

THE “SINAI” OF GEORGIA OR TWELVE HERMITAGES OF KLARJETI

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In the 8th century and in the late 9th century, the population of Kartli, harassed by the Arabs, found shelter in South Georgia. In that period, the territory was within the dominion of the Byzantine Empire. The favorable political situation gave Georgian secular and religious figures an opportunity to begin great construction activities and lay a foundation to a new “Georgian Kingdom” in Tao-Klarjeti.

In the early 9th century, Ashot I the Great, the Principal of Kartli, got rather aggravated relations with the Arabs and had to seek harbor in Shavshet-Klarjeti. Under the agreement between Byzantium and the Arabs, the region was included within the dominion of the Byzantine Empire, and the Arabs had no access to it. Supported by the Byzantines, Ashot laid foundations to a new Georgian political entity proclaiming Artanuji as its center. Ashot Curopalates “found a rock in the forests of Klarjeti, - tells Sumbat son of David, - which was initially constructed by Vakhtang Gorgasali as a castle, named Artanuji; and it was ravaged by Marwan ibn Muhammad. It was Ashot who renovated it and reconstructed the castle.”¹

The formation of a new political entity in South Georgia was associated with a number of hardships. The biggest problem was the grave demographic situation in the region. „*The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*“ specially notes that ” in Klarjeti and in Tao, and in Shavsheti and adjoining places, there are few populated areas.”² Based on appropriate

¹ ს უ მ ბ ა ტ დ ა ვ ი თ ი ს - ძ ე, ცხოვრება და უწყება ბაგრატიონთა, ქართლის ცხოვრება, ტექსტი დადგენილი ყველა ძირითადი ხელნაწერის მიხედვით ს. ყ ა უ ხ ჩ ი შ ე ი ლ ი ს მიერ, I, თბილისი 1955, p. 377.

² გ ი ო რ გ ი შ ე რ ჩ უ ლ ე, შრომა და მოღვაწეობა ღირსად ცხოვრებისაა წმიდისა და ნეგარისა მამისა ჩუენისა გრიგოლისი არქიმანდრიგისაა, ხანციისა და შატბერდისა აღმაშენებლისაა, და მის თანა კსენება მრავალთა მამათა ნეგარ-

sources, K. Kekelidze assumed that the sharp decrease in the number of the population should not have to be associated with the Arab invasion, there also was cholera, having annihilated local residents.³ It seems that K. Kekelidze was based upon Sumbat's one interesting information: "and the gorge of Shavsheti was not built, except some smaller hamlets, as far as it was devastated under the Persian rule, later all the fortresses were ravaged by Marwan ibn Muhammad, covering Shavsheti and Gado. Later, following his devastation, satloba exterminated Shavsheti, Klarjeti, and only few people remained here and there."⁴ Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani provides two definitions for the word "satloba": "a. frequent diarrhea (a disease) and b. devastating disease."⁵ K. Kekelidze seemed to have assumed "satloba" as an epidemic of cholera, and commented that "it, probably, was the cholera of 746-747 which annihilated residents of South Greece and Constantinople, and which, via Asia Minor, might have come to us."⁶ It should be clarified that K. Kekelidze cites A. Vasiliev's work; however, it tells not about the epidemic of cholera in Byzantium but rather about that of the plague.⁷ It seems that "satloba," mentioned by Sumbat, son of David, should be understood as a common term for an epidemic – "devastating disease," which, in this specific case, refers to "the plague." In 746-747, from Italy, the plague was brought to Greece, and, in 747, to Constantinople, and diffused by Byzantine soldiers. In 748-750, the epidemic raged in Iraq, Syria, and Mesopotamia.⁸ It should be assumed that, from the numerous sources of the plague in Byzantium and Middle East in 745-750, the disease reached Georgia. Sumbat, son of David, may have spoken about the dif-

თაჲ, ძველი ქართული აგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები, წიგნი I, (V-X სს.), ილ. აბუ ლადის რედაქციით, თბილისი 1963, p. 257.

³ კ. კეკელიძე, ძველი ქართული ლიტერატურის ისტორია, I, თბილისი 1980, p. 93.

⁴ სუმბატ დავითის-ძე, ცხოვრება და უწყება ბაგრატიონთა, p. 376.

⁵ სულხან-საბა ორბელიანი, ლექსიკონი ქართული, თბილისი 1993, p. 57.

⁶ კ. კეკელიძე, ძველი ქართული ლიტერატურის ისტორია, I, თბილისი 1980, p. 93. შეეაღწეოთ დ. ხოშტარია, კლარჯეთის ეკლესიები და მონასტრები, თბილისი 2009, p. 44-45.

⁷ A. Vasiliev cites Constantine Porphyrogenetos' information and explains: "It is about the terrible epidemic in 746-747, having been brought from Italy and having devastated particularly South Greece and Constantinople. Wanting to replenish the population annihilated by the plague, he relocated residents to the capital from various provinces." А. А. Васильев, *История Византийской империи*, Т. I. p. 552.

⁸ D. Stathakopoulos, Crime and Punishment, The Plague in the Byzantine Empire, 541–749, *Plague and the End of Antiquity, The Pandemic of 541–750*, Edited by Lester K. Little, Cambridge University Press 2007, p. 104.

fusion of this deadly disease; however, it should also be noted that, in 541-750, in the Byzantine Empire and its bordering territories, 18 cases of the diffusion of the plague were documented.⁹ Georgia had close economic links with the regions where the disease occurred occasionally, and, it could reach South Georgia. Thus, Sumbat, son of David, renders the tragic history of Tao-Klarjeti in the 6th-8th cc., identifying three stages: the Sasanian rule, Arab (Marwan the Deaf’s) invasions, and the epidemic.

Ashot I the Great reconstructed the areas in Shavshet-Imerkhevi, Tao-Klarjeti, Kola-Artaani, having been devastated as a result of Arab invasions and of epidemics. People returned to their original settlements. Roads and bridges were reconstructed, new villages emerged. Calm and order were established in the country. Supported by Ashot Curopalates, constructions of churches and monasteries were unprecedentedly large-scale, initiated and organized by Grigol of Khandzta. In the political map of the Caucasus, contours of a new state were outlined shortly becoming a reputable political entity in the region. It is true that one of the Georgian kingdoms¹⁰ was established in Tao-Klarjeti, but the Georgian intellectuals gave birth to the political conception of the common Georgian unity being rendered by Giorgi Merchule in the following way: “And Kartli consists of that spacious land in which the 75 and all prayers are said in the Georgian language. But [only] the *Kyrie eleison* is said in Greek, [the phrase] which means in Georgian “Lord, have mercy” or “Lord, be merciful to us.”¹¹ Later, the unification of Georgia was based upon these common Georgian values – religious, linguistic, cultural unity.

