

History

David Gareji Monastery Complex – an Integral Part of Ancient Cultural Heritage of Georgia

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ABSTRACT. The problem related to David Gareji monastery complex dates back to the last century. The dispute arose due to a wrong resolution of the government of Georgia. In the present paper it is proved that the Gareji monastery complex belonged to Georgia from the very start of its existence. The mountain Gareja and David Gareji monastery complex were located in the old Georgian province Kukheti. The monastery was founded by one of the Assyrian fathers, David Garejeli (David of Gareja) in the 6th century. Assyrian Fathers are associated with the reinforcement of Christianity and construction of monasteries. David's Lavra was in the center. David Gareji monasteries played significant role in the cultural life of Georgian people. David IV the Builder (1084-1115) did a lot for the monastery complex. He exempted them from the state taxes and supported their development in every way. David Gareji monastery complex is recognized as one of the most important monuments of Georgian Christian culture. The paintings on the walls of the churches and refectories are remarkable, especially the frescoes of King Tamar and Lasha-Giorgi in Bertubani church and the fresco of Demetre Tavdadebuli in Khareba church, Udabno. It should be taken into consideration that it is since the Soviet period as David Gareji monastery complex is recognized as the object of Georgian national culture, and since 2008 it is included in the list of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites as a Georgian cultural monument. Everyone should know that Georgia cannot renounce its cultural heritage confirmed in the sources and documentary materials. © 2019 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Key words: Gareja, Assyrian Fathers, David Garejeli (David of Gareja), monastery complex

The problem related to David Gareji monastery complex dates back to the last century [1]. The dispute arose due to a wrong resolution of the Georgian government of the 1920s (see below). In the present paper we are going to provide the historical aspects of the axiomatic truth that Gareja and, consequently, the Gareji monastery complex belong to Georgia since ancient time.

David Gareji monastery complex, David's Lavra is located about 70 kilometers away from

Tbilisi. Gareja is a mountain in the Kakheti mountain range. Its height is about 2500 meters. According to the geological point of view, the mountain is composed of Upper Jurassic and Valanginian intensely folded marls and marl clays and slates. The slopes of the Gareja mountain are covered with beech forests from the bottom to the middle of the mountain, while the upper part consists of subalpine meadows (used as pastures).

There, in the rocky mountains of Gareja, one of the Assyrian Fathers founded a monastery in the 6th century. The founder of the monastery was David Garejeli (David of Gareja) – that is why the monastery is called David Gareji. David Garejeli arrived from Antioch and became the first bishop of the monastery. With the help of David Garejeli his disciples Dodo and Lukiane founded other monasteries in the outskirts of Gareja.

Generally, the arrival of Assyrian Fathers to Georgia was initiated by Ioane Zedazneli (John of Zedazeni), who arrived to Georgia together with his disciples after David Garejeli. There are mentioned "twelve" or "thirteen Assyrian Fathers" in the sources, but, apparently, they were more than that. Besides the above mentioned Assyrian Fathers, history preserved the names of some other monks: Abibos Nekreseli, Shio Mghvimeli, Ioseb Alaverdeli, Anton Martkopeli, Thadeoz Stepantsmindeli, Piros Breteli, Iese Tsilkneli, Stefane Kizikeli (Khirsseli), Isidore Samtavneli, Michael Ulumboeli, Zenon Ikaltoeli, Elia Diakoni, Pimen, Natane and John [2].

Gareja (consequently, David Gareji monastery complex) was located in the old Georgian province Kukheti. The province lied on the banks of the Aragvi and Mtkvari rivers from Zhinvali to the Gareji Udabno (desert). Its centre was Rustavi [3, 4]. Assyrian Fathers are associated with reinforcement of Christianity and building number of monasteries ("Twelve Gareja Monasteries"). They played significant role in conversion of the North Caucasian population to Christianity. The center of Gareji monastic life was David's Lavra. Gradually, away from the center a complex of monasteries was developed including the monasteries of *Tsamebuli*, *Natlismcemeli*, *Chinkhituri*, *Tetrseakerbi*, *Dodos Rqa*, *Udabno*, *Aghdgomisa*, *Bertubani*, *Mghvime*, *Kolagiri*, *Large caves*, *Verangareja*, *Pirukugmarti*, *Small caves*. David Gareji monasteries played important role in the cultural life of the Georgian people. David IV the Builder (1084-1115) did a lot for the complex

of monasteries. Exempting them from the state taxes he supported their development in every way.

