

TSETSKHLIJVROBA¹ AND SOME OPINIONS RELATED TO IT

„ცეცხლიჯვრობა“ და მასთან დაკავშირებული ზოგიერთი მოსაზრება

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Abstract

Tsetskhlijvari is one of the most important shrines in Mtiuleti (mountain region of eastern Georgia). Basing on the available scanty materials, somehow we tried to reconstruct the holiday linked to the shrine and put forward some of our views on its name and essence.

After many years of research and observation based on historical, archival, and field materials collected by me, I concluded that the feast is connected with the Cross of Mtskheta. From the first century to the sixth century we would distinguish three stages in the Christianization of Georgia: first, when St. Andrew, together with other apostles, joyfully tells the Georgians the story of the redemption of mankind by God. Christian communities are emerging at this time. The second stage, when in the fourth century, as a result of St. Nino's sermons, the king of Kartli Mirian officially declared Christianity the state religion of Kartli Kingdom and institutionalized the church. The Assyrian Fathers who came to Georgia in the sixth century strengthened Dyophysitism and introduced coenobitic monasticism. The second period of the spread of Christianity in Georgia I call the "period of the cross" when similar to the erection of the main cross in Mtskheta, crosses were erected in the places of idols or the places of pagan deity worship, which was followed by the construction of churches or shrines on their sites throughout the country.

Therefore, we consider that the general name of East Georgian mountain shrines – jvar-khati (lit. cross-icon) should be related to the "period of the cross" and the Cross of Mtskheta, after which are named most of the main shrines in East Georgian mountains. The term khati (icon) should denote a local shrine, as the "icon", "replica" of the main, Mtskheta Cross. Hence we think that if Lomisa is the shrine dedicated to the miracle of the Cross of Mtskheta (the Wednesday after Pentecost), Lashari should be celebrated on the feast day of the Mtskheta Cross, initially celebrated on the third Sunday after Easter, Tsetskhlijvari was originally supposed to be the feast on May, 7 or erection of the crosses and, like other shrines, was later associated with St. George's Day or Epiphany and Sunday of Thomas. We think that common community shrines should have been established in the name of the Cross of Mtskheta. Those are the main shrines of the historical-ethnographic units of Kartli Kingdom and they should be related to the Cross of Mtskheta in the "period of the cross" (fourth – circa ninth centuries).

Key words: Religious festival, Ethnology, History.

¹ Literary means the feast cross of fire.

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აბსტრაქტი

წინამდებარე სტატია მთიულეთის ერთ-ერთ საინტერესო სალოცავს, ცეცხლისჯვარს ეხება. ისტორიულ, საარქივო და ჩვენს მიერ ველზე მოპვებულ მასალაზე დაყრდნობით შევეცადეთ სტატიაში მოგვეწოდებინა სალოცავის და მასთან დაკავშირებული დღესასწაულის გარკვეული სახის რეკონსტრუქცია და გამოგვეთქვა ზოგიერთი ჩვენეული მოსაზრება მის სახელთან, არსსა და რაობასთან დაკავშირებით.

