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e del medioevo

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SPOLETO

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## ABSTRACTS.....

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## Archeological Research upon One of the Earliest Georgian Christian Basilica

One of the oldest and the most reliable written source in Georgian history, *Leonti Mroveli's* "The Life of the Georgian Kings" informs us that the king of *Iberia* (the old name of the Georgian Kingdom) *Par-najom* started the construction of the city of *Nekresi*, also known as *Nelqari*, in the second century BC<sup>1</sup>.

The information kept in the second oldest and the most significant Georgian historic source, "Moqcevai Qartlisai" (Baptizing of Georgia) tells us that approximately 4–5 decades later, after the recognition of Christianity as the official state religion by the ruling authorities of *Iberia* (in 326 AD) and, under King *T'adat's* reign, the construction of a large Christian temple started in the royal city *Nekresi* which was completed within one lifetime<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the mentioned above informations provided by the historical sources, the specific location of the settlement of *Nekresi* remained unknown until the early 80-s of the XX century. Only one thing was clear: the former city of the late Antique period and early medieval centuries of *Nekresi* should be searched in Georgia, Kakheti region, namely Kvareli Municipality, nearby the well-known *Nekresi* Monastery, which was built on the left side of the Alazani Valley, on a forested area pertaining to the southern branch of the Caucasus Ridge.

Indeed, studies conducted by the archaeological expeditions promoted in the last two decades by the Georgian National Museum proved that the historic districts of the city of *Nekresi* were spread out below the monastery, across a slightly terraced plain, covered with forests and agricultural land plots. As a result of the archaeological excavations in the area, the remains of a large-scale pagan temple, residential buildings and utility rooms, and a powerful fortification system from the II–III century BC were found<sup>3</sup>.

The aim of this paper is to present the results of the excavation of a remarkable monument – discovered about 15 years ago by an archaeological expedition of the S. Janashia Georgian National Museum – located in the center of the former city of *Nekresi*, within the so called Chabukauri plot, and representing one outstanding example of the Georgian religious architecture.

### ARCHEOLOGICAL AND STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE CHABUKAURI BASILICA

Two or three years after the beginning of the archaeological research within the Chabukauri territory, the structure of the large basilica, oriented east-west<sup>4</sup>, was clearly revealed below the hill, covered with dense woods. The basilica naos is divided into three naves by five pairs of rectangular-shaped pillars (Figg. 1, 2). The initial church was 33.4 m long and 15 m wide. A rectangular altar seems to have been placed to the south-east of the central nave, with small utility areas to the right and the left of the altar along the side naves, as well as rectangular-shaped small rooms (conventionally called *pastophorias*). Entrance door to the hall were placed on the southern, western and northern sides. The church is built of large limestone's blocks, sledged stones and gravels. In the corners of the openings, easily processed travertine stones have been abundantly used as column tops, for the arches and accurately cut wherever

1. Mroveli Leonti, *The Life of the Georgian King. Chronicle of Kartli*, V. I, Tbilisi, 1955 (in Georgian), pp. 29, 33.

2. Moqcevai Qartlisai, *Shatberdi Collection of the X century*, Tbilisi, 1979 (in Georgian), p. 325.

3. L. CHILASHVILI, *The Ancient Georgian Inscriptions of Nekresi and Questions of the History of Georgian Writing*, Tbilisi, 2004, pp. 6–15.

4. Such orientation is provisionally suggested to simplify the presentation of the structure to the reader. Actually, the above mentioned axis and longitudinal walls of the basilica are almost 40 degrees leaned to the south-east.

