

**SANEBA OF TSROLI - CYCLE OF TSROLI MOUNTAIN AND HOLY TRINITY
SHRINE****ცროლის სანება - ცროლის მთის და წმინდა სამების სალოცავის ციკლი****NINO GAMBASHIDZE**

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Abstract

In this article, we publish a series of myths (*Andrezi*) about Mount Tsroli. The term "*Andrezi*" essentially refers to something verbal, whether oral or written. It embodies the weight of a testament passed down from a father-ancestor to their descendants, demanding the unwavering fulfillment of its contents. They represent the faith of a member of the congregation who harbors no doubt about the truth of *Andrezi* passed down through generations, as everything around them, from the landscape to current events, affirms the authenticity of *Andrezi*.

In Caucasus, mountains always played a crucial part in systems of ancestor worship. Mountains became part of a complex network connecting communities, as the history of ancestors and cultural meanings were etched into their landscapes.

A prominent theme in Georgian mythological narratives, bordering on a distinct genre, revolves around the establishment of shrines and churches. Virtually all the shrines, renowned for their miraculous events, trace their founding back to *Andrezi*. This genre is prevalent in the mountainous regions of Eastern Georgia, although in all parts of South Caucasus, they are a very important actors of the mythological narratives. Furthermore, the mountains themselves are objects of worship, viewed as the Houses of the Creator. They are intricately tied to the ancient world's understanding of the universe.

In this collection there are presented five myths in English translation. These myths are: **Saneba of Tsroli, Sajanghe's sheltered Kists, The leader of the Cross of Saneba, Miracles of Tsroli Mountain, The Salt Vedza, The story of Blacksmith from Mitkho.**

Keywords: Caucasiology; Ancient history; Mythology; Religion, Folklore and literature.**ნინო ღამბაშიძე**

ისტორიის დოქტ., ნიუ ვიჟენის უნივერსიტეტის ასოც. პროფ.

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აბსტრაქტი

წინამდებარე სტატიაში ვეხებით მითოლოგიური გადმოცემების ციკლს (ანდრეზებს) ცროლის მთის შესახებ. ტერმინი „ანდრეზი“ ნიშნავს ზეპირსა თუ წერილობით გადმოცემას. იგი წარმოადგენს ერთგვარ სავალდებულო წესს, რომლის ცოდნა და ზედმიწევნითი აღსრულება სავალდებულოა და მშობლიდან, თუ წინაპრებისგან გადაეცემა შთამომავლობას. ანდრეზები თემის წევრების რწმენა-წარმოდგენებისა და წეს-ჩვეულებების ერთობლიობაა, რომლებიც ექვის გარეშე მიიღება სალოცავის „ყმების“ მიერ, რამეთუ ყოველივე, რაც მათ ირგვლივ არსებობს თუ ხდება, სწორედ ანდრეზის უტყუარობაზე მიუთითებს.

კავკასიის მთიანეთში მუდამ მტკიცედ იყო გამჯდარი წინაპართა რჯულის ზედმიწევნითი აღსრულების საქმე. კავკასიის მთიანეთმა გააერთიანა სხვადასხვა კუთხისა თუ ეთნოსების წარმომადგენლები, ვინაიდან ისტორიამ და კულტურამ მჭირდოდ დააკავშირა მათი ბედ-იღბალი.

ქართული მითოლოგიური გადმოცემების ერთი უმთავრესი თემა, შეიძლება ითქვას ჟანრიც კი, არის სალოცავებისა და კულტმსახურების ძეგლების დაარსება. ყველა ამ სალოცავსა და წმინდა ადგილს დაარსების სასწაულებრივი ისტორია აქვს, რაც აისახება ანდრეზებში. ეს ჟანრი განსაკუთრებით პრევალირებს აღმოსავლეთ საქართველოს მთიანეთში, თუმცადა, მთელი სამხრეთ კავკასიის მითოლოგიური გადმოცემებისათვისაა დამახასიათებელი. უფრო მეტიც, თავად მთები წარმოადგენენ თავყვანისცემის ობიექტებს, რამეთი ისინი მიიჩნევიან შემომქმედის სამყოფელად. ამრიგად, მთები ბუნებრივად უკავშირდებიან სამყაროს შექმნის უძველეს წარმოდგენებსაც.