ჩვენ, I საუკუნიდან VI საუკუნის ჩათვლით, საქართველოს გაქრისტიანების სამ ეტაპს გამოვყოფდით: პირველი, როდესაც წმიდა ანდრია, სხვა მოციქულებთან ერთად, ახარებს ქართველებს ღმერთის მიერ კაცობრიობის გამოხსნის ამბავს. ამ დროს არსდება ქრისტიანულ თემები. მეორე ეტაპი, როდესაც IVს-ში წმ. ნინოს ქადაგების შედეგად, ქართლის იმდროინდელი მეფე, მირიანი, ოფიციალურად აცხადებს ქართლის სამეფოში ქრისტიანობას სახელმწიფო რელიგიად და ინსტიტუციურად არარსებს ეკლესიას. VIს-ში ჩვენში მოსული ასურელი მამები დიოფიზიტობას განამტკიცებენ და აარსებენ კინობიტურ სამონასტრო ცხოვრებას საქართველოში. ქრისტიანობის გავრცელების მეორე პერიოდს ჩვენ `ჯვრის პერიოდი` ვუწოდებთ, როდესაც მთავარი, მცხეთის ჯვრის აღმართვის დარად, სამეფოში კერპთა თაყვანისცემის თუ წარმართული ღვთაებების თაყვანისცემის ადგილას ჯვრები აღიმართა, რასაც შემდგომ, ამავე ადგილას ეკლესიების თუ სალოცავების მშენებლობა მოჰყვა. აქედან გამომდინარე, მიგვაჩნია, რომ აღმოსავლეთ საქართველოს მთიანეთის სალოცავების ზოგადი სახელი – ჯვარ-ხატები – ჯვრის პერიოდს და მცხეთის ჯვარს უნდა უკავშირდებოდეს, რომლის სახელობისაა ად. საქართველოს მთიანეთის მთავარი სალოცავების უმრავლესობა. ტერმინი ხატი უნდა ნიშნავდეს ადგილობრივ სალოცავს, როგორც მთავარი ჯვრის, მცხეთის ჯვრის ხატს. აქედან გამომდინარე ვფიქრობთ, რომ თუ ლომისა მცხეთის ჯვრის სასწაულისადმი (სულთმოფენობის მომდევნო ოთხშაბათის) მიძღვნილი სალოცავია, ლაშარი მცხეთის ჯვრის, რომელიც თავდაპირველად ზატიკის ზატიკს ანუ ადღომის მესამე კვირას უნდა ედღესასწაულათ, ცეცხლისჯვარი თავდაპირველად 7 მაისის ანუ ჯვრების აღმართვის დღესასწაული უნდა ყოფილიყო და სხვა სალოცავების დარად შემდგომ უნდა დაკავშირებოდა გიორგობას თუ ნათლისღებას და კვირაცხოვლობას. ვფიქრობთ საერთო სათემო სალოცავები მცხეთის ჯვრის სახელზე უნდა დაარსებულიყო. ანუ ქართლის სამეფოში შემავალი ისტორიულ-ეთნოგრაფიული ერთეულების მთავარი სალოცავები `ჯვრის პერიოდში` (IV-დაახ. XIსს.) მცხეთის ჯვარს უნდა დაკავშირებოდნენ.

საძიებო სიტყვები: რელიგიური დღესასწაული, ეთნოლოგია, ისტორია.

Introduction

As it is known the second stage of Christianization of Georgia, which is connected with St. Nino's preaching (fourth century) resulted in the conversion of the kingdom, declaring Christianity as a state religion and institutionalizing the church. Georgian historical chronicle, "Conversion of Kartli," tells us that after erecting the Cross of Mtskheta, idols all over the Kartli Kingdom, fell and crosses, similar to the erected main cross in Mtskheta, were erected on that very places; the places of idols or the places of pagan deity worship, which was followed by the construction of churches or shrines on their sites throughout the country. Thus, the whole network of holy places connected with Christianity and the Cross was formed, obviously showing that the pagan kingdom converted into Christianity. Thus, the Kingdom of Kartli became the "holly lend". This second period of spreading Christianity in Georgia I call the "period of the cross". According to my research, *Tsetskhlijvari* shrine should have been dedicated to the Cross of Mtskheta and thus, be one of the devoted parts of this holly network.

Methods

The paper is based on the interdisciplinary and comparative study of the issue. The study was carried out on the analyses of nowadays ethnographic, as well as archival materials and scientific literature in ethnology and history. The method of interviewing was used during the field works.

Results

The comparative study showed that this local, East Georgia mountain shrine initially should be connected with the Cross of Mtskheta. Mainly the name of Tsetskhlijvari (lit. fire cross) should be connected with the miracle of the Cross of Mtskheta and the feast day of its erecting, May, 7.

Discussion

Tsetskhlijvari is one of the most important shrines in Mtiuleti (mountain region of eastern Georgia). Basing on the available scanty materials, somehow we will try to reconstruct the holiday linked to the shrine and put forward some of our views on its name and essence.

