



The Cultural Heritage of
GEORGIA

Abkhazeti
Shida Kartli

Georgian Arts and Culture Center
Tbilisi 2008

KHEITI CHURCH OF THE ARCHANGEL 18TH – 19TH C

SHIDA KARTLI, ISKHISSALI REGION
Implemented by: Didi Liakhi Museum-Reserve, B. Gasparovi
Funded by: Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia; Georgian Historical Monuments Defense and Survival Fund; 2006



DZELITSKHOVELI 13TH – 14TH C

Implemented by: Centre of Architecture, Art and Restoration of the Patriarchy of Georgia; M. Gelashvili
Funded by: Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia; Georgian Historical Monuments Defense and Survival Fund; 2007



DZARCEMI CHURCH OF THE ST. GEORGE 10TH C

SHIDA KARTLI, ISKHISSALI REGION
Implemented by: Centre of Architecture, Art and Restoration of the Patriarchy of Georgia; P. Basishvili
Funded by: Georgian Historical Monuments Defense and Survival Fund; Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia; 2007



ZEMO KHVITI "SAMEBA" CHURCH, LATE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

SHIDA KARTLI, GORI REGION
Implemented by: Centre of Architecture, Art and Restoration of the Patriarchy of Georgia; P. Basishvili
Funded by: Georgian Historical Monuments Defense and Survival Fund; Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia; 2008



TIRDZNISI "SAMEBA" 10TH C KERE

CHURCH OF THE VIRGIN LATE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

SHIDA KARTLI, GORI REGION
Implemented by: Centre of Architecture, Art and Restoration of the Patriarchy of Georgia; P. Basishvili
Funded by: Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia; 2008

Because of the Russian Invasion in August 2008 the rehabilitation works have been stopped



IKORTA. CHURCH OF THE ARCHANGEL 1172 AD

SHIDA KARTLI, ISKHISSALI REGION
Implemented by: M. Bichoidze, G. Khvatsilava, G. Charukvadze
Funded by: World Monument Fund, OSGE, the WB; 1998, 2004



NIKOZI "GVITABA" CHURCH 9TH-12TH C

SHIDA KARTLI, ISKHISSALI REGION
Implemented by: Centre of Architecture, Art and Restoration of the Patriarchy of Georgia; T. Gabunia, G. Gagoshvize, F. Burkashvili, D. Berikashvili
Funded by: Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia; the WB; 2000, 2005



BISHOP'S PALACE 9TH-10TH C

Implemented by: Centre of Architecture, Art and Restoration of the Patriarchy of Georgia; T. Gabunia, G. Maznashvili, G. Goramashvili
Funded by: Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia; 1999, 2007

The Bishop Palace in the monastery of Nikozi is one of the most important samples of the palace architecture from the late medieval period. The restoration was almost finished when the palace was partly burned. Near the palace there was the residence of the monastery, it was directly bombed on the 10th August.



CHURCH OF THE ARCHANGEL 10TH-11TH C

Implemented by: Centre of Architecture, Art and Restoration of the Patriarchy of Georgia; T. Gabunia, A. Chikaidze
Funded by: Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia; Georgian Historical Monuments Defense and Survival Fund; 1991, 2008



ALEVI SAMEBA 8TH-9TH C

SHIDA KARTLI, AKHALGORI REGION
Implemented by: Centre of Architecture, Art and Restoration of the Patriarchy of Georgia; T. Gabunia, D. Datunashvili, G. Gagoshvize
Funded by: Local community; 2007-2008



THE RESTORED MONUMENTS



Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia



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, Georgian Arts and Culture Center President

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

Historical Overview

The Greek historians of the 6th to 1st centuries BC noted diverse tribes inhabiting the territory of present day Abkhazeti, mentioning among them the ancient Georgian tribes of the Koraks and Kols (also known as Kolkhs), on whose territory are the cities of Dioskuria, now Tskhumi (Sokhumi), and Bichvinta. Other Georgian tribes – Lazs, Svans and Meskhs – are mentioned as well. The ethnic attribution of other tribes (Heniochs, Melankhlens, Phteirophags...) is uncertain. According to the same historical records the territory of today's Abkhazeti was undoubtedly included in the West Georgian state of Colchis.

These tribes, considered by some scholars to be the ancestors of today's Apsua-Abkhazians, do not emerge in the historical records before the first centuries A.D., specifically, the Apsils in the 1st century and the Abasks in the 2nd century. The case is made that by the 1st century the kingdom of Colchis had become weak, and some scholars consider that the movement of the North Caucasian mountaineers into regions south of the Caucasus, which occurred many times thereafter, was caused by this circumstance.