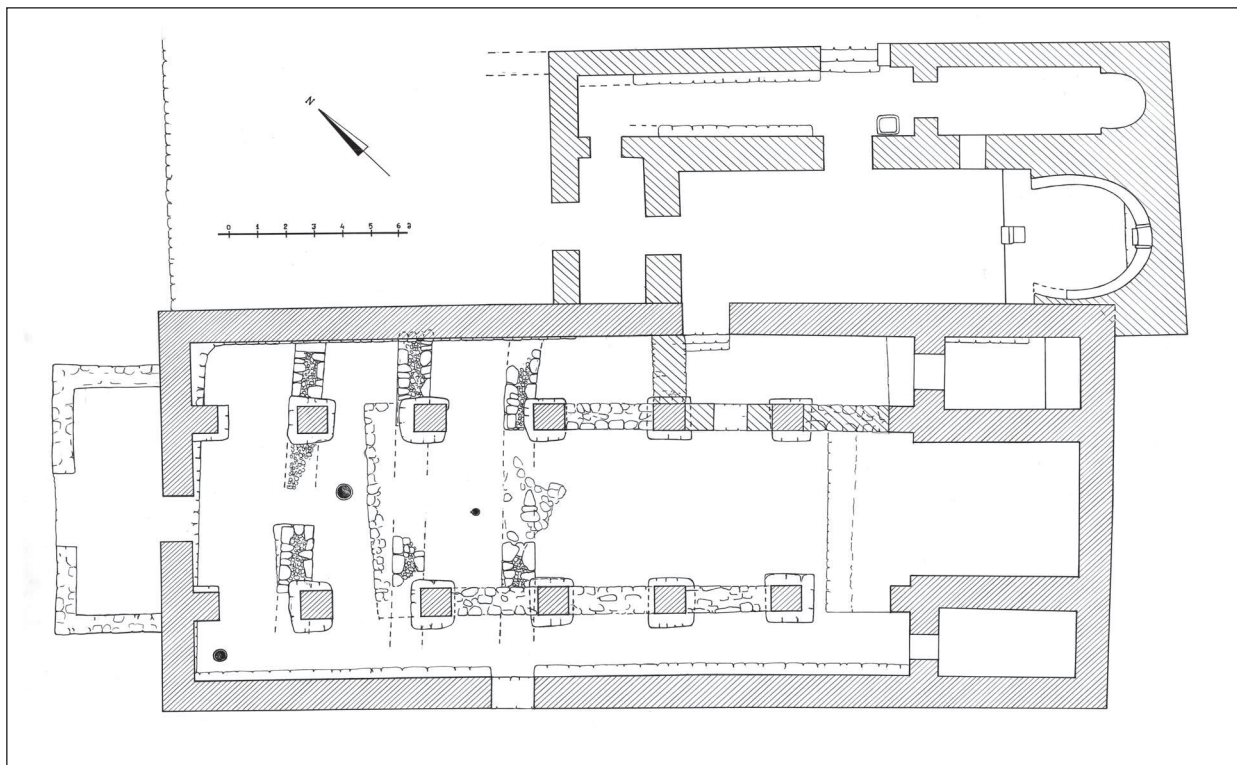


Fig. 1 – The plan of the Chabukauri Basilica and adjoining church (showing excavated remains of the Pagan church)



Fig. 2 – The Chabukauri Basilica central nave (with the view to the east)





Fig. 3 – The central hall of the Church attached to the Chabukauri Basilica (with the view to the east)

necessary. The church walls are made on lime-mortar foundation. The walls are from 1 to 1,2 meters thick. The building has been plastered with lime in the inside and painted in dark red. The building has been covered with flat and roof tiles (solenis and kalifteri) alternating. Alongside the tiles, the facades have been decorated with, rectangular-shaped antefixes of baked clay, painted in white and jagged on one side.

As a result of the excavations of the basilica's interior, it was revealed that the main parts of each wall and column, dismantled in large blocks, lay across the floor northward. If we take into consideration that rather rich interior of the temple was intact under the ruins (see below), the given picture points out to some devastating earthquake consequences.

After the collapse of the basilica, a new smaller-sized church was built beside the relatively better preserved northern wall; in some places the walls of the smaller church are constructed over the ancient temple ruins (Fig. 3). Unlike the basilica itself, the plan is differently achieved. Fragments of carved arches and other evident details of the ruined basilica are built in inappropriate places of the new church walls. At the eastern end of the central hall of the small temple, a horseshoe-shaped altar was arranged. One-level sintronon surrounded the apsis from inside; in the center of it, a special throne with additional steps and vertical stony "armrests" for clergymen of particular hierarchical level (episcopus?) has been built<sup>5</sup>. From the north, a narrow stoa, which ends in a semi-circular apsis to the east, follows the main hall of the new church and the western gateway.

