

## **The history of Tao monasteries - Oshki, Khakhuli, Parkhali and Otkhta churches**

It occupied the middle part of Tao Chorokhi (with right and left tributaries) and was divided into Imieri Tao (Upper Tao) and Amieri Tao (Lower Tao). The border between them ran along the lower part of the river Oltisistskali (today's Oltu Çayi) and Bardusistskali (today's Bardu Çayi). Both Taos (Upper and Lower), in turn, split into even smaller "countries": Gurji-Bogaz, Parkhali / Asis-Pori, Bana Taoskari, Panaskerti, Tortomi, Oltisi, Mamrovani / Bughatakuri, Partizi Ravine, Chakieti. Several administrative centers were formed in Lower Tao in the IX-X centuries - Kalmakhi, Panaskerti and Bana, while the center of Upper Tao was the fortress-city of Oltisi (Tao-Klarjeti, Historical-Cultural Essay 2018: 17).

The main road from Asia Minor to Georgia passed through Imieri Tao. According to later data, there was also customs operating near Tortomi. It is possible that the Tortomi customs functioned in the X century as well; "In any case, the flourishing trade and the well organized collection of trade revenues should have created the wealth, which would have given the opportunity to the Georgian Kuropalates to erect the magnificent temples of Oshki, Khakhuli, Parkhali and the Otkhta Eklesia" (Cheishvili 2023: 19).

David III Kurapalates (died in 1001) built the monasteries of Oshki, Parkhali, Khakhuli, and Otkhta. These monasteries of Tao triggered a great cultural activity and became significant literary centers. David Kurapalates showed great interest in the ongoing translation activities at Athos. John of Athens sent Ekvtime's translations to David Kurapalates. Giorgi of Mtatsminda mentions that the King of Tao was "filled with joy" and asked him to "translate and send" again (Giorgi of Mtatsminda 1967: 61).

The monasteries of Oshki<sup>1</sup>, Khakhuli<sup>2</sup>, Otkhta Eklesia<sup>3</sup> should have been of the Lavra<sup>4</sup> type. So far, we have not been able to find similar information about the Parkhali monastery, and therefore we assume that Parkhali could have been a monastery of the Cenobitic type.

In historical Tao, there were two episcopates: Bana and Ishkhani.

According to the chronicle of Sumbat son of David, the Episcopal Cathedral of Bana was erected by the Georgian King Adarnase (888-923) and Kvirike of Bana became the first bishop of Bana diocese (Sumbat son of Davit 2008: 366). According to the list of episcopates of Samtskhe-Saatabago, the parish of Bana was “The entire Bani, Taoskari, Panaskerti, Harizi Gorge, All Oltisi, Namurkani” (Surguladze 2016: 194).

According to the author of “The Life of Grigol of Khandzta”, Ishkhani Church was erected by catholicos Nerses (Giorgi Merchule 1963: 274), initially he founded the

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<sup>1</sup> Gospel testament of Mestia - „აღწერე ლავრასა შინა კურთხეულისა წმიდისა და წინამორბედისა იოვანესა ოშკს“ (I described it in the Lavra named after St. Jogn the Baptist in Oshkshi) (309v) (Silogava 1986: 42)

<sup>2</sup> “The Life of Ioane and Ekvtime” – „იოანესა და ექვთიმეს ცხოვრება“ – „მას ჟამსა შინა სანატრელი და წმიდა ბერი იოვანე გრძელის ძე ცხოვნდებოდა ვითარცა უკორცოდ დაყუდებით ოთხთა ეკლესიათა ლავრასა შინა“ (At that time, the holy monk Ioane the son of Grdzeli lived like an angel in the Lavra of the Otkhta Eklesia) (Giorgi of Mtatsminda 1967: 56);

<sup>3</sup> “The Life of Giorgi of Mtatsminda” – „ხოლო ვითარცა ვთქუთ, იხილეს რად კეთილთა მათ ბერთა ძმის-წული თვისი ესრეთ შემკული, მიჰგუარეს იგი (აქ საუბარია გიორგი მთაწმინდელზე) მამასა მაკარის, რომელ-იგი მას ჟამსა ღირსებისათჳს მისისა წინამძღუარი იყო დიდისა მის ლავრისად (იგულისხმება ხახული)“ (As we have already said, when the monks saw the excellence of their nephew, he was taken to Father Macarius, who at that time was the archpriest of this great Lavra because of his dignity.) (Giorgi the Lesser 1967: 115).

<sup>4</sup>In Lavra-type monasteries, hermits lived in separated monk’s cells. They spent the whole week praying, fasting and crafting in their cells. On weekends, all the anchorites, except for the hermits and those who lived in a particularly strict ascetic manner - the recluses, gathered in the main church of Lavra to participate in the divine service. Monks in cenobitic type monasteries had daily interactions with each other. They gathered every day in churches for various church services, had a daily common meal (twice a day). One of the types of handicrafts of the monks living in the monasteries of the cenobitic type, who devoted most of the day to various economic work: winemaking, farming, workshop work, was calligraphy and manuscript copying. A subspecies of the Lavra type monasteries is the so-called Hybrid type, i.e. Byzantine Lavra – semi- cenobitic settlements, which unite monks and anchorites living directly in the cenobium, who obey the head of the monastery (Cenobiarch) and the rules adopted in the monastery, but live in hand-made tents or caves located far from the cenobium, and on weekends they join the residents of the cenobium monks to participate in the divine service held in the cenobitic church and to share a common meal (Tseradze 2001: 139-140).

Episcopal Cathedral of Ishkhani (Silogava, Shengelia 2006: 23). In the 20s of the IX century, Saba restored the Ishkhani church, which was “widowed” at that time. He was appointed as the bishop of Ishkhani (Giorgi Merchule 1963: 274). In the historical document “The Bishops and Parishes under the Catholicos in Samtskhe-Saatabago”, dated by the beginning of the XVI century, the parish of Ishkhani was defined as follows: “The entire Tortomi above Gurji-Boghaz, below Taoskari, a place called Sakrulavi, on the side of Artanujstavi, and on the opposite side: the place above the mountain Orjokhi, the entire Sakavkasidzo (implying the domain of the feudal house of Kavkasidze), above the mountain of Ispir-Trebzond” (Surguladze 2016: 193).

The monasteries founded by David Kurapalates should have been under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Ishkhani.

Temo Jojua notes that “after 1001, when the Georgian monasteries of Imieri Tao (Upper Tao) became part of the Byzantine Empire, a special mission was assigned to the bishops of Ishkhani who represented the Kartli Catholicosate in Imieri Tao and were considered the highest clerical hierarchs of the region. At the given stage of history, they were instructed, on the one hand, to maintain the relations with the Georgian churches-monasteries of Imieri Tao, separated from the state-political body of Georgia, up to 1001 years, and, on the other hand, to further strengthen these relations and not to allow the politically “Greek” monasteries of this area gradually part away from the unified ecclesiastic-cultural space of Georgia” (Jojua 2021: 325).

However, in the late period, we witness a different picture. According to the historical document of the first half of the XVI century, namely, 1516 – “The Samtskhe parish of the Patriarch of Kartli - Princely Houses and Estates” – Oshki and Parkhali monasteries were considered the parish of the Catholicos of Kartli and the monasteries under the latter’s command.

Scientific research of Tao monasteries begins in the XIX century. The records and diaries of travelers who traveled to Tao in the XIX-XX centuries and studied the cultural heritage of this historical part are vital for the study of this area.