According to Sergi Maklatia and Julieta Rukhadze this holiday is celebrated in the villages of Tsikhiani and Sharumiani in the Khada Gorge. *Tsetskhlijvari* (lit. the fire cross) also was in Tskhavati. It was the main shrine of this historical-ethnographic region. According to V. Bardavelidze, people say that this name was given to Tskhavati *Tsetskhlijvari* after a woman with periods stepped on this holy place.² Fire came down from heaven, burned the woman to ashes, leaving behind only a cross on a chain, which she had had on the breast. People said that since then this shrine had been called *Tsetskhlijvari* (Bardavelidze, 1947:27).

² Women in the shrines of the eastern Georgia are not allowed to come close to the sacred place, to step over a certain borderline.

The legend has it, that the *Tsetskhlisjvari* church was constructed in Tamar's epoch with the stones brought from the Chokhelis' Gorge 4.5 kilometers afar. The same legend tells that people stood along the entire road, passing the stones from hand to hand; and so was the church built. Water had been pumped out of the spring via gutters before the construction; according to archival materials, so many people worked here, that 7 liters of salt were needed daily for food (Bardavelidze, 1947a: 266-267; Kedeladze, 1947:2). Mikheil Kedeladze's materials tell that the church was built of mortared stone. It is located on top of a hard-to-reach mount above the village of Nadibaani, Tskhaoti community and overlooks the Aragvi River to the north. In 1947 Kedeladze found the church already ruined. The wooden door of the church had partially been burned by the lightning bolt.

People called *Tsetskhlisjvari* troublesome and *mebolove*, which meant that the icon would not punish the offender for a long time, but would eventually retaliate. People also said that the icon would revenge the offender by exterminating his cattle with the help of wild animals. But to the person who asked for forgiveness, it multiplied cattle and dairy products (Bardavelidze, 1947a: 259, 379; 2-3).

People say that in the Khada Gorge both *Tsetskhlisjvoba* and *Alaverdoba* are celebrated on Saturday (Rukhadze, 1946:162). Ruizan Kavtaradze- Dardzulidze, from the village of Nadibaani, says that they celebrated *Tsetskhlisjvoba* on St. George's Day in November.

Here is what she tells: "Our *Tsetskhlisjvari* is here. It is celebrated on 23 November.... There are ruins of a village near *Tsetskhlisjvari*. The church stands on top of the mountain. There used to be pastures on this territory. Clay pipes were laid in the ground. Water came to the village through one pipe and milk through the other. The name of the village was Zamtreuli. There was a stone wall around the village" (Ghambashidze, 2016). According to the 1947 materials, M. Kedeladze notes that since there was no flat place near the Tskhaoti *Tsetskhlisjvari*, the pilgrims gathered 100-125 meters away from the church. The place was referred to as *sajare* (place for getharing people). To the north, on a rocky hill there was the so-called *sabovrage* the niche to place the icon, to the north across the hill, there was a long square covered with trees. If the pilgrim to the church had given a promise to the shrine, he would spend the night here with his family and his guests. This was considered an accommodation place called *ghamissatevi* (place for vigil). If the cattle were slaughtered, then the guests were treated to meat, if not, only drinks and groceries were served. Next to *Tsetskhlisjvari* church there was the church of the *Mother of God*, where people prayed for children. In olden times, elders of the community would gather at *Tsetskhlisjvari* and perform rituals. Near the church Kedeladze also noticed *kvevris* (clay pots), which people called "breakfast pots". In the past, wine was poured into the pots, which was later replaced by vodka. 100-150 meters west of *sajare*, there stood a house with two parts, referred to as a community house. One part was for men, the other – for women. On the hill behind the house there were stone- box burial grounds, which the locals referred to as the tombs of monks. When, at the sunset, the celebration would end in the public square, worshipers entered the *sajare* (Kedeladze, 1947:2, 5, 6). People were afraid of *Tsetskhlisjvari*. As they said, the cross,³ the shrine walked fiery and sought for a cause. It was obligatory to spend two nights in the shrine and it was strictly forbidden to sleep. People believed that whoever fell asleep would be afflicted by the icon. *Tsetskhlisjvari* is the shrine fighting with fire.

