but later in the Middle Ages it underwent significant alterations and restorations for several times. The restoration processes held in the 15th c. are connected with the names of the local feudal Rabaia and his wife Nigamtsira that are mentioned in the ornate stone tiles found in the church yard of Gudava. On the back side of the tiles the cross turned out to be depicted. There is a three lined Georgian inscription inside the ornament that mentions the church donors Rabaia and Nigamtsira. There is also another inscription curved out with the name of a deacon. Both inscriptions and restoration of the church date back to the 15th c.

XX. Sokhumi Fortress. Sokhumi municipality, I-II centuries, XVIII century. In the chronicles of ancient and later period Sokhumi fortress appears under different names: Sebastopolis fortress, Sevastopol, Savatopol, Sanatopol, Favasta, Porto Megrelo, etc. as a town or a port in Samegrelo Principality in Georgia. In French geographic publications of the 17th c. Sokhumi is even referred to as a capital of Samegrelo (Jean Baptist Luis Cluet, Nichol Delacrois, etc.) As mentioned previously, Georgian historians called it Tskhumi and the first notes about "Tskhumi fortress" belong to the 8th c. in the works of Georgian historian Juansher.

The history of Sokhumi fortress is related to

Roman occupation. They came to this place in the 1st century BC and built a fortress that named Sebastopolis. At the beginning of the 6th c. Sokhumi was under control of East Roman (Byzantine) governor. In the period of Sassanid-Byzantine War (542-562) the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I called off the army from Sokhumi fortress and demolished it preventing from being captured by Sassanid Iran. In the year 565 he restored the same fortress and town Tskhumi and consequently in the 7th century it was promoted again. Sebastopolis fortress remained a significant strongholds for Byzantine for quite a long period of time until being sacked by the Arab conqueror Marwan II in 736. Afterwards, the town came to be known as Tskhumi that became one of the most important towns and citadels of the West Georgian State- Kingdom of Egrisi- Abkhazeti. An episcopate was established there as well, in the period of feudal prospering (XI-XIII centuries) Both the town and fortress particularly flourished at this period, although the residence of Tskhumi Eristavi was now Bagrat's Castle.

At the beginning of the 14th c. the Genoese established their short-lived trading factory at Tskhumi. According to Western chronicles, Sokhumi (Tskhumi) fortress was the residence of Odishi Eristavi Eristavi (Head of Principality) then. There Odishi Eristavi Eristavi and Mandaturtukhutsei at the royal court, Vamekh I Dadiani (1384-1396) minted coins that were called "Tskhumuri Tetri" or "Sebastopolis Astra". According to the chronicles, Vamekh II Dadiani's residence also appeared to be in Tskhumi. Before that the town and the fortress were captured by Ottomans in 1453, next time they did it again in the second half of the 16th c. Due to picturesque coastline and wonderful location the Ottoman called it "the second Istanbul". Since this period Sukhumi fort became a significant strong point for Turks in Abkhazia. In 1724 they carried out serious restoration works in the fortress, turning it into the Turkish fortress of Suhum-Kale (fortress of Sukhumi). However, at the end of the 18th c. Sokhumi became the residence of Abkhazeti principal and at the same time the region became a theatre of widespread slave trade. In 1810 Sokhumi fortress was conquered by the Russian Empire which was supported by the heir of Abkhazian house of Shervashidze- Giorgi Shervashidze. Under Russian occupation the fortress underwent several significant alterations with the last one during the Soviet Union.

XXI. Bagrat's Castle, Sokhumi Municipality, X century. The castle named after the Georgian king Bagrat III Bagrationi that was the first king of Unified Georgia, stands in ruins on a hill on the left bank of the Besleti river, in the south-eastern portion of Sukhumi. One group of researches consider that the castle had been built much earlier and in the reign of Bagrat in the period of late 10th or 11th centuries it was fundamentally renovated again.

The castle is characterized by building traditions relevant for fortification constructions of north-west Georgia. The surviving structures are walls of an oval-shape edifice with a rectangular tower guarding the entrance gateway, which shows traces of underground tunnels. Under the conditions of the United Georgian Kingdom (X-XV centuries) under King Bagrat III, the fortress became Sokhumi (Tskhumi) citadel. At the same period (X-XIV) it was serving as the seat of Tskhumi Principal. In the 16th century, when the town's chief settlement moved to the west, on the right bank of the river, the castle was abandoned and left to fall in ruins.

