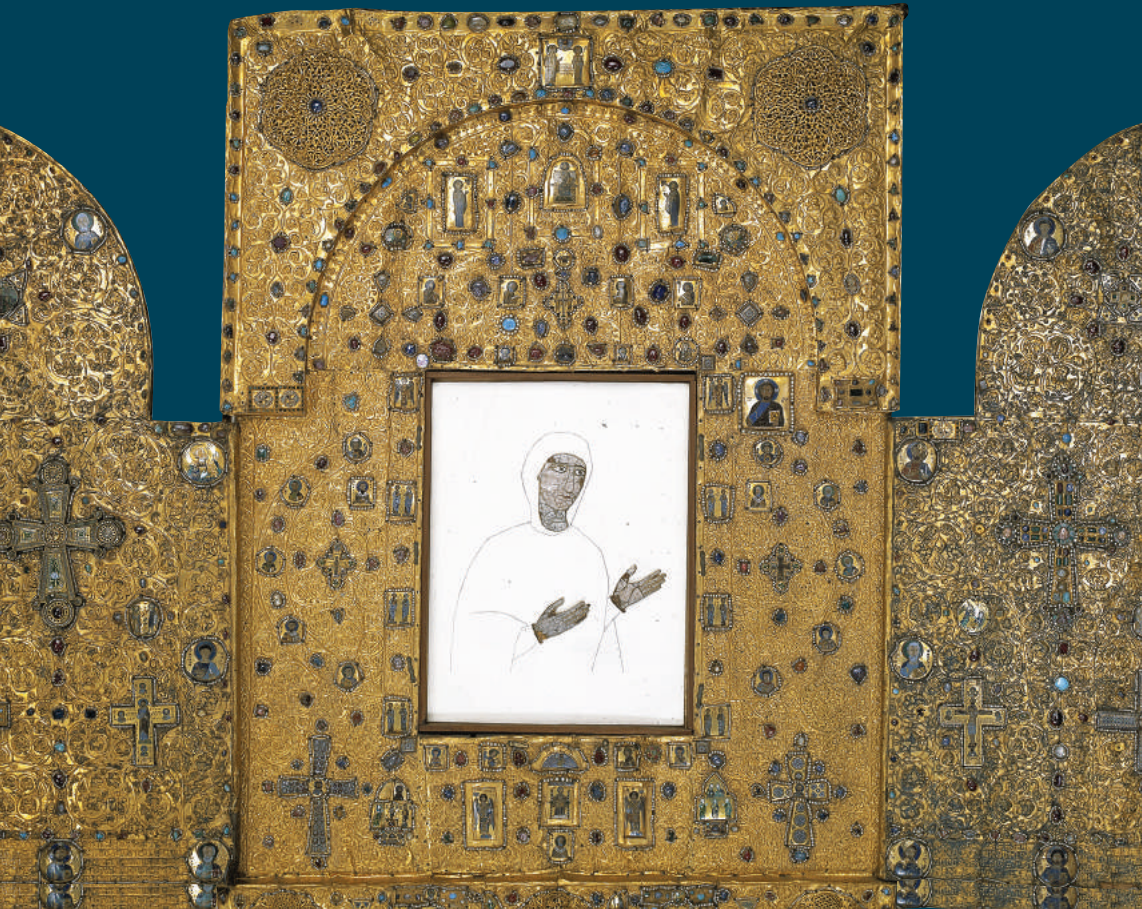




Georgia

GEORGIAN NATIONAL TOURISM ADMINISTRATION

# ORTHODOX PILGRIMAGE TO GEORGIA





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St. George. Svaneti school

13<sup>th</sup> cc., wood, tempera, 80x58 cm.

GNM, Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography



# INTRODUCTION

Located between the Black Sea and the Caucasus, Georgia has been inhabited since ancient times. Moreover, the 1 800 000 year-old human bones excavated in Dmanisi, southern Georgia, have confirmed that it had also been a cradle of the first Europeans. A variety of political unions had existed on this land well before the kingdoms of Colchis (western Georgia) and Iberia (eastern Georgia) emerged in the 1st millennium BC, both of which are known to us thanks to Greek and Roman writers. Georgians have been cultivating land since ancient times and are said to be the first growers of wheat and vine. They also extracted and worked copper, gold and iron.

Rich in forests and water and containing sub-tropical coastal lowlands, glaciers and alpine meadows, this country of modest size has always attracted powerful neighbours. Assyria, Achemenian and Sassanian Persia, Greek colonists, Hellenistic monarchies and the Roman Empire have many times attempted to subdue it. On the other hand, due to the closeness to these powers, Georgia would familiarise itself with the achievements of the oriental and occidental cultures, and accomplishments of the ancient east or Hellas. This explains the early spread of Christianity in the country. According to ecclesiastical tradition, in the 1st century the Jews from Mtskheta brought the Tunic of Christ from Jerusalem, one of the most sacred relics of Christianity to Georgia, which became a lot of the Holy Virgin. St Mary sent St Andrew the Apostle, St Simon the Canaanite and St Matthias to Georgia to preach the Christian faith, while in the early 4th century, following the teachings of St Nino of Cappadocia Christianity was proclaimed an official religion in eastern Georgia. In 325, the First Council of Nicea was attended by a bishop of Pitiunt, a city in western Georgia. Since then the Christianity became inseparable part of national identity for the Georgian people.

In this period the Christian culture starts to develop and in the 6th -7th centuries reaches very high level, especially in architecture.

In the 5th century, King Vakhtang Gorgasali succeeded in uniting almost all Georgian lands and laying a foundation for the autocephaly of the Georgian Church. But the unity of the state did not last long. In the 6th century the Persians abolished the royal throne in Kartli (eastern Georgia) and shortly after Byzantines put an end to Egrisi kingdom (western Georgia), though they failed to eradicate the local system of state administration. Neither did the Arabs, who

took hold of Kartli in the mid-7th century and appointed their amira (ruler) in the 8th century in Tbilisi, capital of Kartli, managed to accomplish that goal. The end of the 8th century was marked by the formation of the kingdom of Kakheti in the east, Tao-Klarjeti in the south and the so-called Abkhaz kingdom with the capital being Kutaisi in the west. Each of the units strived to extend control over the entire country. In the beginning of the 11th century, Bagrat III (975-1014), who was a descendant of the south Georgian Bagrationis from the paternal line and an heir of Abkhaz kings from the maternal side, became king of almost all Georgia. This period is marked with development and flourishing of all branches of art, creating masterpieces of the world culture.

The presence of the Arabs in Tbilisi, the intrusion of the Byzantines and later of the Seljuks impeded the process of building an integral state. Only Bagrat's great grandson Davit IV Agh-mashenebeli (David the Builder, 1089-1125) succeeded in becoming the king of all Georgia which had already, in the 9th century, gained ecclesiastical independence. The reign of King Davit Aghmashenebeli and of his granddaughter, Queen Tamar (1184-1213), is described as Golden Era in the history of Georgia. At the same time, Georgian ecclesiastical literature, represented by numerous brilliant hagiographs, hymnographs and translators beginning from the 5th century, was complimented by secular works, the masterpiece of which is *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* by Shota Rustaveli. The quality of education advanced simultaneously. All branches of art continue to flourish, especially painting and repousse art.

In the 1220s Georgia had to suffer again. The Kwarazm invasion of 1225, a century-long rule of the Mongols beginning from 1235, and especially numerous inroads by Tamerlane in the late 14th and beginning of the 15th centuries inflicted serious damages on the country. As a consequence, by the end of the 15th century Georgia had again disintegrated into three kingdoms (Kartli and Kakheti in the east and Imereti in the west) and several principalities (Samtskhe-Saatabago in the south, Guria, Samegrelo, Abkhazeti and Svaneti in the west). The country then plunged into incessant internal wars and became an object of rivalry between powerful eastern empires, Safavid Persia and Ottoman Turkey. After collapse of Byzantium, Georgia surrounded by powerful and hostile Muslim states never gave up Christianity and faithfully follows it up to now.

Apart from invasions and defeats, this period was also marked by successful kingship of King Giorgi V the Magnificent (1318- 1346) and Alexander I the Great (1412-1442). In the 16th century Kakheti and Imereti, and in the 17th century Kartli made significant progress both economically and politically. Ecclesiastical and secular literature, architecture and almost all branches of art continued to be created and even began to flourish since the 16th century. In the 18th century King Vakhtang VI of Kartli (1703-1724) and Catholicos-Patriarch Anton I

(1744-55; 1764-1788) did not spare an effort to establish and develop scholarship and education of European fashion.

The unification of Kartli and Kakheti (eastern Georgia) under King Erekle II (1744-1798) and the strengthening of Imereti (western Georgia) under Solomon I (1752-1784) in the second half of the 18th century, as well as the signing of an agreement by Georgian kings and governors pledging to unite their efforts created prospects for the restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia. But Georgian secular and ecclesiastical figures of the time believed that the feeble country with reduced population would not be able to survive alone and therefore sought a reliable ally. After the failure to gain support from the west, beginning from the 16th century they would apply to Russia, as a country affirming Orthodox faith, for help. At the end of the 18th century, international documents were drawn up on accepting Russia's protectorship.

Regrettably, the shared Orthodox faith did not appear to provide sufficient ground for fair cooperation. In 1801, Russian authorities began abolishing Georgian political units and soon incorporated them into their empire. By violating the ecclesiastical law, they also abolished the autocephaly of the Georgian Church. For the first time after millennia, the Georgians did not have their own, even nominal, statehood.

This is how the history of old Georgia came to an end and a long struggle for the liberation from the Russian Monarchy and later, after the abolition of Georgia's four-year independence in 1921, from the Soviet Union, started. It was not until the decline and the final demise of the USSR in 1991 that Georgia managed to proclaim the restoration of its independence.

Due to the activities of the Catholicos Patriarche of All Georgia His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II the Christianity has been revived in Georgia; building of churches and monasteries and development of Christian culture started again.



# RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS

## Twelve holy days/Movable

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### Holy Easter

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**Palm Sunday – Glorious Enter to Jerusalem, on the sixth Sunday of Lent**

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**Ascension Day, 40th day after Easter**

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**Holy Trinity Day, Pentecost, 50th day after Easter**

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**Immovable**  
(Gr./Jul. Calendar)

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**The Nativity/Christmas**  
(25 December/7 January)

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**Epiphany**  
(6/19 January)

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**Presentation of Christ at the Temple**  
(2/15 February)

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**Annunciation**  
(25 March/ 7 April)

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**Transfiguration**  
(6/19 August)

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**Dormition of the Blessed Virgin**  
(15/28 August)

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**Nativity of the Blessed Virgin**  
(8/21 September)

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**Exaltation of the Cross**  
(14/27 September)

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**Presentation of the Blessed Virgin**  
(21 November/4 December)

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# RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS

**Candlemas Day**  
(1/14 January)

**St. Martyr Abo Tbileli**  
(8/21 January)

**Equal to the Apostles St. Nino**  
(14/27 January)

**St. Anton Martkopeli**  
(19 January/1 February)

**St. King David the Builder**  
(26 January/8 February)

**Feast day of the icon of Our Lady of Iveron**  
(12/25 February)

**Blessed Pious Queen Tamar's Day**  
(1/14 May)

**St. George**  
(6/23 May)

**St. Andrew the First-called**  
(29 April/12 May)

**St. Ioane Zedazneli and his 12 disciples**  
(7/20 May)

**St. John the Theologian**  
(8/21 May)

**Nativity of St. John the Baptist**  
(24 June/7 July)

**St. Apostle Peter and St. Apostle Paul**  
(29 June/12 July)

**Feast day of the Robe of the Virgin**  
(2/15 July)

**Prophet Elyah, Righteous Ilia**  
(2 August/20 July)

**Beheading of St. John the Baptist**  
(29 August/11 September)

**Anchiskhatoba, St. Anton Martkopeli**  
(16/29 August)

**St. Martyr Queen Ketevan**  
(13/26 September)

**Alaverdoba**  
(15/28 September)

**Mtskhetoba-Svetitskhovloba**  
(1/14 October)

**St. Martyrs David and Constantine**  
(2/15 October)

**St. Grigol Khandzteli**  
(5/18 October)

**Reverend Father Gabriel (Urgebadze)**  
(2 November/20 October)

**100000 Georgian Martyrs**  
(13 November/31 October)

**Synaxis of the Archangels**  
(8/21 November)

**St. George**  
(10/23 November)

**St. Andrew the First-called, St. King Vakhtang Gorgasali**  
(13 December)

**St. Barbara**  
(4/17 December)

**St. Nicholas**  
(6/19 December)

**All Martyred Reverend Fathers and Mothers in Georgia**  
(11/24 December)



## Movable

**Blessed Father Shio Mgvimeli**  
Shrovetide Thursday

**Lazarus Saturday**  
Saturday before Palm Sunday

**6000 Martyrs of Gareja**  
First Tuesday after Easter

**Thomas Sunday**  
Sunday of the Bright Week

**St. David Garejeli**  
Thursday after Ascension

**Feast day of the Holy Cross of Mtskheta; Lomisoba**  
Wednesday after Pentecost

**All Saints**  
Sunday after Pentecost

## Church Tribute Days

**Revival of Autocephaly of Georgian Orthodox Church (1917)**  
(12/25 March)

**Enthronization Day of Catholicos Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II (1977)**  
(12/25 December)

**Angel's Day of His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos Patriarch Ilia II**  
(20 July/2 August)

## BEHAVIOUR CODE WHEN VISITING CHURCHES AND MONASTERIES IN GEORGIA

Almost every tourist route in Georgia envisages visits to churches and monasteries. Visitors of these places should follow several simple rules. It is necessary to keep quiet in the church, all the more if the service is being held. Entrance to the chancel is prohibited. Turn off the ringing tone of your cell phones and do not speak on them, when in the church. When visiting churches and

monasteries, do not put on short trousers and short dresses, neither open T-shirts. Ladies should, desirably, wear dresses and not trousers; however, at the churches proper skirts that can easily be put on are available for the visitors. Ladies should enter the church with the headgear on and the gentlemen should take off their hats.