მოცემულ სტატიაში წარმოვადგენთ ხუთი მითის ინგლისურ თარგმანს. ეს მითებია: „ცროლის სანება“, „საჯანღეს შეფარებული ქისტები“, „სანების ჯვრის გამძღო“, „ცროლის მთის სასწაულები“, „მარილის ვეპა“ და „მითხოელი მჭედლის ამბავი“.

საძიებო სიტყვები: კავკასიოლოგია; უძველესი ისტორია; მითოლოგია; რელიგია; ფოლკლორი და ლიტერატურა.

Introduction

At the core of all mythological systems lies the need for localization, often in specific places. Primarily, these are mountains, as they are perceived as the nearest points to heavenly forces. Consequently, every culture, regardless of its religious affiliations, designates a specific area as the home of its pantheon. Sacred mountains play significant roles in various religions and frequently serve as focal points for legends. The summit of a mountain, believed to be the closest to heaven, holds profound symbolic value. Many religious traditions center on these mountains, deeming them sacred or connecting them to significant events. Examples include Mount Olympus in Greek mythology, Mount Sinai in Judaism and Christianity, which have both historical and mythical associations.

Edwin Bernbaum, an expert on sacred mountains, identifies ten themes common in various cultures¹. These include:

- the height of the mountain;

¹ Bernbaum, (2002)

- its central role connecting different cosmic realms;
- its power;
- association with deities;
- functioning as a temple or place of worship;
- representing paradises or gardens;
- connections to ancestors and the dead;
- providing community identity;
- serving as a source of blessings and acting as a site for revelation;
- transformation;
- inspiration;
- renewal.

In this article, we have chosen to publish a series of myths (*Andrezi*) about Mount Tsroli. The term "*Andrezi*" essentially refers to something verbal, whether oral or written. It embodies the weight of a testament passed down from a father-ancestor to their descendants, demanding the unwavering fulfillment of its contents. "*The narratives found in Andrezi are foundational, rooted in the religious or secular institutions of society, behavior, morality, formal or informal relationships, and all that constitutes the existence and functioning of a historically evolved community of people. "Andrezi Martal As" (Andrezi is true) - these words essentially encapsulate this concept*"². They represent the faith of a member of the congregation who harbors no doubt about the truth of *Andrezi* passed down through generations, as everything around them, from the landscape to current events, affirms the authenticity of *Andrezi*.

Historically, mountains played a central part in systems of mountain and ancestor worship. Mountains became part of a complex network connecting communities, as the history of ancestors and cultural meanings were etched into their landscapes. Sacred mountains contribute significantly to a culture's identity, symbolizing their natural and cultural identity.

A prominent theme in Georgian mythological narratives, bordering on a distinct genre, revolves around the establishment of shrines and churches. Virtually all the shrines, renowned for their miraculous events, trace their founding back to *Andrezi*. This genre is prevalent in the mountainous regions of Eastern Georgia. Furthermore, the mountains themselves are objects of worship, viewed as the Houses of the Creator. They are intricately tied to the ancient world's understanding of the universe.

In this context, each mountain is revered and considered a sacred place, demanding special purification practices for a person to approach. *Andrezi* details the mandatory procedures for purification and provides guidance on how the liturgy—worshiping the deity—should be conducted. This intricate connection between the mythological narratives, sacred spaces, and worship practices underscores the rich cultural and spiritual tapestry of Eastern Georgia.

In the worldwide **agricultural culture**, mountains were places for **pasturage and harvesting different sorts of grains**³. The mythological narratives, tends to concern either the avoidance of damage by wild animals, or flocks to religious property, or disputes between cities over pasturage rights⁴—in other words, cases where the affairs of herdsmen impinged on the wider community.

Mountains were a **source of raw materials**. Sometimes this is stone or metal; usually it is wood, rarely salt. Scholars have differed over just how much afforestation of mountains there was in ancient times⁵ but that one of the reasons for going to an the mountain was for mining.

Mountains played various roles in **warfare**. In time of extreme need the mountain could function as a kind of temporary acropolis, a refuge for those with no prospect of winning a pitched battle and no safe settlement to which to withdraw humans and treasuries.