In 1874, Giorgi Kazbegi visited the Parkhali monastery and described it. In his travel records – “Three Months in Turkish Georgia” there are important references

regarding the paintings of the Parkhali church. At the time of his visit to the Parkhali church, the frescoes were in a better state (“Three months in Turkish Georgia”, 1995).

In 1917, Ekvtime Takaishvili traveled to historical Tao and studied and described the churches and monasteries. He fundamentally studied the architecture, fine arts and epigraphy of Oshki, Khakhuli, Otkhta, and Parkhali. His travel records are of primary importance today. The materials of the 1917 expedition were published in the Russian language in 1952 (“Археологическая экспедиция 1917-го года в южные провинции Грузии”), and in 1960 in the Georgian language (“The 1917 Archaeological Expedition of 1917 to South Georgia”).

Vakhtang DJobadze made a significant contribution to the study of Tao monasteries. In 1965-1983, he organized eight expeditions to Tao-Klarjeti. In 1992, his work “Early medieval Georgian monasteries in historical Tao, Klarjeti, and Shavsheti” was published in the English language. His work discussed the architecture, fine arts, and epigraphy of Oshki, Khakhuli, Otkhta, and Parkhali. In 2006, and again in 2007, the Georgian translation of the book “Early medieval Georgian monasteries in historical Tao, Klarjeti, and Shavsheti” was released.

In 1985, 1986, 1988 and 1990, Bruno Baumgartner traveled and studied Tao-Klarjeti. He combined the results of the research into a thesis – “For the Study of the Historical Geography of Tao-Klarjeti”. He visited not only well-known places, but also discovered still unknown monuments. Bruno Baumgartner found the upper church of the Otkhta Ekleisia, known as the Arseniseuli Monastery<sup>5</sup>.

In 2006, Valeri Silogava published the work “Oshki – X century Memorial Temple”. The book is dedicated to the publication of two stone stelae and their inscriptions discovered on November 7, 2003 in Oshki Temple. Other inscriptions of Oshki have been also discussed in the monograph, their chronological order has been determined and the issue of the construction of the Oshki temple has been clarified based on a new analysis of the data of the inscriptions. The book is in four languages. In addition to Georgian, the material is presented in the English, Turkish and Russian languages.

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<sup>5</sup> Baumgartner B. Studien zur historischen Geographie von Tao-Klarjeti [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Vienna, 1996

In 2009, Zaza Skhirtladze published the monograph “The Frescoes of Otkhta Eklesia”. In the work, the frescoes of Otkhta Eklesia are relatively fully described. The author first paid attention to the individual iconographic and stylistic features of the frescoes.

In 2018, under the editorship of Mzia Surguladze (authors: Mzia Surguladze, Nestan Chkhikvadze, Lela Shatirishvili, Maya Karanadze, Nikoloz Zhgenti, Eter Edisherashvili), a monograph was published – “The Tao-Klarjeti Scholarly Heritage”. The existing knowledge about the scholarly heritage of Tao-Klarjeti is collected and generalized in this work. The book discusses the manuscript heritage of Oshki, Khakhuli and Parkhali monasteries (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018).

In 2020, a group of researchers from Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University released the monograph “Tao” (authors: Mamia Paghava, Mary Tsintsadze, Maya Baramidze, Malkhaz Chokharadze, Tina Shioshvili, Ramaz Khalvashi, Nugzar Mgeladze, Zaza Shashikadze, Merab Khalvashi, Jimsher Chkhvimiani, Jemal Karalidze ). The book narrates and describes the history of Tao, monuments of material culture, literary and scriptural schools, Tao villages in modern Turkey, etc. In the second chapter of the monograph – “Literary and Scholarly Centers of Tao” - the monasteries of Oshki, Parkhali and Khakhuli are discussed.

### **Oshki**

Oshki is located in historical Tao, Erzurum region, Uzundere district, Oshki village (Erzurum İl, Uzundere İlçesi, Çamlıyamaç köyü) (Bagauri. 2017: 38). The monastery was named after John the Baptist. The testament of the manuscript (an ascetic-homiletic collection) copied in Oshki in 977, states: “This holy book was written for the great Lavra of Oshki, the dwelling place of the Holy Baptist” (Collection of Athos 1986: 47). The construction of the temple began on 25 March 963 on Annunciation Day and was completed in 976 (Silogava 2006: 102).

Apart from the main temple, remains of the refectory and scriptorium have survived from the Oshki monastic complex. The bishop’s residence may have been on a hill about 30 meters north of the church. There is a chapel and other ruins to the southwest, one kilometer away, above the church (DJobadze 2007: 112).

The Oshki church is a complex, richly decorated erection, whose interior length without its west annex constitutes 40.60 meters, while the width is 27 meters and the height is up to 34 meters. Typologically, it is a triconch with a cruciform plan, the dome of which is supported by four freely standing piers. Its eastern, northern and southern arms end in semicircular apses, while the western arm represents a long barrel-vaulted nave (DJobadze 2007: 115).

On both sides of the three apses of the Oshki temple, there are small apse chambers. The painted chapel to the south of the apse of the altar, according to the inscription on its window, should be an ossuary to the soul of Bagrat Eristavt-Eristavi (Duke of Dukes). It is possible that he was buried here. The west wing of the church has a gallery with a pedimented roof built from the south.

Twelve windows illuminate the dome of the church. Domed construction is a popular trompe-pendentive system in Tao-Klarjeti architecture. There is a tile cover on the dome. According to one of the inscriptions of the temple, instead of the damaged old roof, it was rebuilt in the 20s of the XI century during the Byzantine Emperors - Basil II (976-1025) and Constantine VIII (1025-1028).

Oshki is distinguished by its reliefs. Its facades are decorated with images of a host of angels, saints, donors of the church construction, the head of construction, symbolic birds and animals. The decoration of one of the columns of the south-west gallery of the church is especially noteworthy; it depicts the tree of life, and the figures of saints in its branches. One of the oldest images of Saint Nino was preserved here.

The facades of the church have preserved a number of iconic images of David Magistros and Bagrat Eristavt-Eristavi (Duke of Dukes): on the south wall, the marginal five-figure composition of the prayer scene (Savior, Mother of God, John the Baptist) represents David Magistros and Bagrat Eristavt-Eristavi as “members”; The reliefs of the brothers are also carved on the capitals of the royal niche of the dome column. There are images of them above the waist on two stelae, which were built into the wall constructed later in the interior of the church (Tao-Klarjeti Historical-Cultural Essay 2018: 346-348).

In 2003, two Oshki stelae were found, erected in the passage between the south-eastern dome of the temple and the south wall. On one stela, in the upper part, the Mother of God with infant Jesus in her hands are depicted, and in the lower part - David

Kurapalates; And on the second stela, John the Baptist is depicted in the upper part, and Bagrat Eristavt-Eristavi is depicted in the lower part. On the stelae, donors of the construction of church are represented with a frontal image above the waist (Silogava 2006: 112).

To the north of the Oshki temple, the remains of older buildings - a refectory and a library (?) have been preserved. The refectory is an elongated three-aisled building on the south-north axis, which ends in a square, domed building (library?) in the north (Tao-Klarjeti Historical-Cultural Essay 2018: 351).

Fragments of Oshki's painting have survived. Three stages of the painting of the temple are to be assumed: X century (963-973), XI century (1036), the end of XII-XIII centuries (Didebulidze 2016: 51)

The Oshki temple was not originally intended for full painting, which is evidenced by the arrangement of the walls made of hewn stone in the interior.