# TBILISI

Attested by archaeological excavations, the territory of Tbilisi had been inhabited as early as the 4th millennium B.C. The most ancient source, in which it is mentioned, belongs to the second half of the 4th century, when a fortress was erected at this location in the reign of King Varaz-Bakuri. At the end of the 4th century, Tbilisi became the residence of the Persian official – the bitakhsh. From mid 5th century, it was again under the control of Kartlian kings. St. King Vakhtang Gorgasali has been considered as the city founder, since he restored and developed it. As the legend relates, the king had sent a falcon after a pheasant, with the birds plunging into a hot spring and being scalded to death. The king apparently chopped down the forest and built the town due to the healing properties of the hot water and the advantageous location of the area. The town was called “Tbilisi” - “Tbili” (“Tpili” in Old Georgian) because of the mineral springs. Sulfur bath houses were constructed at this location later on. The place is a historic district of Tbilisi – The Bath District (Abanotubani). Throughout the centuries, Tbilisi has not been only a political, state center, but also a vibrant hub of literary, cultural activities. The city has been historically known for its religious tolerance. A large portion of the city is Christian, with the majority being Orthodox. The Armenian Apostolic Church has a significant amount of followers. There are many Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, and other Christian denominations. A part of the population is adherents of Islam and another part being Jewish. Kurds also live in Tbilisi, with 61% of them being Yezidic. It is especially notable in Old Tbilisi with its abundance of churches or places of prayer belonging to various confessions.

Among numerous monuments in Tbilisi outstanding architectural value is acquired to the oldest church Anchiskhati, Sioni Cathedral, Metekhi church and among modern. Buildings – to the Trinity Cathedral. Many sacred relics and works of Christian art are stored in the Sh. Amiranashvili museum of Fine arts.





Anchiskhati



## ANCHISKHATI

The Anchiskhati Basilica is the most ancient monument in Tbilisi and the first ecclesiastical structure that has survived. It had originally been built in the 6th century, receiving the name it has today in the 17th century, when the miracle-working icon of Christ (currently kept at the Georgian State Museum of Art) was transferred from Anchi Church. The original part of the Anchiskhati Basilica had been built with hewn stone, whereas sections of the walls rebuilt with bricks, the inner columns, and the roofing belong to a restoration done by Catholicos Domenti III in the 17th century. He also erected a two-storey, bell-tower made of bricks in 1675. 19th-century additions were removed from the church during the years 1958-1964 under the guidance of Rusudan Gverdsiteli, giving it the appearance seen today. There are 17th century murals in the chancel and those of the 19th century on the vault.

Sioni Church



## SIONI CHURCH

According to tradition, the Sioni Cathedral in Tbilisi had been built by King Vakhtang Gorgasali in the 5th century, with chronicles attesting to a big construction project between the 6th-7th centuries. After many times of being destroyed and rebuilt, Archbishop Elise (Saginashvili) of Tbilisi had the current domed church built in the 17th century. In 1710, through the initiative of King Vakhtang VI, it was faced with hewn stone and adorned with stone ornamentation and reliefs, although due to fresh damage in 1795, a great portion of the wall facing was restored in the 19th century. A Late Medieval bell-tower (the pavilion is from the 19th century) stands in the churchyard, across the street is yet one more bell-tower, erected by Russian authorities in 1811. A large portion of the church's interior has been painted by the Russian painter Gregory Gagarin in the 1850's, with the western section however, being adorned with the murals by Le-

Metekhi Church



van Tsutskiridze in the 1980's. The vine cross weaved by St. Nino and the skull of St. Thomas the Apostle are the most precious relics out of those kept at the church, as well as the graves of those who have been canonized as saints: John Mangleli, and the Catholicoses Kyrion and Ambrose.

## METEKHI CHURCH

The Church of the Mother of God at Metekhi, or simply Metekhi, is located in the most ancient, historical district of Isani, on the left bank of the Mtkvari River, situated on a small cliff. According to tradition, the relics of St. Shushanik the Martyr have been buried at Metekhi Church. The cliff at Metekhi is the place where the patron saint of Tbilisi, St. Abo of Tbilisi was martyred (8th century). The current domed church, faced with hewn stone, had been built by St. Demetre II the Self-Sacrificer at the end of the 13th century, being restored in the 16th and 18th centuries. A miracle-working icon of the Mother of

The Trinity Patriarchal Cathedral



God had resided here until 1795.

## THE TRINITY PATRIARCHAL CATHEDRAL

The Holy Trinity Patriarchal Cathedral is located in Tbilisi on Elia Hill in the Avlabari District. It was built during the years 1995-2004 to mark the 1500th anniversary of the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the 2000th year since the Nativity of Christ. The idea for erecting a new cathedral was manifested in 1989 and in the month of May, a competition was announced for the project, "Holy Trinity Cathedral", by the Georgian Patriarch and the Tbilisi government. As a result of two stages of discussions, the project by Architect Archil Mindiashvili was selected. The foundation for the church was only laid on November 23, 1995. Church construction was primarily financed by private donations. The church was consecrated by His Holiness and Beatitude Patriarch-Catholicos of all Georgia Ilia II on November 23,

**1 Cover of reliquary with the Crucifixion and inscription of Giorgi, king of Abkhazia**

10<sup>th</sup> c. Shemokmedi, Guria (West Georgia).  
Gold, cloisonné enamel 8x7.5 cm.

*GNM, Shalva Amirashvili Museum of Fine Arts*



**2 Triptych of the Virgin**

10<sup>th</sup> c., second quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> c. Khakhuli,  
Tao (present Turkey) Gold, gilded silver, precious  
stones, pearls, cloisonné enamel. 148x202 cm

*GNM, Shalva Amirashvili Museum of Fine Arts*





Shalva Amiranashvili Art Museum



2004, the feast day of St. George. The main domed church, of a complex plan layout, is accompanied by a number of minor churches, a baptismal font, monastery buildings, public spaces, etc. Numerous sacred relics are housed in the church, among them the "stone of Grace" brought from Jerusalem by St. David Garejeli in the 6th century.

## SHALVA AMIRANASHVILI ART MUSEUM

One of the main units of the National Museum of Georgia, it is the greatest state repository and museum in Georgia for works of art. It was founded on August 5, 1932, based on the Georgian National Gallery that had been created through the initiative of Dimitri Shevardnadze in 1920. Works of art from the most ancient times to the 20th century are featured in the treasury, halls, and depositories of the museum: archaeological items, Georgian repoussé and painted icons from the Middle Ages, works of cloisonné, jewelry



art, stone or wooden reliefs, mural painting and embroidery. There are also works by Georgian painters, sculptors, and masters of the "minor arts", as well as Russian, European, and Oriental works of art.

# MTSKHETA

The ancient capital of Georgia is a place connected with the birth of the Georgian statehood. The history of Christianity in Georgia begins in Mtskheta. For Georgians, the greatest Christian holy relic – the Lord's Robe – is buried at Mtskheta. For Georgians Mtskheta was an image of Jerusalem, that is attested in the topography of the city.

The town of Mtskheta has been the administrative center (since 1956) of the Mtskheta-Mtianeti Province and of the Mtskheta District (since 1930). Mtskheta has been declared a city-museum, being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The territory of Mtskheta and "Great Mtskheta" was populated in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages (3,000-2,000 B.C.). It had been densely populated (necropolis and settlement-sites at Samtavro, Zemo Avchala, Tsitsamuri, Narekvavi, Tserovani, Nabaghrevi) during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (2,000-1,000 B.C.). Great changes characteristic of the life of the most ancient political entities in the Near East have been reflected in the history of Mtskheta beginning from early first millennium B.C. - A strong cultural stream had infiltrated into ancient Mtskheta, significantly conditioning city life until the 3rd-4th centuries. Its social and professional differentiation is the development of the ancient population centers and their unification into one, large city, Great Mtskheta, with the population's ethnographical variety being one of its unique characteristics. According to legend, the city had been founded by the ethnarch Mtskhetos. It is supposed that the name "Mtskheta" originates from the name of the Meskhi (Moskhi-Mushki) tribe. The residential area for this tribe must have emerged after the 8th century B.C. on the territory of Mtskheta. Mtskheta was the newly formed political center of the Kingdom of Kartli (Iberia) since the end of the 4th century B.C. and the capital remained here until the end of the 5th century A.D.





Svetitskhoveli





Svetitskhoveli

## SVETITSKHOVELI

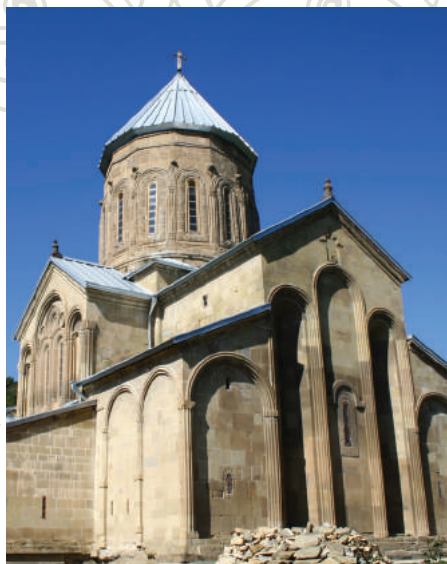
The Patriarchal Cathedral of the Twelve Apostles at Mtskheta, “Svetitskhoveli”, the most important monument of Georgian culture, art, and architecture, is distinguished not only through its artistic value, magnificence, and harmoniousness, but also by the special role it fulfilled in the history of the Georgian people.

The first wooden church was built here by St. King Mirian and St. Nino in the 4th century in the spot, where according to Church tradition, the Robe of Jesus Christ had been buried, having been brought to Mtskheta in the 1st century by a local Jew, Eliozi (the mantle of Elijah the Prophet had also been brought to the same spot by exiled Jews centuries earlier). A myrrh-streaming tree grew above it, from which one of the church's miracle-working pillars - “Sveti Tskhoveli – The Life-giving Pillar” was wrought. St. King Vakhtang Gorgasali had a basilica of considerable size

built here in the 5th century, whereas Catholicos-Patriarch Melchisedek and the architect Arsukisdze erected the domed church seen today during the years 1010-1029. Being the largest ancient Georgian church constructed with hewn stone and adorned with stone carved ornamentation and reliefs, it has been destroyed and restored many times (the work carried out by King Alexander I in 1418-1440 and the restoration of the dome in the second half of the 17th century are of particular importance), although it retains its original glory even today. Fragments of the 17th-century murals are preserved in the church (it is possible that the painting in the chancel is original, having been restored in the 19th century), whereas Gregory Guljavarashvili painted the canopy erected over the “Life-giving Pillar” during the years 1678-1688. Svetitskhoveli was the site of royal coronations and burials as well. The holy martyrs Eustathius of Mtskheta (6th cent.) and Demetre II the Self-Sacrificer (13th cent.) have also been laid to rest here.



Santavro Monastery



## SAMTAVRO MONASTERY

The monastery is situated at a slightly elevated location on the northern outskirts of Mtskheta. It was built where St. Nino had lived for three years – a tiny, domed church from the early medieval period now stands on the spot where blackberry bushes provided her with shelter. The cathedral of archbishop of Kartli had been here since the 5th century and the nuns' convent since 1820. The main church took the place of a yet earlier church erected in the 4th century, the so-called "Upper Church". The current church primarily dates to the 11th century, but it contains remnants of the 5th-century basilica and large segments of a construction from a subsequent period. It is considered to be a construction marking a new stage, for it became a model for the domed Georgian churches of the following centuries, with its stone carvings being one of the masterpieces of medieval art. The dome is from the 14th cen-

Santavro Monastery



tury, inside however, a 15th-century chancel-barrier and fragments of 17th-century murals have been preserved. A bell-tower with the gate on the ground floor from the 15th-16th centuries and an 18th-century tower are in the churchyard, as well as modern monastery buildings. The first Christian king and queen of Georgia, Sts. Mirian and Nana, and a 6th-century hieromartyr, St. Abibos of Nekresi, have found their final resting place within the church. 20th century Saint – Father Gabriel is buried in the monastery. The church houses 18th c. icon of St. Nino, numerous holy relics, and miracle-working icon of the Virgin Portaitissa.

## THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH

Standing at the confluence of the Mtkvari and Aragvi Rivers and faced with hewn stone, the 4th-century, single-nave church, with a western porch, contains important parts of early medieval construction – quite

The Church of Antioch



possibly the remains of the Church of St. Stephen, built in Mtskheta in 420-430.

### THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY CROSS AT MTSKHETA

The Church of the Holy Cross at Mtskheta is located east of Mtskheta, at the confluence of the Mtkvari and Aragvi Rivers, on top of a rocky mountain. It has been inscribed on the World Heritage List. King Mirian III and St. Nino had a wooden cross erected here at this spot, when accepting Christianity in the 330's, which was venerated by Christians all throughout the Caucasus. The Kartlian ruler Gvaram built a small hewn stone church beside the cross in the third quarter of the 6th century, while his sons Stephanos, Adarnase, and Demetre building a domed church over it in 589-607. The latter represents a type of central-domed composition well-known only in the South Caucasus and a logical culmination of the preceding artistic striv-

The Church of the Holy Cross at Mtskheta



ings of Georgian master craftsmen. Built of hewn stone and adorned with stone carved ornamentation and figure reliefs, it is one of the rare examples of a perfect synthesis of architecture with the environment. A relic of the Mtskheta Holy Cross is kept today at Svetitskhoveli Cathedral.



1



2



3

**1 Censer (Syrian-Palestinian)**  
with the scenes from the New Testament. 6<sup>th</sup> c. Ieli church of the Saviour, Upper Svaneti (West Georgia). Bronze. Rim 7.5x5cm.  
*GNM, Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts*

**2 Preatar Cross**  
Mestia, beginning of 11<sup>th</sup> c., gilt silver, 88x50 cm.  
*GNM, Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography*

**3 Triptych of the Saviour**  
6<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> cc. Anchi, Klarjeti (present Turkey) Encaustic on wood, gilded silver, precious stones. 148x185 cm  
*GNM, Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts*





"Fresco of Angel"  
Kintsvisi, St. Nicholas Church

## SHIDA KARTLI

A region in East Georgia, historically and territorially being the very heart of Georgia, with the city of Gori being the administrative center. The climate of Shida Kartli is of moderate, subtropical humidity, with the median annual temperature being around 10-12 °C. In January the median temperature is 3° C and 20-22° C in July. The barometric pressure is around 500-700 mm. The regional climate is continental, with the median annual temperature fluctuating around 12-13° C (in the lowlands), 9-10° C (in higher, outer regions), whereas 4° C at higher altitudes (Java region). There are many monuments of nature, architecture, and culture throughout the region.

Of particular importance from the architectural point of view are the churches of Kvatakhevi, Atenis Sioni, Samtavisi, Ikorta; The murals of the Atenis and Kintsvisi churches are among the masterpieces of the Christian art. Historically distinguished is Uplistsikhe site.





Gori Castle



Uplistsikhe



### UPLISTSIKHE

Rock-cut city Uplistsikhe is one of the prominent monuments of rock architecture in the world, having been carved out in the first millennium B.C. Noteworthy remnants that have survived are the so-called "Long Build-

ing", "Western Church", "The Great Yard" and the "Flat-roofed Houses", "The Single-Pillar Hall" and "The Hall with Caisson Ceilings", "The Beautiful House", "The High Throne Room" Complex, "The Building at the Beginning of the Main Street", "The Inaccessible Building", "The Plain Room", "The Double-Pil-



Ateni Sioni



strategical functions and the residence of the military general.

## ATENI SIONI

The central-domed church of Ateni Sioni was built in the first half of the 7th century on a cliff by the Tana River, at the site of an ancient basilica, as an imitation of the Church of the Holy Cross at Mtskheta. The outer walls are adorned with many reliefs from the 7th-10th centuries, inside however are murals from the 11th century, one of the most important works of the medieval Georgian wall-painting. 8th-11th-century inscriptions within the church provide important historical facts.



lared Hall" and "The Quadruple-Pillared Hall" Complex, "The Prince's Church", "The House at the Edge of the Great Cliff", "The Platform at the Edge of the Street", "The Hall With Paired Rafters", "The Red Room" Complex, the church, etc. In the 9th-11th centuries, Uplistsikhe was a fortress fulfilling military,

## KINTSVISI MONASTERY

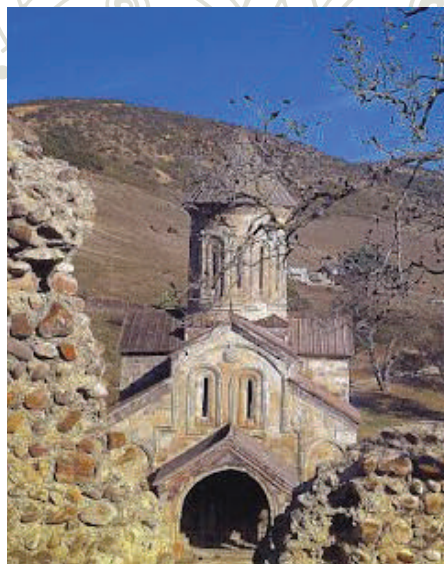
The monastery is located in the Kareli District about ten kilometers away from Kintsvisi Village in the Dzama River Valley. There are two churches and a gate preserved here.

Kintsvisi Monastery



Only the chancel has survived from the older, 10th-11th century single-nave Church of the Mother of God, with remarkable murals dating from the second half of the 13th century. The main domed church of St. Nicholas built by Anthony Glonistavisdze, the Prime Minister and Chkondideli, in the beginning of the 13th century is more significant. The brick church is famous for its mural decoration. An angel heralding the Resurrection on the northern wall and a royal portrait (George III, King Tamar, and George IV Lasha) right underneath it are especially well-known. Kintsvisi murals are of crucial importance in the history of Georgian monumental painting. The church is accompanied by annexes constructed in the 13th-14th centuries and a separate chapel. Inside of the church is a chancel-barrier painted in the 15th century and in the narthex 16th-17th centuries murals are also preserved.

Ikorta



## IKORTA

A domed church dedicated to the Holy Archangels stands in the Tskhinvali region, having been erected in 1172 on the outskirts of Ikorta Village. This typology was often used in the ecclesiastical architecture during the period from the 11th to the 18th century in Georgia. Restored and repaired in the 14th century, in 1672 and in 19th-20th centuries, it has still preserved its original appearance and stone carved ornamentation of high artistic merits. The 12th-century murals inside the church have also partially survived. The 17th-century holy martyrs – Shalva and Elizbar, military governors from Ksani, and Bidzina Cholokashvili are buried within the church.

The church is currently on territory occupied by Russia and it is impossible to see it.

Samtavisi



## SAMTAVISI

The Church of the Ascension at Samtavisi, a very prominent building of crucial significance for Medieval Georgian architecture, is located in the Kaspi region, on the bank of the Lekhura River. This domed church was built by Bishop Hilarion Samtavneli in 1030, over the grave of one of the holy Assyrian Fathers from the 6th century, St. Isidore Samtavneli. Distinguished by architectural features and the exquisiteness of stone carvings, the church had been partially restored in the 15th and 19th centuries. There are murals painted by Meliton Samtavneli during the 17th century within the chancel. The remnants of an early Medieval basilica, a single-nave church from a later period, an 18th-century bell-tower, and an episcopal palace are all part of a complex revealed as a result of archaeological excavations. The grave of St. Isidore (commemoration day – 20 May) is venerated as the relic of the church.

Kvatakhevi



## KVATAKHEVI

The Monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God at Kvatakhevi is situated in the Kaspi region, within the Kavtura River Valley. It is one of the domed churches dating to the 12th-13th centuries that became a model for the architecture of subsequent centuries. The church is abundantly adorned with rich stone carvings. Apart from the church, the Kvatakhevi Complex also contains Late Medieval and the 19th century refectory, a bell-tower, a wall surrounding the complex, and cells. Kvatakhevi is considered to be one of the main shrines in Kartli. Many people were martyred here in the 15th century.

## KVEMO KARTLI

A region in Eastern Georgia, with Rustavi being the administrative center. Kartli is one of Georgia's most important economic centers, being second in line after Tbilisi according to its industrial production output. It has good transport connections due to its geographical location, with highways and main lines for railway transit. Many monuments of nature, architecture, and culture are located within Kvemo Kartli. It is especially interesting from an archaeological standpoint. The climate is humid-subtropical and subtropical-continental (the median annual temperature is 12-13° C).

From architectural point of view most important are the oldest basilica in Bolnisi, the churches at Betania, Pitareti, Tsughrughasheni; the murals of the Betania church are of very high artistic quality.







Dmanisi "Nakalakari"

Bolnisi Sioni



## BOLNISIS SIONI

One of the most ancient episcopal cathedrals of the Georgian Church, Bolnisi Sioni is one of the most important basilican structures that have survived in the country. Being constructed of well-hewn greenish-turquoise tufa stone in 478-493 and distinguished by its monumentality, the church is significant due its oldest majuscule inscriptions and a concentration of stone reliefs in the interior. Next to the church is a three-storey bell-tower standing from the 17th century. Murals dating from the same time period are preserved inside it and in the church interior as well.

## BETANIA MONASTERY

The Monastery of the Mother of God at Betania is situated in the Vere River Valley, close to Tbilisi. A cruciform, domed church from the 12th century, having been built

Betania Monastery



Betania Monastery



by the Orbeli clan using fragments from an older 9th-10th-century structure, faced with hewn stone, and decorated with stone carvings is one of the ancient buildings still remaining. Apart from the church's architecture, partially preserved murals from the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, including a royal portrait – George III, King Tamar, and George IV Lasha – are immensely important. A chapel from the year 1196 stands nearby faced with hewn stone and adorned with stone carved ornamentation. At present it is



The Pitareti Monastery Complex



a male monastery and a burial place of the 20th c. Saints – fathers John (Maisuradze) and John-George (Mkheidze) (commemoration day – 21 September).

## THE PITARETI MONASTERY COMPLEX

Pitareti Monastery is situated in the Ktsia River Gorge, close to the small town of Bolnisi. Its domed church, dedicated to the Mother of God, had been built by the Kavtar Kajipaisdze, an official to King George IV Lasha, in the years 1213-1222. Having been built using stones of various hues, the church is adorned with a variety of highly exquisite stone carvings, in which images of lions, birds, and human heads have been inserted. 13th-century murals are partially preserved in the church, being restored in the 17th century. There are other buildings existing from this same period (a church wall, bell-tower, a wine cellar, etc.) all around. At present it is a male monastery.

Tsughrughasheni Church



## TSUGHRUGHASHENI CHURCH

The domed church of St. George at Tsughrughasheni stands opposite to the cathedral of Bolnisi Sioni in the Poladauri River Valley. Having been erected during the years 1213-1222 by a certain Hasan son of Arseni, the church has a unique appearance, a facing of poly-chromatic hewn stone, and a great abundance of unusual, stone-carved ornaments, in which images of animals have been added throughout.



The Gergeti Trinity church



# MTSKHETA-MTIANETI

This is one of the most beautiful regions of Georgia. Its administrative centre is Mtskheta, a city-museum since 1968, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Here side by side are snowy mountains of the Great Caucasus with 3500 and 5000 m. high picks and passes beautiful gorges, lakes and Alpine meadows. One of the famous mountain skiing resorts – Gudauri is located in the region. Flora and fauna of the region is very rich and diverse. Climate in the lowlands of the region is temperately humid-subtropical. Winters are temperately cold and summers are long and warm, while in Kazbegi district, in the zone of 2600-3600 m. above the sea level, no true summer ever comes. Higher than 3600 m. above the sea level, is the realm of eternal snow and glaciers, with the annual duration of snow cover reaching 5-7 months.

In this region there are several outstanding architectural monuments – The Ananuri Ensemble, the Gergeti Trinity church, church of St George of Lomisa; most distinguished both from architectural, religious and historical points of view are Shiomgvi and Zedazeni monastery.





The Ananuri Ensemble

### THE ANANURI ENSEMBLE

The mighty fortified castle of the Aragvian military governors is located on the Georgian Military Highway on the right bank of the Aragvi River. There are three churches, some towers, a spring, and a water reservoir densely placed on a small piece of land, surrounded by a stone wall. The earliest structure is a Khevsurian-type tower (16th cent.). The small domed church “The Divinity”, with the painted canopy over the grave belongs to the middle of the 17th century. According to an inscription preserved on the southern wall, the ensemble's main cruciform domed church, dedicated to the Mother of God, had been constructed in 1689 through the initiative of Bardzim the Head Judge. The construction was managed by Kaikhosro Baghsarashvili. The church walls have been abundantly adorned with facade décor. Fragments of murals dating to the same period have survived in the interior. There is yet another single-nave church “The Healer”, which has been erected outside of the stone wall. A bell-tower has been built on its flat roof.

The main tower is the one standing the highest, a quadratic, many-storied tower “The Impervious One”. Here, there are also rooms fit for habitation. There is one room per each floor.