Briefly about the historiography of the issue

Of the monasteries of the “twelve hermitages” of Klarjeti, Vakhushti Bagrationi mentions only Opiza in his *Description*: “There is the monastery of John the Baptist. There was the Baptist’s larynx in it. And it

⁹ D. Stathakopoulos, *Crime and Punishment, The Plague in the Byzantine Empire, 541–749*, p. 105.

¹⁰ In that period, there already existed the Kingdom of Abkhaz in western Georgia and the Kingdoms of Kakheti and Hereti in eastern Georgia. See მ. ლორთქიფანიძე, *ფეოდალური საქართველოს პოლიტიკური გაერთიანება, თბილისი 1963*, pp. 137-200.

¹¹ გიორგი მერჩულე, *შრომა და მოღვაწეობა ღირსად ცხოვრებისაა წმინდისა და ნეგარისა მამისა ჩუენისა გრიგოლისი არქიმანდრიტისაა, ხანცთისა და შაგბერდისა აღმამეუბლისაა, და მის თანა ქსენებაა მრავალთა მამთა ნეგართაა*, p. 290.

was very well designed and constructed. There were a lot of monks. And it was decorated and rich in everything. With the ecclesiastic rule and donated lands, and now the great facility is useless and empty. It is called the Opiza Monastery.”¹² Until the 1870s, Georgian scholars did not learn much about with respect to this. In 1873, D. Bakradze published his encyclopedic article “Caucasus in the ancient monuments of Christianity” in which only Opiza deserves a brief definition.¹³ Here, the scholar sorrowfully notes that “it is for sure that inscriptions might have been retained in Opiza which have not be copied by anyone and, therefore, they are not familiar to us.”¹⁴

Giorgi Kazbegi was the first among the Georgian travelers who visited the Opiza Monastery and provided its brief description. It is true that, some days later, he was already near the village of Doliskana but told nothing about that monastery. G. Kazbegi informed the reader about other monasteries: “In the surroundings of Opiza, in an hour’s distance, there are villages of Pora (Porta – J. S.) and Berta. People say that remnants of a big church have been preserved here.”¹⁵ Following the Russia-Turkey war in 1877-1878, this territory was included into the Russian empire and, naturally enough, it became significantly easier for Georgian scholars to study antiquities of Klarjeti and Shavsheti. Irrespective of the fact, Georgian and Russian historians and art experts have not been particularly enthusiastic in this respect. For almost two decades, only three expeditions were organized in this unfamiliar and unstudied region. Ekvtime Takaishvili repeatedly noted the deeds of the scholars concerned with antiquities of Tao-Klarjeti; however, he did not spare rebukes: “Even D. Bakradze is to be reprimanded who is very

¹² ბ ა ტ ო ნ ი შ ვ ი ლ ი ვ ა ხ უ შ ტ ი, აღწერა სამეფოსა საქართველოსა, ქართლის ცხოვრება, გეგსტი ღაღგენილი ყველა ძირითადი ხელნაწერის მიხედვით ს, ყ ა უ ხ ჩ ი შ ვ ი ლ ი ს მიერ, IV, თბილისი 1973, p. 678.

¹³ *Акты, собранные Кавказскою археографическою комиссиею, Т. V, Издан. под ред. председ. комиссии с. с. Ад. Берге, Тифлиς 1873, p. 1069.*

¹⁴ *Акты, собранные Кавказскою археографическою комиссиею, Т. V, p.1069.* It is true that international authors started describing of monuments of Tao-Klarjeti some decades earlier but antiquities of Shavsheti and Klarjeti were spared by them. This can be well illustrated with the German traveler and botanist K. Koch. E. Takaishvili specially noted that “as for the part of Tao which belonged to Oltisi Province of Kars District before WWI, before my 1902 and 1907 expeditions, there were just informations by the German botanist K. Koch about the Oltisi Castle and mostly about Nefsi-Penyak, that is, Georgian Bana and also about Dadasheni of Kola.” K. Koch, *Wanderungen im Oriente, während der Jahre 1843 und 1844, Reise langs der Donau nach Konstantinopel und nach Trebisonde, Landes-Industrie-Comptoir, 1846.* ექ. თ ა ყ ა ი შ ვ ი ლ ი, 1917 წლის არქეოლოგიურ ექსპედიცია სამხრეთ საქართველოში, თბილისი 1960, p. 6.

¹⁵ გ. ყ ა შ ბ ე გ ი, სამი თვე თურქეთის საქართველოში, ბათუმი 1995, p. 103.

brief and laconic while describing monuments of Oltisi and does not say much about them in his diary. As for the painter B. who accompanied Bakradze, he has made surprisingly helpless, literally childish drawings.”¹⁶ It is true that E. Takaishvili’s rebuke is about the monuments in the region of Oltisi, specifically, the Bana Cathedral, but the same can be said about individual monuments of “twelve hermitages” in Klarjeti. It was the region of Shavsheti and Klarjeti that was initially visited by D. Bakradze, publishing a short description of this travel. In 1879, under the aegis of the Russian Academy of Sciences, D. Bakradze traveled to the gorge of the river Chorokhi – Batumi, Artvini and Artanuji. He delivered a report of the expedition at the session of the Department of History and Philology of the Academy on March 4, 1880, and, later, he published it in *Записки Императорской Академии Наук*. The report is rather brief and contains only general information.¹⁷ Later, D. Bakradze repeatedly dealt with the monasteries of Doliskana, Opiza, Porta.¹⁸ In 1889, A. Kutateladze published the article “The Cross Monastery and its State before 1845” in the newspaper *Iveria*, telling of an unknown work - about the life of Archimandrite Grigol, the builder of Shatberdi and Khandzta, appended with a testament.¹⁹ From the very beginning, Georgian scholars showed keen interest in that article, and, in the same year, D. Bakradze, in his „A History of Georgia“ somehow collated the knowledge, collected during his travel, and the data from the testament of the life of St Grigol.²⁰

In 1888, Academician Praskovya Uvarova and Academician Andrey Pavlinov traveled to Klarjeti and Shavsheti. Countess Uvarova’s notes are too general; however, she mentions Berta, Doliskana, Opiza, Porta,

¹⁶ ექ. თაყაიშვილი, ავგობიოგრაფიული ჩანაწერები და მოგონებები, ექ. თაყაიშვილი, რჩეული ნაშრომები, I, თბილისი 1968, p. 383.

¹⁷ Д. Б а к р а д з е, *Об археологической поездке, совершенной в 1879 г., по поручению Академии наук, в Чорохский бассейн, в Батум, Артвин и Артанудж, Записки Императорской Академии Наук*, Том 37, С. П. 1881, pp. 47-50.

