

ASOMTAVRULI INSCRIPTIONS ON DITSI
SAINT MARY VIRGIN CHUCH NEAR
THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATIONAL LINE

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Ditsi Saint Mary Virgin church is located near the village cemetery. It is a hall type, simple rectangle shaped building, with a newly renovated two double inclined tin roof. On the south façade the church has a new outbuilding. On the south and west sides the church has two doors. The church has window installed on the east side (one window) and on the south side (two windows). On the interior side we could envisage see the signs of old plasters. The newly discovered inscriptions were discovered on the south and interior sides – on the east step of the south pylon.

About the inscriptions: In the scientific literature Ditsi church was considered as the late feudal cultural site, however the inscriptions on the church changed the history. It is worth mentioning that in April 2013, we discovered inscriptions on the east facade of the church under the damaged plasters. After brushing the plasters we discovered three-lined Asomtavruli inscriptions on the builder's stone. Initially, the inscriptions were inspected by the T. Gogoladze, academic doctor of Historical Sciences and Mr. Nodar Kharshiladze and at the initial stage the inscriptions were read by the same pesearchers, however with regards to the scratch inscriptions on the east step of the south pylon, working group of N. Kharshiladze, T. Gogoladze and T. Djodjua should be entitled for the findings. The Ditsi church inscriptions should have more value due to the fact that all the inscriptions cultural and historical sites (eredvi, Tbeti, etc.) in Large and Small Liakhvi gorge are beyond occupied territories which makes it impossible for Georgian scientifics to research. Village Ditsi is located near the demarcation line. The new Asomtavruli findings have a great importance and it clearly demonstrates the continuity of the

life of Georgians in the Small Liakhvi gorge and their religious-cultural activities.

Description of the inscriptions: Inscription of the three bulders, brothers Beshken, Goderdzi and Djaridi (IX century)

The inscription is located on the east window on the large tuff stone (142X57 cm). The stone itself represents a irregular shaped top part of the window and it is equipped cross-shaped relief image, whilst on the bottom part of it, on both sides of the cross, four lined inscription is unevenly distributed. The first and the second lines are divided into two parts by the lower arm of the cross, the third line is located in the center and the fourth line is locate on the central part of the brow and the right ledge. The inscription is not full. We can fragmentally read the images of the last two words of the first line, however the two letters are fully faded. We can fragmentally read read the images of the last two words of the second line. Also we can see the relief heading is also fragmented. In the worth word of the first line (a) is excessive, wheres on the relief heading in the second word phrase (xan) has an uneven distribution. The depth of thye cuts on the inscriptions is 0, 2 – 0, 5 cm; the highest image is 9, 1 cm; lowest image is 1, 2 cm. Sign of the allegory: short horizontal line; sign of the snap – two dots in the first line. Despite the fact that the inscriptions are damaged, we still read it; the inscription has the following meaning:

სტუნიტო ნიტი: უსუნი || უსა ტიხუ[--]ტი
სტუტი კუტიტი უსუნი || უსუნიკუტი
ბი ატიხუტი

ნ // უნი ჩახიტიუნიუნიტიტიტი [--]

1. „სახელითა ღ(მრ)თი(საითა): ესე ეკა(სიც)||ღეს(ია) აღვ(ა)შენ[ნე]თ
2. სამთ(ა) ძმათა ბ(ე)შქე(ნ) || გოდერძმან
3. ღა ჯარიღმა
4. ნ ვინ წ(ა)კითხ(სიც)ოს ლოცვასა [მოგვიხსენეთ]“



Image 1.



Image 2.

As according to the archaic traditions, we do not encounter the sign of the beginning of the text – cross (m). As according to the IX century texts, the words in the text do not have spacings in between and the only sign of the snap is that two dots are placed in between the two words. Words, such as gans, ens, vins, lass have extra horizontal lines, whereas the line on word man-is does not proceed to the right side. The horizontal lines of the words man and en on some occasions are lifted upwards. The images with shaft are increased in height. From our point of view the inscription outflows from the two lined Asomtavruli inscriptions, and tends more to be a four lined

Nuskhuri inscription.¹ The r (k) letter resembles the r (k) of the Usaneti stela (VIII century) image.² (r) With a right inclination and with the decoupled arcs resembles the (r) Nuskhuri inscription (IX-X centuries) on the north side of the altar of Ateni Sioni.³ The inscription is missing the chronology, which as according to N. Shoshiashvili began only after the IX century, however many of the important inscriptions dated after IX century are still without chronology.