The Ananuri Complex is one of the best architectural monuments from the Late Middle Ages in which structures fulfilling military, ritual, and secular purposes have been gathered together. Ananuri was the main shrine and a symbol of authority for the Aragvian military governors.

The churches are operational. Hieromartyr Dositheos Kutateli († 1820; commemoration day – 6 (19) March) is buried here.

### THE GERGETI TRINITY CHURCH

The Gergeti Holy Trinity Church is prominent monument of Georgian architecture and an outstanding sample of landscape architecture. The church has been erected on a mountaintop at 2,200 m above sea level, with the 5,047 m high mountain of Kazbegi towering over it.

The Gergeti Trinity church



Closed within a stone wall, the architectural ensemble of Gergeti consists of the domed Trinity Church dating to the 1430's and a bell-tower that had been built during the subsequent years of the same century. The church has an annex built onto the southern side fulfilling a unique function, "Sabcheo" (The Council – the turn of the 16th cent.) - a place for elders of the Khevi community to consult with each other. For many centuries, Trinity Church was the storehouse and also the hiding place for the treasury of Mtskheta. One of the holiest relics for Georgian Christians – the Cross of St. Nino, had been kept precisely in this location for a long period of time. The 16th century painted decoration of the church's chancel-barrier is noteworthy, being revealed during a restoration in 2006 and contains the image of St. Nino. The vigorous body of the church and modest facade décor leaves one with a monumental impression. The bell-tower is relatively more lavishly decorated – clusters of grapes, fantastic figures of animals and people. The Gergeti Holy Trinity is an especially famous shrine and the only domed structure in Khevi. At present, a

St. George of Lomisa



male monastery has been established at Holy Trinity. Miracle-working icon of the Virgin is housed here. The feast day of the church – "Gergetoba" – is celebrated on 16 July.

## ST. GEORGE OF LOMISA

The Church of St. George of Lomisa is situated on the mountain pass acting as a watershed for the Ksani and Aragvi Rivers at 2,400 m above sea level.

Lomisa was the pre-Christian deity in Mtiuleti



Shiomghvime Monastery

and finally became connected to the name of St. George after the Christianization of the mountain regions.

At the turn of the 9th to the 10th century, a Christian church dedicated to St. George was erected in Lomisa. The church is of a single-nave plan, being built with rough-hewn stones. There is a porch built on the south side. The church has been altered many times, changing its interior significantly.

Around the church, burial vaults and the remnants of structures used for different purposes, and a two-storied bell-tower from the Late Middle Ages have survived. A set of large ritual iron chains are kept at Lomisa Church. Icons and crosses of the church are now kept at the Kvemo Mleta church. Lomisa was the foremost shrine of the Mtiuleti and Ksani Valleys. Many important issues have been decided here.

The church is currently operational. Its feast – “Lomisoba” is celebrated on the seventh Sunday after the Easter.

## SHIOMGHVIME MONASTERY

Shiomghvime Monastery is located 9 km away from Mtskheta on the left bank of the Mtkvari, on the south slope of the Skhaltba Ridge. The monastery was founded in the middle of the 6th century by one of the Assyrian Fathers, St. Shio, who lived in a small cave (thus the name “Shiomghvime” - “Shio's Cave”).

A church dedicated to St. John the Baptist (560-570) is the monastery's most ancient structure, which had been built when St. Shio was still alive. The lower portion of the church has been set into the rock. Between the years 1010-1033, Catholicos Melchisedek I had an chancel-barrier made for the church. Its stone carvings and reliefs are the best sample of Medieval Georgian sculpture (at present are kept in Tbilisi, in State Museum of Fine Arts). In the 11th and subsequent centuries annexes and a bell-tower were built to the church.

St. King David the Builder built the large brick domed Church of the Dormition during the



Zedazeni Monastery



years 1103-1123. The building was transformed into a three-nave basilica in 1678, whereas a defensive tower was added onto the church in the 18th century. Both churches were painted in early 20th century by N. Andreev and G. Zaziashvili.

A spring, the so-called "Spring of Tears" by the entrance gate is mentioned in the Life of St. Shio. Its architectural design dates to 1901. A small single-nave church of the Ascension of the Cross has been constructed on top of a hill 1 km away from the monastery to the southeast, with the 13th century mural decoration in its interior.

At present a male monastery is established here. The main relic of the monastery is the grave of St. Shio (commemoration days – 20 and 22 May).

## ZEDAZENI MONASTERY

Zedazeni Monastery has been built on the left bank of the Aragvi River, on top of the Saguramo Ridge, 8 km away from Mtskheta

to the northeast. The name "Zedazeni" (Zeda Zadeni) originates from the name of the most ancient pagan deity of the Georgians, Zadeni.

The monastery was founded by one of the Assyrian Fathers in the 6th century, John of Zedazeni, who is buried here. A single-nave church was erected on his grave. It was included into a basilica of St. John the Baptist built by Catholicos Clement during the years 760-770. In the 9th c. a porch was built to the church. In the 18th century, Catholicos Domentius attached a brick bell-tower onto the porch and restored the church. Cells for monks and a remnant of the surrounding wall are also from the same period. Holy Bishop Alexander Okropiridze had repaired the church in the 19th century. Surviving fragments of the murals are probably from the 17th century.

There are monks currently living on the monastery grounds. The relics of the monastery are the grave of St. John (commemoration day – 25 December) and a well miraculously emerged as a result of the saint's prayer in the north aisle of the basilica.

# SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI

This is the oldest southern Georgian region, its administrative centre being the town of Akhaltsikhe. Numerous archaeological monuments are unearthed on its territory. The region is the richest in lakes and is even called the realm of lakes. According to the tradition, the greatest Georgian poet, Shota Rustaveli, was of Meskhetian origin. The region is also famous for Borjomi-Bakuriani resort zone. Winters are cold and less snowy here, while summers are long and warm. Median annual air temperature ranges between -30 C and +90 C. Samtskhe-Javakheti abounds in distinguished Christian monuments, which leave unforgettable impression on the visitor.

In this region there are several important monuments of Georgian medieval architecture: Poka, Sapara, and Zarzma with outstanding murals. Of special significance is the rock-cut monastery at Vardzia with brilliant frescos and Vani Caves.







"Queen Tamar and King George III"  
Frescoes of Vardzia





Vardzia

## VARDZIA

Vardzia, a 12th century rock-cut town-monastery, is located in historic Javakheti, on the left bank of the Mtkvari, 30 km from Aspindza, holding a prominent place in rock architecture not only in Georgian, but in world history. The construction of Vardzia is connected with the names of St. King Tamar and her father – King George III. The complex has been carved into a 500-meter long section of the cliff, consisting of 13 levels. It comprises more than 600 caves. The complex was supplied with a plumbing system and drinking water. Rooms for different purposes are also encountered here: the so-called “Pharmacy”, “Tamar’s Hall”, “The Banquet Room”, “The Refectory”, “The Stable”, etc.

The main structure at Vardzia is a single-nave church of the Dormition. Its exquisite mural decoration dating to the turn of the 13th century, apart from the religious scenes, contains the portraits of King Tamar and her



Vardzia

father King George.

Only two built structures were located in the Vardzia complex, which was damaged early enough – these are a two-storey bell-tower (13th cent.), with only the ground floor remaining today, and the porch of the main



Poka Mothers Monastery



church 13th cent.).

Of certain importance is the Ananauri settlement, in the 10th century rock-cut church of which fine 13th and 15th century murals are preserved.

Currently there is a male monastery at Vardzia.

## POKA MOTHERS MONASTERY

Poka is a village that has been built in historical Javakheti on the shore of Lake Paravani, first being mentioned in the 4th century on a map by Castorius. St. Nino had rested precisely in this spot when she had entered Georgia to preach Christianity.

A single-nave church dedicated to St. Nino was constructed by Mikel, "the banakasalari of Kartli" (presumably the "khurotmodzghvarukhutsesi" - the senior architect), through the commission of John Okropiri, the Catholicos of Kartli, during the years 1030-1040, in the center of the village.

The Rock-cut Monastery of Vani (Vahani) Caves



The exterior window framings are adorned with exquisite ornamentation and lapidary inscriptions.

There are currently a residence of Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia and functioning male and female monasteries here.

## THE ROCK-CUT MONASTERY OF VANI (VAHANI) CAVES

The monastery complex is located on the right bank of the Mtkvari, close to Vardzia and consists of 200 caves and several churches spread out over 16 levels. The earliest dwellings date to the 8th century. The remnants of an early 11th century, rock-cut domed church dedicated to St. George with a two-storey burial chapel, a built stone porch, a burial chapel and an ornamented chancel-barrier, is one of the remarkable cult structures. A small, domed church built into an upper terrace deserves special attention, where a large number of drawings and inscriptions written in the modern Georgian alphabet have been preserved on the walls,



Sapara

having been done with black ink in the 15th-16th centuries. One of the stanzas from *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* is legible.

The Vani Caves, as well as Vardzia, were property belonging to the king and were one of the leading spiritual and literary centres of the region.

### SAPARA

The monastery of Sapara is located about 10-12 km from Akhaltsikhe close to Ghreli Village in the depths of a canyon. The monastery was one of the residences of the Tsikhisjvarel-Jakeli clan ruling Samtskhe and their burial place. A 10th-century single-nave church of the Dormition, a small 11th-century chapel, the domed Church of St. Sabas from the second half of the 13th century, a bell-tower and a palace dating to the 13th-14th centuries, the Church of St. George from the 14th-16th centuries, small chapels, and the ruins of towers are all part of the ensemble surrounded by a wall.



The small-sized single-nave church of the Dormition is the earliest structure. A remarkable chancel-barrier adorned with 11th-century relief sculptures had been kept here (it is currently at the State Museum of Art).

The chief structure is the cruciform,

Zarzma



domed church of St. Sabas, having facades abundantly and richly adorned with stone carvings. There are many lapidary inscriptions, with one of them preserving the name of one of the architects – Paresasdze. The entire church interior was painted in the same period, representing a significant work of Georgian monumental art. Apart from religious subjects, the Atabags of Samtskhe are also depicted here. Family portrait of the Jakelis is preserved in the murals of the Dormition church.

The bell-tower consists of two stories. There is a chapel and a sepulcher on the ground floor which belonged to Lasurisdze, the head butler of the Jakeli clan. The portraits of the members of this family have been depicted on the northern wall.

Sapara is currently a functioning monastery.

## ZARZMA

Zarzma Monastery is located in Zarzma Village within the Kvabliani Valley. The

monastery was founded by the 8th century monk – St. Serapion of Zarzma, although nothing from the earlier structures has survived. The monastery currently consists of a domed church, a bell-tower, and the remnants of a few small-sized single-nave churches. A 10th century inscription has been preserved on an architrave stone belonging to the oldest chapel located next to the bell-tower. The main structure is the 13th-14th century domed Church of the Dormition (earlier dedicated to the Transfiguration) of high artistic level. The interior of the church is adorned with the mural decoration comprising several chronological layers. Apart from the traditional subjects, 14th and 16th century historical figures are also depicted here. The bell-tower, being from the same period as the main church and having richly adorned facades, had been restored by the Khurtsidze clan, the patrons of Zarzma, in the 16th century.

There is currently a functioning male monastery here.





# KAKHETI

A region in eastern Georgia, Kakheti is one of the oldest centres of viticulture and wine making. About 80 kinds of vine are spread here. The history of wine making in Kakheti goes back to the III-II Mill. B.C. Kakheti is well known for the richness of its cultural heritage. It is also distinguished by the diversity of its climate and landscape, uniting both subtropical and steppe features. Annual median air temperature in winter is +140 C and +230, +250 C – in summer.

The Kakheti region is especially rich with the monuments of early Christian architecture: Nekresi Monastery, Dzveli Shuamta The All-Holy Virgin of Gurjaani as well as of medieval period: Alaverdi, , Ikalto, Bodbe Convent, The Church of the Archangels at Gremi, Akhali Shuamta; Special interest is to be paid to the rock-cut monasteries of Davit-Gareja, distinguished with fine and unique wall paintings.



Akhali Shuamta



## AKHALI SHUAMTA

The Akhali (New) Shuamta Monastery Complex has been built a few kilometers from Telavi, in the Shuamta Forest. It was founded by Queen Tinatin, the wife of the Kakhetian King Levan in the 1540's. She had also constructed the domed Church of the Mother of God of Khakhuli and a four-storey bell-tower to the northwest of it, on territory encircled by a stone wall. Tinatin having taken veil here by 1550 lived in the bell-tower. Tinatin's daughter, nun Thekle, built an annex onto the church at the end of the century. The church decorated with blind arches and crosses on the facades is also adorned with the interior murals of the same epoch, which, apart from the traditional subject scenes, contain portraits of Queen Tinatin and King Levan. Restoration works were undertaken in the monastery in the 18th century and works that had disfigured the church were carried out in the 19th century. The church has now regained its former appearance. Today, there

Bodbe Convent



is a nuns' convent re-established here. The feast day of the church is celebrated on 21 September.