¹⁸ In his papers “A note on Batumi district” and “A historical-ethnographic essay on Kars district,” D. Bakradze repeatedly dwelt upon some monuments of Klarjeti; however, his descriptions are rather general. Д. Б а к р а д з е, *Заметки о Батумской области, Известия Кавказского отдела Императорского Русского Географического общества*, Том 6. Выпуск I. 1879-1881, pp. 153-167. Д. Б а к р а д з е, *Историко-этнографический очерк Карской области, Известия КОИРГО*, Тф., т. VII, №1, 1882-1883, p. 200.

¹⁹ ა. ქუთათელაძე, ჯვარის მონასტერი და მისი მდგომარეობა 1845 წლამდე, ბიბლიოთეკა და წარწერანი წიგნებზედ ჯვარის მონასტერში, გაზ. „ივერია“, 1 აპრილი 1889, N70, pp. 3-4; 4 აპრილი, № 72, p. 2; 5 აპრილი, № 73, pp. 2-3.

²⁰ დ. ბაქრაძე, ისტორია საქართველოსი, (უძველესი დროიდან X საუკუნის დასასრულამდე), გვილისი 1889, pp. 233-234.

(Khandzta).²¹ The most comprehensive, for the time, descriptions of Opiza, Porta (Khandzta) and Doliskana were made by A. Pavlinov. Besides, he also visited other monuments of Klarjeti and Shavsheti and produced rich data as an architect-restorer.²²

The substantial study of hermitages of Klarjeti has been associated with the name of Nicolas Marr. In 1902, Nicolas Marr and Ivane Javakhishvili organized an expedition in order to explore the library at the monastery on Mount Sinai. They were also aimed at studying of Georgian antiquities of Jerusalem. N. Marr copied the text of „*The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*“ at the library of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The work was initially discovered by N. Chubinashvili in 1845 but he failed to study it. In 1894, A. Tsagareli published his archive which contained a brief description of *The Life*.²³ In 1889, A. Kutateladze published a brief note about the work in the newspaper *Iveria*.²⁴ This is all what was known about „*The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*“. The discovery of the manuscript by N. Marr totally changed our imaginations about the twelve hermitages of Klarjeti. It took N. Marr several years to study *The Life*. In July-August, 1904, he traveled to Shavsheti and Klarjeti visiting all the places associated with the activities of Grigol of Khandzta. In 1911, following his long endeavors, N. Marr published the critically established Georgian text of „*The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*“ accompanied with its Russian translation.²⁵

A new stage of the study of antiquities of Tao-Klarjeti has been associated with the name of Ekvtime Takaishvili who arranged three major

²¹ П. Уварова, *Кавказ: Абхазия, Аджария, Шавиетия, Посховский участок, Путевые заметки*, ч. II, Москва 1891, pp. 306-314. As a matter of fact, in 1901, Z. Chichinadze published information about the archeological excavations by Countess Praskovya Uvarova and about her taking of various artifacts from the church to Moscow. Z. Chichinadze write: “The church of Tbeti was excavated by Countess Uvarova. All the tombs were excavated... Alongside with various artifacts, 80 poods (1310.4 kilograms) of rare ornamented stones were packed in boxes and taken to Moscow by the countess.” გაზ. „ცნობის ფურცელი“, № 1562, 1901 წლის 24 აგვისტო, p. 3.

²² А. М. Павлинов, *Батумская область, экспедиция на Кавказе 1888 года, Материалы по археологии Кавказа подъ ред. графини Уваровой*, вып. III, Москва 1893, pp. 63-68.

²³ ლ. მენაბდე, ძველი ქართული მწერლობის კერები, I, ნაკვ. II, თბილისი 1962.

²⁴ ა. ქუთათელიძე, ჯვარის მონასტერი და მისი მდგომარეობა 1845 წლამდე, ბიბლიოთეკა და წარწერანი წიგნებზედ ჯვარის მონასტერში, გაზ. „ივერია“, № № 70, 72, 73.

²⁵ Георгий Мерчул, *Житие св. Григория Хандзтийского, Введение, издание и перевод с дневником поездки в Шавицию и Кларджию* Н.Я. Марра, *Тексты и разыскания по армяно-грузинской филологии*, Кн. 7, Санкт-Петербург 1911; ნ. მარი, შავშეთსა და კლარჯეთში მოგზაურობის დიურები, რუსულიდან თარგმნარ. დიასამიძემ, ბათუმი 2012; მ. ჯაფარიძე, ნიკო მარის მოგზაურობა შავშეთსა და კლარჯეთში, თბილისი 1996. N. Marr took a small bell from Opiza and donated it to the Church Museum of Georgia. See „ცნობის ფურცელი“, № 2758, 1905 წლის 2 მარტი.

expeditions (in 1902, 1907, and 1917) to explore monuments of Kola-Artaani and Tao. E. Takaishvili did not travel to the gorges of the Shavshetistskali and Artanujistskali, that is, to Klarjeti and Shavsheti. He provides an explanation why these two regions stayed beyond the scope of his scholarly interests: "When I started my archeological travels to "Ottoman Georgia," I visited all the areas except Klarjeti, Shavsheti, Imerkhevi and the District of Batomi, that is, the basin of the Chorokhi, because that region was thoroughly explored by N. Marr and, -- who would doubt? -- he provided his best, thorough and truly scientific description concerning the publication of „*The Life of Khandzta*“. It is a wonderful book and, even if he did not do anything else for the history of Georgian culture (but he did so much!), that would be sufficient to gratefully acknowledge his deeds forever."²⁶ Irrespective of this, Ekvtime Takaishvili collected data on Shavsheti and Klarjeti. He seemed to have conceived of exploring the provinces, however, at that stage, it was not urgent as far as Nicolas Marr had visited the regions. E. Takaishvili studied the antiquities which were either totally or partially unknown. E. Takaishvili discusses the following monuments: Opiza, Ancha, Khandzta, Shatberdi, Berta, Jmerki, Midznadzori, Tskarostavi, Gunatlu or Gunatle Convent, Mere, Baretelta, Doliskana, Tbeti, Sveti. The scholar provided both brief and comprehensive descriptions of the monuments.²⁷

After 1921, this region was included in Turkey, and Georgian scholars were no longer allowed to visit them. Exceptions were made for foreign scholars and ethnic Georgian scholars living abroad; however, almost till the end of the 1950^s, even neither American nor European scholar were able to study Tao-Klarjeti. At the turn of the 1950^s-60^s, there came an improved period in the Soviet Union-Turkey relationships. In 1964-1965, Turkey was visited by the delegation of the USSR Supreme Soviet and S. Gromiko, Minister of Foreign Affairs; respectively, Moscow was visited by high-ranking delegations of the Republic of Turkey. The processes in point set forth the issue of the lifting of the regime of excessive security along the Soviet Union-Turkey border. Turkey lifted some restrictions along the border. It was easier for foreigners to travel there, giving those interested in the history of Klarjeti and Shavsheti an opportunity to visit monuments of the Georgian architecture on site.