The details revealed as a result of the archaeological excavation, indicate quite clearly that the original style, obviously visible in the church architecture and widespread in almost all the leading provinces of Kartli Kingdom throughout V – VI centuries, is not yet felt in the construction plan of the three-nave Chabakauri basilica<sup>6</sup>.

It is well-known that in 313, according to the Edict of Milan, Constantine the Great proclaimed Christianity in Roman Empire, initially as one of the religions<sup>7</sup>. After that, basilica-type constructions

5. The later church is well dated back to the VI century due to the numismatic material, excavated around its floor: two silver coins were found in the layer, dated back to its demolition – a Persian coin, from the time of Hormizd IV (579–590) (fig. 7) and Byzantine, minted in the name of Mavrikos Tiberius (582–602). That is why we cannot rule out that reconstruction of the ruined temple in this way could be linked to one of the famous clergyman in Georgia, Assyrian Father – St. Abibos Nekreseli's episcopacy period in the mentioned above eparchy – the middle of the VI century (I. ABULADZE, *Book of Lives of the Assyrian Fathers, old editions*, Tbilisi, 1955).

6. G. CHUBINASHVILI, *History of Georgian Art*, V. 1, Tbilisi, 1936, pp. 32–50; V. BERIDZE, *Old Georgian Architectur*, Tbilisi, 1974, pp. 22–25.

7. Christianity was recognized as the only state religion later in 380.

became almost the only mass kind of newly-built temples for Christian congregations throughout the Empire and the countries under its political and cultural influence, during at least 1–2 centuries. It is obvious, even in the mentioned above age, despite the identity of common initial scheme, that basilicas of the Christian world have been marked with regional peculiarities: they were still different from each other by construction technologies, spatially-planned proportions, etc<sup>8</sup>.

The architectural theme of the Chabukauri Basilica seems to be nourished directly on general trends characterizing the Roman and Byzantine world basilica architecture of the IV–VI centuries; however, in its details, some typical characteristics identifying the basilicas of Eastern-Christian countries are felt.

For example, the rectangular-shaped altars and pastoforium-like spaces found in Chabukauri Basilica don't have any analogs among the earliest Georgian basilicas. However, the tradition of arranging altars and the adjacent spaces in the similar way was common in basilicas throughout Northern Syria and Holy Land (Palestine) in IV–VI centuries<sup>9</sup>, more rarely across Mesopotamia and Egypt<sup>10</sup>. In Syria, rectangular altars, as easy-to-build construction, were used more in second-rate churches throughout IV–V centuries<sup>11</sup>. However, these elements soon became “canonized” and have been used in many important, monumental basilicas (for example, Kirbit Hassan, Kirbit Tezin, Dar Qita and others<sup>12</sup>). Some rather monumental basilicas of the Holy Land, adorned with highly artistic relief decorations and mosaics, built in the mentioned above period, have rectangular altars (for example, in Herodium, Judean Desert<sup>13</sup>). It should be noted that in the same period, the traditions of arranging rectangular-shaped small rooms in the north and south parts of the basilica's altars became noticeable in Northern Syria and Palestine (for example, Pepirtin (372), Bebiske (401), Horvat Brachot (V century) and others<sup>14</sup>). However, they had somehow other functional loads in contrast to some others pastoforiums.

The rectangularity of the Basilica altar in Nekresi settlement should certainly be an artistic architectural element copied from the basilicas of Georgia's neighboring Eastern-Christian countries and not the consequence of a rather weak construction art (we should remember that at the same place, on the territory of the former city of Nekresi, we discovered a late antique monumental pagan temple of approximately III–IV century, which is adorned with 4 apses directed symmetrically towards the central room and realized at a rather highly technical level)<sup>15</sup>. Given the fact that in Georgia such three-nave basilicas with altars have not been confirmed elsewhere yet, we should think that the above mentioned theme has not gained much popularity in the Georgian basilica architecture<sup>16</sup>. Also, the pastoforium-like spaces are brought here, as it can be supposed, from the abovementioned regions.

The tile roofing, supported by wooden constructions of the basilica central and lateral naves, represents an important element in dating the Chabukauri Basilica as well. Here, the following facts demonstrate an actual usage of the abovementioned method of covering, absolutely unusual for Georgian basilicas:

1. Regardless their size, all curved fragments of the travertine cut stones found in excavation had flatly curved three edges – lower arc and sides, the back sides were rough. Such configuration is entirely acceptable for the arches dividing the colonnade, whereas coves supporting arches should have had backs.