Image 3.

¹ ქართული წარწერების კორპუსი (ქწკ). ლაპიდარული წარწერები, I, აღმოსავლეთ და სამხრეთ საქართველო (V–X სს.). შეადგინა და გამოსაცემად მოამზადა ნ. შოშიაშვილმა (For the mentioned paleographic peculiarities please see Georgian Inscription Collection. Lapidary inscriptions, I, East and South of Georgia (V-X centuries). Collected and prepared for publication by N. Shoshiashvili, Tbilisi 1980, pp. 32-33).

² Ibid, pp. 127-129; images № 54, 57, 58, 59.

³ ქართული წარწერების კორპუსი (ქწკ). ფრესკული წარწერები, I, აგენის სიონი, ოამოსაცემად მოამზადეს, გამოკვლევა და საძიებლები დაურთეს გურამ აბრამიშვილმა და ზაზა ალექსიძემ, თბილისი 1989 (Georgian Inscription Collection. Fresco paintings, I, Ateni Sioni; Prepared for publication by Guram Abramishvili and Zaza Aleksiz, Tbilisi 1989, pp. 96-97. Image 31).

The existing inscriptions in the interior of the church are graffito, they are located on the east step of the south pilaster, on the third quadra above the ground, where the surface is wavy and small and large foveolas are placed on it.

Tribute inscription to Michael

One line Mkhedrul-Nuskhuri inscription is placed after the tribute inscription of Michael 139,5 cm above the floor. From the left side 1,7 cm. Its area is 7,5 X 3 cm, whereas the height of the letters are 2-0,7 cm. Same inscriptions are revealed in Ateni Sioni, in the north side, on the inscription after Michael Bagvashi under the paint layers⁴ This inscription has resemblance to two other inscriptions, one of Tevdore⁵ (X century) and one of Ioane (X century).⁶



Image 4.

ეშემლ

[ქ](როსტ)ე შ(ეიწყალ)ე მ(იქ)ელ

Tribute to Konstantine (X century)

Two line Mkhedrul-Nuskhuri inscription is placed after the tribute inscription of Michael 137,5 cm above the floor. From the left side 1,7 cm. Its area is 7,5 X 3 cm, whereas the height of the letters are 2-0,7 cm.

⁴ გ. აბრამიშვილი, აგენის სიონი, ადრეული შუა საუკუნეების ცენტრალურ-გუმბათოვანი ხურთომოდურული ტიპის ისტორიიდან, „ნეკერი“, (G. Abramishvili, *Ateni Sioni, From the history of middle ages central domed type buildings*, “Nekeri”, XLIII, Tbilisi 2012.

⁵ ქართული წარწერების კორპუსი (ქწკ). ფრესკული წარწერები, I, pp. 170. Picture, 39.

⁶ Ibid., 39.

The sign of a hint is expressed with two short, horizontal lines near the first and third names. In the writing, we can differentiate two separate hand-writings, the first and the second lines are scratched thinly, however the following lines are distinguished with wide and strong contour. (შ) letter with its configuration is similar to the Michael's inscription (Xth century). It resembles a lot the fragmented tribute inscription of Ioane Gvtismetkveli at Ateni Sioni (Xth century) and the (კ) letter in Michael's cryptogram.⁷ Letter (ე) is in resemblance to the letter (ე) on mkhedrul - nuskhuri inscription in the north-western part of the church.⁸ The existence of letters (კ) and (ე) could be an antroponym of name Konstantine, however this supposition could be wrong, as letters (კ) and (ე) are repeated several times and therefore, it may have different meaning from the above-mentioned.