²⁶ ექ. თაკაიშვილი, ავტობიოგრაფიული ჩანაწერები და მოგონებები, p. 365.

²⁷ The materials are in preparation for publication.

In 1959, Tao-Klarjeti was visited by N. and J.-M. Thierry who, of the “twelve hermitages” saw Doliskana, Berta and Opiza, Khandzta (Porta).²⁸ It is noteworthy that, in that period, Opiza was not yet destroyed and the monastery had a domed church which was soon exploded. Beginning from 1967, V. Jobadze, an ethnic Georgian art historian living in the USA, started expeditions in Klarjeti and Shavsheti; in 1968-1983, he organized eight expeditions to explore Tao-Klarjeti and produced one of the most significant monographs „*Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historical Tao, Klarjet'i and Shavshet'i*.”²⁹

In the Soviet period, Georgian scholars were not given an opportunity to explore Georgian antiquities in the territory of Turkey. Notwithstanding the limitations, some interesting studies were published in Georgia addressing the past and the architecture of the Klarjeti hermitages.

„*Giorgi Merchule*“ by Pavle Ingorokva is a good summary of the information on the case in point, available by the mid 20th century.³⁰ We should note „*Place of Monuments of Tao-Klarjeti in the History of the Georgian Architecture*“ by V. Beridze,³¹ „*Architecture of Tao-Klarjeti*“ by P. Zakaraia.³²

Since the 1990^s, alongside with increased interest toward Tao-Klarjeti, Georgian scholars got actively involved in the exploration of the twelve hermitages of Klarjeti. Not only art experts were active; historians, linguists, ethnologists, philologists made interesting contributions.³³

²⁸ N. Thierry, Notes d'un voyage en Géorgie turque, Bedi kartlisa: Revue de kartvélogie, vol. VIII-IX, №34- 35, Paris 1960, pp. 10-29; N. Thierry, Notes d'un nouveau voyage en Géorgie Turque, Bedi kartlisa: Revue de kartvélogie, vol. XXV, Paris 1968, pp. 51-65; M. Thierry, Topographie et état actuel des monuments géorgiens en Turquie orientale, Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes, 5, 1989, pp. 129-167.

²⁹ ვ. ჯობაძე, ადრეული შუა საუკუნეების ქართული მონასტრები ისტორიულ ცენტრში, კლარჯეთისა და შავშეთში, თბილისი 2006, pp. 23-89.

³⁰ პ. ინგოროკვა, გიორგი მერჩულე, თბილისი 1954.

³¹ В. Беридзе, Место памятников Тао-Кларджети в истории грузинской архитектуры, Тбилиси 1981; ვ. ბერიძე, ძველი ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრება, თბილისი 1974.

³² П. Закарая, Зодчество Тао-Кларджети, Тбилиси 1990.

³³ დ. კლდიაშვილი, კლარჯეთის სამონასტრო მშენებლობის სათავეებთან: გუნათლეს ვანი, ლიგერაგურა და ხელოვნება, 4, 1998, პპ. 162-180. დ. კლდიაშვილი, სინას სულთა მაგიანე (მარკოზი - ხანცთას სამრეკლოს მამულებელი და სინას სულთა მაგიანის ბოლო შემავსებელი), ლიგერაგურა და ხელოვნება, № 3, 1999, pp. 47-77. დ. კირთაძე, ხანძთისა და შაგბერდის ადგილმდებარეობის საკითხისათვის, ჟურ. „რელიგია“, № 1, 2, 3, თბილისი 2003.

ირ. გაგვიშვილი, ირ. კოპლაგაძე, ცხო-კლარჯეთი, თბილისი 2004; დ. ხოშტარიანი, კლარჯეთის ეკლესიები და მონასტრები, თბილისი 2005; თ. ხუციშვილი, კ. შენგელია, შ. მაჭავარიანი, ვ. სილოგავა, შაგბერდის მონასტრის ლოკალიზაციის პრობლემისათვის, ილია ჭავჭავაძის სახ. ენისა და კულტურის უნივერსიტეტის საქართველოს ისტორიის კათედრის სამეც-

Grigol of Khandzta in Klarjeti

In the 9th century, the beginning of the political and cultural revival in Tao-Klarjeti, South Georgia, was expressed in the enlivening of the church life. New churches and monasteries were constructed and old ones were reconstructed. In the Middle Ages, activities of monasteries were not confined to religious functions only; they were the country's dominant cultural and educational centers. Therefore, the revival of new monasteries in Tao-Klarjeti implied facilitation of culture, art, education. That was why, as soon as Grigol of Khandzta appeared in Klarjeti in order to establish new monasteries, he was supported by the king and the royal court, as well as local feudals. It would not be justifiable to conceptualize St Grigol's activities only within the religious and cultural aspect. This process was of great political importance. R. Siradze was quite adequate stating that "in the later half of the 8th century, Georgian public figures went to Tao-Klarjeti, as to a promised land, in order to regain their motherland – Georgia. Owing to Grigol of Khandzta, Tao-Klarjeti became a religious and cultural center of all Georgia. It was not by accident that great fathers of Mount Athos further developed that aspect of the activities of those in Tao-Klarjeti, and "they illuminated the language and country of Georgians." Spiritual life triggered the revival of Klarjeti and later it became a political center."³⁴

Grigol of Khandzta was born in 579 to noblemen's family of Kartli. Grigol's aunt (father's sister) was a wife of Nerse, the Principal of Kartli. This kindred relationship shows that Grigol should have belonged to one of the distinguished noble families in Kartli. The family decided that Grigol was to become a clergy. Therefore, he was educated adequately. Initially, he was consecrated a priest; later, he was prepared

ნიერო შრომათა კრებული, „საისტორიო შტუდიები“, V, 2004; თ. ხუციშვილი, კ. შენგელია, მ. ციხაძე, შ. შაჭავარიანი, შატბერდის მონასტერი, მასალები, იდენტიფიკაცია, კვლევის პერსპექტივები, თბილისი 2006; რ. თოფჩიშვილი, მოგიერთი ქართული ეთნოგრაფიული რეალია შავშეთში, კლარჯეთსა და ტაოში. სამხრეთ-დასავლეთ საქართველო მეზობელ სახელმწიფოთა გეოპოლიტიკური ინტერესების კონტექსტში აჭარის დედასამშობლოსთან დაბრუნების 130 წლისთავისადმი მიძღვნილი საერთაშორისო საერთაშორისო-სამეცნიერო კონფერენციის მასალები ბათუმში 2009; მ. ფაღავა, ხანძთისა და შატბერდის ლოკალიზაციისათვის. მნათობი № 1, 2007; მ. ფაღავა, ძეგლისა და მიძინაძორის ეტიმოლოგიისათვის. ჩვენი სულიერების ბალავარი, 4, 2012; ნ. ანდლუაძე, ფ. დევედარიანი, თ. ღვალა, დ. ხოშტარია, ტაო-კლარჯეთის არქიტექტურა და მონუმენტური ფერწერა, კრ. ახალციხის და ტაო-კლარჯეთის ეპარქია, თბილისი 2013; მ. ჩოხარაძე, ხანძთა და „ათორმეტ სავანეთა“ მხარის ძველი სალოცავები, ბათუმში 2015.