2. In the surface layer nearest to the basilica floor, a large number (more than 3 hundred) of iron nails (from 7,8 cm to 16–18 cm in length) have been discovered; such amount of nails together with tile debris can indicate that the covering of the building was done with only wooden constructions. Indeed, in the floor surface layer of the ruins, at some places, the traces of beams destroyed by moisture are clearly seen.

8. A. KOMECH, *Architecture, The Byzantium Culture*. Moscow, 1984, pp. 573–595; R. MILBURN, *Early Christian Art and Architecture*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980, pp. 85–88, 93–111, 124–129.

9. H. BEYER, *Der Syrische Kirchenbau*, Berlin, 1925, fig. 4, 5; 36–44; 80–9; E. NETZER – R. BIRGER-CALDERON – A. FELLER, *The Churches of Herodium. Ancient Churches Revealed*, Jerusalem, 1993, pp. 219–232.

10. S. CLARKE, *Christian Antiquities in the Nile Valley*, Oxford, 1912, tab. VI, XIX, XX.

11. G. TCHALENKO, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du nord. Le massif du Bélus à l'époque Romaine*, II vols, Paris, 1953, pl. X-1, XI-3, 6, XIII-1, 3, 4.

12. BEYER 1925 (note 9), pp. 81, 84, 90.

13. NETZER – BIRGER-CALDERON et Alii 1933 (note 9), p. 222.

14. KOMECH 1984 (note 8), p. 580; Beyer 1925 (note 9), pp. 16, 17, 37–40; Y. TSAFRIR – Y. HIRSCHFELD, *The Byzantine Church, at Horvat Berachot*, Jerusalem, 1993 (*Ancient Churches Revealed*), p. 209.

15. L. CHILASHVILI, *Pagan Chapels of Nekresi*, Tbilisi, 2000, fig. 13.

16. We do not mean relatively later, the VI–X centuries' certain reminiscences on the given theme, which were registered in several Georgian hall churches. N. CHUBINASHVILI, *Zedazeni, Kikis Jvari, Ghviara*, in *Georgian Art*, 7 (1971), pp. 27–65.

3. During the excavations of the interior of the temple, in the floor layer, fragments of arches cut from travertine were found. By inserting the measurements of the arch fragments data done by us into appropriate mathematical formulas, it was found out that these details are parts of semicircular arches having a diameter, taking into account approximately up to 10 cm error, equal to 3 meters. As we can see, the shape of the semicircular travertine fragments, unearthed during the basilica excavations, do not even slightly resemble the size of the base supporting 6 meters arches, surrounding the temple central nave from above. On the other hand, their outlines do not fit the 2.4–2.25 meter-wide side naves either.

However, the distance between columns longitudinally dividing the basilica's naves makes up exactly 3 meters (with 5–10 cm error) and, therefore, the parts of arches found in the interior of the temple seem to be fragments of the arching constructions above, especially as the mentioned rough backs of the circular arches correspond to the similar function of a wall supporting arch.

Resulting from Ancient Roman traditions, in Christian West as well as across Eastern Christian provinces of Rome, saddle roofs of ancient basilicas mainly rest on wooden bearing constructions, which were seen either transparent from the hall interior, or were “planked” with wooden ceilings<sup>17</sup>. Exceptionally in Central Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Iran, sometimes, stone vaulting was also used in order to cover Christian basilicas during early Byzantine period. In addition, it should be noted that both these basilicas' roofing methods were used in constructions of especially monumental temples of state importance as well as in ordinary rural monasteries and churches.

The founder of the Georgian history of architecture and recognized reputable authority among the Georgian art history circles up hitherto, the academician G. Chubinashvili considered the difference between the abovementioned two roofing methods of basilicas as traditional for one or another region<sup>18</sup>. The respected scientist based the given regularity upon the examples of Georgia, where every basilica during its period of activity has been really roofed only with stone vaulting since V–VI centuries.