² Kiknadze Z. (2004)

³ Georgoudi, (1974), p. 155, Skydsgaard, (1988), p. 75

⁴ Sartre, (1979), p. 275

⁵ Halstead, (1987), p. 79

“West to Rioni Gorge, under the Caucasus mountain chain, there is a very high mountain - Khomli⁶. It gained its name because of its high, equal to plead name. There is a cave curved in the midst of the mountain, which is inaccessible for the enemies, shelter for the treasuries of the kings. From Gorda, up to Caucasus Mountains, is located the Lechkhomi region which is named after the Khomli Mountain – Lechkhomi. When the country will get into a great necessity, the Khomli Mountain will rescue it?”⁷.

Mountain as **fortification structure** - fire-signaling from beacons on the mountain and the stone construction – tower - was developed with enormous ingenuity. Clearly, though, this is all peripheral to the main issue: fighting. The mountain was a territory which could be exploited by light-armed troops, but which was wholly unsuited to the heavy armored state troops. It was a place for deception, for ambush, for night combat. Given the pervasive rules of appropriateness underpinning Georgian state warfare, the mountain warfare is as relatively frequent as it was the border with northern tribes, who were combating the civilized Emperies. Retrospectively, Georgian Kingdom was envisioned by Persia, Greece, Rome and Byzantine in various epochs, as the border supporter for them. Thus Georgia, during the whole history of the civilized humankind, had regional purpose as the defender of the Caucasian mountains. This became quite fatal during 17th-18th centuries, when Daghestanian burglars got involved in trading with the slaves with Ottoman Empire and Persia.

In the same framework of ideas— the mountain, a space which is simultaneously not the city and not the plain, should form the **backdrop to the military education of the adolescent male**, at the stage when he was neither (yet) a full member of the community nor (yet) a warrior⁸.

The mountain could be an **initiatory space**. Within these tales, discernible traces of historical events emerge, such as the conversion of mountain-dwelling people to Christianity during the reign of King Tamar in the 12th century. The same frame could be traced in Rising King Tamar’s son Lasha-Giorgi in mountains, to become the inheriting of the Georgian Kingdom, which was in its “Golden Era” in those times.

Additionally, these narratives reflect the intricate relationships between Georgians and North Caucasian peoples, including the Vainakhs, Kists, Chechens, and others.

Finally, mountains of Georgia, as well as in other parts of the Ancient world, including Greece in Classical era, were considered as sanctuaries for Gods. In A.B. Cook's monumental study of the god there are references to nearly 100 mountain cults⁹.

The Adoration of the Clouds, while potentially linked to other aspects of Orphic doctrine and susceptible to resurfacing in popular practices, was often dismissed as foolish and futile. Christianity, however, not only holds the memory of "a cloud that overshadowed them" (Mark 9:7) and "a cloud" that "received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9) but also anticipates the arrival of "another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud" (Rev. 10:1). Additionally, Christianity envisions a final revelation with "a white cloud, and upon the cloud one... like unto the Son of man" (Rev. 14:14). In Christian tradition, these references to clouds are not ridiculed but rather revered as significant and meaningful occurrences.

In the cycle of the Tsroli Mountain in addition to Christian saints, the mythological narratives introduce non-Christian characters, including both men and women. Some of these figures are borrowed from Islam

⁶ Georgian Synonym of Pleads – the Kimah constellation (Job 9:9) or Kesil constellation (Isaiah 13:10), is used as an acronym for the mountain in Khvamli, also known as Khomli, is a limestone massif situated in Georgia, specifically in Lechkhumi, within the western part of the region near the administrative border of Tsageri and Tskaltubo municipalities. The massif reaches a height of 2002 meters above sea level. It constitutes a double crest and is primarily composed of Cretaceous limestone. Approximately 300 meters to the south lies the Simkali slope, home to the historical Khvamli Sakhizari - a refuge or shelter cave. The northern slopes of both crests are marked by numerous karst funnels, enhancing the geological features of the area. Notable among the caves in the vicinity are Tekenteri, accessible through a beech hole, and the Boga ice cave. Surrounded by a mixed forest, Khvamli provides a picturesque natural setting. Its diverse geological formations and historical caves contribute to its significance in the region. (Bliadze, 2003).