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## ALAVERDI

The Church of St. George at Alaverdi is located in the Akhmeta District, in the Alazani Valley, on the left bank of the river. It seems likely that a pagan shrine had been at the church's location. One of the Assyrian Fathers, St. Joseph of Alaverdi, had constructed the Church here in the 6th century, whereas in the first quarter of the 11th c., King Quiricus of Kakheti had commissioned erection of the one of the largest domed cathedral in Georgia at the same spot. Its monumental facades have been designed in the laconic style characteristic of Kakhetian architecture. Fragments of the mural painting from the 11th, 15th-16th, 17th centuries have been preserved in the interior.

Various buildings from different periods and serving different functions survive on the church territory, surrounded by the 17th-18th centuries stone wall: a palace of bishop from the 16th century, the palace of Feikar Khan, the Iranian Vice Shah in Kakheti from the 17th century, as well as various other structures from the time of the Persian dominion – a wine cellar, a bell-tower, a bathhouse, etc.

Alaverdi is the highest among the old churches of Georgia. It was an important spiritual, cultural, and educational center for many centuries. Well-known Georgian men of letter and calligraphers have labored here. The founder, St. Joseph of Alaverdi (commemoration day – 20 May), is buried in the church, which was also a burial place for the Kakhetian kings; in the 17th century, relics of St. Queen Ketevan were buried under the altar. On 28 September, a feast-day – “Alaverdoba” – is held annually here. The Alaverdi Monastery is currently operational.



Davit-Gareja

### DAVIT-GAREJA

The grandiose complex of cave monasteries is a remarkable religious-cultural center of the Medieval Georgia and one of the largest monastic establishments in the world. It is located about 60-70 km from Tbilisi to the southeast on the slope of the watershed between the Iori and Mtkvari Basins. A minor portion of the complex is currently on Azerbaijanian territory.

Spread out for 25 km, the monastery had been founded by St. David of Gareja, one of the Assyrian Fathers, in the 6th century. Monuments of all epochs, from the 6th century onwards, including the 19th century, are preserved here.

The most ancient monastery is the Laura of David founded by Father David. Two other monasteries: the so-called "Dodo-Rka" ("Horn of Dodo") and Natlismtsemeli (the Baptist) had also been created during the time of St.

David of Gareja. The monasteries – "Udabno", Chichkhituri, Bertubani, Kolagiri, "Tsamebuli", and others had been founded during later times.

The monastic life, spiritual, and creative activities never ceased throughout the middle ages, even until the end of the 18th century. The 11th-13th centuries was a time of a special efflorescence, during the unification of the Georgian Kingdom. Hundreds of rock-cut monastic cells, churches, chapels, and refectories have been preserved at Davit-Gareja. 9th-18th century mural decorations the Gareja monasteries are of the utmost importance for the development of Georgian and, in general, of world mural painting, due to their diversity and high artistic merits. They bear evidence to the existence of a school of painting at Gareja, distinguished by its exceptional artistic character. The relics of the Davit-Gareja are the grave of St. David, the so-called "Spring of Tear", emerged through his prayer and relics of the 6000 martyred.

The Church of the Archangels at Gremi



The monastery is currently operational.

## THE CHURCH OF THE ARCHANGELS AT GREMI

One of the best examples of the Late Medieval Georgian architecture, the Church of the Archangels at Gremi, dating to 1565, has been constructed in the Kvareli District, at the Gremi town-site, on a slightly elevated spot. The church had been built during the reign of King Levan of Kakheti and he is buried here. His portrait with the inscription: "King Leon the Builder", is included into the murals of the church of the same period.

A residential tower has been erected on this small platform next to the church. Unity of the church and the tower, their compositional and artistic wholeness contribute to an unforgettable artistic effect. Ruins of the former capital of the Kingdom of Kakheti have survived at the base of this ensemble – a bathhouse, lines of bazaar shops, several

The All-Holy Virgin of Gurjaani



churches, etc. The feast day of currently operational church is celebrated on 21 November.

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Nekresi Monastery

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### NEKRESI MONASTERY

Nekresi Monastery is built on the thick, forested slope of a mountain a few kilometers from Kvareli, close to Shilda Village. Over the centuries it was a influential Christian center of the diocese.

From an artistic-historical standpoint, the complex consists of exceptionally important buildings from different periods and fulfilling different functions. Among them remarkable are: the earliest preserved miniature Christian chapel in Georgia from the 4th century; a 7th century three-church basilica, in which 16th century murals are preserved (they were commissioned by King Levan of Kakheti); 9th century domed church of a peculiar plan; as

well as a 9th century episcopal palace, a 16th century tower, a wine cellar, a refectory, cells for the monks, small chapels, and buildings fulfilling different functions from a later period. At present the male monastery is again operational. Its feast day is celebrated on 12 December.

### IKALTO

The Ikalto Monastery Complex has been built about 7-8 km to the north of Telavi. It is founded by one of the Assyrian Fathers, St. Zenon, in the 6th century. It was a vibrant center of Georgian culture, spirituality, and education for many centuries. According to tradition, a school of higher education – an academy had been established here, where a well-known Georgian philosopher Arseni of Ikalto was active (11th-12th cent.). As a result of archaeological excavations, it was discovered that many structures - a workshop, a blacksmith shop, a wine cellar, and other subsidiary facilities existed around

Ikalto



(commemoration day – 19 February) of Ikalto are buried here.

## DZVELI SHUAMTA

Dzveli Shuamta



There are three churches on the monastery grounds, with the chief one being the 8th-9th century cruciform-domed church "Divinity", altered in the 19th century and built upon the site of an old church. Despite considerable alterations, in the small Church of the Trinity, parts of the 6th century domed church have survived. And finally, the single-nave church of "All-Holy Virgin" from the High Middle Ages has been preserved here. The monastery churches are currently operational. St. Zenon (commemoration day – 20 May) and St. Arseni

The Dzveli (Old) Shuamta Monastery is located in Kakheti, in a thick forest, 7 kilometers from Telavi. A three-aisled basilica from the 5th century and two domed churches from the 7th century typologically resembling the Church of the Holy Cross at Mtskheta are the buildings currently preserved within the monastery. The construction material used for all three of the structures is, basically, cobblestone, traditional for Kakheti and a small amount of shirimi (water tufa) stone. Although, the monastery was abandoned from the 16th century, the churches had reached us without considerable losses and alterations. Dzveli Shuamta is one of the significant samples of the Early Medieval Georgian architecture.

## IMERETI

It is one of the historical, geographical regions of Western Georgia. The main city is Kutaisi. Imereti is notable for its rich spiritual, agricultural, and material culture. You can visit the Sataplia and Ajameti Nature Reserves in Imereti. A sub-tropical sea climate is dominant in Imereti, being warm during the winters and hot during the summers. The annual median air temperature is around 11-15° C. The climate of Zemo Imereti is humid, sub-tropical. The winters here are comparatively colder, with much precipitation.

In Imereti there are several outstanding monuments of the Georgian Christian architecture and history of church: Bagrati Cathedral, Gelati monastery, Mostasameta, the Katskhi pillar. Ubissi church is famous for its unique murals.







Gelati Monastery



Bagrati Cathedral

### BAGRATI CATHEDRAL

The cruciform, domed church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, known as “Bagrati Cathedral”, stands in Kutaisi, on Arkieli Hill, on the left bank of the Rioni River. Its name is linked with the king Bagrat III (975-1014), who had built it at the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century. According to one of the inscriptions, its floor had been laid in 1003, although work had continued until the year 1008. Western and southern porches were added to the church during the 1030's. The facades of Bagrati Cathedral have been adorned with stone-carved ornaments. Two haut-relief heads facing each other are on the southern facade. The sculptural décor of the porch columns are notable for their diversity and high level of craftsmanship. Bagrati Cathedral is one of the largest Georgian churches. An 18th-century bell-tower stands southwest of the church.

The church had first suffered damage in 1692,

when the Turks had blown it up, resulting in the collapse of the dome and the vaults. It was subsequently damaged when the Kutaisi Fortress was set free from the Turks in 1770. A restoration of Bagrati Cathedral had been carried out several times during the years 1952-1994. The current appearance is the result of restoration work done in 2009-2012, with the walls and vaults being rebuilt and finished off by a new dome.

### GELATI MONASTERY

Gelati Monastery is located on top of a hill, on the outskirts of Gelati Village. The monastery was founded by St. King David IV the Builder in 1106. An academy, a centre of education was also established by him in Gelati. Gelati was burned to the ground by the Turks in 1510. The Imeretian King Bagrat III (1510-1565) restored the monastery very soon afterwards, first with the establishment of a bishopric, and then transferring the Catholicosate from Bichvinta. A few



Gelati Monastery



structures make up the monastery complex, being surrounded by a stone wall. The main, cruciform, domed Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God was erected during the years 1106-1130. During the 12th-13th centuries, porches and annexes were added to the church from the south and north. A major portion of the painted ensemble within the church and its annexes was done in the 16th and 17th centuries through the initiatives of Imeretian kings, bishops of Gelati, and Western Georgian Catholicoses. Only a few fragments have survived from the original mural decoration: a brilliant mosaic in the apse conch (1125-1130) – the Mother of God with the Infant Child flanked by the Archangels, high artistic level of which can be compared with the best Byzantine mosaics, and the narthex murals (1125-1130). Some fragments of paintings from the 13th and 14th centuries have survived in various parts of the church. It is quite remarkable that many portraits of kings and clergymen have been preserved within the church, among

them is David IV the Builder, holding a church, standing in a line of Imeretian kings in 16th-century murals.

Standing to the east of the main church is the cruciform, domed Church of St. George, erected in the middle of the 13th century, representing a slightly altered copy of the Church of the Mother of God. The church's mural decoration had been created in the 16th century through the commission of Catholicos Evdemon I Chkhetidze and King George II of Imeretia.

The two-storey Church of St. Nicholas (the end of the 13th cent.) stands to the west of the Church of the Mother of God, whereas in the northwest is a three-storey bell-tower (a spring is on its ground floor), having been erected in the second half of the 13th century. The Gelati Academy must have been placed in a large structure situated a little further to the west. There are two entry gates in the wall surrounding the monastery. David the



Motsameta



Ubisa



Builder has been buried within the southern gate of the monastery.

Gelati Monastery was the patrimonial church of Georgian kings and a burial place of Western Georgian Catholicoses and Gelati bishops.

In the church of St. George, sacred relics are kept, including those of St. George and St. Nicholas. King Demetre I (monastic name Damian) and 19th century Saint, Gabriel Bishop of Imereti are buried in Gelati.

## MOTSAMETA

The Motsameta Monastery Complex stands on a high peak in the Tskaltsitela River Valley, close to Kutaisi, harmoniously fits to the environment. Surrounded by a wall, the monastery consists of the domed Church of the Annunciation (1844-1865), a bell-tower (1846), two towers, and cells for the monks (1960). A Church of the Annunciation had

stood there during the Early Middle Ages, being destroyed by Murvan the Deaf during an Arab campaign (735-737). David and Constantine – the Argvetian rulers, who were martyred in this battle, are buried in the church crypt. It seems likely that Bagrat IV (1027-1072) had erected a monastery on this spot a few centuries later, laying the relics of the holy martyrs to rest in its church. Thus the monastery was called “Motsameta” (motsame – martyr, with “Motsameta” roughly meaning “place of the martyrs” (trans.) The small-sized single-name church that had been built by Bagrat IV was widened in the middle of the 19th century and topped off with a dome, with the construction work being done by Levan, Moses, and Phillip Berekashvili. The decoration of the church facades was also carried out by them. A fresco composition of the Deesis dating to the 15th-16th centuries has survived in the apse conch. A reliquary containing the relics of St. David and St. Constantine stands by the eastern wall of the church (commemoration day – 14 October).

The Katskhi Pillar



## UBISA

Ubisa Monastery is located in Ubisa Village. The monastery was founded by St. Gregory of Khandzta in the 9th century. The main single-nave church dedicated to St. George, with annexes on three sides, belongs to this period (the western annex is from the 16th century). Simon of Chkondidi built a four-storey tower – a place for a stylite to live – to the east of the church in 1141. A bell-tower erected during a later period also stands in the yard. The monastery is surrounded by a wall constructed of cobblestone.

The Church of St. George at Ubisa is famous for its wall paintings. The 14th-century

murals are a remarkable example of the so-called Palaeologan style and are one of the distinguished samples of Georgian monumental art from the middle ages. A rather extensive life cycle of St. George has been represented along with the feast cycle scenes. An image of a Georgian saint, David of Argveti, is also noteworthy.

Ubisa belongs to a number of rare medieval monuments that have preserved the names of its architect – Mavrik the Builder and the painter – Gerasime, in its inscriptions.