XXII. Anakopia fortress. Iveria Mount, at New Athos. Historical Anakopia is located some 20 km away from Sokhumi, at the top of the Iverian Mountain. In the 19th. c it was called New Athos. The fortress citadel of Anakopia is erected on the mountain, 350 metres above the sea level. According to the Georgian historian Vakhushti Bagrationi 'The town of Anakopia stands at the edge of the sea', there was a beautiful town built over the sea and later adored by the Bagrationi".

Anakopia fortress is a defense building with stone walls around the site of the citadel, watchtowers, siege pool and limes stoves. A small Christian church inside the fortress was of great importance that is dated from 7-8th centuries. Some splendid ornament fragments of later period can be still distinguished in the remains of the church.

In the 80s of the VIII century Anakopia was a residence for Abkavian eristavs (heads of principality). In 735-738 years Arab forces led by Marwan II the Deaf (Abū 'Abd Al-Malik Marwān ibn Muhammad,) were defeated at Anakopia by the united forces of Qartli eristavi Miri and Archil and Leon I of Abkhazia. Later the last Arab Caliph (744-750) was forced to leave Georgia. At the end of the 8th c. Leon II of Abkhazia declared himself first as a commander and later a king of Abkhazia. He united the whole West Georgia and moved the capital from

Anakopia to Kutaisi.

After unification of Georgia Anakopia fortress became one of the most significant defense points of Georgia and was restored by the government for several times. Royal army was standing at this point and defending north-west borders of the country. During archaeological excavations a coin of the King of Georgia Giorgi II was found with the inscription "Christ! Bless Giorgi the king of Abkhazs and Georgians and the Cesar! " Significant repair and restoration work was held in Anakopia fortress during king Giorgi II. Several Greek inscriptions are known from Anakopia fortress, including some medieval graffiti that mainly have cult function.

When at the end of the 15th c. Georgian State was divided into kingdom-principalities Anakopia first belonged to Abkhaz Eristavs and later became residence of Abkhaz governors. In the 17th c. Anakopia was conquered by Turks and the residence of Abkhaz governors was conveyed to Likhni. Afterwards Anakopia was left in ruins and Abkhazs called it "Psirtskha".

In 1876-1900 under Russian Empire, a monastic complex of St. Panteleimon was built on the territory of former Anakopia that served as a branch of Russian monastery on Mount Athos.

As is evident from all above-mentioned, majority of listed cultural monuments were created in the period of Lazika kingdom (IV-VII) Egrisi-Abkhazeti kingdom (90s of the 8th c. 70s of the 10th.c) and the United Kingdom of Georgia (from the 10th to 15th centuries). Nowadays they are situated within borders of present-day Abkhazia but then they would belong to one of the historical parts of Georgia-Odishi saeristavo (principality). In the 16-17th centuries when Caucasus mountain people started migrating on the territory of Abkhazia they started oppressing native Georgian population and driving them out of the territory towards Odishi principality and consequently the border of Odishi principality was changed as well. Under the present circumstances the monuments of unique value were not created but the existing ones were gradually being demolished on the territory of Abkhazia. This is certified by desolation of Bichvinta, Bedia, Dranda and other churches from the 16-17th centuries. Unfortunately, we encounter the same situation at the beginning of the 90s of the 20th c. when majority of population was outcast from Abkhazian Autonomous Republic and the separatist government carried out restoration works that spoilt

authenticity of Ilori, Bedia, Dranda and St. Simon Cananean churches, Likhni, Gagra and Chuburkhinji churches suffer from wretchedness. The mentioned churches were observed by a Russian representative of ICOM whose report reveals deplorable state of the monuments of Abkhazian material culture. The report says: 'as seen from observation of monuments they mostly require carrying out complex conservation operations in order to be protected. The operations include: cleaning and fortifying the (wall) construction, conserving it with special composition; installing protecting cover (roof) and drainage from the walls; fighting against salty gravel and lime scurf; fortification of the foundations, etc.

Another problem is intervention and wilful negligence of church users (church servants, restorers, scientists) that result in distortion of historical image and damage of authentic components of the monuments. Examples are Ilori church image distortion (façade whitening, domes), Dranda church (Font replacement), Bedia (botched frescos through injection). Insufficient concern and controlling resources from the side of local monuments protection authorities of the Republic of Abkhazia cause this deplorable situation there.

