

History

Antefix Inscription from Chitakhevi Church and Kviriketsmida Monastery, Georgia

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ABSTRACT. Until recently, location of the Kviriketsminda Monastery, founded by Christopher, one of the disciples of St. Gregory of Khantsta, which is mentioned in the life of the above Saint, was disputed as either being in the vicinity of the village of Sakuneti (a site of the village of Kvirike) or nearby the village of Akhaldaba (the Potoleti church). It was also identified with the well-known Chitakhevi church or the Kviriketsminda monastery opposite the village of Kvabiskhevi. We have studied an antefix inscription from Chitakhevi church and graffiti from Potoleti church and arrived at the conclusion that the Chitakhevi and Potoleti churches are not the same as the Kviriketsminda Monastery founded by Christopher. We have studied Georgian narrative sources concerning the Monastery complex of Kviriketsminda, compared them with the results of epigraphical study and resolved the problem related to the location of Kviriketsminda mentioned in the “Life of St. Gregory of Khantsta”: based on convincing arguments we hold that Kviriketsminda mentioned in the “Life of St. Gregory of Khantsta” and the Monastery complex of Sakvirike opposite Kvabiskhevi are the same. Correspondingly, we date the monastery complex to 840s. © 2019 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Key words: antefix, Kviriketsminda, Georgian inscription

The Chitakhevi church is located 15 km from Borjomi, in Chitakhevi gorge, southwestern part of Borjomi-Kharagauli natural reserve. The church is a three-nave Basilica. It dates back to mid-9th century or 870s.

In 2012, an antefix was found in the territory of the Monastery. The antefix is a triangle block with the cross in its center. The cross is mounted on a base (Fig. 1). A square is seen in the upper right quadrant of the cross. It is criss-crossed. Symbolically, the square pertains to the Earth, and the circle pertains to the Heaven [1: 12]. In our opinion, the criss-crossed square is a symbol of the rejected earthly life.

Only two antefixes with an image of St. George were mentioned in the scholarly literature: 1. Antefix from the village of Kuntsa (Aspindza region) with an Image of Saint George killing Diocletian. The accompanying inscription reads: “Christ has mercy upon Khutsri” [2: 115-116]. 2. Antefix from the village of Zeda Meskheta (Tskaltubo region), now in the Kutaisi Museum [3: 27-37].

A two-line inscription in Asomtavruli script executed in relief accompanies the cross. The inscription is mirror-inverted. The inscription reads:

Tsmida Giorgi (Saint George).



Tsmida Giorgi

Fig. 1. Antefix with the Cross.

Mentioning of St. George in the inscription of Chitakhevi antefix is the sole example of that type available till now.

Inscription with the mention of St. George provides a convincing argument for identification of the saint to whom the church was dedicated. Based on the above-mentioned inscription, it can be stated that the church was constructed in the 9th century and was dedicated to St. George. This conclusion assisted us in localization of the Kviriketsminda church constructed by Christopher, disciple of Gregory of Khantsta, the problem that remained unsolved to this day.

Kviriketsminda church is mentioned several times in "The Life of Gregory of Khantsta", the hagiographic narrative which is the primary source about this church. According to "The Life", Theodore and Christopher, disciples of Gregory of Khantsta, established two monasteries: Theodore established the Monastery of Nedzvi in Samtskhe, near Vani, and Christopher founded the Monastery of Kviriketsminda in Kartli. [4: 230]. The above two monks brought members of the brotherhood from Khantsta to Nedzvi and Kviriketsminda [4: 231].

Kviriketsminda is mentioned in the chronicle written in the 14th century by an unknown chronicler. He narrates that when the Hulaguid Khan Abagha (1265-1282) was at war with Khan Barakha of Khorasan, the Prince Tegutar sent three commanders to Georgia. "The Tatars camped in the place called Lomistavi. From there they ravaged Javakheti up to Faravan." Once when the tatars

entered Javakheti, "they met on their way the herd of Mechurchletukhutsesi Kakha of Tori and the herd of Qurumchi, head of a thousand horsemen... They took the herds with them and went to Lomistavi. Learning of this, Qurumchi-Badur called Kakha of Tori and set out in pursuit of the Tatars. But Tegutar's people had crossed the Mtkvari already at the place where the Gurkli River flows into it." "The leader of the Tatars, Qurumchi-Badur, was killed and his people dispersed; unable to escape they went over the Rugeti Mountain up the steep slope which is called Kviriketsminda" [5: 606].

The third source which mentions the village of Kviriketsminda, the seventh village of Atskuri nahie (i.e. parish or commune) [6: 124-125; 131-132], is "The Grand Log of Gurjistan Vilayet" compiled by the Ottomans in 1595.

Several scholars attempted to localize the Kviriketsminda Monastery. Taking into consideration account found in "The Grand Log of Gurjistan Vilayet", Pavle Ingorokva assumed that the monastery lay close to the village of Kopadze, in the administrative border-zone between Borjomi and Akhaltsikhe [7: 393-395]. Niko Berdzenishvili believed that under Kviriketsminda was implied the Monastery of Sakvirike, which lies in the Borjomi Gorge, close to the village of Dviri [8: 250]. A significant number of scholars supported localization suggested by Niko Berdzenishvili. Sergi Jikia shared Pavle Ingorokva's view.