³⁴ რ. სირაძე, ლიკნაბურულ-ესთეტიკური ნარკვევები, თბილისი 1987, p. 78.

for becoming a bishop. However, by 782, he left Kartli and secretly fled to Klarjeti. Grigol and his three associates settled at the Monastery of St John the Baptist in Opiza. Two years later, Grigol decided to establish a new monastery. In the words of Giorgi Merchule, his biographer, by God's blessing, he came to Khandzta where there was "a hermit" whose name was Khuedios. St Grigol was so drawn to the environs that he decided to build a monastery there. Initially, the monks built a wooden church and cells; later, with the material help of the local feudal Gabriel Dapanchuli, they constructed a stone church. In order to arrange the monastic life, St Grigol established a strict typicon based on that of the Sabatsminda Monastery near Jerusalem.

"Twelve Hermitages of Klarjeti"

In the medieval centuries, the Klarjeti monasteries were frequently referred to as the glorious "twelve hermitages" of Klarjeti; they are: Opiza, Khandzta, Shatberdi, Midznadzori, Tskarostavi, Baretelta, Mere, Daba, Parekhi, Berta, Jmerki, and Doliskana. Some of them are well-known; locations of others are arguable, and they are to be traced and their exact localization is necessary.

Of the twelve hermitages of Klarjeti, ten monasteries have already been exactly localized (Opiza, Khandzta, Shatberdi, Midznadzori, Tskarostavi, Daba, Parekhi, Berta, Jmerki, and Doliskana) and the localizations of only two of them (Baretelta and Mere) are doubtful.

Here is a brief history of these monasteries:

Opiza

The complex of the Opiza Monastery is located in the province of Artvin, in the gorge of the Shavshetistskali, in the village of Opiza (Turkish name Bakçılar). Opiza was one of the oldest among the hermitages of Tao-Klarjeti. The Opiza Monastery was established by Artavaz, duke of Vakhtang Gorgasali. In the early 9th century, Grigol Khandzteli came to Opiza. In that period, under Ashot I the Great, the construction of a new church of Opiza started. On the southern façade, there was a bas-relief with the image of Ashot Curopalates. In the site of the church, built by Ashot I, Guaram Mampali constructed a new one. According to „*Georgian Chronicle*“, "Guaram, son of Ashot, died and was buried in Opiza which had been built by him anew."³⁵ As it is seen from King

³⁵ შ ა გ ი ა ნ ე ქ ა რ თ ლ ი ს ა, უ ც ნ ბ ი ა ვ გ ლ ო რ ი, ქ ა რ თ ლ ი ს ც ხ ო ვ რ ე ბ ა, გ ე ქ ს ტ ი ლ ა დ გ ე ნ ი ლ ი ყ ვ ე ლ ა ძ ი რ ი თ ა დ ი ს ე ლ ნ ა წ ე რ ო ს მ ი ხ ე დ ვ ი თ ს. ყ ა უ ს ჩ ი შ ე ი ლ ი ს მ ი ე რ, 1, თ ბ ი ლ ს ი 1955, p. 260.

Bagrat's charter, Guaram donated lands to Opiza.³⁶ According to the anonymous Georgian chronicler (Zhamtaagmtsereli), holy relics of St John the Baptist were kept at the Opiza Monastery. The chronicler tells that St John the Baptist meted out the terrible tempest to the Mongol army and thus saved the monastery from routed.³⁷

The complex consisted of the main church, the belfry, the refectory, the ossuary, monks' cells, and various facilities. After the Ottoman conquest of Shavsheti and Klarjeti, the monastery was depopulated. In Vakhushti Bagrationi's words, in the monastery of the Baptist, "and now the great facility is useless and empty".³⁸ Until the mid 20th century, the monastery was well preserved; the main church still had a dome. In the 1960^s, Opiza was exploded. Currently, the monastery is completely demolished. While constructing the village road, the walls of the main church were further destroyed.

Khandzta

The Khandzta Monastery is located in Klarjeti (Republic of Turkey), District of Artvin, near the village of Firnal (previously called Porta). There are three main settlements: Lower, Middle, and Upper Porta. The church is in Lower Porta, and there are several dozens of households in Upper Porta, in the deep gorge. Before St Grigol and his associates' coming, there was a habitat of hermits (monks) under schema vows in this area. In approximately 784, St Grigol built a wooden church in Khandzta which was soon substituted with a stone one. The refectory and monks' cells were constructed. The church, which has reached our days, was erected in the earlier half of the 10th c. in the site of the church of St Grigol. Its construction started under the reign of Grand Duke Ashot Kukhi (d. 918) and was completed under the reign of Grand Duke Gurgun (d. 941).

Presently, there is the surviving main church after St George which is in a regrettable state. For years, it was used as a cattle stall. The monks' cells, the belfry, and the spring with a small church have been better preserved. The refectory and other facilities are in ruins.

Nowadays, the place-name "Khandzta" is lost. Local residents do not know this name. As for the former monastery, they refer to it simply

³⁶ ქართული ისტორიული საბუთები IX-XIII სს., შეადგინეს და გამოსაცემად მოამზადეს თ. ენუქიძემ, ვ. სილოგავამ, ნ. შოშიაშვილმა, თბილისი 1984, p. 33.

³⁷ ქამთაალმწერელი, ქართლის ცხოვრება, ტექსტი დადგენილი ყველა ძირითადი ხელნაწერის მიხედვით ს. ყაუხჩიშვილის მიერ, II, თბილისი 1959, p. 259-260.