Taking into consideration particular value of historical monuments on the territory of Abkhazia provision of certified professional restorers is required while undertaking these operations. Moreover, the restoration work should be performed according to conventional rules and approved by special documents (project, project offers, engineering, technological and methodical recommendations, etc.) We can conclude from the above-mentioned report that all international standards of cultural heritage protection are violated

on the territory of the occupied Abkhazia. The "Venice Charter" declares that historical and cultural monuments on the occupied territory are inviolable and "we are obliged to pass this heritage in the full richness of their authenticity to next generations. Ilori and Bedia cathedrals have lost their historical and aesthetic value after the so called "restoration" procedures and the unity connecting the past and present has gone. The International law aimed at protection of cultural heritage refers to this unity. According to the "Venice Charter" 'monuments are inseparable from the history they witness' and they must be preserved in their traditional environment. In 1995 in Nara, Japan, at an international a new document "Nara Document On Authenticity" was purposefully created in order to protect cultural heritage of conflict regions. The document states: 'Cultural heritage diversity exists in time and space and requires respect towards different cultures and systems of their values. In cases when cultural values appear to conflict with each other, the principle of respect towards cultural diversity requires recognition of cultural value legitimacy between sides'. The referred document is based on both "the Venice Charter" and the convention from November 16, 1972 "Upon Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage". Despite all the above-mentioned documents, a certain formation of people led by some self-declared Besarion Apla on the territory of occupied Abkhazia, try to misappropriate cultural heritage that does not belong to them, alter it and delete traces of Georgian culture. Unfortunately, this is not only the attempt of deleting Georgian traces, but also uprooting Abkhazian history, losing their identity and thus, adapting easily to the actual reality.

Литература:

- [1]. Lia Akhaladze, Monuments of Material Culture of Abkhazia and their Classification. In: The Cultural Heritage of Georgia on Occupied Territories. Tbilisi, 2012. P.131.
- [2]. Levan Recheulishvili. Essays on the Georgian Art History. Tbilisi, 1994. In: Georgian Cultural Heritage, Abkhazia. Vol.1. Tbilisi, 2007.
- [3]. L. Akhaladze. Epigraphic Monuments of Abkhazia. In: Investigations on the history of Abkhazia/Georgia. Tbilisi, 1999. P.363-374. (In Russian). V. Silogava. Epigraphy of Samegrelo and Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 2004 (In Georgian); L. Akhaladze. Epigraphy of Abkhazia as a historical source (Lapidary and Fresco Inscriptions). Tbilisi 2005 (In Georgian).
- [4]. Lia Akhaladze. Epigraphy of Abkhazia as a historical source (Lapidary and Fresco Inscriptions). Tbilisi 2005.
- [5]. T. Kaughchashvili. Block of Greek inscriptions of Georgia. The second Complete Edition. Tbilisi, 2004.
- [6]. Kh. Bghazhba. From the History of Writings of Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 1967.

- [7]. L. Akhaladze. Inscriptions of the Kings of Egris-Abkhazeti. Informational-analytical journal "Abkhazeti" I. Tbilisi, 2004
- [8]. G. Chubinashvili. Georgian Embossing Art; Studies on the History of Georgian Medieval Art. Tbilisi, 1959. G. Chubinashvili. The Georgian Embossing Art from the VIII to the XVIII centuries. Tbilisi, 1957.
- [9]. L. Rcheulishvili. Domical architecture of the VIII-X centuries in Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 1988.
- [10]. L. Rcheulishvili. Domical architecture of the VIII-X centuries in Abkhazia.
- [11]. A. Katsia. Monuments of the XVI century. Sokhumi. 1963. In Russian).
- [12]. G. Chubinashvili. Georgian Embossing Art; Studies on the History of Georgian Medieval Art. Tbilisi, 1959.
- [13]. L. Akhaladze. Epigraphy of Abkhazia as a historical source (Lapidary and Fresco Inscriptions). Tbilisi 2005.

ЛИЯ АХАЛАДЗЕ

Доктор истории, профессор Сухумского государственного университета (Грузия)

ГРУЗИНСКИЕ ПАМЯТНИКИ МАТЕРИАЛЬНОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ - АБХАЗИЯ

(Краткий обзор)

РЕЗЮМЕ

Географические рамки топонима «Абхазия» менялись в течение веков. Иностранные источники упоминали под этим названием сначала Западную Грузию, а затем всю страну. Территория современной Абхазии входила в состав Абхазского княжества (саэриставо). В результате распада единого централизованного грузинского феодального государства в XV в. нынешняя территория Абхазии входило в пределы сначала Имеретинского царства, а затем Одишского княжества. В XVII в. В результате продолжения дробления грузинских феодальных государственных образований возникло Абхазское княжество. Абхазское княжество было таким же образованием как и другие грузинские царства и княжества.