The earliest painting appears to be preserved in the South Pastophorium. The conch depicts the glory of Christ: enthroned Christ in a mandorla, archangels and seraphim on fiery wheels; On the walls of the apse, there is a row of monarchs, separated by a central figure of the Mother of God, apparently. A fragment of "Annunciation" can be seen on the part of the arch surrounding the conch, and below it, on the wall, some scene of the royal feast with a small fragment of the figure of the Savior. The painting of this part of the temple is probably contemporaneous with its construction, performed in the years 963-73 (Didebulidze 2016: 52).

The painting of the apse of the altar of the cathedral is related to the work of Jojik Patrikios and dates back to 1036, as evidenced by the Georgian inscription made in the apse, between the registers (Didebulidze 2016: 52).

In the western part of the apse there is a fragment of a painting with the image of two large groups of people against the background of architectural buildings, which is defined as the Bana temple by the majuscule (Asomtavruli) inscription on the right. According to one of the opinions, it depicts the coronation of Bagrat IV as king and his wedding with the niece of the Byzantine Emperor Romanos Argyros, Helen, which took place in the Bana Cathedral (1032) (Didebulidze 2016: 54).

In the conch of the apse of the southern gallery of Oshki, there is also a fresco preserved, in particular, the enthroned infant Virgin Hodegetria accompanied by angels. The date of this painting should be different from the rest of the fragments, perhaps the second half of the XII century (Didebulidze 2016: 55).

Among the churches of David Kurapalates, Oshki is distinguished by the abundance of inscriptions.

A twelve-line inscription written in red ink is preserved on the tympanum of the door of the southern arm. The inscription reveals not only the names of the donors of church building (Bagrat Eristavt-Eristavi and David Kurapalates) and the name of the construction overseer (Grigol), but also the annual expenses of the monastery (20 000 drams), tax in kind (5 000 jugs of wine and 250 ephahs of grain) and necessary construction materials (sand, sandstone, light porous stone [spondiki] and iron (50 liters). There were 50 permanent workers, builders and blacksmiths: a total of 80 people participated in the construction, 30 oxen pulled the stones, 30 mules brought porous stone, and other livestock was used as well.

The inscription does not include the date of completion of the church construction. It was written during the lifetime of Bagrat Eristavi. The inscription was probably made between the years 963-966.

On the eastern facade, on the south side of the apse, there is a four-line inscription about donors on the wattled window brow. Indented round letters are painted with red ink. In the inscription, Bagrat Eristavt-Eristavi, David Magistros, Father Michael, Father Ioane and Grigol are mentioned. Vakhtang DJobadze dates this inscription to 963-966 (DJobadze 2007: 157).

Another inscription about the donor on a worked sandstone slab was used a second time in the wall of the southern arm. The inscription is written in red ink and has twelve lines. The inscription contains important information. It reveals that the construction of the Oshki church was started on 25 March 963, during the celebration of the Annunciation. According to the inscription, on 02 October 966, on Tuesday, Bagrat Eristavt-Eristavi died. The inscription was made approximately between 966-973 years (DJobadze 2007: 159).



Grigol, the overseer of the construction of the monastic complex, is mentioned in the red-painted inscription on the architrave of the south main entrance of Oshki named after John the Baptist. In the inscription, Grigol calls himself the “overseer of the works”, which, in the modern sense, means the head of the works (Silogava 2006: 43).

On November 7, 2003, the inscription on the stele of King David found in Oshki, which Valeri Silogava dates to around 966, states an appeal to God about Grigol: “And Grigol, the builder of this icon and the worker in this temple, protect him in both lives and make him worthy to stand at your right hand”. In the inscription on the stele, Grigol is called the builder of the icon and the “worker” of the church (Silogava 2006: 43).

There is an image of Grigol below the relief sculpture of praying on one of the arches of the octagonal column of the southern gallery of the cathedral, on the right. He is depicted kneeling, in a supplicating pose towards the image of praying (Silogava 2006: 44). In 1917, Ekvtime Takaishvili saw an inscription made with red ink, which accompanied this image: “Christ, have mercy on your servant Grigol”. According to Ekvtime Takaishvili, he is the same “Grigol of Oshki, the overseer of the construction of the temple” (Takaishvili 1960: 40).

According to Nodar Shoshiashvili, since three representatives of the Tao branch of the Bagrationis are mentioned in the inscriptions of Oshki: Adarnase III Kurapalates and his sons Bagrat Eristavt-Eristavi and David Magistros, Oshki must have been their common ancestral monastery (Shoshiashvili 1980: 55).

According to Elene Metreveli, “based on the Georgian narrative sources and the testaments of the manuscripts copied in Oshki, the Oshki Lavra was the own monastery of the House of Great Chordvanelis from the time of its completion (973). In the scriptorium of the Oshki monastery, not only Varazvache and Ioane Tornike - the “lords” of this Lavra – worked in the scriptorium, but also other members of the great family (Metreveli 1996: 35-36).

After the death of David Kurapalates in 1001, Basil Caesar, according to the will of the ruler of Imieri Tao, Imier Tao, Basiani and other “upper countries” appeared under Byzantium, including the monastery of Oshki (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018: 24).

It is likely that the Oshki monastery passed from the Byzantines into the hands of the Seljuks, because an army of Georgians rescued the monastery from the Seljuks. According to the chronicler of Lasha-Giorgi, after the victory in the Battle of Basiani (1202), the cavalry of King Tamar freed Oshki from the Seljuks and took it back (The chronicler of Lasha-Giorgi 2008: 354).

In the second half of the XV century, Qvarqvare II Jakeli (1451-1498) donated the Oshki monastery to Tsmedi Tsmedisdze (Jojua 2015: 263).

According to the historical document “Samtskhe Parish of the Patriarchate of Kartli - Princely Houses and Estates” compiled around 1516, the Oshki monastery “with its revenues” was the parish of the Catholicos of Kartli.

Oshki Monastery occupies an important place among the cultural and literary centers of Tao. The most learned figures of Tao-Klarjeti worked in Oshki – theologians, hymnographers and translators-editors, most of whom were brought up in Shatberdi. David Kurapalates and the representatives of the Chordvaneli feudal house, famous for their scribes, worked hard to strengthen the cultural significance of Oshki (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018: 98).

In 977, Archpriest Stephane copied the book – “Paradise”, an ascetic-homeletic collection (Ath 9). The patrons of the manuscript are Ioane-Tornike Ioane and his brother (father of Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli) Ioane-Varazvache. At the time of the transcribing of “Paradise”, the abbot of the Oshki monastery was Saba (Collection of Athos 1986: 34-49, Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018: 99).

Among the books transcribed in the Oshki Lavra, the “Oshki Bible” copied in 978 is of special significance (Ath 1). It is the oldest dated list among the manuscripts containing the Georgian Bible, and it is of great importance for the study of the translation and edition of the books of the Old Testament (Menabde 1962: 451). The owner of the manuscript is Ioane-Tornike, whose long dated will was written in 978 by Stephane. The copyists of the manuscripts are the best scribes of Tao-Klarjeti at that time: Michael, Giorgi, Stephane, Michael and Giorgi (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018: 100)

In the Oshki Lavra, Iovane Chirai copied Giorgi of Alexandrieli's "Life of John Chrysostom" (Ath 6). The copying of the manuscript began in 978 and was completed in 979, which is indicated by the mention of Ioane-Tornike in the supplication letters first as Patrick, and finally as Bishop's attendant monk<sup>6</sup> (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018: 101).

Manuscripts transcribed in Oshki reflect how the idea of establishing the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos took off, aiming at full assimilation of Greek-Byzantine culture by Georgians. On the long and difficult path to achieving this goal, the Georgian monasticism, which came into the Greek environment, would have to repeatedly confirm its identity with the Greek "Orthodoxy" and demonstrate thorough knowledge of the Orthodox faith. This need is reflected in the extensive theological preambles of the Oshki manuscripts, which represent real theological treatises (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018: 101-102).