According to Kedeladze's materials, half a kilometer away, near Tskhaoti *Tsetskhlisjvari* there lived three Kekishvili families. The history of their settlement here is as follows: three brothers Kekishvili fled from Pshavi for the fear of vendetta and settled in the village of Salajuri in Mtiuleti. The

³ In the eastern Georgian mountains shrines are called *jvari* (cross) and *khati* (icon).

eldest brother was a hunter and hunted in the woods near *Tsetskhlisjvari*. At the time the monks lived in the shrine and he was their frequent guest. When the monks heard his story they told him: our things are going bad, come and settle here, in our place, with your family. Indeed the monks handed everything over to eldest Kekishvili and his family, on the condition that every year he would pay *kulukhi* and taxes to *Tsetskhlisjvari*, from the lands which the monks had given him. *Kulukhi* included: wine, later vodka, slaughter (2 male sheep or 2 barren sheep), a quarter of a litre candle with wick, 2 *kadas* (ritual bread). In addition, the Kekishvilis would pay for hosting the pilgrims at the celebration (Kedeladze, 1947a:133-140). Thus, the pilgrims who came to the shrine offered their sacrifices and also enjoyed the *kulukhi* and taxes served by the Kekishvilis.

According to Makalatia, in the Khada Gorge the *dekanozes* (archpriests) of *Tsetskhlisjvari* would bring flags to the shrine on top of the Mount Sharumiani, the worshippers would also come here to spend a night with the icon and beg for the protection of their families and cattle from fire (Makalatia, 1930:179; Rukhadze, 1946:162). According to J. Rukhadze's materials, the pilgrims would bring *kada*, vodka, slaughter and provisions to the shrine. The archpriest (*dekanozi*) would bless the donation. A table would be laid at the shrine (Rukhadze, 1946:162). Those who prayed at the shrine would have holliday after the afternoon. They would bake special kind of *kada-Samtskalobno*. In the evening the family would sit at table, a man would light a candle, stick it to the pole and say: "Tsetskhljoro (fire cross), save us both people and cattle" (Rukhadze, 1946:162).

A very large *kada* was baked for the celebration of the Tskhavati *Tsetskhlisjvari*. For each family the archpriest (*dekanozi*) would weigh 1 kilo of melted butter, from which *kada* had to be baked. The *kada* was carried on the head to the shrine. Community slaughter, a sheep, was brought there too. The afflicted brought theirs separately. Pilgrims also brought money. Those, who had made a vow to the icon, mostly women, would put a few pebbles into their mouth and would walk barefooted to *Tsetskhlisjvari* church, and leave the pebbles at a certain spot (Kedeladze, 1947b:101-106). Kedeladze notes, that there were 2 roads leading to the Tskhaoti shrine, and women would throw the pebbles at the crossing of these roads (Kedeladze, 1947:1). Women would light candles, carry the sacrifice and cut them in the name of their children, so that *Tsetskhlisjvari* would grant them long life and health (Kedeladze, 1947b:101-106; Bardavelidze, 1947:264). Next to *Tsetskhlisjvari* Church (as told by the narrators from the villages of Manaseuli and Nadibaani) there was the Church of the Mother of God, where, for the celebration of *Tsetskhlisjvari* the pilgrims would light candles for their children's health and well-being, slash the ritual bread, they also used *kulukhi*⁴ of *Tsetskhlisjvari* brought from the mountain hay meadows and estates (Bardavelidze, 1947:260, 263; 274, 47).

To better understand what the Feast of the Cross of Fire was we will draw your attention to its four components: *date, distinguished sacrifice in the form of a large Kada pastry, connection to the fire, protection of women and children*. It should also be emphasized here, that the Cross of Fire in Tskhavati and the Khada Gorge were somewhat differently celebrated. In the Khada Gorge, the Cross of Fire is not the chief shrine of the area, and thus it acquires a slightly different context, which is the subject of a separate study. As it is known chief shrine of the Khada Gorge is *Khadijvari* (Topchishvili, 2017:150).