⁷ Batonishvili, (1948), p. 148

⁸ Vidal-Naquet (1981), p. 154

⁹ Cook (1940), p. 68

or Judaism. Antagonistic entities such as "Devi" (derived from the Indo-European Deus), "Kajs" (goblins), "Eshmaks" (Devils), and others seem to be remnants inherited from ancient religions that have faded away over time. However, despite their diverse origins, all of these mythical beings, in spite of being devil by their nature, ultimately obey the highest power— "The Creator." This convergence contributes to the formation of a monotheistic pantheon with a distinctive hierarchy in the mythological landscape.

It's noteworthy that atheism, imposed as the prevailing ideology in the late 19th and particularly the 20th century, left a profound impact on the religious practices of all peoples under the Russian influence. This circumstance may elucidate the fusion of religious practices—individuals, devoid of formal religious education, might have devised their own subjects of worship. Relying on their memories, they sought to reconstruct practices without a complete understanding, endeavoring to establish worship methods that appeared logical or at least "traditional." In essence, they were striving to preserve their cultural identity in the midst of suppression from Russian imperial policies.

The tendency of reacting *Andrezi* – following Christianity, being turned off from Christian culture, can be observed in the formal Georgian literature. For instance, the poem "Davitiani" by the renowned Georgian poet Davit Guramishvili. Captured by the Leks¹⁰ and sold, Guramishvili laments the weakening of faith, which led to a decline in courage among the people. Consequently, he, along with many other men and women, became commodities in trade between the Leks, the Ottoman Empire, and unscrupulous individuals. In the spirit of lament, reminiscent of folk tales and *Andrezi*, where there is regret for losing holy places due to discouragement or impurity in society, Guramishvili recounts the story of his captivity. This narrative bears striking similarities to the legends of Tsroli Mountain presented below.

In the presented mythological texts it is worth to mention a linguistic context as well. Among others, our sight was captured by linguistic borrowings from the Russian language also make their presence felt. An illustrative example is the term "Bobochka/babochka," borrowed from the Russian "бабочка" meaning "butterfly." This term is utilized to describe a wooden door adorned with ornaments, showcasing the influence of Russian language and culture on the mythological narratives of Eastern Georgia.

In the mythological cycle of the Tsroli Mountain, the existence of the sacred Sajanghe Grove, known as the "Flying Cross," is apparent throughout the mountainous region of Eastern Georgia. These "crosses", also referred to as *Andrezi*, are widespread in areas where people live in congregations under the protection of divine entities.

The narrative describes these crosses as potentially possessing the characteristic of flight, although all crosses, being material symbols of the Son of God, could be considered as such. In certain communities, the attribute of flying becomes a permanent epithet for the Cross, representing the Son of God. For instance, Khadu's Saneba is mentioned in a eulogy as the "Flying angel of the beard". This flying angel, representing the Trinity, follows a specific path of crucifixion and travel.

Saneba, originating from Bethlehem, moves to the lowland but faces desecration, leading to its relocation to the high mountain of Khmelt Shuachi (in the midst of earth). The rhythm of the cross's movement, from mountain to lowland and back to mountain, signifies a historical pattern during challenging times.

The story emphasizes the sanctification of the congregation's territory, with the cross often traveling with the ruler and kept in an ark until needed. The ark holds significance, reminiscent of the ark of the Lord in Israel.

The narrative delves into various locations where the cross flies, marking places for prayer and establishing its presence. However, as holiness declines, the cross's disappearance is foretold. The narrative concludes by noting that the phenomenon of a cross flying from its original place, seeking a higher existence, is a common theme in the history of cross-icons.

¹⁰ According to Leonti Mroveli, Lekos was granted territories extending from the Sea of Daruband to the river Lomek, and northward up to the great river of Khazareti. This suggests that Lekos was likely the first king in the territory of Dagestan (Djanashvili, 1897). Etymology: The Georgian term "Leki" is naturally associated with the Laks, as noted by P. K. Uslar: Uslar, P. (1889).