It should be an "Ascetic Collection" (National Center of Manuscripts, A-35) copied by the calligrapher from Oshki, Nathanael, commissioned by Bishop Hilarion of Ishkhani (Jojua 2021: 313-314). The mentioned manuscript was studied for the first time by Tedo Zhordania, who assumed that Hilarion from Ishkhani, who commissioned the manuscript, and Hilarion from Ishkhani mentioned in the 973 inscription on the cross of Tsageri church are the same person (Zhordania 1892: 91). The "Ascetic Collection" was also studied by Temo Jojua, who notes that in the near times when the manuscript was copied, that is, in the X-XI centuries, two bishops Hilarion of Iskhani are known. The researcher writes: "The study of the issue shows that there is no direct or indirect reference, based on which we can say that the "Ascetic Collection" is still the work of Hilarion I (970-1000 AD) or Hilarion II son of Massur (1032/1033 - 1050/1060s) copied by order. As for the material that has reached us, it can be said with equal success that the manuscript was copied by Hilarion I, and that Hilarion II was the patron of the collection" (Jojua 2021: 319).

Cultural and literary activity in Oshki monastery continued even in the XI century. In 1033, Gabriel of Oshki the so-called Gospel of Mestia in Oshki monastery by the order of the bishop of Ishkhani, Hilarion II son of Massur.

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<sup>6</sup> In volume I of the description of the Athonian collection, the date of copying of the manuscript of "The Life of John Chrysostom" is considered to be 979-980 years (Collection of Athos 1986: 28-29).

According to Temo Jojua, “the decision of Hilarion II of Ishkhani son of Massur to copy the desired manuscript by the scribe working in the Oshki monastery was not dictated only by the fact that one of the best Georgian scriptoriums of his time operated in Oshki”. I think there was another important reason for this decision of Hilarion II. It seems that Hilarion II tried not to weaken the connection with the monastery of Oshki, which was part of the Byzantine Empire, and to strengthen this connection through purely ecclesiastical-administrative relations” (Jojua 2021: 326).

Ephrem of Oshki, a contemporary of Ephrem the Lesser, is from the literary school of Oshki. Ephrem adds a note to the translation of the explanation of the small psalms: “Pray ... for his father Saba, monk Ephrem of Oshki, because by their guidance... we received everything good from God above us” (Zhordania 1892: 214). According to Levan Menabde, Ephrem the Great moved from the Oshki monastery to the Georgian cultural and educational center of Black Mountain and became a close collaborator of Ephrem the Lesser. The researcher writes that it is conceivable that he also provided information about Grigol of Oshki to Ephraim the Lesser (Menabde 1962: 454).

After the conquest of Samtskhe-Saatabago by the Ottomans, the Oshki monastery was emptied and the monastic life here ceased.

### **Khakhuli**

Khakhuli is located in historical Tao, Arzrum area, Tortomi district, in the village of Khakhuli (Erzurum İl, Tortum İlçe, Bağbaşı köyü) (Bagauri... 2017: 48). According to the testament of John Chrysostom’s translation of the Gospel of Matthew (XI century), the Khakhuli monastery was named after the Mother of God (Menabde 1962: 457).

In addition to the main temple of the Khakhuli monastery complex, small churches and a fence have survived (Bagauri... 2017: 48)

According to Vakhushti Batonishvili, one of the Khakhuli churches was constructed by Bagrat Kurapalates’s son David I (876-891) (Batonishvili 1973: 686). According to Vakhushti’s notice, which is confirmed by “The Life of Kartli”, the Khakhuli monastery was built by David III Kurapalates, the ruler of Tao: “This David Kurapalates was glorified more than all the Tao kings, because he was the first to be God-loving and

merciful... He built the monastery and the seat of the Holy Church of God in Khakhuli (Batonishvili 1977) 3 : 686. Matiane Kartlisa (The Chronicle of Kartli) 2008: 267). The monastery was named after the Mother of God. Giorgi the Lesser refers to Khakhuli as “Great Lavra” (Giorgi the Lesser 1967: 115).

To the south-east of the monastery, on the right bank of the Tortumi water, there is another hall church. There is a small church one kilometer west of it, on the top of the rock. According to Vakhtang DJobadze, the number of buildings indicates that there were numerous brotherhoods in Khakhuli (DJobadze 2006: 164). It should be noted that Giorgi the Lesser refers to it as the “Great Lavra” (Georgi the Lesser 1967: 115).

Khakhuli Church is a large cross-domed building with a three-aisled western wing. There are apse pastophorions on both sides of the altar. The west wing of the church is surrounded by buildings of the later period on three sides. A dome with eight windows is erected at the intersection of the arms. The transitional construction from the domed square to the circle is trompe-pendentive. There is a haut-relief of an eagle on the south wing of the church. Reliefs are also depicted around the door of the south arm. In the interior of the church, a niche is arranged in both piers under the dome - places for kings and high clergy to attend the service (Tao-Klarjeti, Historical-Cultural Essay 2018: 352).

Above the southern window of the Khakhuli Cathedral is a haut-relief statue of an eagle, a symbol of the Savior’s royal nature and resurrection. There are images in low relief around the southern door, among which there is a rare iconographic scheme - the composition of the ascension of Alexander of Macedon to the sky, which ideally should echo the idea of expanding the borders and unifying Georgia by David Kurapalates (Tao-Klarjeti, Historical-Cultural Essay 2018: 385).

Khakhuli’s wall painting is ahead of Ishkhani’s wall painting in terms of its artistic solution, it is more linear, graphic, flat, characterized by an excess of straight, clear lines, pictorial modeling is simpler, and the composition is more concise and plain. It is likely that at first only the altar and the dome of the temple were painted, and then, at a certain time, the entire space of the temple was also painted, although now only separate fragments remain (Didebulidze 2016: 45).

The painting of the dome’s neck is impressive, with a huge white cross on a blue background, decorated with precious stones and pearls. It is not the lifting up of the

cross by angels, but another version of the glorification of the cross, the “cross of victory”. This theme is attributed to the Palestinian tradition (Didebulidze 2016: 43).

In the eastern part of the dome, the “Ascension of St. Elijah” is depicted. The Holy Prophet Elijah stands on a chariot of fire, which is ascending by a four-winged steeds. St. Elijah is “led” by the archangel St. Raphael depicted above him. The chariot is not actually depicted - just two fiery wheels shaped like a blossoming flower. St. Elijah’s hands over his woolen cloak to St. Elisha, he turns back towards him. The figure of St. Elisha on bended knees is damaged, almost completely ruined. In the hemisphere of the dome, in the southern and northern parts, there were images of the moon and the sun, currently only the sun is preserved in the form of a disc with bell-shaped rays (Didebulidze 2016: 44).

Probably, at first only the altar and the dome of the temple were painted, and then, at a certain time, the entire space of the temple was also painted, although now only separate fragments have remained (Didebulidze 2016: 44).

After the death of David Kurapalates in 1001, Basil Caesar, according to the will of the ruler of Imieri Tao, Imier Tao, Basiani and other “upper countries” appeared under Byzantium, including the monastery of Oshki (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018: 24).

According to Basil the Treasurer, Zakaria of Panaskerti<sup>7</sup> took Bana, Khakhuli and liberated many other famous fortresses and places: “He performed many great acts: he seized Bana, Khakhuli and other glorious fortresses and places) (Basil Ezosmodzgvani 2008: 494). According to the chronicler of Lasha-Giorgi, after the victory in the Battle of Basiani (1202), the cavalry of King Tamar liberated Khakhuli from the Seljuks (The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha 2008: 354). It is conceivable that both works of “The Life of Kartli” state about the same historical fact, and Zakaria of Panaskerti freed Khakhuli after the Battle of Basiani.