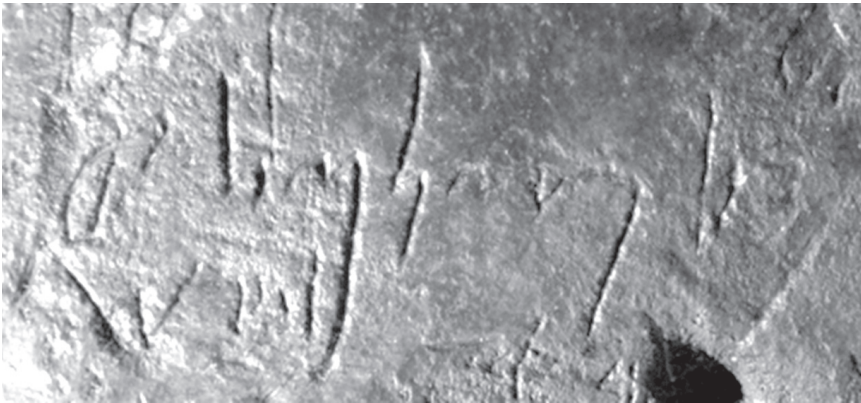


Image 5.

შე კე კე კე 1. შ(ეიწეალ)ე კ(ოსგანგინ)ე კ(ოსგანგინ)ე კ(ოსგანგინ)ე
 წმ 2. წმ(ილა)

Scraped Inscription (IX – X centuries)

Three line Nuskhuri inscription is placed after the tribute inscription of Konstantine 134 cm above the floor. From the left side 2,3 cm. Its area is 3 X 5 cm, whereas the height of the letters are thinly scraped.

⁷ ქართული წარწერების კორპუსი (ქწკ). ფრესკული წარწერები, I, p. 170. Picture, 40, 41.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 178-179. Picture, 49.



Image 6.

შე.....	1. შ(ეიწყალ)ე
ოვეს?...	2. ოვეს
ეს	3. ეს . . .

Tribute inscription to Bakanai (IX – X centuries)

Tribute to Konstantine (X century)

Three line Mkhedrul-Nuskhuri inscription is placed after the scraped inscription 131 cm above the floor. From the left side 3 cm. Its area is 3,2 X 6 cm, whereas the height of the letters are 1,3 - 0,5 cm. Letters (ბ), (ვ) and (გ) are similar to the pilgrym inscription marks under the black painting on the south side of the Ateni Sioni altar (IX century).⁹ The marks are larger in height and the inscription derives from the two line inscription and tends to be more of a four line inscription. Letter (კ) lower part is distributed evenly on the vertical line, its circled center is located on the left side. Such letters (კ), but with right inclination is seen on the east façade inscription of Ninotsminda church, on the north side, under the window.¹⁰

⁹ ქართული წარწერების კორპუსი (ქწკ). ფრესკული წარწერები, I, Fresco inscriptions, I, p. 103. Picture, 38.

¹⁰ ქართული წარწერების კორპუსი (ქწკ). ლაპიდარული წარწერები, I, აღმოსავლეთ და სამხრეთ საქართველო (V–X სს.). *Lapidary inscriptions, I, East and South of Georgia (V-X centuries)*. Tab. 116.



Image 7.

ქ შე კე ბა	1. ქ(რისგე) შ(ეიწყალ)ე კ(ოსგანგინ)ე ბა
კ[ა]ნაი ამე	2. კანაი ამე
ბ	3. ბ

At the end of this inscription on the second line, we can notice a letter (ჟ) done in Nuskhuri, and at the end of the third line letter (ვ). Across the writing, near the second edge we notice eight vertically scratched deep lines, whereas beneath it there is a graphic illustration of a long neck bird, with its feet and wings fold up.

Tribute inscription to Jaridi (IX – X centuries)

Three line Mkhedrul-Nuskhuri inscription is placed across the bird-shaped graphic illustration 120 cm above the floor. From the left side 2,8 cm. Its area is 4 X 10 cm, whereas the height of the letters are 3,6 - 0,5 cm. The mark of an inkling is placed on the wide horizontal line on top of first and second words „ქ(რისგე) შ(ეიწყალ)ე“. Letters (ე) and (მ) are inclined to the top. The inscription on the east façade of the church contains letter (რ) and similarly the letter (რ) in Jaridi tribute inscription has an open circle. Letter (ანი) has major resemblance to the letter (ანი) in Ateni Sioni epitaph of Mampal Sumbat (885).¹¹ This inscription similar to Jarid's inscription has a horizontal shelf on the right side.

¹¹ ქართული წარწერების კორპუსი (ქწკ). ფრესკული წარწერები (*Fresco inscriptions*, I, p. 95. Picture, 29).