It is noteworthy that Anton Gnolistavidze, the prominent clergyman having a conflict with Michael Catholicos continued his activity in Gareji. Then, King Tamar (1179-1213) "brought Anton Gnolistavidze from Gareji... He was appointed as a vizier, was given Chkondidi, Samtavisi, Kisiskhevi, and served as *mtsignobartukutsesi* (royal chancellor)" [5]. The chronicler worried with the invasion of the Mongols led by Berke Khan describes the demolition of Gareji and its surrounding areas: "Berke ravaged the land of Shirvani, Hereti, Kakheti, and all the Iori river valley, and the troop reached Tbilisi and lots of Christians were massacred, while Berke Khan stayed in the mountains of Gareja" [6].

David Gareji monasteries especially flourished during the reign of Demetre II Tavdadebuli (1270-1289). In those days a typical opportunist Sadun Mankaberdeli (Sadun of Mankaberd) was promoted on the positions of Atabag and Amirpasalari (Commander-in-Chief of Army). He was the descendant of the Armenized (changing nationality into Armenian) Kurd. Sadun was concerned only about his career trying to accumulate wealth. However, the chronicler points out that Sadun did some good deeds too (obviously, Demetre Tavdadebuli should have played a great role in that). He exempted the monasteries and the monks from certain taxes and devotedly served king Demetre [7].

In the first half of the 15th century, during the reign of Giorgi V Brtskinvale (1299/318-1346), David Gareja expanded, developed and became politically, economically and culturally strong. Tamerlane's invasions (1386-1403) were devastating for the country. His eight-fold invasions caused serious problems to the country and, consequently, to the monastic life, including David Gareja. In the history of Georgia, the important period was in the reign of Aleksandre I (1412-1442), who drove the enemy out of Georgia

and restored peace and calm in the country (as he himself notes in a special charter). His name is associated with restoration of the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. Besides, he donated David Gareji monastery to Svetitskhoveli.

The period of invasion of Persians (1616-1617) was very difficult. David Gareji was demolished. The monasteries practically ceased to exist. The monastic life was restored in the reign of Teimuraz I (1606-1648), in particular in 1639. In the 18th century, David Gareja was still subordinated to the king. The monastery had the villages and vast lands at its disposal and the people inhabited there were considered as David Gareji monastery serfs. The monasteries existed until the end of the 19th century.

David Gareji monastery complex is recognized as the most important monument of Georgian Christian culture. Its wall-paintings are remarkable [8-10]. The wall-paintings of the main churches and refectories make a great impression. David Gareji's wall-painting is very important for numerous images of its ktetors. The frescoes of King Tamar and Lasha-Giorgi in the Bertubani church and King Demetre II in Khareba church, Udabno, are remarkable. Very impressive is the wall-paintings of the refectory in Bertubani church. The painting of the apse of the Amaghleba church in Udabno monastery is especially wonderful. The wall-painting in the main church of Udabno showing the scenes of life of David Garejeli (David of Gareja) is of interest. It should be noted that in different periods of time some famous political and cultural figures worked in David Gareji monastery, such as: Demetre I, Onofre Garejeli (17th-18th cc), Onofre Machutadze (17th-18th cc), Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, Besarion Baratashvili-Orbelishvili, Nikoloz Cherkezishvili (18th cc), Gabriel Saginashvili (18th), Grigol Dodorkeli, Anton I, Timothy Gabashvili, Gabriel Mtsire and others [11-13].

There are Georgian inscriptions including the six-line Asomtavruli inscription of the 6th-7th century on the stela survived.

The large-scale excavations carried out by the Georgian Academy of Sciences (Academy Member, Prof. K. Pitskhelauri, etc.) confirmed that the site was already settled in the Old Stone Age, and several settlements and burials of the Bronze-Aderkian period found there are the organic part of the eastern Georgian culture. Apparently, there was a compact settlement of our ancestors in the 6th century until the deterioration of ecological conditions. Then, in the Middle Ages, the area was used as pastures.

In 1924 under the Decree of the Executive Committee of the Transcaucasian Federation (after the revolt of Georgia!) a significant part of the monastery territory was given to the Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan for the reason that the nomadic shepherds of that region did not have enough pastures. It was a criminal action [14].