In retrospect, after our discoveries, perhaps we should take a new different approach to the roofing of ancient Georgian basilicas only with stone vaulting. The opinion expressed by G. Chubinashvili and his Georgian art school that real large basilicas, so rapidly and widely spread in almost all provinces of the Roman and Byzantine or Eastern-Christian world, have not been built at all after proclaiming Christianity as the state religion in Georgia during at least a century, – has not been proved<sup>19</sup> (The probable explanation of the mentioned above reason was as follows: the first Georgian Christian temples were built by the local architects in accordance with the oral descriptions of the missionaries from spiritual centers of the Byzantine Empire about the existent there churches. Therefore, these temples were different, with primitive design as the type of a small chapel built within the Nekresi Monastery have shown<sup>20</sup>).

Moreover, the basilica designed and formed in compliance with “standards” of eastern provinces within Roman-Byzantine world, discovered by us during excavations in Nekresi settlement, actually proves the fact clearly reflected in the Georgian written sources, that the first Georgian Christian temples were being built under the guidance of the architects or local builders well aware of the used construction methods and invited by the Iberian officials from Greece (here historical sources might have implied Byzantine world in general)<sup>21</sup>.

More than a century ago, some famous art historians arrived at the following conclusion: after triumphantly spreading Christianity throughout Roman Empire and adjacent Eastern countries during nearly a century many large basilicas designed if not precisely in accordance with the Roman-Byzantine style, but very close to it, were built almost across the entire Eastern-Christian world. The given period in oriental churches' constructions cannot be considered as an epoch of great creative search – basilicas built by means of poor architectural and construction techniques sometimes were easily destroyed as a result of earthquake. Only later, since the V century, when “fever” of hastily building the first basilicas passed, the architects and ruling circles of the abovementioned countries started to

17. G. KOCH, *Frühchristliche Kunst*, Stuttgart – Berlin – Köln, 1995, pp. 25, 27, 33, 46; C. MANGO, *Byzantine Architecture*, New York, 1976, pp. 17–25.

18. G. CHUBINASHVILI, *On the Initial Forms of Christian Churches*, in *Questions of Art History*, I (1970), p. 40.

19. G. CHUBINASHVILI, *Architecture of Kakheti*, Tbilisi, 1959, p. 37; BERIDZE 1974 (note 6), pp. 22–23.

20. CHUBINASHVILI 1936 (note 6), p. 26.

21. Moqcevai Qartlisai 1979 (note 2), p. 323.



“reconsider” creatively the given topic, taking local traditions into account. As a result of such “reconsideration”, typological variations of basilicas, more or less different from ancients, classical models and frequently completely original masterpieces were created in almost all separate regions<sup>22</sup>.

We think that it is quite possible to link the grandiose Chabukauri temple, built in accordance with early Greco-Roman Christian basilica schemes and constructions, to the same general eastern trend. Such understanding of the given issue enables us to answer the question – why the same unreasonably adopted wooden roofed constructions and naturally less earthquake-resistant basilicas were not being built any more in Georgia in the II half of the V and VI centuries? They were replaced in Georgia with relatively less elongated, well-built stone-arched and more appropriate to the local architectural traditions samples<sup>23</sup> which have reached us in better condition, thanks to correctly selected constructions.

#### DATING TANGIBLE MATERIALS FROM RESULT OF THE ARCHEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS OF THE CHABUKAURI BASILICA

On the floor of the basilica and around it, obtained in the lower layers of the ruins, tangible material is represented mostly by flat and grooved tile fragments which in general are dated back to IV-VI centuries<sup>24</sup>. Sufficient amount of pottery fragments has been also found in the same layer; we can provide more specific information about production and consumption dates of these fragments. For example, there are numerous parts of burnt pink, well-polished, pear-shaped pounchy, three-spouted or spout-folded one-handle pitchers. The mouths and bodies of some jars have been adorned with wavy ornaments, carved by means of notched or jagged tools (Fig. 4, 1-5). These artifacts have close parallels with the unearthed in Georgian former cities – *Urbnisi* and *Lochini* early medieval clayware, which are dated back to IV-V centuries by researchers<sup>25</sup>. The analogous artifacts found in the Citadel of another Georgian former settlement, *Cheremi*, are also dated back to the same period of time (here, after the Persian invasion, the city fade out in 502)<sup>26</sup>.