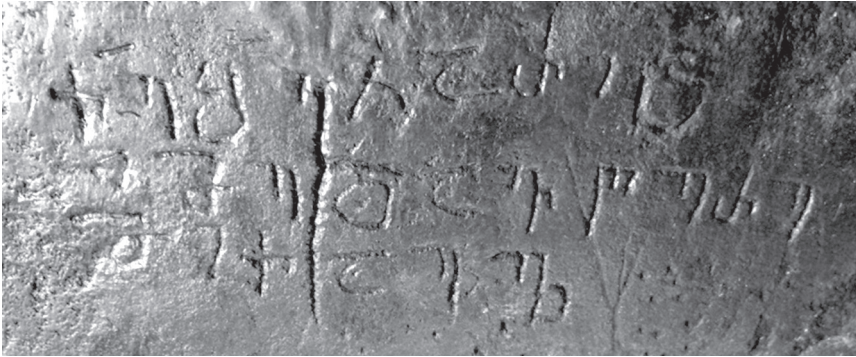


Image 8.

ქე შე ჯა რილ
 ი მე ლავეწერე
 მიქაელ

1. ქ(რისგ)ე შ(ეიწყალ)ე ჯარილ
 2. ი მე ლავეწერე
 3. მიქაელ

Tribute inscription of Konstantine Bakanai

Three line Mkhedrul-Nuskhuri inscription is placed across the bird-shaped graphic illustration 115 cm above the floor. From the left side 1,5 cm. Its area is 11 X 3,5 cm, whereas the height of the letters are 1,4 - 0,5 cm. The mark of an inkling is placed on the wide horizontal on top of the name „კ(ოსგანგინ)ე“.

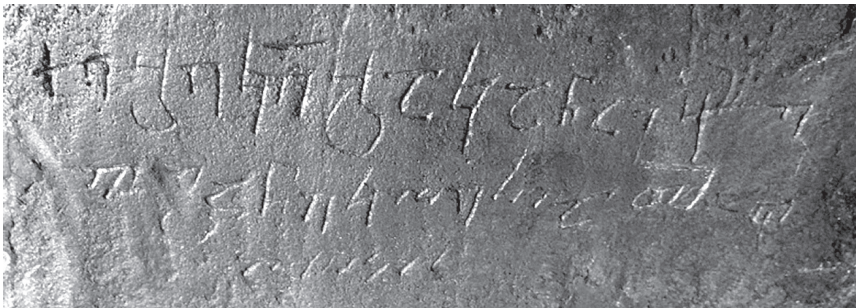


Image 9.

ქე შე კე ბაკანაი ყოე
 ლგან ეკლესიათ მათ
 ალა...

1. ქ(რისგ)ე შ(ეიწყალ)ე კ(ბაკანაი)
 ყოე ოსგანგინე
 2. ლგან ეკლესიათ მათ
 3. ალა(გს)



Image 10.

It is thus worth mentioning that the inscriptions in the interior side of the church on the left wall above the Asomtavruli writings is a graphic image, which holds the sun in his right hand, the left palm is ruined, however we are able to see a cross shaped scratch. It is interesting that a human shaped graphic figure has heart shaped figure instead of head, where both eyes are scratched (please see image № 6) and above the graphic figure there are three marks. All of them have circle linings, whereas the first mark with its linings resembles letter (ბაბ). After this mark, we could not read furthermore, as the inscription is damaged. It is followed with letter (აბგდ). From our point of view, this inscription could be also inkling and it might represent symbol productivity, as it is related to a human figure with a heart instead of a head. The sizes of the images are: 4-7mm. Image № 6.

Persons mentioned in the builder's inscription

The correct identification of the persons mentioned in the Ditsi inscriptions is of utmost difficulty, because in the inscriptions we notice only the names of the builders of the church. Who could be the persons Goderdzi, Jaridi and Beshken on the east wall of Ditsi Saint Mary Virgin church? Mainly all of the Asomtavruli inscriptions of the X century in Shida Kartli (Patara and Didi Liakhvi Gorge) are done on the churches and it is related to the famous feudal house of Tbeli. The inscription on the Eredvi church of Saint George is specifically important, where the inscription is placed above the round shelf on the east façade of the church; and where the ruler of Kartli Ivane Tbeli is mentioned.¹² Eredvi church inscription is dated 906-914. The researcher does not offer us paleographic description of the building and therefore, abstained from giving exact date of inscription.¹³ The first bases of construction of Nikozi church are dated back to V-VI centuries and due to the fact that it was renovated on several occasions, we cannot define the exact date of the construction bases.¹⁴ We should not however abandon I. Megreliдзе's argument, where he states that Ioane, stefane and Zakaria were the representatives of the house of Tbeli. Succession of Tbeli house on the political arena began in IX century.¹⁵ Tbeli house took advantage of the expansion of Abkhaz kings in Shida Kartli, by becoming their allies in the region and in this way becoming rulers; house of Tbeli became significantly strong during the reign of Ivane Tbeli. Significant importance had been given to Tbeli house due to the fact that they controlled the linking route to