According to Mikheil Kedeladze's materials, the Cross of Fire was celebrated on Epiphany, Sunday of Thomas and St. George's Day (Kedeladze, 1947b:101-106). In Khada today, it is celebrated on the seventieth day from Easter,⁵ i.e. on the tenth Sunday after Easter, which is the third Sunday

⁴ Here taxes are meant.

⁵ For the information we are grateful to Gela Kistaouri.

after Pentecost and one of the Saturdays of the Apostles' Fast. According to our informant from Nadibaani, they celebrate this holiday on St. George's Day at Tsetskhlisjvari in the deserted village of Zamtreuli. We should assume that since in the Khada Gorge the date of the Cross of Fire is counted from Easter, it should have some kind of connection with Easter. Strange to us is that the seventieth day after Easter is usually the Apostles' Fast. The seventieth day after Easter can only be free from the Fast if Easter comes extremely late. For example, in 1961-2020 Easter coincided three times with May 1, four times with May 4, 5 and once with May 8 (Calendar of the Georgian Church, 1976:397). Hence, the seventieth day after Easter will coincide with the day free from Fast only if Easter comes at least on May 4. In the shrines of West Georgian highlands, as a rule, slaughtering is prohibited during Fast.

Julietta Rukhadze provides very interesting information regarding the date of *Tsetskhlisjvropa*: "It is noteworthy that a number of holidays were held in Georgia on 7 May. An example of this is *Tsetskhlisjvari* – common shrine of Tskhavati community in Mtiuleti, located on the hill above the village of Nadibaani" (Rukhadze, 2001:200). Roland Topchishvili notes that, *Tsetskhlisjvari* was the common shrine of the historical Tskhavati community and that Khada and Tskhavati were independent ethnographic units (Topchishvili, 2017:150). This fact is of certain significance for our discussion, which we will touch upon below. Thus, evidently, the Cross of Fire holiday (*Tsetskhlisjvropa*) – main shrine of Tskhavati was celebrated on May 7, which may even be the original date of the holiday.

As said above the sacrifice for the Cross of Fire was a large *kada*. In addition to *Tsetskhlisjvropa*, the tradition of baking a *kada* larger than traditional size is also known for 2 other holidays.

The second holiday is *Gergetoba* in Khevi. Traditionally *Gergetoba* was held three times a year: on the so-called *Sameboba* (Trinity Day), i.e. third day after Easter, *Peristsvaleba* (Transfiguration) and *Mariamoba* (Holy Virgin's Day) on 28 August. On *Mariamoba* night, the Sujashvilis and Khutshvilis from Gergeti would bake a large *kada-Kobobi*. The *kada* would be baked with 10 pounds (Itonishvili, 2015:177, 203-204) of melted butter in the common oven of district. Because it was too big it was pulled out with a plow belt. It was cut and distributed to all families. From the filling of the sliced large *kada* they baked ordinary, traditional-sized *kadas* and made noodles from the crust. The rule for baking a large *kada* was called *didkadoba*. According to Valerian Itonishvili this rule was followed until 1850. Later only small *kadas* were baked. S. Makalatia notes that *dekanozes* -the archpriests- of Sameba Church celebrated *didkadoba* on the third day after Easter. A large *kada*, baked from 5 liters of melted butter, would be brought to the roof of the house, cut and distributed to all families (Makalatia, 1934:229). Obviously, *didkadoba* must have been related first to Easter period and to the Virgin Mary; later, it became fully connected with 28 August, Dormition of the Virgin.