Excavations around the basilica's floor level revealed varied and very interesting collection of lighting devices spread in different places within the site. Bronze and glass oil lamps and chandeliers are among the findings. According to the revealed archaeological picture about the time of devastating disaster, each of them was hanging from fixed fastenings in the temple ceiling as well as on its walls.

For example, bronze oil lamp found between the 4th and the 5th naves dividing northern columns belongs to one of the unique discoveries; similar samples of applied art has not been discovered by researchers among medieval Georgian archeological sites up to now (Fig. 5). The lamp stood on the flat bronze rectangular base, which one its sides ends in apsidal ledge and it is clear that it is a symbolically expressed design model of a Christian church. The base hung on four chains, consisting of wattled rods and rings replacing each other, was fixed on anchor-like fastening. The lamp itself has a wick duct, lily-shaped relief back and spherical fuel filler body. This sample, on the one hand, demonstrates rather close stylistic links to the applied art samples of the same purpose from the Late Classical Roman world. However, it also has rather a close parallel with the IV-V centuries' metal artworks from different regions of the Byzantine world (among them, Syria)<sup>27</sup>. Although the general structure of the given lamps from II-I centuries BC to VI-VII centuries AD has not changed a lot, these artworks can be grouped in at least 3 categories taking into account artistic styles and workmanship, by our estimations. In particular, shapes of the artworks created in Roman period are extremely exquisite in accordance with the law of proportion (tight-fitting duct, with legs, softly fused from stem to shaft, etc.); they are vegetative, zoomorphic as well as anthropomorphic images that directly correspond with realistic character of the Late Antique

22. N. KONDAKOV, *Archeological Journey through Syria and Palestine*, Sankt Petersburg, 1904, pp. 30-62.

23. CHUBINASHVILI 1970 (note 18), pp. 39-40.

24. J. JGHAMAIA, *Construction Ceramic in Feudal Period Georgia*, Tbilisi, 1980, pp. 21-22.

25. L. CHILASHVILI, *Ancient Town Urbnisi*, Tbilisi, 1964, pp. 100; R. ABRAMISHVIL – L. CHILASHVILI, *Archeological Excavations of the Lochini Settlement*, in *Bulletin of the S. Janashia Georgian State Museum*, XXIII-B (1962), figg. 3,4; M. SINAURIDZE, *Early Feudal Period Pottery of the East Georgia*, Tbilisi, 1966, p. 62.

26. N. MAMAIASHVILI, *The Former City of Cheremi*, Tbilisi, 2004, pp. 134-136.

27. S. DJURIC, *The Anawati collection, Catalog 1: Ancient Lamps from the Mediterranean*, Toronto, 1995, pp. 56, 78, 84; S. LOFREDA, *Light and Life: Ancient Christian Oil Lamps of Holy Land*, Jerusalem, 2001, pp. 101-134.