³⁸ ბატონიშვილი ვახუშტი, აღწერა სამეფოსა საქართველოსა, p. 678.

as “monastery.” This is hard to explain as far as local residents remember other Georgian place-names in the vicinity of Khandzta. N. Marr considered the church of Nuka to be the Khandzta Monastery, and the complex in Lower Porta to be Shatberdi.³⁹ P. Ingorokva was completely correct to have assumed that Shatberdi could have in no way been in that zone. It is very well seen in „*The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*“ that Shatberdi is far from the hermitages of Opiza and Khandzta. Meanwhile, P. Ingorokva referred to the monastery of Lower Porta as Khandzta.⁴⁰ his approach did not seem to be doubtful; however, recently it was stated that the monastery of Khandzta was located in Imerkhevi⁴¹ and that Khandzta and the church of Nuka were one and the same.⁴² Despite of the controversies, the arguments supporting the approach that the monastery in Lower Porta is Khandzta are much more ponderable.

Shatberdi

According to „*The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*“, Ashot I the Great granted “arable land” of Shatberdi to the monasteries of Khandzta. During the reign of Ashot’s son – Bagrat I Curopalates and with his support, St Grigol decided to build a monastery in those areas which was later referred to as either “Great Lavra” or “Glorious Lavra.” From the very beginning, Shatberdi was a distinguished literary center among the hermitages of Klarjeti. Presently, it is difficult to flatly state which of the hermitages was known as Shatberdi. In 1966, I. Zdanevitch made a point about the identity of Yeni-Rabat and Shatberdi.⁴³ Some scholars supported that viewpoint; however, others were more reluctant about this identity.

In 1995, M. Kadiroğlu set forth a viewpoint that the site near the village Okumuşlar Koy, called Sharbeti, might have been Shatberdi, and organized an expedition-experiment in order to prove her assump-

³⁹ Георгий Мерчул, *Житие св. Григория Хандзтийского, Введение, издание и перевод с дневником поездки в Шавшию и Кларджию* Н.Я. Марра, *Тексты и разыскания по армяно-грузинской филологии*, Кн. 7, Санкт-Петербург, 1911, pp. 135-155.

⁴⁰ პ. ინგოროკვა, *გიორგი მერჩულე*, pp. 311-321.

⁴¹ რ. თოფჩიშვილი, *ზოგიერთი ქართული ეთნოგრაფიული რეალია შავშეთში, კლარჯეთსა და გათში*, p. 205.

⁴² მ. ფალავა, *ხანძთისა და შატბერდის ლოკალიზაციისათვის. მნათობი № 1*, 2007, p. 147. M. Chokhadaze considers the rejection of N. Marr’s version to be premature. See მ. ჩოხაძე, *ხანძთა და „ათორმეც საფანეთა“ მხარის ძველი სალოცავეები*, ბათუმი 2015, p. 80.

⁴³ I. Zdanevitch, *L’Itineraire géorgien de Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo et les églises aux confins de l’Atabégat*, Paris 1966, p. 12.

tion.⁴⁴ Georgian scholars echoed the viewpoint and enriched it with new details.⁴⁵ It should also be noted that initially it was P. Ingorokva who stated about the identity of Sharbeti//Shakhberdi//Shatbedri. He wrote: "It is noteworthy that the name of Shatberdi may not be lost. In 1890, the historian T. Zhordania recorded the information by Grigol Gurieli, a competent individual in areas of Meskheta, that "the village of Shakhbedi (which probably is a disfigured version of the name of Shatberti) is located in the gorge of Chorokhi, on the mountain: there are 40 versts from Artvin to Shakhbedi."⁴⁶ The Shakhbedi should have been the Sharbeti of the village of Okumuşlar; both sites are in the gorge of the river Chorokhi, in the mountains, and approximately 30-40 kilometers away from Artvin. Currently, the view that Shatberdi is located in the gorge of Chorokhi has more supporters; however, it will be difficult to ascertain something until archeological excavations are conducted in the site of the former monastery.

Tskarostavi

Tskarostavi has been a significant hearth of old Georgian literature. For a long period of time, the center was assumed to be located in Javakheti, by Lake Kartsakhi. The discovery of „*The Life of Grigol of Kahndzta*“ shed light on the issue in question. According to it, the literary center of Tskarostavi is located in Klarjeti, in the gorge of the river Karchkhala. The Tskarostavi Monastery was established by the disciple of David of Midznadzor, Ilarion, later the Catholicos of Mtskheta. The monastery, founded in the 9th century, later turned into a significant literary center. A number of Georgian public figures were educated at the Tskarostavi Monastery. In the early 20th century, only ruins were survived in Tskarostavi where the remnants of the seminary were still identifiable in which several generations of men-of-letters were educated.

⁴⁴ M. Kadiroğlu, *Untersuchungen an mittelalterlichen georgischen Baudenkmalern in Nordost-Anatolien*, Georgica, 22, 1999, pp. 8-19.

⁴⁵ თ. ხუციშვილი, „შაგბერდის მონასტრის იდენტიფიკაციის პრობლემისათვის, გაზ. „24 საათი“, 15 სექტემბერი, 2004; თ. ხუციშვილი, კ. შენგელია, შ. მაჭავარიანი, ვ. სილოგავა, „გაო-კლარჯეთი (კატალოგი), თბილისი, 2004; თ. ხუციშვილი, კ. შენგელია, შ. მაჭავარიანი, ვ. სილოგავა, შაგბერდის მონასტრის ლოკალიზაციის პრობლემისათვის, ილია ჭავჭავაძის სახ. ენისა და კულტურის უნივერსიტეტის საქართველოს ისტორიის კათედრის სამეცნიერო შრომათა კრებული, „საისტორიო შგუდიები“, V, 2004; თ. ხუციშვილი, კ. შენგელია, მ. ციბაძე, შ. მაჭავარიანი, შაგბერდის მონასტერი, მასალები, იდენტიფიკაცია, კვლევის პერსპექტივები, თბილისი 2006.

⁴⁶ პ. ინგოროვიჩი, გიორგი მერჩულე, p. 318.

Midznadzori

It is very well seen from „*The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*“ that this monastery was a rather big hermitage. Initially, it was N. Marr who provided its description; however, during his expedition, the former monastery was destroyed.⁴⁷ Local residents pronounce its name as “Miznazol.” It is located in the village of Yeniköy, at the bank of the river Karchkhala. Its facilities are dispersed on the terrace. A rather sizable church and a monastic complex were here. Among the ruins, the big hall is still visible which should have been a seminary.

The place-name “Midznadzori” is Armenian, meaning “middle gorge;” however, recently, M. Pagava attempted to associate the name with Georgian roots. In the scholar’s opinion, Midznadzori must be a distorted form of the mijna-jvari (“hedge-cross”) (*midzna-dzori//midznajvari//mijna-jvari*).⁴⁸

Parekhi

The Parekhi monastic complex is located in the province of Artvin, in two kilometer’s distance from the historical village of Parekhi (the village of Uganali), in the gorge within high-rising rocky mountains. The main church was domed. Beside it, there is a ruin of another church. In the late 20th century, the refectory and other facilities were still remaining. The hermitage was founded in the earlier half of the 9th century by Mikel of Parekhi who used to be at the Midznadzory Monastery before.