¹² ქართული წარწერების კორპუსი (ქწკ). ლაპიდარული წარწერები, I, აღმოსავლეთ და სამხრეთ საქართველო (V-X სს.). შეადგინა და გამოსაცემად მოამზადა ნ. შოშიაშვილი (N. Shoshiaashvili, *Lapidary inscriptions, I, East and South of Georgia (V-X centuries)*. Collected and prepared for publication by N. Shoshiaashvili, Tbilisi 1980, pp. 172); რ. მეფისაშვილი, ერედვის წმ. გიორგის ეკლესიის საამშენებლო წარწერა, საქსსრ. მეცნ. აკადემიის შობაზე (R. Mepisashvili, *Building Inscription on Eredvi church of Saint Giorgi*, part V, 10(1944), pp. 44-45). ქართული ენის ისტორიული ქრესტომათია, ტ. I, V-X საუკუნეების ძეგლები გამოსცა და გაბეჭდა და ლექსიკონი დაურთო ი. იმნაიშვილმა (Historical Chrestomathy of Georgian Language, part I, V-X century's historical sites, prepared and published by I. Imnaishvili, Tbilisi 1953, p. 3); Р. Меписашвили, В. Цинцадзе, *Архитектура нагорной части исторической провинции Грузии - Шида Картли*, Tbilisi 1975, pp. 52-53.

¹³ ი. მეგრელიძე, სიძველეები ლიახვის ხეობაში (I. Megreliдзе, *Antiquities in Liakhvi Gorge*, part I, p. 149).

¹⁴ მ. ლორთქიფანიძე, ფეოდალური საქართველოს პოლიტიკური გაერთიანება (M. Lortkipanidze, *Political reunification of feudal Georgia*, Tbilisi, 1963, p. 255).

¹⁵ რ. მეფისაშვილი, ზოგიერთი ისტორიული ძეგლი სამხრეთ-ოსეთის ტერიტორიაზე, ძეგლის მეგობარი (R. Mepisashvili, *Some historical sites on the south ossetian territories*. 14(1968), p. 11).

Northern Caucasus, which was strengthened with several castles, such as: Atchabeti, Kekhvi, etc.,¹⁶ It is hard to explicitly define the Tbeli house controlled territories, as Mepisashvili states: “Tbeli controlled territories during this time, as the cultural-historical sites show were the middle part of the Patara and Didi Liakhvi gorge. The territories had significant economic and social development during X-XI centuries. As according to the territorial dimension, near Eredvi territory the following sites existed in IX – X centuries: apart from Eredvi saint Giorgi church, Saint Saba church in village Kheiti, Monk church in Eredvi, small temple in Zemo Nikozi, Dodoti Tskhrakara, built by Ivane Tbeli and lastly, large church in village Tbeti, were members of the Tbeli house are mentioned in the inscriptions. Apart from these important sites, less important sites are preserved in Eredvi and Tbeti territories.¹⁷ Tbeli house in comparison to other feudal houses had significant advantage, it seems that, Tbeli house had significant trust of Abkhaz kings and apart from this, their feudal house had specific importance for the Abkhaz rulers. The Abkhaz kings laid path to Shida Kartli via the Tbeli feudal house. In the Eredvi inscription, where the King of Abkhaz Konstantine’s quest to Kakheti is mentioned, it is noted that” მუნი (here Tidan) მსვიდობი იყა, ცისკრად ალავრდს ილოცა, მუხრი ბრეზას გადარდა”¹⁸, which means that when King Konstantine left Alaverdi in the dawn, dusk came when they entered Bredza. They laid their path from Abkhazeti via Bredza to Shida Kartli, where this route via Patara Liakhvi gorge had passage to Ksani Gorge and from there it was connected to Kakhet-Hereti. The passageway from Patara Liakhvi gorge to Ksani Gorge is mentioned in several sources of late feudal period.¹⁹ For Abkhaz kings the Tbeli feudal house had strategic importance, as Patara Liakhvi Gorge neighbored Ksani Gorge. It is a