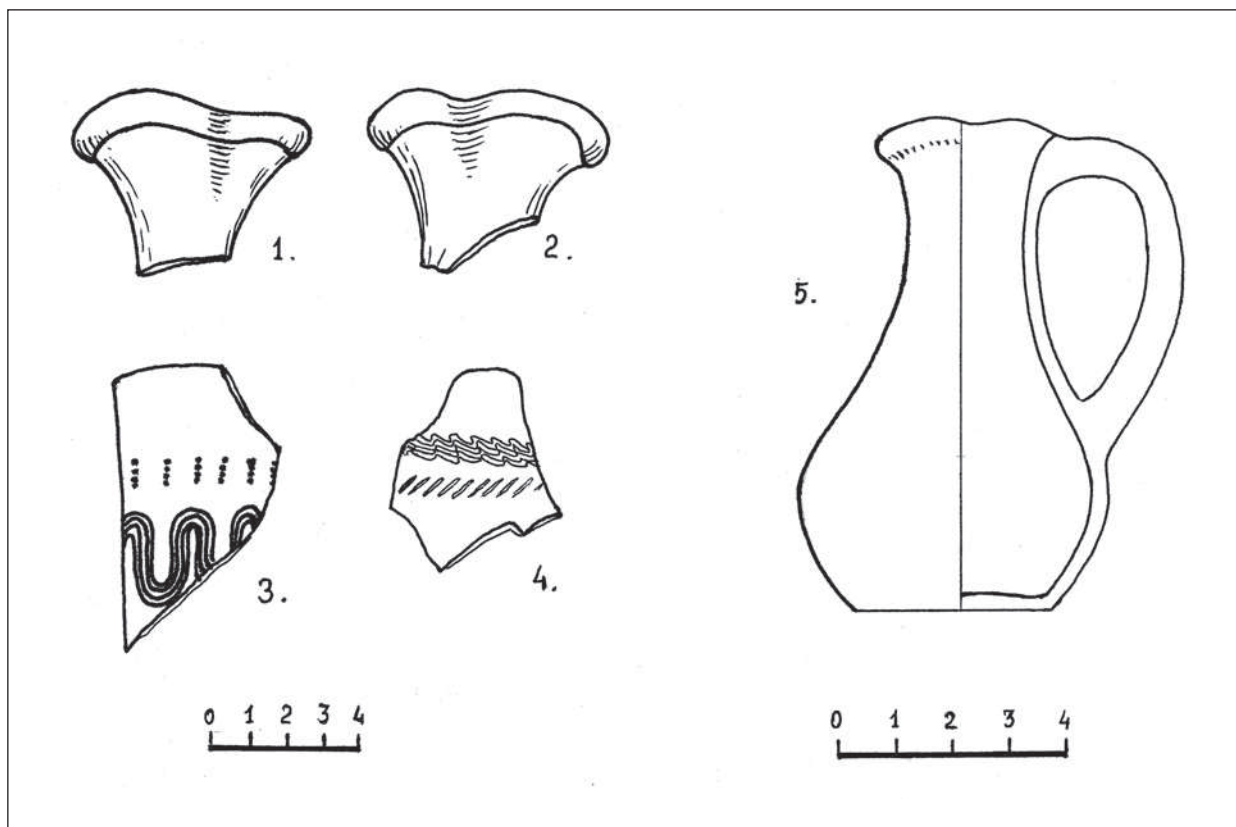


Fig. 4 – Pottery and their fragments discovered at the Chabukauri Basilica floor level



Fig. 5 – Lamp with bronze support from Chabukauri Basilica



Fig. 6 – Six-wicked bronze lamp from Chabukauri Basilica

art<sup>28</sup>. Similar made lamps in the IV-V centuries were mostly decorated with these zoomorphic images, but Christian symbols then frequently replace zoomorphic and anthropomorphic images which disappeared from their decor (sometimes image of cross is intertwined with back decor, in our case the shape of the base reflects the church). Since the V-VI centuries, the artistic style and structure of such lamps have become rather rigid, fusion of smooth forms are often ribbed and with back ornaments schematic<sup>29</sup>. Apparently, the foreign scientist who dated back very close samples of their analogues, unearthed in the Chabukauri basilica, to the IV century took into consideration chronological gradations of such styled bronze lamps<sup>30</sup>.

Also, six- and four-shafted artistic and extremely exquisite bronze lampads (chandeliers) were found by the southern line of the basilica hall columns and at the bottom of the eastern altar wall (Fig. 6). The lamps with several ducts around oil filler were widespread in the I-III centuries AD, but they are rare in the IV century. Thus, it is perhaps impossible to date them back to later than IV or IV-V centuries AD<sup>31</sup>.

#### PRE-CHRONOLOGICAL PHASE OF THE CHABUKAURI BASILICA CONSTRUCTION – PAGAN TEMPLE

In relation to the confirmation of the basilica construction date, the archeological picture as a result of horizontal section of the temple floor yielded especially important results. It was revealed that the abovementioned Christian basilica had been built almost on the same site as a grandiose pagan temple<sup>32</sup>, that was demolished as soon as Christianity was proclaimed as official religion in East Georgia. Some masonry of its foundations served as a basis for the walls and columns of the Christian temple<sup>33</sup>, while remaining material of the demolished building was used in construction of the temple. As it seems, this was a so called “sectional-type” temple which consisted of at least five practically similarly outlined and same-sized rooms connected with each other by means of the passageways located along the central axis. More or less close parallels of the abovementioned temple constructions have been found in the Antique Period Church Architecture of Western Asia as well as Georgia<sup>34</sup>.