Rusudan Mepisashvili supposed that the Monastery of Sakvirike in vicinity of the village of Dviri was actually Kviriketsminda constructed by Christopher, but after taking into consideration smallness of the site and mentioning of both villages (Kviriketsminda and Sakvirike) side by side in the "The Grand Log of Gurjistan Vilayet", abandoned the idea [9: 234].

Giorgi Zedginidze focused his attention on "The Grand Log of Gurjistan Vilayet" and accounts of an unknown chronicler. Namely, he paid

attention to an account from the latter. In the scholar's opinion, the first battle between the regiment of the Mongol prince and united army of Kakha Toreli and Kurumchi Baadur took place in Gurkeli Gorge, i.e. on the left bank of the Mtkvari River. Kakha Toreli's army swam across the river and entered the Atskuri Fortress, while the second part of the army moved eastwards and found shelter in the village of Kviriketsminda on the slope of Rugeti Mountain. From the chronicler's narrative it is not clear how did they get to the mountain. According to G. Zedginidze, the warriors probably crossed the river to reach the village. He cites an account, according to which even nowadays Rugeti Mountain is considered as a continuation of Kodiani Mountain. Kviriketsminda mountain ridge runs parallel to the Rugeti Mountain. The scholar continues to discuss the issue and finally notes that there is a monastery near the village of Dviri which is known to the local citizens under the name of Kviriketsminda.

Finally, after comparing the two accounts found in "The Grand Log of Gurjistan Vilayet" and the chronicle, the scholar arrived at the conclusion that Kviriketsminda constructed by Christopher and the Monastery of Kviriketsminda in vicinity of the village of Dviri are the same. He also found explanation to the side-by-side mention of two placenames: Kviriketsminda and Sakvirike.

G. Zedginidze holds that according to the text of the Life of Gregory of Khantsta, the monastery bore two names from its establishment onwards. He cites a passage from the "Life", according to which "He found good fellow men... Theodore – the builder of Nedzvi and father, and Christopher – the builder of Kviriketsminda and father". And another passage states: "and gave the name of Nedzvi to the monastery built by Theodore, and the name of Kviriketsminda to the one built by Christopher". The name Sakvirike should have originated later than Kviriketsminda. Stem of the former is "Kvirike" (name of St. Kvirike) and means something that belongs to Kvirike (one should

imply Kviriketsminda), i.e. the etymology of Sakvirike is explained as "the village which belongs to Kviriketsminda Monastery" [10: 165-166].

Rusudan Mepisashvili proposed a new consideration, different from the one put forward by her in 1963: Chitakhevi Monastery, dated to the 9th century, might have been Kviriketsminda [11: 6-7].

David Khoshtaria rejected this consideration [12: 141-157]. According to him, "Chitakhevi cannot be identified with the monastery built by Christopher: Chitakhevi lay higher than Tashiskari, i.e. it belonged to Samtskhe, not to Kartli" [12: 141-157, footnote 46].

Later on, David Khoshtaria published a special article about localization of Kviriketsminda. He focused his attention on a phrase found in the Life of Gregory of Khantsta that Nedzvi and Kviriketsminda were built in the "deserts of Samtskhe and Kartli in general... within Kartli". Based on this account, the scholar assumed that "the two monasteries were built in close proximity to each other" [13: 75]. Simultaneously, D. Khoshtaria took into consideration the fact that in the 8th-10th centuries a border post between Kartli and Samtskhe, in the basin of the Mtkvari River, was at Tashiskari. This description corresponds to the actual location of Nedzvi. The scholar also took into consideration that in the 8th-10th centuries the border between Kartli and Samtskhe did not always pass through Tashiskari, but through Dviri as well. In the scholar's opinion, in this case, Kviriketsminda and Chitakhevi church fall within the border zone, whereas Nedzvi shows up at a reasonable distance from it. As a result, D. Khoshtaria considers identification of Sakvirike with Chitakhevi less feasible. More than that, he considers that Kviriketsminda should be localized in vicinity of Nedzvi, Akhaldaba zone.

The scholar considers that Potoleti is the most important church in the above zone. Next he describes architecture of the church and arrives at the

conclusion that “as it was shown above, the Potoleti church corresponds to the description given by Giorgi Merchule, the author of the “Life of St. Gregory of Khantsta”. Its architectural type falls within the same period during which Christopher founded the monastery. Moreover, Potoleti church closely resembles the Nedzvi church. Such a coincidence suggests believe that Kviriketsminda and the church nowadays known as Potoleti are the same. Of course this identification is not unconditional and is related to certain assumptions. But by taking into consideration all available data, the above localization seems to be more plausible at today’s level of our knowledge” [13: 80].