At present the Georgian-Azerbaijan state border passes through the mountainous part of David Gareji monastery. It should be noted that the Mutual Defence Agreement between the Republic of Georgia and the Republic of Azerbaijan of 16 June 1919, under which they should protect the territorial integrity of their countries together in case of threat, does not contain any territorial claims, or the claim that David Gareja monastery complex is the monument of Albanian culture (as there is a futile attempt to prove it now) rather than Georgian Christian monument. There are over a thousand Georgian inscriptions (graffiti) of the 7th-19th cc found in the David Gareja monastery complex and none of them is Albanian [15].

Academician G. Chubinashvili visited and studied those sites in 1921. In the expert's report on "Gareji exploitation" sent to the government, he writes about the huge cultural values this unique Georgian Christian monument has. In 1943 the Academy of Sciences of Georgia published a monograph "David Gareji Cave Monasteries", which contains important information about Gareja complex.

Some Facts about the Recent History

In 1918, monastic priest Germogen published detailed information in the article "Destruction of David Gareji Udabno" in the newspaper "Georgia" of 2 January and 14 January. Father Germogen reported: Azerii shepherds pasturing the sheep in the Valley of Kara demanded David Gareja and Udabno Monastery complexes (being built and painted over centuries) for winter stalls. They attacked Lavra, robbed the monasteries, demolished the crosses and icons and burned everything and destroyed the buildings by pickaxe. In that case the vandalism was stopped. But then the Soviet government itself committed a criminal act: violating all laws, on January 28, 1922, a large portion of the Karaya and Udabno (pastures and cultural monuments!) was assigned to the Soviet Azerbaijan under a special decree. Bertubani and Udabno Monasteries with the great frescoes of King Tamar and Lasha Giorgi, Demetre II and the ktitors turned out within the territory of those "pastures" and the Lavra became a shelter for nomadic shepherds.

Eldar Stepp was transferred to the Azerbaijan SSR by the Resolution of 30 April 1923 of the Central Executive Committee of the Federation of Transcaucasian SSR. The administrative border moved to David Gareji, which used to be the historical land of the Georgian state over the centuries [16, 17].

On October 17, 1925, A. Gegechkori and I. Bunyat-Zade the Agricultural Commissars of Georgia and Azerbaijan SSR had a meeting in Tbilisi about the disputed sections of Sighnaghi and Zakatala Mazras ("Uezds") [18]. The border was settled to be on Alazani, and the pastures near Gareji were given to Azerbaijan "in the principle of labor purpose" since allegedly "actually they were already in their use." Under the Resolution of 6 October 1925 of the Central Executive Committee of the Federation of the Transcaucasian SSR, the protection of the cultural monuments of the David Gareji monastery was assigned to the

Executive Committee of Tbilisi Mazra of the Georgian SSR. The staff units of the armed guards were allocated. There were several clashes between the guards of the monuments and Azerbaijanian shepherds, who intended to use the monastery buildings for staying in winter season. In January 1926 the conflict was discussed at the session of the "Zak Raikom" (Transcaucasian Regional Committee), which legally recognized the Agreement of 1922 on the use of pastures. On February 18, 1929, the Central Executive Committee of the Federation of Transcaucasian SSR adopted a new resolution on the "Winter Pastures of Gareji and Eldar, Samukh". The border of Georgia and Azerbaijan passed the Chichkitsi hill and the tower located there [19]. All the documents related to the problem are made in Russian and are published [20].

In our opinion it should be taken into consideration that David Gareji monastery complex, the ancient monument of Georgian culture and education, has been declared as an object of Georgian national cultural heritage even since the establishment of the Soviet Union. On the 24th of October 2008, at the 33rd session of UNESCO it was introduced in the list of the world monuments. The Azerbaijanians call the complex "Kok-dagh" or "Mountain of the Priest". According to the Azeri experts, the problem of its territorial belonging "remains open". The Azerbaijanian society should be well-aware of the fact that Georgia cannot renounce its cultural heritage, which is proved in numerous sources and documentary materials [21]. We dare to express our belief that we will find a common language with our Azeri colleagues and we will protect Georgian monuments together.