Every indication points out that destruction of the pagan temple and construction of a large Christian Chabukauri Basilica, specially emphasizing the strength of new religion, should have taken place around the same period – as the ceramic material, unearthed in the pre-Christian chapel cultural layer of the basilica floor pavement and after the floor section excavations, typologically, stylistically and by technically is almost identical to each other. Construction of the church at the given site, supposedly, served the common intention of the secular and spiritual leaders within the entire countries, representing the early Christian world: on the one hand, demolition of the pagan chapel and construction of an even more grandiose temple at the exactly same site must have been considered as a symbol of the victory of the new religion over the ancient belief. Meanwhile, awe and reverence of the population towards the usual place of worship could have been unconsciously “transferred” to the new church.

Of course, based on the architectural analysis of the abovementioned complex and the presented archeological picture, even in theory, the following chronological order of events cannot be ruled out: the abolished pagan temple might have been already demolished eventually in the first or the second part of the V century and the large Chabukauri Basilica could have been built during the same period of time. The latter church may have been destroyed very soon after the earthquake and a small church might have been urgently built on the old one (which, in its turn, may have existed for a century). The presented version of such “time-constrained” replacement of the temples within the Chabukauri

28. A. MUTZ, *Die Kunst des Metalledrehens bei den Römern*, Stuttgart, 1972, ph. 393-394, 408-409.

29. L. BOURA – M. PARANI, *Lighting in Early Byzantium*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 62 (2008), pp. 23-35.

30. A. BANK, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums*, Leningrad, 1985, fig. 17; MUTZ 1972 (note 28), p. 145, ph. 412-413.

31. MUTZ 1972 (note 28), p. 141.

32. On the assumption of the fragments of black and grey kilned, polished clayware, discovered near its foundation, the given construction could have been built in Hellenistic period.

33. The remains of pagan temple on the basilica are traced in the vicinity of the first three pairs of columns from the western direction, in the northern and central naves, perpendicular to the elongated walls.

34. G. KIPIANI, *Pagan Temples of Kolchheti and Iberia and Questions on Origins of Georgian Christian Architecture*, Tbilisi, 2000, tab. XLVIII, L.

complex, cannot be categorically disproved by means of neither real materials, nor by the church architectural styles revealed at the site. On the other hand, in such circumstances the following “indirect arguments” should have been taken into consideration:

1. According to the historical sources, at the end of the V century, the Persian invaders intruded into Kakheti region through the former city of Nekresi<sup>35</sup>. The traces of ravage and violent fire, found on numerous buildings of the mentioned period and excavated by us within the settlement site, are well-observed<sup>36</sup>. In Chabukauri, neither in the basilica, nor in the adjoining church, the traces of the invasion are not noticeable at all (absence of any fire traces, inclination of the constructions to one side and precious materials and jewels intact and well-preserved under the given constructions convinced us that enemies did not participate in the destruction). It seems that the basilica had been already ruined by the time of the earthquake, whereas the new church has not been built yet.

2. As it turned out, in Eastern Georgia, only two devastating earthquakes were registered in the V century – in 427 and 453. The 7-magnitude earthquake of 453 with the epicenter in the north of Caucasus Ridge, in the experts’ opinion, could not have harmed greatly the Nekresi Basilica. The epicenter of the 427 earthquake was located not very far from Nekresi, near modern *Ganja* and its magnitude here equaled 9 degrees<sup>37</sup>. This earthquake could have easily caused sudden and complete destruction of the large Chabukauri Basilica.

Therefore, the results of Chabukauri Basilica architectural and stylistic analyses and stratigraphic pictures registered at the time of the monument excavations give us sufficient reasons to identify the temple built by king Trdat in the IV century, as it is mentioned in the Georgian written sources, with the Chabukauri three-nave Basilica.

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35. D. MUSKHELISHVILI, *Georgia in IV-VIII centuries*, Tbilisi, 2003, p. 185.

36. For example, throughout the settlement of “Sakireebi”, which is situated close to Chabukauri, this layer has been dated to the end of the V century by the Tbilisi State University Laboratory of Carbon Isotopes.

37. *Atlas of Strong Earthquakes of the USSR until 1975*, Moscow, 1977, pp. 69–94.