The same consideration is found in PhD dissertation thesis “Architectural Monuments of the 9th-10th Centuries in Borjomi Gorge”, defended by D. Khoshtaria in 1987. The scholar also concludes that Sakvirike doesn’t correspond to the description of Kviriketsminda given by Giorgi Merchule and based on its architectural features, dates the church to the turn of the 9th century to the 10th century, or more precisely – to the first decade of the 10th century [14: 15-23; 53-63].

As we can see, several considerations about localization of the Kviriketsmida Monastery have existed by now. Some scholars [6, 7] linked Kviriketsminda with the village of Kopadze, Sakuneti zone, whereas others [8, 3] linked it with the village of Dviri. Based on architectural features of Kviriketsminda church, R. Mepisashvili identified it with Chitakhevi church, whereas D. Khoshtaria, based on historical-geographical data and its architectural features, identified Kviriketsminda with Potoleti church.

As it was already mentioned, P. Ingorokva’s consideration about location of Kviriketsminda in the Sakuneti zone was varified by R. Mepisashvili and it wasn’t confirmed.

In 2008, archeological excavations were conducted in Potoleti church. A stone slab with the 11th century graffiti in nuskhuri and mkhedruli scripts was unearthed. We have studied the above

inscriptions. All these inscriptions contain supplications addressed to St. George. Based on this, we arrived at the conclusion that the Potoleti church [9th-10th cc.] was dedicated to St. George. Thus, the consideration expressed by D. Khoshtaria lately that Potoleti church can be identified with Kviriketsminda, turned out not to be the case [15: 253-265].

Until recently, two considerations existed in Georgian historiography: 1. Christopher’s Kviriketsminda church must be identified with the monastery complex of Sakvirike, opposite Kvabiskhevi, and 2. Kviriketsminda must be identified with Chitakhevi church.

As we have noted, based on the inscription found on the antefix of Chitakhevi church, we can convincingly say that the Chitakhevi church was built in the 9th century and was dedicated to St. George, therefore the above assumption can be rejected.

As it was already mentioned, after comparing the two accounts found in “The Grand Log of Gurjistan Vilayet” and the Chronicle of an unknown author, the scholar arrived at the conclusion that Kviriketsminda constructed by Christopher and the Monastery of Kviriketsminda in vicinity of the village of Dviri are the same.

By taking into consideration a) graffiti from Potoleti church, b) inscription on the antefix of the Chitakhevi church and c) a consideration suggested by G. Zedginidze, which he has based on narrative sources, we can assume that the problem of Kviriketsminda’s localization was resolved: Kviriketsminda built by Christopher and mentioned in the “Life of St. Gregory of Khantsta” and the monastery complex of Sakvirike opposite Kvabiskhevi are the same. In analogy with the Nedzvi Monastery, Sakvirile can be dated to 840s.

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ისტორია

ანტეფიქსის წარწერა წმიდა გიორგის მოხსენიებით ჩითახევის ეკლესიიდან და კვირიკეწმიდის მონასტერი, საქართველო

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ქართულ ისტორიოგრაფიაში დღემდე „გრიგოლ ხანცთელის ცხოვრებაში“ მოხსენიებული მისი ერთ-ერთი მოწაფის, ქრისტეფორეს მიერ დაარსებული კვირიკეწმიდის ლოკალიზაციის შესახებ სხვადასხვა მოსაზრებები არსებობდა. ქართული ნარატიული წყაროების მონაცემების გათვალისწინებით მეცნიერთა ერთი ნაწილი მას სოფელ საყუნეთთან მდებარე ნასოფლარ კვირიკესთან აიგივებს, მეორე ნაწილი ჩითახევის ცნობილ ეკლესიასთან, მესამე ნაწილი სოფელ ახალდაბის ახლოს მდებარე ფოთოლეთის ეკლესიასთან, ხოლო მეოთხე ნაწილი სოფელ ქვაბისხევის პირდაპირ მდებარე კვირიკეწმიდის სახელით ცნობილ სამონასტრო კომპლექსთან. ჩვენ ჩითახევის ანტეფიქსის წარწერისა და ფოთოლეთის ეკლესიის ნაკაწრის წარწერების შესწავლის შედეგად გამოვრიცხეთ ჩითახევისა და ფოთოლეთის ეკლესიების გაიგივება გრიგოლ ხანცთელის მოწაფის, ქრისტეფორეს მიერ დაარსებულ კვირიკეწმიდასთან. გარდა ამისა, მხედველობაში მივიღეთ ქართული ნარატიული წყაროების მონაცემები კვირიკეწმიდის სამონასტრო კომპლექსის შესახებ. წყაროებისა და ეპიგრაფიკული მასალის ურთიერთმეჯერების შედეგად გადავჭირით „გრიგოლ ხანცთელის ცხოვრებაში“ მოხსენიებული კვირიკეწმიდის ლოკალიზაციის საკითხი და მას მყარი არგუმენტების საფუძველზე ქვაბისხევის პირდაპირ მდებარე „კვირიკეწმიდის“ სახელით ცნობილ სამონასტრო კომპლექსთან ვაიგივებთ. აქედან გამომდინარე, სამონასტრო კომპლექსის აგების ქრონოლოგიას IX საუკუნის 40-იანი წლებით განვსაზღვრავთ.

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