## THE KATSKHI PILLAR

The Katskhi Pillar is a limestone monolith 40 m. high located in the Katskhura River Gorge close to Katskhi Village. A luminous cross – “Dzeli Tskhoveli” (The Life-giving Tree) – had been carved on the base of the rock pillar in the 6th century and from this time onwards the Katskhi Pillar was given the name of Dzeli Tskhoveli or Sveti Tskhoveli. There is a small monastery complex on top of the pillar, a hermitage where a few monks lived. The monastery consists of a small-sized, 10th-century single-nave church built of shirimi stone (water tufa), supposedly dedicated to the Holy Cross, some semi-rock cut cells, and a subsidiary facility. There is a crypt underneath the church. Monastic life on the Katskhi Pillar was interrupted during the 16th-17th centuries and resumed in 1997. Having been reduced to ruins, the church was covered with a new roof and underwent restoration. A single-nave church from the 9th-10th century, dedicated to St. Simeon the Stylite and some modern cells stand at the base of the pillar.







# GURIA

The region is located in western Georgia on the Black Sea coast. The administrative center is the town of Ozurgeti. Here are seaside and mountainous resorts and medicinal and drinkable mineral water "Nabeghlavi" being popular in the international market.

The outstanding architectural monument is Shemokmedi monastery, and of great significance are the murals of the Achi church.





Shemokmedi Monastery

## SHEMOKMEDI MONASTERY

Shemokmedi Monastery is situated on a steep hill approximately 7 km from Ozurgeti to the southeast. There are two churches clinging to each other within the monastery complex. One of them is a large-size three-nave basilica, supposedly constructed in the 16th century and then repaired at a later period. The second one, a type of "domed hall" church, known by the name of Zarzma, had been built by the Gurian ruler, Vakhtang I the Gurian in ca. 1580 in order to house an icon of the Transfiguration (886) and other holy relics transferred over from Zarzma Monastery, following the Turkish conquest of Samtskhe (1577). Thus it was called "Zarzma". The church bears traces of a renovation done during a later period. A 16th-century bell-tower within the monastery had been restored during the 19th century. Murals, supposedly dating to the 16th-18th centuries are preserved in both churches.



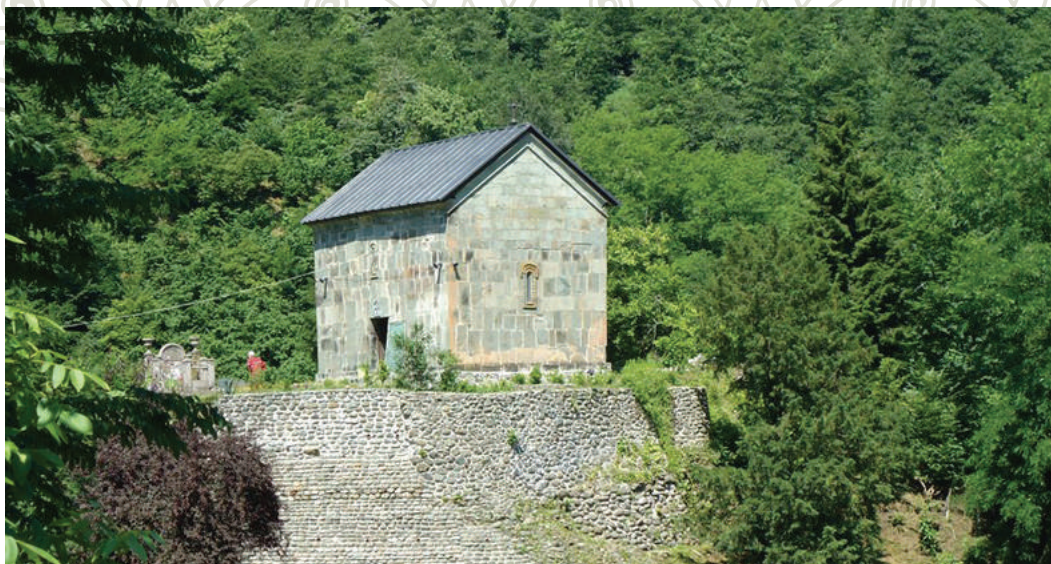
Likhauri Church

At present a male monastery is established here.

## UDABNO MONASTERY

The most ancient monastery complex in Guria stands on a rocky mountain slope. The entire southern region of Guria unfolds before one's eyes from the male monastery of St. John the Baptist at Udabno. According to architectural

Achi



Udabno Monastery



peculiarities, the monastery's rock-cut church has been dated to the 13th century, although it can be supposed that monastic life had begun much earlier here. At present a male monastery is established here.

## LIKHAURI CHURCH

Having been built in the Achistskali River

Valley, Likhauri Village was the political center of the Gurian military province during the feudal era. A single-nave church dedicated to the Mother of God, constructed during the 13th century, stands even today on top of a hill in the middle of the village. It is protected on one side by a stone wall, with a bell-tower built of hewn stone inserted into it. Fragments of 16th-century murals are preserved within the church.

## ACHI

A single-nave church dedicated to St. George and constructed from hewn stone stands on a small hill in the center of Achi Village. It had been erected and painted at the end of the 13th century. Outside, the church seems quite modest, whereas the interior has been adorned with vivacious mural decoration with remarkably light and bright colors. Scenes from the life of St. George are represented here along with the Feast cycle.



## SAMEGRELO

Represents a western region of Georgia, with the administrative center Zugdidi. In ancient times the legendary Kingdom of Colchis comprised the greatest portion of the territory of modern-day Mingrelia. In this region the legendary Greek heroes sought the Golden Fleece. Ancient Phazisi, founded in the 7th century B.C. and being an important port city, was located in the environs of the modern town of Poti. The Colchis National Park is located in Mingrelia, covering wetlands, aquatic sea areas, and Paliastomi Lake. The climate in the coastal regions of Mingrelia is humid, subtropical, with hot summers and warm winters. In the lowlands the annual median temperature is around 13-19° C. The air temperature decreases in the north as the mountains increase in altitude.

From the architectural point of view the most important monuments are Martvili cathedral, Khobi monastery, Tsalendjikha church, famous also for its brilliant wall-painting. The most sacred and venerable Christian relics are stored in the Dadiani Palace museum.





Virgin's Mantle



Martvili Cathedral

## MARTVILI CATHEDRAL

Martvili cathedral stands on a hill situated between the Tskhenistskali and Abashistskali Rivers close to the district center, Martvili. In ancient times Martvili was called Chkondidi, which means a big oak tree, due to a pagan shrine, an oak tree, which stood there. St. Apostle Andrew had cut down the oak tree, when he converted Mingrelians to Christianity. According to tradition, the altar of the Church of the Mother of God was placed on the stump of the oak tree. Sacred relics of martyrs (Georgian – “martvili”) were kept in the church. The Chkondidi Diocese was one of the important spiritual centers during the middle ages. Bishops of Martvili were called “Chkondideli”.

The domed Church of the Mother of God typologically belongs to the group of churches resembling the Holy Cross of Mtskheta, dating to the 7th century, although it had undergone considerable changes

throughout the centuries (10th, 16th, 18th-19th cents.). The church is adorned with reliefs on the exterior (7th cent. reliefs on the east and west facades) and 10th c. image of Christ surviving on the porch pediment.

The majority part of the church’s murals had been done in the 16th and 17th centuries, although certain fragments of earlier paintings from the 13th and 14th centuries have survived. The 16th-17th-century murals have preserved remarkably interesting donor portraits. A small-sized two-storey domed church (11th cent.), called “The Chikvanta Church”, and a hermit “column” (11th cent.) stand in the monastery yard. Martvili was the patrimonial burial place for Mingrelian rulers, the House of Dadiani in later centuries.

## KHOBI MONASTERY

Khobi Monastery – itself the patrimonial church and one of the burial places of the House of Dadiani – stands in a clearing on



Khobi Monastery



Khobi Monastery



top of a high hill close to Nojikhevi Village. It was well-known for its relics, including the Mother of God, relics of St. Marina and St. Cerycus, and a cross belonging to St. King Tamar containing a piece of the True Cross (at present they are kept at the Zugdidi Museum and Tbilisi Museum of Fine Arts).

The Church of the Dormition has been set on the foundations of an old church, unifying construction layers dating to the 12th and the turn of the 14th centuries. The church is of an unusual domeless cruciform plan, with chambers in the corners and south-western ambulatory. 6th-century Byzantine marble plaques have been inserted into the masonry of the southern gallery.

The mural decoration in the church naos is mainly from the 17th century, although there are isolated pieces of older murals (13th and 16th cent.). There are 14th-century murals that had been commissioned by Vamek Dadiani in the southeast chapel. The church's painted ensemble is remarkable for the multitude of portraits of the 13th, 14th, and 17th cent. Historic figures, donors of the paintings.

A bell-tower has been placed in the wall surrounding the monastery, with the gateway arranged on its ground floor. The ruins of an



The Dadiani Palace in Zugdidi

ancient palace have survived in the yard.

### THE DADIANI PALACE IN ZUGDIDI

In 1921 a museum was opened in the palace of the Mingrelian rulers – the House of Dadiani, in Zugdidi, where the basic collection is represented by the patrimonial archive and items of the Dadiani family.

The architectural complex consists of: a palace belonging to Queen Catherine Chavchavadze-Dadiani, designed by the German architect, G. Reiss in the 1850's at the spot of an older palace, the palace of Niko Dadiani, from the 1880's (by Russian architect Leonid Vasiliev), and the Church of the Mother of God of Blachernae (19th cent.).

The botanical garden surrounding it is an indispensable part of the architectural ensemble, which was designed by a gardener invited from Trieste in 1840, Joseph Babini.



The Dadiani Palace in Zugdidi

One of the richest collections in Georgia is kept at Zugdidi Museum. The museum also is famous for its own holy relics. The Robe of the Mother of God, the particles of the True Cross, and holy relics of St. George, St. John the Baptist, St. Marina, St. Cerycus etc. are kept here.

The Church of the Savior at Tsalenjikha



## THE CHURCH OF THE SAVIOR AT TSALENJIKHA

The cruciform domed Church of the Savior with an ambulatory on three sides was built in the 14th century (there is an extant line of thought that the church had been built in the 12th century, with the dome being restored in the 14th century). Some time later, small-sized ossuary chapels were constructed in the southern and northern portions of the ambulatory.

The church at Tsalenjikha is famous for its wall art. Iconography within the primary space of the church is the only surviving example of the Constantinople school dating precisely to the 14th century, also preserving the names of those who commissioned and painted the art. It is known from Georgian and Greek fresco inscriptions, that the ruler of Odishi, Vameq Dadiani had invited an iconographer from Constantinople – Cyrus Emanuel Eugenicus. He painted the central space of

the church (1384-1396). It seems that local master artists had also assisted Eugenicus. The portrait of Vameq Dadiani is pictured on the northern wall. The iconography is one of the splendid productions of the Palaiologos style, being an outstanding example of the Constantinople school in the 14th century.

Members from the House of Dadiani and figures that were close to them have been buried in the church's open galleries and chapels, with iconography from the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries in these places having been done through their very commission. Many donor portraits of the Dadiani family have been preserved in the chapel iconography.

The church is encircled by a stone wall, with a bell-tower being built into the northwestern corner. The ruins of a palace belonging to the House of Dadiani have been preserved in the yard.





Svaneti

# SVANETI

Zemo Svaneti, the highest mountainous region that is populated in Georgia, is remarkable for its beauty, the diversity of natural zones (mountain slopes covered with deciduous and evergreen trees, alpine meadows and grazing areas, glaciers and mountain peaks eternally covered in snow), mineral waters, old customs and rituals surviving to the present day, and rich folklore. Many traditional old dwelling complexes with towers and churches have survived in villages tucked away in the valleys and spread out on the mountain slopes, superbly blending in with the nature surrounding them. Icons and crosses have been kept to this day in a majority of the churches. A significant portion of the cultural heritage preserved in Svaneti is represented by wall paintings, which evidence the existence of the Svanetian School of painting with its individual artistic identity (9th-17th cents.).

In Zemo (upper) Svaneti of special significance is the Ushguli Architectural Ensemble; nearly every church comprises unique wall paintings: Nalipari, Kala, Jibiani, and Seti. The most sacred relics and works of Christian art are stored in Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography







The Ushguli Architectural Complex

## THE USHGULI ARCHITECTURAL COMPLEX

Ushguli is a historical community unifying four villages that have been built at the base of the highest peak in the Caucasus, Shkhara (5,068 m.). Its indisputably impressionable view is one of the “postcards” of Svaneti in its entirety. The Ushguli community was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, having been declared a natural reserve. Being built at 2,400 m above sea level, Ushguli is one of the highest settlements in Europe. The character of Svaneti’s medieval settlements can be best felt in its villages – with their narrow alleys, dwelling complexes with towers, separately standing defense towers, churches, and common community gathering places. In this respect, Chazhashi Village is remarkable, historically the main village of the Ushguli community. The entire treasures of the Ushguli community – repoussé and painted crosses and icons from the 10th-14th centuries – were kept there in



The Church of St. George at Nakipari Village

the Church of the Savior. Currently, all the most important works of repoussé art and icon painting as well as archaeological and ethnographical items have been transferred over to a museum that is within a tower standing close to the church.