On the second Thursday of Lent Tusheti celebrated *Erumsaletoba* – a commemoration day of the deceased. This was considered a great holiday in the East Georgian Mountains. In Tusheti on this day every family would bake a loaf of bread on a clay tile, roast grains, cook beans, light candles and put one liter of vodka on the table before sunrise. With vodka they would drink to the souls of the deceased. The bread of the day was referred to as *Erumsaletoba* bread. People believed it should be as big as possible. For it was to be rolled to Jerusalem and enter the gates of Jerusalem. On the one hand, it had to "get to the souls of the deceased". And on the other hand, the souls of the dead should be able to come and gather in their families. The dead would be able to "look into this world" and "come from Jerusalem" (Bochoridze, 1993:307). As a result of research on this issue we have concluded that *Erumsaletoba-Sultakrepa* is a syncretic folk holiday, in which pre-Christian views and beliefs of death and resurrection, fertility-abundance based on the cult of the deceased were linked to the Christian; were connected with one of the most important norms of ecclesiastical life – fasting. Moreover,

connected to Lent and the preparation period for “bestowing life on those in the tombs” is Easter, one of the most important days to commemorate the souls in the Orthodox liturgical practice. The related Tushetian narration touches upon the Gospel story and the greatest visible miracle of Christians about Jesus Christ who rolls the stone and rises from death. When, after the crucifixion, the Savior smashed the door to hell and freed the souls of the dead. Of what actually reminds us the miracle of the Divine fire that comes from the Savior’s tomb on Holy Sunday in Jerusalem. The folk collective unconscious connected the unusual bread of Erumsaletoba *with* Jesus Christ, the Savior’s tombstone. Practically, *Erumsaletoba-Sultakrepa* is a commemoration day of the deceased; celebration of resurrection of the dead and eternal life, at the same time (Ghambashidze, 2010:92-100).

The tradition of women bringing pebbles to *Tsetskhlijvari* for the sake of their children’s health and well-being in our opinion finds parallel with *Mamadavitoba* in Tbilisi and the ethnographic material we collected in Akhaltsikhe in 2017.

It is known that childless women and unmarried girls prayed to St. Davit of Gareja, as he was known to be the giver and protector of family life. Unmarried girls would try to pin pebbles in the wall of Father Davit’s Church. If the pebble was fixed and some noise was heard, it was the sign that the request was received and the praying person would soon get married (...ზ., 1846:25-26; 1854:2).

Regarding the church of Abi, which overlooks Akhaltsikhe, our attention was drawn to the black stone placed near the altar on the outside of the church. People believe that when they put a little stone against this stone and make a wish, if their stone gets fixed, their wish will come true. The wall of the church above the stone is blackened, which makes us think that candles were lit here. Alongside the Georgians, the Armenians also come here to this stone (Ghambashidze, 2017). Obviously, throwing pebbles at the holy place, so to say fixing a stone in the “Holy wall”, on a sacred stone was conducted for the purpose of marriage and childbearing.

Sergi Makalatia expresses an interesting opinion concerning *Tsetskhlijvroba*, the Cross of fire. He links the Cross of Fire Church of the Khada Gorge and Naghvarevi-Kharkheti to the “miraculous Cross of fire which showed itself to the newly converted Iberians on one of the hills in Mtskheta” (Makalatia, 1930:179). For illustration we will refer to the oldest known version of the “Conversion of Kartli”, discovered in the 1990s. According to this version, which is also confirmed by other versions, on 7 May from Friday evening to Saturday until dawn, everyone saw the Cross of Fire crown of stars above the Church, in which there were the crosses, carved on 1 May, to be erected outside Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. At dawn, two stars separated from the crown. One moved to the East, the other – to the West. The Cross of Fire itself with the crown hung above the hill on the other side of the Mtkvari River, where one of the crosses, lately called the Cross of Mtskheta, was erected (“Moktsevai Kartlisai”, 2007:57-58). On Wednesday after Pentecost, as is well known, a miracle happened at Mtskheta Cross. Above the cross erected on the Golgotha in Mtskheta there appeared a Cross of fire, seven times brighter than the sun, made of twelve stars. Angels were moving on the Cross of Fire, the hill was moving and fragrance was sprayed around (Chronicles, 1973:91). Thus according to the historical source, the Cross of fire is a spiritual, heavenly icon of the Cross of Mtskheta.