In early medieval times, specifically in the 4th to 5th centuries, when the West Georgian state of ancient Colchis was replaced by its successor, the kingdom of Lazica, the territory of Abkhazeti was part of it. The resident tribes, in particular Apsils, Abasks and Misimians (Svanetian inhabitants of the Kodori gorge), were, according to the evidence of the 6th-century Byzantine historians, dependants of Lazican king.

The Byzantine Empire, which tried to bend to its will all the Caucasian mountaineers, sought to control the policy of Western Georgia and the Lazican state (in Georgian: Egrisi) and for this reason, in the 620s, Emperor Heraclius managed to annex Abkhazeti – a province of the Lazican kingdom – and appointed his ruler in Anakhopia (today's Akhali Atoni).

Thus, with the aid of Byzantium, the strengthening of the Abkhazian principality began. By the 730s, Abkhazeti enclosed the territory from the Kelasuri River to the outfall of the Kuban River. In spite of Byzantine efforts to bring Abkhazeti into the area of Byzantine policy and culture, the cultural-political line of the Abkhazian principality was distinctively pro-Georgian and in the 740s the Abkhazian governor Leon I broke away from the Byzantine Emperor's control and became a vassal of the king of Kartli, whereas at the end of the same century, Leon II, governor of Abkhazeti, who inherited the West Georgian kingdom, assisted by the Georgian political leadership, entirely disengaged himself from Byzantine influence. He moved the capital city from Anakhopia to Kutaisi – Western Georgia's central city – and gained the title of king of Abkhazeti as the ruling dynasty came from Abkhazeti.

Up to this time, in the western regions of West Georgia the liturgy was performed in the Greek language and the Church came under the Constantinople patriarchate, but now it was replaced by the Georgian Church. Abkhazian kings strongly popularized the common Georgian culture; they established Georgian bishoprics and monasteries instead of Greek ones, used the Georgian written language, and promoted the progress of Georgian literature.

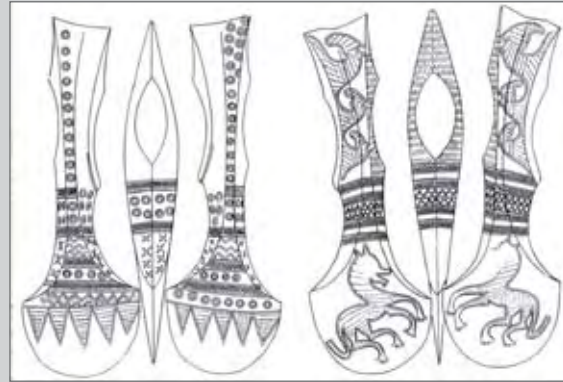
For two hundred years after the establishment of the Abkhazian kingdom (the 9th-10th centuries) the Abkhazian kings can be said to be the most positive protagonists of the amalgamation of Georgian lands and the development of a unitary Georgian state.

All this confirms that from the perspective of feudal culture, the Abkhazians were Georgians, just as were the Kartlians, Kakhetians, Megrelians, Gurians, Svans, etc. Indeed, one of the Georgian manuscripts, rewritten in 1040, has the following postscript "I, unworthy Giorgi the Abkhazian, donated this book to the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem." It is evident that this "Giorgi the Abkhazian," whose surname is Mitsivaisdze, was an ordinary Georgian.

Precisely for this reason, from this period, in Georgian as well as in foreign historical records the ethnonyms "Abkhazian" and "Georgian" are synonyms, while Abkhazeti, during the feudal monarchy period of unitary Georgia (11th to 15th centuries) appears to be a natural part of the Georgian state, just as Odishi, Guria, Svaneti, Kakheti, etc. were.

In the second half of the 15th century, due to external political difficulties, the unitary state of Georgia disintegrated into independent kingdoms and principalities. The principality of Abkhazeti became part of the kingdom of Imereti, in Western Georgia. In 16th and 17th centuries, when the principalities of Guria and Odishi (Megrelia) broke away from Imereti, Abkhazeti became a vassal region of the Odishi principality. After the end of the 17th century Abkhazeti was a separate principality, although formally within the Imeretian kingdom. The situation remained unchanged until Abkhazeti was incorporated into Russia, which occurred in 1810.

During the same centuries the Apsua-Abazine tribes, as testified in the oral tradition of today's Apsua-Abkhazs, migrated intensively from the North Caucasus and settled in the territory of Abkhazeti, causing drastic cultural-demographic changes there. Thus, the formation of the present day Apsua-Abkhazs was a result of the mixing of the North Caucasian Apsuas with the local population. Georgians retained the ancient name of "Abkhaz" for them, whereas their autonomy is "Apsua."



David Muskhelishvili

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. Dioskurias, located on what is the site of modern Sokhumi (Tskhumi in ancient Georgian) was among these centers. According to the Greek ge-