The Ushguli Architectural Complex



The Church of Sts. Cerycus and Julitta at Kala



## THE CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE AT NAKIPARI VILLAGE

The single-nave church at Nakipari, dedicated to St. George, had been built in the 10th century. The facade murals and stone reliefs are of the same time period as its construction. Its interior however, was painted by the well-known royal painter Theodore, in a highly impressionable manner, in 1130. The composition of the apse conch and the life cycle of St. George are especially attention grabbing. Among the 11th-13th repoussé icons kept in the church, an 11th-century gilt silver repoussé icon of St. George is remarkable.

## THE CHURCHES OF LASHTKHVERI VILLAGE

There are two churches in Lashtkhveri Village, the Church of the Holy Archangels and the Church of St. Gabriel the Archangel, notable for the interesting murals of their

own epoch preserved in them. The Church of St. Gabriel the Archangel (Svans call it "Mkheri", which means "the Messenger") in Mukheli Village, on the left-hand side from the center of Lashtkhveri, was painted in the middle of the 14th century by the painter David. Chancel murals of the Church of the Holy Archangels in Lashtkhveri also belong to him, whereas the paintings in the naos of the church done on the turn of the 14th to the 15th century are the works of several master artists. All four of the church facades had also been painted by one of them during the same period. It is worth noting that apart from the traditional subject matter (the Deesis, St. Eustathius' Hunt, images of the Warrior Saints), scenes from the heroic epic "Amiran-Darejaniani" have been inserted into the facade mural decoration at Lashtkhveri. Scenes from "Amiran-Darejaniani" (17th cent.) have also been depicted on the northern facade of the Church of the Savior at Chazhashi.



The Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God at Zhibiani Village

### THE CHURCH OF ST. CERYCUS AND JULITTA AT KALA

Located by Khe Village, the Church of Sts. Quiricus and Julitta (also called Lagurka) is the greatest shrine in Zemo Svaneti. The church had been built in the 10th century and a monastery complex had also been here in earlier times. Lagurka is adorned with exquisite murals executed by the well-known royal painter Theodore in 1112. Apart from Gospel scenes, the mural decoration also contains scenes from the martyrdom of the church's patron saints, exerting a great influence upon the viewer through its classical monumentalism and emotional expressiveness. Repoussé and painted icons, crosses, etc. from the 10th-14th centuries are kept in the church.



The Church of St. George at Seti

### THE CHURCH OF THE DORMITION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD AT ZHIBIANI VILLAGE

Dating from the 10th century, the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God (also called Lamaria) at Zhibiani Village is one of the shrines of the Ushguli community. Situated



on a high hill, the church is accompanied by a tower and high wall surrounding it. Two layers of painting are distinguishable in the church, with the most ancient belonging to the 10th century and the more recent layer being from the 13th century. The great feast day, Lamarioba (Mariamoba) dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God is held here on August 28.

## THE CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE AT SETI

The Church of St. George at Seti is located in the center of Mestia, being the main cathedral. The church extant today had been built at the end of the 19th century over the foundations of the older church. Exemplary work of repoussé art from the 11th century – a pre-altar cross containing the life cycle of St. George, as well as repoussé and painted icons from the 11th-13th centuries are some of the most remarkable sacred objects kept at the church.

## SVANETI HISTORY MUSEUM

The Svaneti History Museum existing in Mestia is a museum of world significance. A large portion of the vibrant heritage of the Svaneti region has been gathered here. There are collections of ceramics, ritual items, weapons, agricultural tools, and numismatic collections among the almost 13,000 exhibits kept here. Several exhibition halls have been devoted exclusively to Christian treasures, where repoussé and painted icons, crosses, and examples of the some of the most ancient Georgian manuscripts (one of them are the Adishi Gospels made in 897) created during the 9th-18th centuries and having global significance are on display. The Silikhani Icon is especially important, as a relic from the Golgotha Cross has been inserted into it.



## RACHA-LECHKHUMI

Being located in the furthestmost region in the country's NW, the administrative center of Racha, Lechkhumi, and Kvemo Svaneti is Ambrolauri. Its originality and uniqueness is not only defined by its geographic location, but also by its rich and varied flora and fauna. The region's mountainous realm, the snowy peaks and ridges of the Caucasus, rivers and waterfalls, myriads of forested areas, the animals and birds spread about therein, natural grottoes and caves, mountain passes, alpine meadows, beautiful roads and paths, the Shaori and Lajani reservoirs, and other astounding sights delight all those who see them. Local medicinal mineral waters and resorts are important. There are countless interesting historical, ethnographical, archaeological, and architectural monuments. Two outstanding monuments of the Christian Georgian architecture are preserved in Racha: Nikortsminda and Barakoni churches.





Nikortsminda



## NIKORTSMINDA

The Church of St. Nicholas at Nikortsminda was built during the years 1010-1014. You will not see such a richly, vibrantly ornamented church as this anywhere else in Georgia. This is a central domed church. All twelve of the dome windows, the column bases and capitals, the vaults of the porches, and all other details have been adorned with lavish and superb ornamentation. All the ornaments seen on the facades of churches built during that epoch in Georgia have been gathered here together. Nikortsminda is also distinguished by a multitude of incomparable figure reliefs creating a unified system. Frescoes painted on the church walls date to the 16th-17th centuries. An 18th-century iconostasis and a painted altar ciborium have been preserved in the church.

Barakoni



## BARAKONI

In order to see the Church of the Mother of God of Barakoni, we must go to Tsesi Village. The church was built by a master craftsman, Avtandil of Shulaveri in 1753, through the commission of Rostom, the military governor of Racha. The cruciform, domed church has been constructed with hewn stone, with the dome being supported on the corners of the chancel and two, free-standing piers. The church facades have been adorned with stone carvings of high professional mastery. A contemporary, painted iconostasis has also been preserved within the church.





1

- 1 Chalice**  
999, Bedia, Abkhazia (West Georgia)  
Gold. 14x14x13 cm.  
*Georgian National Museum Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts*

- 2 Cross reliquary of Queen Tamar**  
12<sup>th</sup> c. Khobi, Samegrelo  
(West Georgia) Gold, precious  
stones, pearls, niello 7x4 cm.  
*GNM, Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts*



2



St. Nicholas Church

# ADJARA

Adjara is one of the historical regions of Georgia, located in the south-western part of the country, along the Black Sea coast. It borders Turkey and the Shavsheti and Arsiani ranges in the south. The climate is subtropical, with mild winters and hot summers. On the Black sea coast, the humidity is much higher than in the highlands. The temperature during the summer is 22-24° C, in the winter - 4-6 °C.

The administrative center is Batumi, which is an important port on the Black Sea.

The history of Adjara dates back to the Paleolithic era. It was closely connected with Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine cultures and served as a sea port for all of Georgia.

Adjara was part of the Kingdom of Colchis (8th c. BC) and of the West Georgian Kingdom – Lazika. In the 9th century AD it became a part of the Kingdom of Tao-Klarjeti and at the end of the 10th century, a part of the United Georgian State. At the end of the 15th century, after the disintegration of the Georgian State, it fell under the control of the Gurieli princes. In 1547 it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks, resulting in a part of the population adopting the Muslim faith. In the 19th century, the Adjara region became a part of the Russian Empire. In 1921 it became a part of the Soviet Union, and in 1991 – an autonomous republic in the independent state of Georgia.

According to historical sources (Chronicles of Kartli) Adjara was the first region of Georgia where Christianity was preached by the Holy Apostles, namely St. Andrew the First-Called, St. Simeon the Canaanite and St. Matthias. They were sent to Georgia by the Virgin, who was chosen to be a patron saint of the country. According to the tradition, St. Matthias died in Adjara and was buried in the Gonio Apsaros Fortress.

The Churches of St. Nicholas and St. Mary in Batumi, as well as Skhalta Church and Gonio Fortress are of outstanding architectural significance. The wall painting of Skhalta Church is an important work of medieval Georgian mural art.



St. Nicholas Church



### ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH

The Greek Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas is located in a historic area of the city (20, King Parnavaz St). The domed church with a bell-tower on the west side and a large, protruding apse on the east was built at the request of the local Greeks in 1865-1871. With its exterior forms and interior artistic rendering, it divulges close links to monuments of Byzantine architecture. The interior wall painting was executed in 2002. Today the church is owned by the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Batumi Cathedral of the Nativity of the Virgin Originally designed for the Catholic community, Batumi Cathedral (53, Dimitri Tavdadebuli St / 25, I. Chavchavadze Ave.) was constructed in 1898-1902 through the donations of a well-known Georgian oil producer and Maecenas Stephane Zubalashvili.

Batumi Cathedral of the Nativity of the Virgin



The three-nave basilica was built in the Pseudo-Gothic style. The interior of the construction is decorated with wall paintings on Biblical themes. The exterior is decorated with stained glass, and bronze statues of St. Andrew the Apostle and St. Nino, Illuminators of Georgia.

This structure represents one of the most remarkable buildings in the city.

The church has been owned by the Georgian Orthodox Church since 1989. Nowadays, it is the main cathedral of the Batumi and Lazeti Diocese.

### SKHALTA MONASTERY

Located in the village of Kinchauri (the Municipality of Khulo), a single-nave Church of the Virgin Mary at Skhalta Monastery was constructed in the middle of the 13th century at the site of a 4th c. Christian shrine. The visitor's attention is attracted by its

Skhalta Monastery



wide protruding apse and large porches on the south and north sides. The interior of the church is decorated with the so-called Palaeologan-style of wall painting, executed at the turn of the 14th -15th centuries.

Apart from the main church, there is a small chapel built on the ruins of a 10th-11th cent. Church and a medieval, vaulted wine cellar, still containing dolia buried in the ground.

## GONIO APSAROS MUSEUM-RESERVE

(Gonio-Kvariati Area, 55, Apsaros St (Batumi Municipality)

Apsaros was the largest fortress built by the Romans in the first century A.D. on the east coast of the Black Sea. It represented one of the most important centres of the so-called Pontos Limes, a defender of Caucasian borders. Roman and Byzantine authors have related the history and name of the city to

the myth of the Argonauts.

Built with blocks of ashlar stones, the fortress has survived in nearly the same condition as it used to appear originally. Having massive cubic dimensions, the nowadays 5 m high wall (measurements: 245 x195 m) encircles 4.78 hectares of space. It used to have 22 protruding towers and four gates.

Apsaros retained its importance till the Middle Ages (it has been called Gonio since the 12th cent.). Building layers of the fortress date back to the time of Emperor Justinian (most towers) and the Ottoman dominion.

Historical sources state that St. Matthias the Apostle, who accompanied St. Andrew the Apostle to preach Christianity in Georgia, had died in Adjara and was buried in the Gonio Fortress. His burial place is marked by a Cross.



Gonio Apsaros Museum-Reserve

### PETRA - TSIKHISDZIRI ARCHAEOLOGICAL- ARCHITECTURAL RESERVE

(the village of Tskhisdziri (Kobuleti Municipality))

According to 6th-9th century Byzantine sources, Petra was a town-fortress of historic Lazica and an episcopal centre in the Constantinople Patriarchate. It was built through the decree of Emperor Justinian (527-565). Some fortifications, a small, single-nave church built on the site of a large three-nave basilica from the Justinian era, an early Byzantine bath, and other household constructions have been found on the territory of the Acropolis.



Petra-Tskhisdziri Archaeological-Architectural Reserve





**Forty-Seven Martyrs**

First half of 12th c., cloth, temper, 68x52.5 cm.

GNM, Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography

## ABKHAZIA

Abkhazia (Aphkazeti), the north-western region of Georgia, is located on the shore of the Black Sea. It borders Russia in the north. It covers an area of about 8,660 sq.km. The climate is sub-tropical, but differs significantly on the sea coast and in the highlands (the Caucasus range). The average temperature on the coast is 25° in the summer and 6° in the winter; in the highlands - 13° in the summer and -9° in the winter.

Since the Late Bronze Age and throughout the centuries, Abkhazia has been an integral part of the Georgian state: the Kingdoms of Colchis, Lazika, Abkhazia (Egrisi) including nearly all of Western Georgia, and the Unified Kingdom of Georgia.

In the 19th century, after the annexation of the Georgian State by the Russian Empire, Abkhazia also became a part of Russia, being an autonomous Soviet republic within the borders of the Georgian Soviet Republic after 1921 and an autonomous republic within the borders of the independent Georgian Republic since 1991. The capital of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia is Sokhumi. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia sponsored separatist movements in Abkhazia, provoking armed hostilities. **Today, Abkhazia is under occupation and Russia has direct control over the region.**

Abkhazia is one of the regions of Georgia where Christianity was preached by St. Andrew the Apostle and the Apostle St. Simeon the Canaanite in the first century AD. The latter died here and was buried in the north part of Abkhazia (Nikopsia), and then reburied in Anakopia (New Athos).

The cultural heritage of Abkhazia dates back to the earliest stages of human history. Yet the most outstanding is the architectural and artistic heritage surviving from the Christian period: The churches at Bichvinta, Anakopia, Ilori, Likhni, Bedia and Mokvi are masterpieces of medieval Georgian architecture. The murals at Likhni are outstanding works of Georgian wall painting. The Church of St. George of Ilori is one of the most venerated Christian sites in Georgia as well as the Church of Simeon the Canaanite in New Athos.