In 1210, the Synaxarion edited by Giorgi of Mtatsminda was copied by the order of Eristavt-Eristavi (Duke of Dukes) Zakaria of Panaskerti. According to Darejan

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<sup>7</sup> In 1191, during the revolt of Giorgi the Rus, Zakaria of Panaskerti was promoted, he took the place of Guzan of Taoskari, the opponent of King Tamar, and became the Duke of Tao-Shavshet-Klarjeti (Kldiashvili 1986: 55).

Kldiashvili, Synaxarion belonged to the Khakhuli monastery. Most of the testaments begin with an address to the Mother of God of Khakhuli. The researcher assumes that Synaxarion was commissioned and copied for the same Khakhuli monastery (Kldiashvili 1986: 59).

According to one of the inscriptions in the manuscript of the homiletic collection of Ephraim the Lesser (National Center of Manuscripts, S-1276, XI-XIII centuries), in the second half of the XV century, Tsmedi Tsmedisdze (the Tsmedisdzes, later Tsmedisdze-Kakhulians, is one of the feudal houses of Tao) in the city of Yerznka (present-day Erzincan ) “gained” “Kakhuli” i.e. Khakhuli Monastery and the so-called Khakhuli community from the prevailing trade-religious order (Jojua 2015: 263).

A powerful literary center was created in Khakhuli Monastery. Monks from Khakhuli actively engaged in cultural and educational activities.

A prominent representative of the Khakhuli Monastery is Ioane of Khakhuli (he probably worked in the X-XI centuries). Two manuscripts are associated with his name. Both manuscripts were preserved in the Jvari Monastery, and today they are preserved in the library of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. On the initiative of Ioane of Khakhuli, “February Menaion“ and the collection, which includes the studies and other writings of Cyril of Alexandria, were rewritten (Menabde 1962: 455-456).

Giorgi the Hagiorite (Mtatsmindeli) was brought up in Khakhuli monastery. According to Giorgi the Lesser, young Giorgi was transferred from the Tadzrisi nunnery to the Khakhuli Monastery. At that time Bagrat III’s son Basil, Hilarion of Tvali, Giorgi’s uncles - Giorgi Mtserali and Saba worked in Khakhuli. The archpriest of the monastery was Macarius (Giorgi the Lesser 1967: 114-115). Giorgi the Hagiorite was brought to Khakhuli approximately in 1019 (Menabde 1962: 456).

The representative of the literary school of Khakhuli was Grigol of Khakhuli, whose name was found in the colophon of the manuscript of the October-November Athonian Menaion copied in 1076 (Ath 54, 117r): “Pray, holy ones in God, for me, the unworthy monk Grigol of Khakhuli, who for love of this holy hymnbook desired to write this menaion down” (Catalogue of the Georgian Manuscripts 2022: 495-498).

From the manuscripts transcribed in Khakhuli itself, the explanation of the Gospel of John copied by David Tfileli in the XI century is known. The testament of the manuscript mentions that the manuscript was copied in the Khakhuli Lavra. According to Levan Menabde, the colophons of the manuscript make it clear that the figures of the Khakhuli monastery did not engage in literary activities in isolation, away from others, but, on the contrary, had a close and lively cooperation with the monks of their monastery. The manuscript was transcribed by David Tfileli for the Palavra Monastery. It is not known whether David moved to Palavra or not. The manuscript was taken to the Jvari Monastery in Jerusalem. According to Levan Menabde, this fact informs us about the relationship between Tao-Klarjeti and the Georgian Estates of the Middle East (Menabde 1963: 457).

In addition to Athos, Khakhuli scribes also had literary contacts with the Black Mountain monastic centers. In one of the manuscripts preserved in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Jer 2), there is a report that the “newly translated” lives of the martyrs came from Khakhuli to the Kalipos Monastery on the Black Mountain (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018: 103)

Among the relics of the Khakhuli Monastery, the triptych icon of the Mother of God of Khakhuli is known, which is an important monument not only for the Georgian, but also for the world cultural heritage. It is dated in scientific literature to the X century and, therefore, it may have been created by order of Bagrationis of Tao, Bagrat Eristavt-Eristavi and David Kurapalates (Burchuladze 2016: 308).

From the original icon of the Mother of God, only the enamel face and the hands remained. They are distinguished from all other samples made with this technique, by large sizes and special colors. They are decorated with a pinkish-wine hue, characteristic only of Georgian products, on which facial features and contours of fingers drawn with thin gold partitions are effectively outlined. To match the position of supplicant Virgin Mary's hands, a small plate with a frontal image of Christ-Pantokrator is placed on the top right corner of the central icon's door. It is him that the Mother of God is turned towards - he stands in front of her as the guardian and protector of people (Burchuladze 2016: 310).



In the upper part of the central board of the door, there is a small fragmentary cross, which contains a part of the Golgotha cross.

From the historical point of view, the cross with the inscription of the king of Kakheti, Kvirike the Great (X century), arranged symmetrically on the wings, is significant. Its one part depicts the crucified Savior, and the other part – John the Baptist.

Georgian, Byzantine and Russian enamels of the VIII-IX centuries are presented on Khakhuli's folding icon, which are made with three different techniques. This set of partitioned, die-pressed and pictorial enamel products clearly represents the line and character of the development of this field of art both in Georgia and in Byzantium and Russia.

Byzantine enamels occupy the most prominent place on the icon-case (kiot). It is placed at the highest point of the fold, in the center, and is visible even when the folds-wings are closed. The plate depicts Byzantine Emperor Michael Doukas Parapinak and Queen Mariam, who was the daughter of Bagrat IV of Georgia (Burtchuladze 2016: 311). Shalva Amiranashvili writes that the enamel icon was brought to the homeland by the Byzantine queen Marta-Mariam, who came to Georgia with her dying father, Bagrat IV (Amiranashvili 1972)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> In 1001, the monasteries of Khakhuli, Oshki, Parkhali and Otkhta became part of the Byzantine Empire. According to Giorgi Cheishvili, the Oshki inscriptions show the spread of the sovereign rights of the Caesars in the Imieri Tao (Upper Tao) and the trend of turning the Bagrationi temple into an imperial temple, replacing the testaments of the Bagrationis with the testaments of the Byzantine emperors (Cheishvili 2023: 37). It is possible that Queen Mariam did bring the icon, but not only the plate with the images of her and the Byzantine Emperor Michael Doukas, but the whole triptych icon. The Khakhuli monastery should have been under the control of the Byzantine emperors during this period as well, and Mariam, as the queen of Byzantium, could adorn the icon of Khakhuli and bring it to Georgia in 1072. It should be also noted that, according to the historian of David the Builder, in the 70s of the XI century, the eastern or Anatolian side of the Byzantine Empire passed into the hands of the Seljuks. The Seljuks came close to the border of Georgia (The Life of King David 2008: 301). It can be assumed that the Tao monasteries were occupied by the Seljuks during this period. In the scientific literature, there is an opinion that David the Builder moved the icon from Khakhuli to Gelati under construction (Burchuladze 2016: 308).

The interior setting of the Khakhuli icon dates back to the first half of the XII century. On this layer of setting, on the lower plate of the folds-wings, an iambic text is stated, in which the donors of folded icon - David the Builder and his son Demetre I are compared to David the Prophet and Solomon the King (Tao-Klarjeti, Historical-Cultural Essay 2018: 446).