¹⁶ რ. მეფისაშვილი, დასახ. ნაშრომი, გვ. 101. X-XI საუკუნეებში აგებული ზემოთ აღნიშნული ძეგლების საშენ მასალად გამოყენებულია ერედვის ღვინისფერი ქვა. იხ. შიდა ქართლი, პაგარა და დიდი ლიახვის ხეობების არქიტექტურული მემკვიდრეობა. (ცხინვალის რაიონი) 1981-1983 წლების ექსპედიციის მასალები, R. Mepisashvili, mentioned works, p. 101. *Architectural legacy of Patara and Didi liakhvi Gorge (Tskhinvali region), 1981-1983 expedition works*, Tbilisi 2002, pp. 54-60).

¹⁷ რ. მეფისაშვილი, დასახ. ნაშრომი, გვ. 101. X-XI საუკუნეებში აგებული ზემოთ აღნიშნული ძეგლების საშენ მასალად გამოყენებულია ერედვის ღვინისფერი ქვა. იხ. შიდა ქართლი, პაგარა და დიდი ლიახვის ხეობების არქიტექტურული მემკვიდრეობა. (ცხინვალის რაიონი) 1981-1983 წლების ექსპედიციის მასალები, R. Mepisashvili, mentioned works, p. 101. *Architectural legacy of Patara and Didi liakhvi Gorge (Tskhinvali region), 1981-1983 expedition works*, Tbilisi 2002, pp. 54,60,63,84,106).

¹⁸ ქართული წარწერების კორპუსი (*Georgian Inscription Collection*. part II, p. 172).

¹⁹ გ. სოსიაშვილი, გმები პაგარა ლიახვის ხეობაში, ჟურნ. აღმოსავლეთი და კავკასია (G. Sosiashvili, *Passageways in Patara Liakhvi Gorge*, Journal East and the Caucasus, 5(2007), p. 93).

wide known fact that in IX century Ashot Kurapatat and King of Kakheti Grigol fought in Ksani. Kakhetian choreposcopos had even their castles in Ksani gorge, in order to preserve Kartli; one of those castles, was Lot-sobani castle, which was built in the beginning of X century supposadly, by choreposcope Fadla II.²⁰ The head of the Tbeli feudal house Ivane Tbeli became allies with the kings of Abkhaz, the Abkhaz kings used his territories to their political needs and this is why they made Ivane Tbeli the ruler of Kartli. When was Ivane Tbeli promoted? Its is an interesting fact that 28 kms away from Tskhinvali in Kornisi region, 8 kilometers away from village Tsorbilisi, scientist I. Megreliдзе discovered a stone with an inscription, where supposedly Ivane Tbeli was mentioned. The scientist dates the inscription back to the year of 880.²¹ Village Bieti is located in Tskhinvali region, 20 kms away from Tskhinvali on the west side. 1 kilometer away from the village west of river Mejuda, left of its bank is located a semi cave church,²² and in one of the Bieti inscriptions which is dated back to X century, Bache and Beshken are mentioned.²³ Bieti belonged to Kanchaeli territories and supposedly, one of the builders of Ditsi church would not be mentioned in the Bieti inscription. As according to R. Mepisashvili, Vache and Beskhen mentioned in the Bieti Inscription should be the representative of Kanchaeli house. Antroponym of Vache was a widely used name in among Kanchaeli house.²⁴ It is possible that they were the sons or simply persons bearing the same name of Ivane Eristavi, who was mentioned in Bieti inscription. The reign of Beshken, who was mentioned in Bieti inscription should be chronologically different and late than of Ditsi and Eredvi inscriptions. The builder of Ditsi church Beshken, as according to the inscriptions had two brother, Jaridi and Goderdze, who are not mentioned in Bieti inscriptions. If in case Beshken, mentioned in Bieti and Ditsi inscriptions was one person, than we suppose that his brothers should also have been mentioned in Bieti inscriptions.²⁵ Jaridi, who was mentioned in Ditsi inscriptions was not

20 ჯ. გვასალია, აღმოსავლეთ საქართველოს ისტორიული გეოგრაფიის ნარკვევები (J. Gvasalia, *Historico-geographical findings of eastern Georgia*, Tbilisi 1983, p. 60).