Berta

The main church of the Berta monastic complex was a basilica. Presently, it is destroyed and only one remnant has been maintained. There are a number of remnants of other facilities in the territory of the monastery. Monastic activities started to revive in Berta since the 9th century. According to „*The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*“, when the kings of the Bagrationi dynasty came to see monasteries of Tao-Klarjeti, they paid a special visit to Berta.

Doliskana

Doliskana Church is located in the southern part of the village of Hamamli (Artvin Province). It might have built between 850-950. Accord-

⁴⁷ Георгий Мерчул, *Житие св. Григория Хандзтийского, Введение, издание и перевод с дневником поездки в Шавшино и Кларджию* Н.Я. Марра, pp. 131-135.

⁴⁸ მ. ფაღავა, *ძველისა და მიძნაძორის ეგიმოლოგიისათვის. ჩვენი სულიერების ბალაგარი*, 4, 2012, p. 206.

ing to „*The Life of Kartli*“, Doliskana is referred to in the description of the assassination of Ashot I Curopalates. A camp of the king’s supporters was in Doliskana from where they chased Ashot’s assassins and defeated them on the banks of the river Chorokhi. The construction of the church is associated with the names of Bagrat and Sumbat, sons of the Georgian King Adamase. There is a standing-out slab with the image of King Sumbat built in the south-eastern facet of the isthmus of the church. There is the inscription on this slab: “Christ glorify our King Sumbat with longevity.”⁴⁹

Under the Ottoman rule, the Doliskana church was transformed into a mosque. After the reunification of the district by the Russian empire, it housed a military unit. Scratched inscriptions by soldiers are still preserved on the church wall. Later, the church was once again transformed into a mosque. In 2004, when a new mosque was built, the church was cleaned and interesting pieces of ancient painting became visible.

Baretelta and Mere

Baretelta is referred to several times in „*The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*“. N. Marr attempted to localize it on the left bank of the river Shavshetistskali where local residents indicated the place-name “Baretevla//Bareteuli.”⁵⁰ N. Marr failed to see the former monastery; he only came across smaller ruins which could hardly be assumed a religious facility. In Merchule’s text, it seems that Midznadzori, Tskarostavi and Baretelta are within a single zone: “And the kings paid visits to Midznadzori, Tskakostavi, and Baretelta, and their places.”⁵¹ The locations of Midznadzori and Tskarostavi have been established; as for Baretelta, N. Marr localized it as situated some kilometers away from those places, on the left bank of the river Shavshetistskali. Of course, we can only assume that Baretelta is the present-day church of Nuka, located in the gorge of the river Karchkhala, on the opposite side of the Tskarostavi Monastery. We have only oblique arguments for ascertaining that. While visiting western Georgia, Grigol of Khandzta tells the King of Abkhaz about the beauty of hermitages of Klarjeti, concluding: “There are no roads and they can hardly be reached by villagers because

⁴⁹ დ. ხოშტარია, კლარჯეთის ეკლესიები და მონასტრები, p. 118.

⁵⁰ Георгий Мерчул, *Житие св. Григория Хандзтийского, Введение, издание и перевод с дневником поездки в Шавшию и Кларджию* Н.Я. Марра, pp. 115-116.

⁵¹ გიორგი მერჩულე, შრომა და მოღვაწეობა ღირსად ცხოვრებისა და წმიდისა და ნეტარისა მამისა ჩუენისა გრიგოლისი არქიმანდრიგისა, ხანცთისა და შაგბერდისა აღმაშენებლისა, და მის თანა კსენება მრავალთა მამათა ნეტართა, p. 276.

they are located in the high mountains of Gado. And it is surrounded by a high mountain and the river Shavshetistskali as its hedge.”⁵² As it is seen, the southern parts of the hermitages of Klarjeti were washed by the river Shavshetistskali; hence, Baretelta should be expected to have been located on the right bank of the river, where other hermitages of Klarjeti were situated (of course, with the exception of Shatberdi which was far from that area). Giorgi Merchule notes: “At the time, they were welcomed by Abbot of Midzmadzori, Archpriest, Venerable David, builder of monasteries, and his disciples – Venerable Ilarion, Father and builder of Tskarostavi, who became Catholicos of Mskheta, and Venerable Father Zakaria, builder of Baretelta.”⁵³ Thus, two monasteries: Tskarostavi and Baretelta were built by the monks from Midznadzori. Midznadzori is located in the middle of the gorge of the river Karchkhala, while Tskarostavi is on one side of the gorge down the river before it joins Shavshetistskali, and the church of Nuka is located on another side. Were the both monasteries built by Ilarion and Zakaria, disciples of David of Midznadzor? In that case, Baretelta should be assumed to be the church of Nuka; but what is to be done with the place-name “Baretevla”? I do not rule out that the name emerged owing to the fact that the environs belonged to the monastery. Such cases are frequent in Tao, Klarjeti, and Shavsheti when lands of a monastery have its name. For instance, the place-name “Khandzta” is attested in Imerkhevi, this implying that the territory belonged to the monastery.

Irrespective of the aforementioned, it should once again be noted that the identity of Baretelta and Nuka is just a viewpoint and it needs substantial argumentation. As for the nunnery of Mere, its location is still not established. The place-name “Mere” occurs in the gorge of the river Karchkhala. N. Marr identified several locations in Imerkhevi with this name; however, he preferred the village of Mere, to the north of Midznadzori, but he failed to detect the former monastery.⁵⁴ To our days, the famous nunnery of Mere has not been traced.

* * *

There was a certain hierarchy among the hermitages of Klarjeti, which might have not been regulated with a document and was only a strictly established tradition. Giorgi Merchule quotes a conversation

⁵² გიორგი მერჩულე, p. 269.

⁵³ გიორგი მერჩულე, p. 275.