Greek inscriptions are preserved on the icon of Khakhuli, the main part of which dates back to the X-XII centuries. Yet, the inscriptions of the VIII-IX centuries and the later period of the XII century can be encountered as well. Two of the Greek inscriptions are of historical significance: one, Kvirike's inscription of the X century, and the other, the inscription of the Byzantine Emperor Michael Parapinak and his wife, Queen Mariam, from the second half of the XI century.

In addition to the explanatory inscriptions of the saints and the Gospel episode depicted on the enamel, there are also some more extensive inscriptions from the Gospel text (Qauqhchishvili 1951: 151, 161).

After the conquest of Samtskhe-Saatabago by the Ottomans, Khakhuli was emptied and the monastic life there ceased.

### **Otkhta Eklesia**

The Otkhta Eklesia is located in historical Tao, Artvin Province, Yusufeli district, the village of Otkhta (Artvin İli, Yusufeli İlçesi, Tekkale köyü) (Bagauri... 2017: 35). Giorgi of Mtatsminda in the text of "The Life of John and Ekvtime" refers to the monastery as "the Lavra of Otkhta Eklesia" (Giorgi of Mtatsminda 1967: 56).

Apart from the main temple, four or five small churches, a refectory, a seminary / scriptorium (?), a crypt (the lower floor of the small church), and another building (of uncertain function) have survived from the monastery complex of Otkhta. A small anchorite monastery was subordinated to the Otkhta Lavra (Bagauri... 2017: 35).

The Basilica of the Otkhta Eklesia is paved with pure hewn tuff stone. Roughly hewn tuff, cobblestone and brick are used for interior decoration. The temple is divided by four pairs of complex profile piers. On both richly decorated piers, there are two-cell pastoforiums separated by a wall on both sides of the apse of the altar. On the floor

above them, there are also two-cell receptacles, with the difference that here these receptacles end with apses. A choir loft is located at the western end of the church, it can be accessed from the outside through a door in the western wall.

The facades of the Otkhta Eklesia are decorated with decorative arcature. The western and eastern facades are divided by seven arches rising towards the center. Two different stages of construction can be observed in the area of the pediments of the same walls.

Research has revealed that the Otkhta Eklesia was built for the first time by David Magistros, probably in the 60s of the X century. The same founder renovated and raised the church between 978-1001. It is worth noting that since 978, the ruler of Imieri Tao held the title of Kurapalates.

To the north-west of the temple there is a large refectory, which has four piers and is divided into two naves by arches over it. It is possible to enter the church from the refectory through an arched-vaulted building constructed between them, which Ekvtime Takaishvili tentatively calls a seminary. There is a two-storey church to the southeast of the temple, with a monastic crypt on the lower floor (Tao-Klarjeti, Historical-Cultural Essay 2018: 356-358).

The painting only covers the altar, as it was conventional in the Georgian art of this period, but with the complexity and multipart of its program it already includes the basis of the future painting as a whole (Didebulidze 2016: 36).

Conch painting is the most damaged one. A large part of the plastering has been removed. The Savior standing on a pedestal surrounded by an oval mandorla is depicted in the center of the conch. Outside the Saviour's mandorla is a troop of robed and mantled angels holding open scrolls. The second register is occupied by Hetoimasia; In the center, a trapezoidal throne is enclosed in a medallion and is held by two angels. A cross is erected on the throne. On both sides of the seat, along the entire length of the register, there are two groups of angels facing each other. Each of them is presented in a different dynamic movement, covered in cloaks, with their arms outstretched. Between the angels' nimbuses, there are some remains of majuscule (Asomtavruli) inscriptions made with white paint, although the texts cannot be restored.

The frontal figure of the Mother of God standing on a pedestal is depicted in the center of the third register. On both sides of it are angels standing with their heads bowed, dressed in royal robes. Both of them hold a sphere in one hand and a scroll in the other. To the left (south) of the Mother of God, St. John the Baptist is depicted next to the Archangel. Next to the Mother of God, John the Baptist and the angels, there is an outline of the figures of several apostles dressed in robes and cloaks, all of them holding a book or a scroll in their hands.

The third and fourth registers are separated from each other by a wide ornamental frieze, like a spiral garland. Small figures are included here and there between the branches and leaves of the ornament. Painting in the fourth register is relatively better preserved. It is divided into two parts by a large window. On the two sides of the window, on the walls of the altar, the images of the prophets and high priests are presented.

Next to the window, the figures of David and Solomon are the first in the line of prophets. From the images of other prophets on the walls of the altar, only the outlines of large figures dressed in ancient tunics and long cloaks remained. All figures have one hand raised and the other holding an open scroll. The identification of the images of the prophets is not possible now. The only exception is the Prophet of Amos, the third figure on the south wall, on whose scroll a multi-line text is preserved in a fragmentary form. The inscription should have been drawn from two quotations from the book of the Prophet.

The Fathers of the Church are presented frontally, with the blessing in the right hand and a closed book in the left hand; Just to the south, the third image in the row of high priests holds a half-opened codex.

The only wide window of the sanctuary is also decorated with paintings. In its arch, a frontal half-figure of a crowned woman in a leafy medallion has been completed. The figure is topped by an angular crown with a raised middle. The crown-bearer, covered with a white cloak, holds a model of the Otkhta Eklesia near the chest in the left hand, touching it with the uncovered right hand.

On the south side of the window frame of the altar window, the figure of Moses the Prophet was depicted with the Tables of the Law in his hands. The prophet, King Melchizedek of Salem, is also depicted on the north side of the window frame; A frontal

standing figure is depicted next to a communion table; He holds a plate in his left hand extended in front of him, and with his right hand he pours liquid on the plate from the chalice.

The fifth register is dedicated to the scenes of royal feasts. The compositions are arranged according to the Gospel narrative and are “read” from left to right (from north to south).

The first scene near the northern edge of the apse is the Annunciation (only the upper part of the bodies of the angel and the Mother of God have survived). It is followed by the scene of meeting of St. Mariam and St. Elizabeth; The third scene is Christmas, from which only the upper part of the composition has survived - the Child Savior wrapped in swaddling clothes, St. Joseph's nimble and a fragment of the cattle shed. The last, fourth scene on the northern part of the window - Candlemas is also half destroyed; One can see the upper part of the purgatory, fragments of figures of St. Simeon the God-Receiver and St. Mother (Skhirtladze 2006: 49-86).

Marika Didibulidze writes: “There is almost no program similar to the painting of the apse of the Otkhta Eklesia in the Eastern Christian world, neither in grandeur, nor in the complexity of the theological content of the painting, nor in the multitude of themes, the composition of the window is also outstanding. Everything leaves an impression of uniqueness and specialness and testifies that in this region of Georgia a truly independent, high-level artistic creativity was developing” (Didebulidze 2016: 41).

Arguing about the number of painters working in the Otkhta Eklesia and the distribution and separation of work among them is conditional for today. The first master (that is how Zaza Skhirtladze conventionally calls one of the painters) could have been a monumentalist in his artistic vision. The upper half of the painting of the altar should have been performed by him, if not completely, at least two registers with the faces of apostles and prophets. The second master should have been the performer of the lower register of painting. The portrait of the founder on the lower part of the adjacent wall to the south of the altar should have belonged to the same painter. The hand of the third master should be distinguished in the painting of the altar window. Zaza Skhirtladze notes that the figure of Moses the Prophet is relatively better preserved among the images of this part of painting, it is outstanding in terms of fine techniques

and differs from the handwriting of both masters mentioned above. Based on the scale of the painting of the altar of the Otkhta Eklesia, it is likely that more than two or three masters should have been working on it (Skhirtladze 2009: 249-251).