As it is known, when one of the crosses was erected on the Golgotha in Mtskheta, a historical source writes “...In the country of Kartli all idols that stood on the borders of Kartli immediately fell down, were smashed and their shrines were destroyed” (Klarjeti Polisepalon, 1991:351).

“High mountains of the Caucasus, still involuntarily provoking respect were the object of special reverence for the ancient pagans. Where altars to the gods had been erected in centuries-old oak forests, Christian preachers erected Holy Cross, constructed churches, to whom the inherited respect is still preserved among the ancient descendants of this region” – Platon Ioseliani writes (Ioseliani, 1846:40).

After many years of research and observation, we came to the conclusion that the aforementioned is also confirmed by ethnographic material. From the first century to the sixth century we would distinguish three stages in the Christianization of Georgia: first, when St. Andrew, together with other apostles, joyfully tells the Georgians the story of the redemption of mankind by the God. Christian communities are emerging at this time. Second stage, when in the fourth century, as a result of St. Nino's sermons, then the king of Kartli Mirian officially declared Christianity the state religion of Kartli Kingdom and institutionalized the church. The Assyrian fathers who came to Georgia in the sixth century strengthened Dyophysitism and introduced coenobitic monasticism (Ghambashidze, 2008: 456-458). The second period of the spread of Christianity in Georgia I call the “period of cross”, when similar to the erection of main cross in Mtskheta, crosses were erected in the places of idols or the places of pagan deity worship, which was followed by the construction of churches or shrines on their sites throughout the country. This is known to be typical and characteristic of spreading Christianity in the world, which began in the preaching period of the apostles. Therefore, we consider that general name of East Georgian Mountain shrines – *jvar-khati* (lit. cross-icon) should be related to the “period of cross” and the Cross of Mtskheta, after which are named most of main shrines in East Georgian Mountains (Ghambashidze, Alavardashvili, 2018:246-251, 343, 356). The term *khati* (icon) should denote a local shrine, as the “icon”, “replica” of the main, Mtskheta Cross. Hence we think that if *Lomisa* is the shrine dedicated to the miracle of the Cross of Mtskheta (the Wednesday after Pentecost), *Lashari* should be celebrated on the feast day of the Mtskheta Cross, initially celebrated on the third Sunday after Easter, *Tsetskhlisjvari* was originally supposed to be the feast on 7 May or erection of the crosses and, like other shrines, was later associated with St. George's Day, Epiphany and Sunday of Thomas. We think that common community shrines should have been established in the name of the Cross of Mtskheta. That is main shrines of the historical-ethnographic units of Kartli Kingdom should be related to the Cross of Mtskheta in the “period of cross” (fourth – circa ninth centuries).

The consideration that the Cross of Fire, Tsetskhlisjvari, should be the feast of the Cross of Mtskheta is also supported by the fact that, like Mtskheta Cross, the Cross of Fire is also associated with the Mother of God. As we know 7 May was followed by a one-week (8-15 May) holiday of the Mother of God. Both the Cross of Mtskheta and the Mother of God grant and protect childbearing. Pernoctation and vigilance were necessary at Tsetskhlisjvari. Falling asleep was strictly forbidden. According to a historical source, the people of Mtskheta spent the night of 6 May, from Friday to Saturday 7 May, in prayer and again they saw Mtskheta Cross with the Cross of Fire and the crown of stars above it. Could that strange-size *kada*, which was carried on the head to the shrine, be the symbol of that very crown?

Could the ritual bread, which was a pre-Christian solar symbol, this time, represent the crown of stars, celestial bodies above the Cross of Fire? If the great ritual bread *Erumsaletoba* was associated with Christ and the tomb of the Savior, then, as if, in the folk psychology, the folk imagination, the great ritual bread was associated with the crown of the stars of the Mtskheta cross, which people carried to the Tskhavati fire cross.

Finally, we would like to point out, that the main shrine of Tskhavati community – *Tsetskhlijvari*, which should be dedicated to the 7 May celebration of the Mtskheta Cross, is located within the frames of St. Nino's active preaching.

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