Historical justice requires to leave Gareji monastery complex with all its monasteries within Georgia. This can be resolved as a result of intergovernmental negotiations. The Georgian government should take a very principal position in this regard. In his interview ("Asaval-Dasavali"

newspaper) Mr. Jumber Patiashvili explained that on the basis of negotiations the problem was almost solved in the 80s of the last century. The political situation that developed later did not give us a positive picture (the question is about 500 hectares of disputed land). Maybe the problem is possible to be fairly solved on the basis of substitution principle. It should be underlined that David Gareji complex has no relation with material and spiritual culture of Azerbaijan or historical Albania. The same can be said about the Gobi episcopal church and the St. George church in Kurmukhi, Saingilo. It is known that Iv. Javakhishvili and P. Ingorokva were involved in the governmental commission of the first Republic establishing the Azeri-Georgian border (1918-1921). In 1919, Iv. Javakhishvili's work "The Borders of Georgia Considered in Historical and Contemporary terms" published

under the aegis of the Ministry of Military Defense of the Republic of Georgia and the map attached to it has not lost its great scientific value for today. The same can be said about P. Ingorokva's essay "On the Borders of the Territories of Georgia" (Published by "Sarangi", Rustaveli Association, Tbilisi., 1990, pp. 13-15). The research material of the great scientists should be taken into consideration for the objective determination of the real boundaries of Georgia.

Thus, the existence of the whole complex David Gareji monasteries on the territory of Georgia and the issue of their belonging to Georgia is an axiomatic truth since ancient times and we hope that the decision made by the two states will be fair basing on the existing material (sources, literature and tradition).

ისტორია

დავითგარეჯის სამონასტრო კომპლექსი – ოდიტგანვე საქართველოსი იყო

რ. მეტრეველი

აკადემიის წევრი, საქართველოს მეცნიერებათა ეროვნული აკადემია, თბილისი, საქართველო

დავითგარეჯის სამონასტრო კომპლექსის პრობლემა გასული საუკუნიდან მომდინარეობს. დავის მიზეზი საქართველოს ხელმძღვანელობის მცდარი გადაწყვეტილება იყო. წინამდებარე სტატიაში დასაბუთებულია, რომ გარეჯის სამონასტრო კომპლექსი დასაბამიდან საქართველოს ეკუთვნოდა. გარეჯა (შესაბამისად დავითგარეჯის სამონასტრო კომპლექსი) ძველ ქართულ პროვინციაში – კუხეთში მდებარეობდა. მონასტერი კლდოვან მთებში იქნა დაარსებული VI საუკუნეში ერთ-ერთი ასურელი მამის დავით გარეჯელის მიერ. ასურელი მამების სახელთანაა დაკავშირებული ქრისტიანობის განმტკიცება, მონასტრების აშენება. ცენტრი დავითის ლავრა იყო. დავითგარეჯის მონასტრებმა მნიშვნელოვანი როლი შეასრულა ქართველი ხალხის კულტურულ ცხოვრებაში. მონასტერთა კომპლექსს განსაკუთრებული ამაგი დასდო დავით IV აღმაშენებელმა (1084-1115 წწ.), გაათავისუფლა სახელმწიფო გადასახადისაგან და ყოველმხრივ უწყობდა ხელს მათ განვითარებას. დავითგარეჯის სამონასტრო კომპლექსი ქართული ქრისტიანული კულტურის უმნიშვნელოვანეს ძეგლადაა აღიარებული. განსაკუთრებულია მთავარი ეკლესიებისა და სატრაპეზოების მოხატულობაც. აღსანიშნავია ბერთუზნის ფრესკა მეფე თამარისა და ლაშა-გიორგის გამოსახულებით, უდაბნოს ხარების ეკლესიაში გამოსახულია დემეტრე თავდადებული. ანგარიში უნდა გაეწიოს, რომ დავითგარეჯის სამონასტრო კომპლექსი ჯერ კიდევ საბჭოთა პერიოდიდან ქართული ეროვნული კულტურის ობიექტად არის გამოცხადებული. 2008 წლიდან კი შეტანილია „იუნესკოს“ მსოფლიო მნიშვნელობის ძეგლთა ნუსხაში, როგორც ქართული კულტურის ძეგლი. ყველამ უნდა გააცნობიეროს, რომ საქართველო უარს ვერ იტყვის თავის კულტურულ მემკვიდრეობაზე, რაც დამტკიცებულია წყაროებითა და დოკუმენტური მასალით.

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