Inscriptions of donor content have been preserved on the temple of the Otkhta Eklesia. On the eastern facade of the temple, on the tip of the front of the middle nave, in the section that belongs to the second stage of construction, a one-line majuscule (Asomtavruli) inscription crowned with an equal-armed cross encircled in a circle is carved „ქ(რისტე) ა(დიდ)ე დ(ავით) მ(ეფე) კ(ურა)პ(ა)ლ(ა)ტი“ (Christ, glorify David Kuropalates) (Skhirtladze 2009: 23).

The extensive seven-line inscription carved on the eastern half of the southern wall of the church contains important information for the history of the construction of the Lavra of the Okhta Eklesia. “ქ. ს(ა)ხელითა ღ(მრთისა)ათა დაუდევით ჩ(უ)ენ ოთხთა ეკ(ლესიი)[სა კრ]ე[ბუ]ლსა საღ(ო)ც(ავი) მ(ო)მ(ავლისა) ს(ა)ხლი(ი)სა ჩ(უ)ენისა უკ(უნი)ს(ამდე), ს(ა)ლოცველად(?) ჩ(უ)ენთ[ა][...]სა[...] ე(რისთავთ)-ე(რისთავი)ს(ა) ხ(უ)რს(ი)ს და ეკ(ლესიი)სა ამ(ი)ს [კრ(ებული)]სა – ღ(მერთმა)ნ შ(ე)ნ(ყალ)ენ [...] [და] ვინ არა ულ(ო)ც(ო)ს, ღ(მერთმა)ნ იგ(იცა) გ(ა)ნ(ი) კ(ითხო)ს]“ (“In the name of Christ God, we ordain the future monks working here to pray for our family for eternity. May God have mercy on our Eristavt-Eristavi Khursi (Duke of Dukes) and the members of this church, and may God judge those who do not pray”) (Shoshiashvili 1980: 289). According to Ekvtime Takaishvili, the mentioned inscription should be contemporary with the hewn stone cladding of the Otkhta Eklesia. The scientist dates the inscription to the second half of the X century (Takaishvili 1960: 78).

According to Zaza Skhirtladze, the main obstacle to the identification of the Khursi Eristavi (Feudal Lord) is the large chronological limit that exists between the Battle of Palakacio and the construction of the Basilica of Otkhta Eklesia. (It is difficult to say whether the inscription was made during the remodeling or during the original construction). The upper limit of the construction of the basilica cannot go much beyond the beginning of the 80s of the X century, which indicates that at least four decades must have separated between these two events. However, the researcher cannot rule out the identity of these two persons, because Eristavi (Feudal Lord) Khursi played an active role in the life of the kingdom of Tao-Klarjeti (Skhirtladze 2009: 25-26).

Giorgi Mtatsmindeli's "Life of John and Ekvtime" is an important source for studying the early history of the Otkhta Eklesia. It is known from the writings that in the 60s of the X century, Ioane of Mtatsminda was consecrated as a monk in Otkhta. In that period, monks - Moses and Gelasius - were working in the Otkhta Eklesia (Giorgi of Mtatsminda 1967: 43). In the 80s of the X century, Ioane Grdzelisidze and Arsen of Ninotsminda came to Otkhta (Giorgi of Mtatsminda 1967: 56). The inscription of one of the churches of Otkhta informs us that Arsen of Ninotsminda built a temple in Otkhta in 984 (Skhirtladze 2009: 32). The church is located away from the main cathedral and is referred to as the Arseniseuli Monastery. It is a small anchorite monastery under the jurisdiction of the Lavra.

Unlike the Parkhali, Oshki and Khakhuli monasteries founded by David Kurapalates, the manuscripts found in the Lavra of the Otkhta Eklesia are unknown. No other artefacts (crosses, icons) are known from the church.

After the death of David Kurapalates in 1001, Basil Caesar, according to the will of the ruler of Imieri Tao (Upper Tao), transferred Imieri Tao, Basiani and other "upper countries" to the Byzantine jurisdiction, including the Otkhta Monastery (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018: 24). It is likely that, like other Tao monasteries, the Otkhta Eklesia was freed from the Seljuks by the Georgians who returned the area during the reign of Tamar, namely, after the Battle of Basiani (1202) (The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha 2008: 354).

There is an inscription in the small manuscript of Canonical collection copied in 1031 (National Center of Manuscripts, A-96) in which the deacon of the "Otkhta Monastery" Avgaroz Mamatsashvili is mentioned (Takaishvili 1960: 74).

It is likely that after the conquest of Samtskhe-Saatabago by the Ottomans, the Otkhta Eklesia was emptied and the monastic life ceased.

### **Parkhali**

Parkhali Monastery is located in historical Tao, Artvin area, Yusufeli district, the village of Parkhali (Artvin İli, Yusufeli İlçesi, Altıparmak köyü) (Bagauri... 2017: 40).

According to the testament of the Parkhali (I) Gospel transcribed in 973, the monastery of Parkhali was named after John the Baptist (A Fund 1955: 2).

The years 961-973 are considered to be the time of construction of the Parkhali church (Zakaraia 1992: 134; Silogava 2006: 157). Vakhtang Beridze dates the Parkhali temple to the 60s-70s of the X century (Beridze 1981: 167). The donor of the temple was David Kurapalates (Takaishvili 1960: 89).

Grayish sandstone was used as the building material of the church. According to Vakhtang DJobadze, the construction method is the same as in the majority of Tao-Klarjeti churches. Well-hewn blocks are arranged in successive rows, so that the mortar between the stones is not visible in the external cladding of the walls; The interior walls to be painted are of light-colored hewn stone, except for the carved pilasters, door-window frames, and piers on the outer walls. The gap between the inner and outer layers of the wall is filled with gravel, with the limestone mortar on (DJobadze 2007: 203).

Like the Otkhta Eklesia, Parkhali is a three-nave basilica built on a two-tiered foundation. The church has three entrances of the same size (1.86 x 2.8 m.) and arrangement. Of these, only the western door is functional. The northern entrance is completely built up. The simplest mihrab is arranged at the south door (DJobadze 2006: 205).

According to the description of Ekvtime Takaishvili, the roof of the Parkhali is rather sloping, which the researcher explains by climatic conditions. According to him, a lot of snow falls in Parkhali, and if precipitation fell on the roof, the building would not be able to withstand it (Takaishvili 1960: 86).

The inner space of Parkhali church is divided by four pairs of piers. The construction of the arches of the piers is the same as in the Otkhta Eklesia - the width of the arches increases towards the east. From the east, in the second pair of piers, there are niches for the attendance of secular authorities and high clergy. The facades of the church, like the Otkhta Eklesia, are decorated with decorative arcature, but Parkhali, unlike the Otkhta Eklesia, has a more "austere" and less "artistic" look (Tao-Klarjeti, Historical-Cultural Essay 2018: 358).



As a result of the transformation of the Parkhali temple into a mosque, the entire interior was covered with oil paint, which is why the painting, unfortunately, no longer exists. Like the painting of the Otkhta Eklesia, the painting here was also divided into 5 registers, with the exception of the row of shielded angels, which were separated by wide ornamental bands; The lower two were probably devoted to royal holidays or, perhaps, one depicted scenes from the life of St. John the Baptist (Didebulidze 2016: 42)

Over time, the inscriptions on the temple have been washed away or the paint has faded from the sun. However, one extensive inscription, which contains important information for the Parkhali church, has been completely preserved. The inscription is placed between the 6th and 7th arches of the facade chamber. It is written in 19 lines - 8 lines are in the 6th arch and 11 lines in the 7th arch: "In the name of God, with the help of the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist, may God glorify Patriarch John of Kartli and all of the East. The dome of the Parkhali church was built by Kurapalates, he decorated it. Eternal glory to him. May the Lord rest the soul of the archpriest Giorgi Ghaghueli, Amen, Amen. Ioane the Leader" (Silogava 2006: 159-160).