The Virgin Mary Cathedral at Bichvinta

### THE VIRGIN MARY CATHEDRAL AT BICHVINTA

Bichvinta Cathedral is one of the most outstanding examples of Georgian Christian architecture. It is located in the area of the great ancient city of Pitiunt. Bichvinta was the religious centre of Western Georgia from the 3rd-4th cents. to the mid 14th cent. Its bishop had participated in the First Church Council at Nicea (325). According to ecclesiastical tradition, St. Andrew the Apostle had preached the Christian faith here. There are ruins of an early Christian basilica, with floor mosaics from the 4th-5th centuries on the monastery grounds.

The cruciform, domed Bichvinta Cathedral was built in the 10th-11th cents. It reveals



The Church of St. Simeon the Canaanite

The Church of St. George of Ilori



Likhni Cathedral



traits characteristic of both Georgian and Byzantine architecture. The famous Golden Cross, the Golden Icon of the Virgin, and other relics had been kept at Bichvinta Cathedral, which are now in the Tbilisi State Museum of Art.

### THE CHURCH OF ST. SIMEON THE CANAANITE (SVIMON KANANELI)

The church is located in New Athos (ancient Anakopia), on Mount Iveria. Its original construction dates back to the 7th-8th centuries. The present building is an example of Georgian architectural style from the 9th-10th cents. It is a cruciform, domed church with protruding apses on the east and a narthex on the west. There are curved images on the facades with Christian symbols: fish, a lion, the Cross etc.

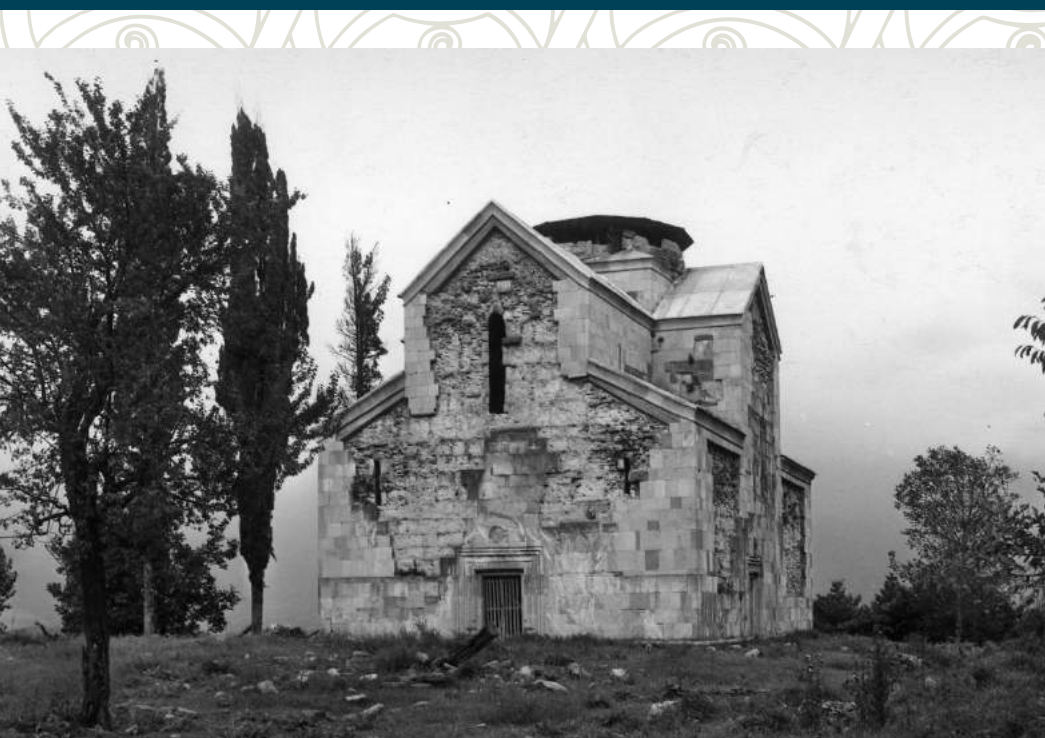
According to historical sources, one of the apostles of Christ, Simeon the Canaanite,

together with St. Andrew the Apostle, was the first to preach Christianity in western and southern Georgia, including Abkhazia. It is said that Simon the Canaanite is buried inside the church.

The church is at risk of being destroyed due to illegal excavations.

### THE CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE OF ILORI

The 11th century Church of St. George of Ilori is located 3 km from Ochamchire, in Ilori Village. Built in the beginning of the 11th century, it used to be the most prominent Christian and spiritual centre of Western Georgia. Ilori Church is a hall-type building with proportions characteristic of Georgian architecture from the period. The facades of the church have preserved several reliefs with images of the Saints (e.g. St. George) and many inscriptions in Georgian. The church was severely damaged in the 18th c. by Ottoman Turks. At present,



Bedia Monastery Complex

due to the improper and illegal restoration, its architectural appearance has suffered serious alterations (e.g. a Russian-style dome has been added on the roof; the facades are covered with a thick layer of white paint).

### LIKHNI CATHEDRAL

The cruciform, domed Cathedral of the Dormition of the Holy Virgin is located 5 km from Gudauti, on the seacoast. It is a cruciform, domed building from the 10th c. with three apses on the east, a narthex and choir gallery in the west part, and arched porches on the west, north and south. The interior of the church preserves fragments of mural paintings from the 14th century and numerous Georgian “Asomtavruli” (majuscule) inscriptions mentioning the Georgian kings Bagrat IV and Giorgi II, along

with other secular and religious figures.

### BEDIA MONASTERY COMPLEX

The Bedia Monastery Complex is located 25 km from Ochamchire, in the center of Bedia Village. Presently, the Church of the Virgin Mary, an episcopal palace and the bell tower have been preserved there. According to historical sources, the complex, a symbol of unity of the Georgian state, was constructed through the commission of the first king of united Georgia, Bagrat III. The church had been restored in the 13th-14th cents. Most of the murals preserved in the interior of the church date to the 14th cent. Numerous inscriptions in Georgian Asomtavruli script have been preserved on the facades of the church. The Bedia Diocese was one of



Mokvi Cathedral

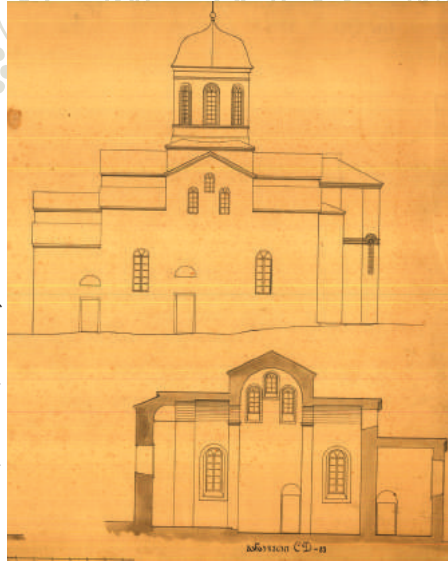


the most prominent religious and cultural centres of medieval Georgia. The first king of the United Georgian Kingdom is buried here. In 2010, under the guise of “rehabilitation” work carried out by the occupational regime, unique frescoes, among them the image of Bagrat III and Georgian inscriptions have been painted over and defaced.

## MOKVI CATHEDRAL

Mokvi Cathedral, distinguished monument of Georgian architecture from the 10th c. is located 15 km from Ochamchire. According to Georgian historical sources, the cruciform, domed cathedral had been built in 957-967 by King Leon III. He founded an episcopal see here. The lofty, spacious interior is comprised of seven chapels in the south and seven in the north; there is a choir gallery on three sides of the second floor. Historical sources have also mentioned that the church was painted during the reign of the king of United Georgia, David Aghmashenebeli

Akhali Atoni (New Athos) Monastery



(The Builder).

For centuries it was a centre of Georgian culture, where many manuscripts were created, with one of them being the famous Mokvi Gospel (1300). It is an outstanding work of Georgian calligraphic art and book illumination.

## AKHALI ATONI (NEW ATHOS) MONASTERY

The monastery complex is located on Mount Iveria. The Church of St. Panteleimon, founded in 1875 by monks from Holy Mount Athos, Greece, constitutes an integral part of the complex.

The 50 meter high bell tower and the five domes of the church have been designed and decorated in the Neo-Byzantine style. The interior of the church as well as that of the refectory were adorned with wall paintings.

## ST. NINO'S ROUT

Cappadocian maiden, St. Nino came to Georgia in the 4th century and Christianised the country. She had followed a long way before reaching Mtskheta, the capital of Kartli at that time. Since 1989, every 1 June, on the day Equal-to-Apostles St. Nino came to Georgia, a voyage begins, called St. Nino's Rout. Those willing to undertake it, follow the "traces" of St. Nino during 42 days and on 12 July, on the feast day of Sts. Peter and Paul, return to Mtskheta. The same rout can be covered by car far faster, in a day's time.

St. Nino had entered Georgia from Javakheti and had rested by the Paravani Lake. At present Poka male monastery of St. Nino is located at the spot, while somewhat afar is Poka nun's covenant. St. Nino's Rout starts with visiting these monasteries. At a small distance, one will see a river issuing from the Paravani Lake; here the maiden had first rested. The next stop is at Urnisi. Here St. Nino had stopped after having left behind a hardly manageable road and stayed at Urnisi for a month. A small-size church is now erected at the spot. After a month's stay, St. Nino had followed crowds of people to Mtskheta, to the feast of Armazi. She had found shelter in a cave and had destroyed the idols by her prayer. This place is now known as the Betlemi Cave and is located at the foot of Mount Bagineti, to the south of Svetitskhoveli cathedral. Having destroyed the idols, St. Nino settled in Mtskheta, in a blackberry bush. This bush is now in the yard of Samtavro monastery and next to it, a tiny church of St. Nino is erected. After the Queen and the King, as well as the Mtskheta inhabitants had embraced Christianity, construction of Svetitskhoveli was begun; miracle, which took place in the process, is also linked with St. Nino. Last period of her stay in Mtskheta, St. Nino spent at the foot of the mountain, on top of which, later, the monastery of Holy Cross was built; miracle-working spring emerged here and is still flowing. Last years of St. Nino's life were spent in Kakheti, in Bodbe, where she passed away and is buried in Bodbe monastery. In Kakheti, along the road leading to Bodbe, near Sagareji, in the Ninotsminda village, a church is erected on the spot, where, according to the tradition, St. Nino had rested on her way to Bodbe.

### Major itinerary of St. Nino's Rout is as follows:

**Javakheti:** Paravani Lake, Poka monastery of St. Nino ▶ **Shida (Inner) Kartli:** Urnisi ▶ **Mtskheta:** Betlemi Cave ▶ **Mtskheta:** Samtavro nun's convent ▶ **Mtskheta:** Svetitskhoveli cathedral ▶ **Mtskheta:** monastery of Holy Cross **Kakheti:** Ninotsminda ▶ **Kakheti:** Bodbe

## ST. APOSTLE ANDREW'S ROUT

Disciple of Jesus Christ, St. Apostle Andrew the First-called was the first to preach Christianity in Georgia. He came to Georgia with the mission and blessing of All-Holy Virgin, bringing with him the icon of the Virgin not-made-by-hands. The Apostle first arrived to Khulo, Didajara village. It was in this village that the icon had first manifested its miracle-working power. St. Andrew had converted the inhabitants of the village to the Christianity and, according to the tradition, had also built a church, ruins of which are still preserved in the village. From Didajara, the Apostle went to Samtskhe. On his way, on the Zekari pass, he had erected a cross and the spot is now called Iron Cross. Entering Samtskhe, he passed the Andriatsminda (St. Andrew) village, which had received its name in commemoration of the St. Apostle. Here St. Andrew had worked several miracles and through his prayers a spring had emerged, which is called St. Andrew's spring. The church dedicated to St. Andrew is erected in the village. From Andriatsminda the Apostle went to Atskuri, which was called Sosangeti at those days. In Atskuri St. Andrew had worked many miracles with the help of the miracle-working icon of the Virgin, had destroyed the idols, had resurrected the son of a widow and, finally, Christianised the village inhabitants. Miracle-working icon of the Virgin was housed at the newly built Atskuri church, which is why, up to now the icon is called the icon of the Atskuri Virgin. At present it is kept in Tbilisi, in Sh. Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Art. Atskuri church of the Virgin is now destroyed, but its remnants were unearthed during the archaeological excavations. After this, St. Andrew had left Georgia and returning shortly afterwards, together with St. Simeon Kananites and St. Apostle Matatha, had preached Christianity in Mingrelia. In Mingrelia, the Apostle had cut down the big oak tree, a sacrificial place of the pagans – Martvili cathedral is erected on this spot. From Mingrelia St. Andrew went to Svaneti and from there – to Apkhazeti.

**The major itinerary of St. Apostle Andrew's Rout is as follows:**

**Adjara:** Didajara village ▶ Zekari pass (Iron Cross) ▶ **Samtskhe:** Andriatsminda village ▶ **Samtskhe:** Atskuri village ▶ **Mingrelia:** Martvili cathedral ▶ **Svaneti** ▶ **Apkhazeti**



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