⁵⁴ Георгий Мерчул, *Житие св. Григория Хандзтийского, Введение, издание и перевод с дневником поездки в Шавшию и Кларджию* Н.Я. Марра, p. 131.

between Grigol of Khandzta and the abbot of Opiza: "And every time, the Holy Fathers gathered at Khandzta and adopted a canon for Lent and left. Once, the venerable fathers gathered at the saint, and Father Grigol preached kind words of spiritual life to all of them except the abbot of Opiza. And the Abbot got worried and told: - Holy Father, why did you spare your spiritual words for me?" And he said: - Worthy Father, I spared you not for the sake of neglect but because Opiza was built earlier than all of these monasteries and I do rule neither over Opiza nor its abbot."⁵⁵ The context highlights the preference of the Opiza Monastery over other ones. That was echoed by the anonymous Georgian chronicler (Zhamtaagmtsereli) telling that "Opiza, built and located among the mountains of Gado, is the foremost among the twelve hermitages. In it there is the larynx of John the Baptist, superior of all prophets and martyrs."⁵⁶ The distinguished status of the Opiza Monastery has an adequate explanation, and this detail has very well been observed by Giorgi Merchule; however, "superiority" was only symbolic and did not imply any organizational preference. This is well visible in the discussion of the land grievances between fathers of Opiza and Midznadzori under Bagrat IV. Both monasteries were independent in their efforts, and, moreover, monks of Opiza lost the case; the king granted them lands to compensate their losses.⁵⁷

Despite of the fact that Opiza "superior among the twelve hermitages," the Khandzta Monastery too enjoyed some rights. According to Giorgi Merchule, priests of Gunatle and Mere were ordained from Khandzta. "And Venerable Father Grigol thoroughly looked for and found a right place near Gunatle, made the sign of the cross on it, and there the nunnery was built called the Gunatle Convent, and, following Gabriel's request, Venerable Grigol appointed a priest from Khandzta... And Mother Pebronisa, venerable and decorated with omens, came from Samtskhe and settled in Mere... And the priest of Mere has come from Khandzta."⁵⁸ The status-quo was in effect till the later half of the 10th century; this is attested by Giorgi Merchule's special notes, almost an emphasis of that right. Nothing known whether the preferential right of the Khandzta Monastery was reserved or not in the following centuries.

⁵⁵ გიორგი მერჩულე, p. 282.

⁵⁶ ქამთააღმწერელი, p. 259.

⁵⁷ ქართული ისტორიული საბუთები IX-XIII სს., pp. 32-34.

⁵⁸ გიორგი მერჩულე, pp. 260-261.

A separate issue is the one concerning the archimandrite of “the twelve hermitages.” „*The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*“ tells about how St Grigol was consecrated an archimandrite of the hermitages of Klarjeti: “After that Holy Fathers intended to elevated Father Grigol to the position of a bishop, and they appointed Grigol the Archimandrite of All the Hermitages of Klarjeti, and reported to the kings. And they were very glad and confirmed it with a view to his great deeds. And for many years till his death he was well in charge of the order of holy fathers.”⁵⁹

Judging from the passage, after being appointed the Archimandrite of “the twelve hermitages,” Grigol of Khandzta was entitled to some administrative rights -- “he was well in charge of the order of holy fathers.”⁶⁰ Some scholars have made a point that the hermitages of Klarjeti “made up an organizational entity.”⁶¹ However, it should be noted that no such organizational entity is outlined in the work, and, moreover, the status of St Grigol is symbolic rather than fuctional. D. Khoshtaria justly states that Grigol’s “distinguished position was due to his title but rather to his generally acknowledged deeds and personal characteristics.”⁶² N. Marr referred to the hermitages of Klarjeti as “a republic of monks;”⁶³ however, this should not be understood that he drew a parallel with “the republic of monks” of Athos. “The twelve hermitages” have never been unified by means of a common administration; neither is any deliberative body seen anywhere. I already mentioned the deed issued by Bagrat IV “To Fathers of Opiza and Mijnadzori” dealing with the land grievance between the largest monasteries of “the twelve hermitages.” Bagrat IV states: “And with God and grace of all the saints, I laid them under the tribute: I summoned the clergy, grand dukes, dukes, and noblemen of upper and lower valleys to the royal court, and we sat together.”⁶⁴ If the hermitages of Klarjeti had a single archimandrite in the mid 11th century, he would by all means be invited to the royal court. The final part of the deed is far more interesting: “Hence, those who shall view our order and deed: future kings, grand dukes, dukes, abbots of Tao and Karjeti and all rulers, shall accept and shall not

⁵⁹ გ ი ო რ გ ი მ ე რ ჩ უ ლ ე, p. 276.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁶¹ დ. ს ო შ ტ ა რ ი ა, კ ლ ა რ ჯ ე თ ი ს ე კ ლ ე ს ი ე ბ ი დ ა მ ო ნ ა ხ ს ტ რ ე ბ ი, p. 52.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶³ Георгий Мерчул, *Житие св. Григория Хандзтийского, Введение, издание и перевод с дневником поездки в Шавшию и Кларджию* Н.Я. Марра, შესავალი, p. I.

⁶⁴ ქართული ისტორიული საბუთები IX-XIII სს., p. 34.

denounce and change it.”⁶⁵ It is hard to believe that, had an archimandrite of “the twelve hermitages of Klarjeti” existed, Bagrat IV did not mention him in the listing. It was an archimandrite who was to enforce and supervise decisions of the royal court both in that period and later. It seems that such an honorable status either did not exist then or it had only a symbolic function.

In the middle ages, the term “twelve hermitages” was a common phrase in no way referring to any kind of an administrative entity. The Opiza monastery was, of course, was particularly honored but that did not imply that its abbot stood higher than others.

“The twelve hermitages” of Klarjeti are to be explored in the future. None of these monuments have been studied archeologically. Despite of the fact that gold prospectors, that is, followers of black archeology, commit great crimes, multilateral excavations can open a new page in the history of monasteries of Klarjeti.

The “Sinai” of Georgia or Twelve Hermitages of Klarjeti

In the medieval centuries, the Klarjeti monasteries were frequently referred to as the glorious “twelve hermitages” of Klarjeti; they are: Opiza, Khandzta, Shatberdi, Midznadzori, Tskarostavi, Baretelta, Mere, Daba, Parekhi, Berta, Jmerki, and Doliskana. Some of them are well-known; locations of others are arguable, and they are to be traced and their exact localization is necessary.

Of the twelve hermitages of Klarjeti, ten monasteries have already been exactly localized (Opiza, Khandzta, Shatberdi, Midznadzori, Tskarostavi, Daba, Parekhi, Berta, Jmerki, and Doliskana) and the localizations of only two of them (Baretelta and Mere) are doubtful.

In the middle ages, the term “twelve hermitages” was a common phrase in no way referring to any kind of an administrative entity. The Opiza monastery was, of course, was particularly honored but that did not imply that its abbot stood higher than others. “The twelve hermitages” of Klarjeti are to be explored in the future. None of these monuments have been studied archeologically. Despite of the fact that gold prospectors, that is, followers of black archeology, commit great crimes, multilateral excavations can open a new page in the history of monasteries of Klarjeti.

⁶⁵ ქართული ისტორიული საბუთები IX-XIII სს., pp. 32-34.