According to Valeri Silogava, the author and possible performer of the inscription was Ioane, the abbot of the Parkhali monastery. At the end of the text, he names another dean - Giorgi Ghaghueli was dead at the time of writing the inscription, because the text states about the forgiveness of his soul. The researcher assumes that Giorgi Ghaghueli must have been the predecessor of Ioane, during which the temple was being built by David Kurapalates (Silogava 2006: 159-160).

One word of the text of the inscription "chasdudara" (arcade) draws attention, which tells about the embroidering. According to Niko Marr, "chas-dud-ara" means arch, vault, arcade at the same time (Marr 1934: 199-218; Takaishvili 1960: 89-91; Silogava 2006: 161)

The inscription mentions two historical persons - Kurapalates without a name and Ioane, the Patriarch of Kartli and all of the East<sup>9</sup>. Kurapalates named as the builder of the temple in the inscription must be David Kurapalates, and in the history of the Georgian Church, the contemporary Catholicos of David Kurapalates is known as John I

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<sup>9</sup> According to Ekvtime Takaishvili, he considered the patriarch of Kartli Ioane mentioned in the inscription to be a figure of the later period. In his opinion, he must have been the Catholicos-Patriarch Ioane VIII (1497-1507), and he dated the inscription to this time (Takaishvili 1960: 93).

Chrysostom (980-1001). He must have been mentioned in the Parkhali inscription and the Parkhali church was incensed by him. According to Valery Silogava, the inscription should be dated to the end of the X century, before the death of David Kurapalates (1000/1001 AD), which is confirmed by its palaeographic signs (Silogava 2006: 161-163).

There are numerous small inscriptions on the stones of the Parkhali Basilica Cathedral. Some of them were noticed for the first time in 2003, during the expedition of the South Caucasus and Anatolia Research Center. In 2016-2017, Buba Kudava carried out detailed recording and research of the inscriptions. According to the preliminary observation of the researcher, the minuscule (Nuskhuri) graphemes made with red ink mainly inform us of the names, and by deciphering the inscriptions, the identity of dozens of old masters, stone hewers working during the construction of the temple is revealed.

According to Ekvtime Takaishvili, there were many mural inscriptions in Parkhali. There is a damaged fresco in the area of the north-eastern pylon, which was intended as a living quarters for priests. Most likely, the archpriest of the monastery was depicted on the fresco. Here and there Takaishvili has seen inscriptions in majuscule (Asomtavruli), which mentions the archpriest of Parkhali, Abraham: “God, Christ, have mercy on Abraham, the archpriest of Parkhali, Amen”.

A fragment of a large fresco inscription was preserved on the second northern pylon. Another large inscription was in the altar, below the window on the right. In the middle, the plaster fell off and a large part of the inscription was lost. Only a small part of the inscription is readable. According to Ekvtime Takaishvili, this inscription can be contemporary with the first painting of Parkhali. The second 17-line performed in mkhedruli (modern lay) inscription is relatively late and damaged. Ekvtime Takaishvili conveys the content of the inscription as follows: the archpriest of the Parkhali monastery, Archbishop Saba (in the inscription he calls himself “Patron”), received an order from the Catholicos of Kartli, Nikoloz, to settle the issue of the monastery’s burial place (Takaishvili 1960: 93-94).

In the Parkhali monastery, the Gospel copied by John Bera in the Shatberdi monastery in 973 was kept, which is known in the scientific literature as the Parkhali (I) Gospel (National Center of Manuscripts, A-1453). The calligrapher copied the Gospel for

the newly built Parkhali church. It is clear from the manuscript's testament<sup>10</sup> that by this time the church in Parkhali had already been built: "In front of the new church, on the new altar, it should be placed in praise of the King of Kings, may God praise King David Magistros. May the Lord praise the holy Father Ekvtime for his outstanding spirituality..." (A Fund 1955: 2). From this colophon it is also known that in 973 Ekvtime was the archpriest of the Parkhali monastery.

It is worth noting that according to the Parkhali Gospel (National Center of Manuscripts, A-1453) and the Parkhali inscription, we learn about the activity of the three archpriests of the Parkhali monastery - Ekvtime, Giorgi Ghaghueli and John - probably from the 70s of the X century to 1001.

At the turn of the X-XI centuries, Gabriel Patarai worked in the Parkhali monastery, and three of his transcribed manuscripts have reached us. They are: 1) Parkhali Gospel (S-4927), transcribed, probably at the turn of the X-XI centuries, the manuscript is 140 pages, written on parchment, with minuscule (Nuskhuri). As the place of activity of the copyist is considered to be the Parkhali monastery, the manuscript is also considered to have been copied in Parkhali (S Fund 1969: 174-175); 2) Klarjeti Synoptic Gospel (A-144), the manuscript has 217 pages, written on parchment, with minuscule (Nuskhuri). Along with the translated homiletics, the Klarjeti Synoptic Gospel also contains samples of original writing: eight sermons of Ioane Bolneli and a story taken about elevation of the St. Cross in Mtskheta from the "Conversion of Kartli" for pentecost reading. The translated texts of the collection are mainly derived from Greek, the chronological range of their translation and further processing is placed in the V-X centuries. Many Greek originals corresponding to the ancient layer are lost today (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts: 106-107); 3) Parkhali Synoptic Gospel (National Center of Manuscripts A-95), the manuscript has 655 pages, written on parchment, with minuscule (Nuskhuri). It contains recitations by John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa and others, sermons by Ioane Bolneli, texts of Acts of Martyrs Shushanik and Abo (A Fund 1973: 361).

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1.<sup>10</sup> In 1889, Ekvtime Takaishvili found the Parkhali Gospel and published its description (Takaishvili Ek., Three historical chronicles (about Conversion of Kartli, Sumbat of Bagrationis and Meskhetian Davit), Tbilisi, 1890)

The Gospel transcribed in 1241 was probably kept in the Parkhali monastery, which is currently preserved in the National Library of Georgia. In 1879, Dimitri Bakradze saw the manuscript in Artvin. He writes that the manuscript belonged to the Parkhali monastery (Sharashidze 1982: 64).

After the death of David Kurapalates in 1001, Basil Caesar, according to the testament of the ruler of Imieri Tao (Upper Tao), Imieri Tao, Basiani and other “upper countries” were transferred under Byzantium, including the Parkhali monastery (Tao-Klarjeti Heritage of manuscripts 2018: 24-25).

According to the document “Parish of the Samtskhe of the Patriarchate of Kartli - Princely Houses and Dominions” drawn up in the period of 1516, Parkhali with its revenue and twelve Aznaurishviliz constituted the parish and the serfs of the Patriarchate of Mtskheta (Surguladze 2016: 55).

In 1518, the Atabag of Samtskhe Kvarkvare III (1516-1535) renewed the process of transferring the donation of Pharkhali monastery to Mtskheta church (Surguladze 2016: 70-71).

After the conquest of Samtskhe-Saatabago by the Ottomans, the Parkhali monastery was emptied and the monastic life here ceased.

As our research shows, Tao monasteries played a significant monastic and cultural role in the development of medieval Georgia. Tao figures had an active relationship with the great religious and cultural centers abroad. We tried to identify the clergy and laity related to these monasteries, their activities and role in the development of the monastery.

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