21 ი. მეგრელიძე, სიძველეები ლიახვის ხეობაში (I. Megreliдзе, *Antiquities in Liakhvi Gorge*, part II, p. 95).

22 P. Меписашвили, *Полупещерный памятник IX в. в сел. Биети*, 6-а, 1963, pp. 29-55.

23 P. Меписашвили, *Полупещерный памятник IX в. в сел. Биети*, 6-а, 1963, pp. 29-55.

24 რ. მეფისაშვილი, დასახ. ნაშრომი (R. Mepisashvili, *Works*, pp. 45-46); შ. ამირანაშვილი, ქართული ხელოვნების ისტორია S. Amiranashvili, *History of Georgian Arts*, Tbilisi 1961, p. 254).

25 ქართლის ცხოვრება, ტ. I, რ. მეტრეველის რედ., (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*. part I, R. Metreveli edition, Tbilisi 2001, pp. 317. 282, 442, 560).

the eldest among the brothers, however, he was mentioned in the second inscription too, as he took special care of the church.

Who could be Konstantine Bakanai? Whose name is related to the two inscriptions of Ditsi church on the south wall; the second inscription is especially important as it is noted that:

1. ქ(როსტ)ე შ(ეიწყალ)ე კ(ოსტანტინ)ე ბაკნაი ყოე
2. ლგან ეკლესიათ მათ
3. აღა(გს)”. აქ

We can have various conjunctions:

1. Konstantine Bakanai is a well known ecclesiastic person and he reigned before Tbeli house took over Kartli; prior to 906-914, before Nikozian episcopo Stefane became an ecclesiastic hierarch of the region. During the building of Eredvi church and during the making of an inscription, Konstantine Bakanai could not have been a highly ranked ecclesiastic, if he had so much power and influence as it was mentioned in Ditsi inscription, then he should have been mentioned in Eredvi inscription too. We might also suppose that he was simply a representative of the house of builders of the church: Goderdzi, Jaridi and Beshken. What could Bakanai mean? It is possible that Bakanai had a meaning of an ecclesiastic rank or a belonging to a particular feudal house (this is a topic for further research).

2. Konstantine Bakanai perhaps was a civil person. Prior to Tbeli feudal house reign, in particular prior to Ivane Tbeli becoming a ruler of Kartli, was a representative of a feudal house, whose name was associated with the bulding of Ditsi church. If in fact, Konstantine was a representative of other feudal house of the region, he should not have mentioned his name along with Jaridi in the Dtsi inscription, rather he would have mentioned his name in a separate inscription; perhaps Konstantine even was Jaridi's son. We should not exclude the fact that in wake of Tbeli feudal house becoming stronger, Konstantine's feudal house lost influence and that is why they mentioned that their feudal house had influence not only Ditsi church, but rather their feudal house built many other churches in the region. During the Tbeli feudal house reign such churches could have been built by different feudal house. It seems that their feudal house was responsible for building many other churches. During this time we witness name Michael in several lapidary inscriptions. Michael is mentioned in the Tbeti inscription of X century. This inscription could have been

made in tribute to Vakhtang's (brother of Patrick Tbeli) sons.²⁶ It is really difficult to define from this inscription, whether Michael is mentioned as the son of Vakhtang, or as a person who made the inscription. It could have been that he was a craftsman for Tbeli feudal house and he made the above-mentioned inscription as according to Tbeli house instructions. It could also have been that Michael belonged to Tbeli feudal house. We witness several Michaels' in Ateni sioni inscriptions of X- XI centuries.²⁷ In the inscriptions of the time, Archbishop Michael is mentioned as the builder of Zemo Nikozi church in the Asomtavruli inscription; whereas he is also mentioned in other inscription too.²⁸ Michael is also mentioned to be a builder of nikozi Divine church.²⁹ These inscriptions are dated back to X century in the scientific literature.³⁰ Michael is also mentioned in an inscription made on the graveyard stela in Village Tcharebi church in Patara Liakhvi gorge. We can assume the following regarding Michel (Michael) mentioned in Ditsi inscription:

1. Tbeli feudal house was in Nikozi area, if we take into consideration the Nikozi inscription, where archbishop Stepane is mentioned, on whose will the church was built. As we indicated, In the second half of the X century as according to the Nikozi inscriptions archbishop was Michael, who built the church, or renovated it (in the inscriptions he is mentioned as the builder of the church); it seems that they had a strong ecclesiastic hierarchy, maybe simply due to the fact he was a representative of Tbeli feudal house or a close ally. During the X century (in the second half) Tbeli feudal house was an influential house, as they made the political weather in Kartli at that time and therefore, they would have given the Nikozi area to govern either to their close relative or a close ally. After the death of Stepane, (at this point we could not explicitly state the time of his death, however we could suppose that he was archbishop till the midst of the century and therefore, he could have been newly appointed archbishop during the time, when the Eredvi inscription was made) Michael became an archbishop.* It could be that this Michael, who is mentioned in Nikozi inscriptions as an archbishop, could also be mentioned in

²⁶ ქართული წარწერების კორპუსი (ქწკ). ლაპიდარული წარწერები, I, (*Georgian Inscriptions Collection, Lapidary inscriptions*, part I, p. 181).

²⁷ თ. ბარნაველი, ატენის სიონის წარწერები (T. Barnaveli, *Ateni Sioni Inscriptions*, Tbilisi, 1957, pp. 49, 50, 53, 54, 57, 62).

²⁸ Ibid., p. 187; ი. მეგრელიძე, სიძველეები ლიახვის ხეობაში (I. Megrelidze, *Antiquities in Liakhvi Gorge*, part I, Tbilisi 1986, p. 135).

²⁹ Ibid., p. 187.

³⁰ ი. მეგრელიძე, სიძველეები ლიახვის ხეობაში (I. Megrelidze, Works, p. 137).

Tbeti inscriptions as Michael (representative of Tbeli feudal house, son of Vakhtang) alongside with Vakhtang. It could also be that Michael being an archbishop made an inscription on Ditsi church as an archbishop as attribute to himself.

2. It could also be that the inscription made on Ditsi church was made by one of the Michael's mentioned in Ateni Sioni inscriptions. It is worth mentioning that on Ditsi church we see cross shaped scratches made on the red stone. It seems that Ditsi church was frequently visited by pilgrims and it could be that one of them made an inscription.

To summarize, we would like to say that newly discovered inscriptions on Ditsi church fills the gaps in the history of Shida Kartli, one of the oldest regions of Georgia. The surrounding area of the church is covered with turf; however archaeological research could open a new chapter in the history of the region by discovering new inscriptions.

Asomtavruli inscriptions on ditsi Saint Mary Virgin Church near the Russian occupational line

Ditsi Saint Mary Virgin church is located near the village cemetery. It is a hall type, simple rectangle shaped building, with a newly renovated two double inclined tin roof. On the south façade the church has a new outbuilding. On the south and west sides the church has two doors. The church has window installed on the east side (one window) and on the south side (two windows). On the interior side we could envisage see the signs of old plasters. The newly discovered inscriptions were discovered on the south and interior sides – on the east step of the south pylon. About the inscriptions: In the scientific literature Ditsi church was considered as the late feudal cultural site, however the inscriptions on the church changed the history. It is worth mentioning that in April 2013, we discovered inscriptions on the east facade of the church under the damaged plasters. After brushing the plasters we discovered three-lined Asomtavruli inscriptions on the builder's stone. Initially, the inscriptions were inspected by the T. Gogoladze, academic doctor of Historical Sciences and Mr. Nodar Kharshiladze and at the initial stage the inscriptions were read by the same researchers, however with regards to the scratch inscriptions on the east step of the south pylon, working group of N. Kharshiladze, T. Gogoladze and T. Djodjua should be entitled for the findings. The Ditsi church inscriptions should have more value due to the fact that all the inscriptions cultural and historical sites (Eredvi, Tbeti, etc.,) in Large and Small Liakhvi gorge are beyond occupied territories which makes it impossible for Georgian scientists to research. Village Ditsi is located near the demarcation line. The new Asomtavruli findings

have a great importance and it clearly demonstrates the continuity of the life of Georgians in the Small Liakhvi gorge and their religious-cultural activities.

To summarize, we would like to say that newly discovered inscriptions on Ditsi church fills the gaps in the history of Shida Kartli, one of the oldest regions of Georgia. The surrounding area of the church is covered with turf; however archaeological research could open a new chapter in the history of the region by discovering new inscriptions.