На современном этапе изучения грузинского культурного наследия многочисленную и разнообразную материальную культуру Абхазского региона можно условно разделить на четыре основные группы: I. Архитектурные памятники; II. Памятники древней письменности; III. религиозные предметы; IV. Материал, полученный в результате археологических раскопок;

Данная классификация условна, хотя в настоящее время она действительно отражает некоторый общий облик памятников материальной культуры Абхазии.

I. Архитектурные памятники представляют собой наиболее многочисленную группу абхазской материальной культуры, и их количество составляет примерно более сотни. Несмотря на то, что большинство этих памятников сегодня выглядят разрушенными, они имеют свою историю развития. Архитектурные постройки в свою очередь составляют две наиболее многочисленные подгруппы материальной культуры Абхазии: а) Памятники церковного зодчества; б) памятники светского назначения. Монастырские комплексы, соборы, небольшие церкви и храмы относятся к первой группе; вторая группа объединяет крепости, мосты, сторожевые башни, дворцы гражданской и крупной церковной феодальной знати и т. д.

II. Памятники древней письменности составляют одну из самых многочисленных групп в культурном наследии Абхазии, которая в свою очередь подразделяется на две группы: 1. Эпиграфические памятники, 2. Рукописи (написанные на мягком материале); 3. Нумизматический материал с сохранившимися надписями.

1. Эпиграфические памятники представлены лапидарным письмом (глубокая резьба на камнях),

чеканкой (надписи на иконах, крестах, различных церковных предметах) и фресковой росписью. Встречаются эпиграфические памятники, надписи на грузинском, греческом, латинском и турецком языках (арабским алфавитом). Среди них более 100 грузинских надписей. Существует более тридцати греческих надписей. Хронология грузинских надписей, имеющих историческое значение, относится к 8-9 векам. Греческие надписи в основном относятся к IX в., хотя встречаются греческие граффити XI в.

На территории Абхазии найдены многочисленные нумизматические образцы, которые в основном обнаружены в районе Сухуми, в Анакопийской крепости (Иверская гора), Лихни и др. Большинство монет имеют грузинские и византийские происхождения. Согласно надписям на грузинских монетах, они принадлежат грузинским царям Баграту IV (1027-1072), Георгию II (1072-1089), Давиду IV Строителю (1089-1125). Кроме того, были обнаружены серебряные деньги, которые местные жители называли «Цхумури тетри», а генуэзцы – «Севастополис Аспра». В древней Грузии Сухуми назывался Цхуми, а в латинских источниках, как и римляне, упоминается как Севастополис.

Из церковных предметов наиболее интересными являются Бедийская Золотая Чаша, Илорская Серебряная Чаша, Цебельдинские иконы св. Екатерины, Иоанна Крестителя и св. икона, подаренная Давидом VI Нарини Илорскому собору, Бичвинтская икона Пресвятой Богородицы и процессный крест Евдемона Чхетидзе и многое другое.

Большой интерес вызывает Гагрская базилика VI в. Так как оно является одним из древнейших образцов грузинской архитектуры начала средних веков, а также Бедийская и Илорская церкви. Однако сегодня в оккупированной Абхазии ведутся не законные реставрационные работы где российская сторона меняет облик грузинских исторических памятников, следует отметить, что стены Илорской церкви побелили, а на крыше установили не свойственный грузинским церквям купол - в результате храм потерял свой первоначальный вид. Учитывая особую ценность для Грузии исторических памятников на территории Абхазии, Правительство Грузии направило официальное письмо в Международный исследовательский центр по сохранению и реставрации культурных ценностей, Миссию наблюдателей Евросоюза, Международный совет музеев, ЮНЕСКО. Полагаем, что международные организации должны использовать имеющиеся в их распоряжении средства, чтобы остановить целенаправленное уничтожение грузинского исторического и культурного наследия на оккупированной территории Грузии. Кроме выше отмеченного следует отметить, что «Венецианская хартия» провозглашает, что памятники истории и культуры на оккупированной территории неприкосновенны и «мы обязаны передать это наследие во всем богатстве его подлинности следующим поколениям. Соборы Илори и Бедия утратили свою историческую и эстетическую ценность после так называемых «реставрационных» процедур.

Международное право, направленное на защиту культурного наследия, ссылается на это единство. Согласно «Венецианской хартии», «памятники неотделимы от истории, свидетелем которой они являются», и они должны быть сохранены в своем традиционном виде.