Saneba of Tsroli

Historically, according to the "Chronicle" of the "Conversion of Kartli," when Alexander the Great conquered Kartli, Azo, who was appointed as his ruler, defined the borders of Hereti as extending to the east, Egrisi water to the west, Armenian water to the south, and Mount Tsroli (referred to as "Tsroli Mountain") to the north¹¹.

In folklore, Tsroli Mountain was regarded as the boundary of the Khevsurian community with the lands of Kists, as depicted in a folk poem: *"To pass through the bearded stalls, Border with blood and Kists..."* Additionally, in local belief, it is evident from *Andrezi* that the Khevsurian people considered Tsroli Mountain as the center or "navel" of the earth¹². At an elevation of 3100 meters on Mount Tsroli, there is a sacred icon known as "Saneba Tsroli Tsveri" (Holy Trinity of Saneba Peak), which is revered by game hunters and "Buglers"¹³.

One of these *Andrezi* recounts that before Saneba of Tsroli was established, it was located in a field near a village. The cross of the Saneba (Trinity) is still venerated in various places, but its primary chapel and dwelling is situated on Mount Tsroli. His attendants referred to this cross as: "Flying angel, Batono Sanebav Tsrolistsveris" (Flying angel, Lord of Saneba of the Peak of Tsroli). While Saneba was in the field, it was believed by the people of plain that when they prepared to visit the cross, they would consecrate themselves for a month, avoiding impure places and refraining from contact with women. If any such transgressions occurred, they would abstain from going to the cross. Unfortunately, over time, a few individuals began to disregard these customs, and the practice spread. Consequently, the sanctity of the cross waned, and it was cast aside. Saneba then retreated to the mountains, avoiding the village altogether, and established "Khmelt Shuachi" (In between of the land) on the lofty heights of Tsroli Mountain¹⁴.

There are rare researches regarding etymology of the word "Tsroli". Thus our understanding can be only speculative, rather than an established scientific opinion. There are two versions of understanding the word **Tsroli**:

Tsra (ცრა/tsra) = **sieving**. *Tsra* – is the verb, which means: 1. sieving of wheat flour; 2. Cleaning of coarse impurities with a special sand sieve; 3. Slow but intensive raining, precipitation, drizzle, sleet, and torrent. : *Jhinhlva, t'qorva: moijanhga, shemodgomis tsam tsra daiwyo* (I. Mchedlidze) – Sky became gray and the autumn sky has started to drizzle. This version seems true, because on the slopes of Tsroli mountain there is the forest, name of which is **Sajanghe** (misty, cloudy, and dark). In this forest find their shelter the Kistian burglars. This root should form the word **Tsremli** (ცრემლი) = tear – the drops coming down from the mountain¹⁵. If it is connected with the concept of raining, and thus make similarity to the Greek mythology, where Zeus is the god of rain. In a review of the evidence for mountain-tops as locations for sanctuaries of Zeus, Merle K. Langdon has concluded that, while occasionally these are explicitly dedicated to Zeus as god of rain (e.g. Zeus Ombrios on Hymettos), in most cases no specific divine function of this or any other kind can be identified with certainty¹⁶. Nevertheless the association between Zeus and the peak is worth noting as an example of differentiation in the religious topography of the mountains¹⁷.

Another interpretation could be found by connecting the root **Tsroli** to *tsurva* - landslide avalanche. As the prominent Georgian Linguist, Merab Chukhua suggests, Svanetian Ch-l-zs, Lnt. Ch-al-lshkh. – "avalanche"// Ch-al-ob-zs., "frequent avalanches". In Georgian it corresponds: *tsor-, tsor-ial-i, a-tsor-d-a, a-tsor-v-eb-a, and tsor-v-a* (to slide on snow or valley)¹⁸. From This definition, it is clear that the Georgian

¹¹ Gigineishvili B., Giunashvili E., (1979) p. 320

¹² Tradition (2008), pp. 11-12

¹³ Kiknadze (2004), Mythological Encyclopedia for Youth. vol III, Georgian Mythology, pp. 104-105

¹⁴ Kiknadze (2009), p. 81

¹⁵ Chikobava A, et al., (1956-1964)

¹⁶ Langdon (1989) and Cook (1940)

¹⁷ Buxton, (1992), p. 5

¹⁸ Orbeliani, Sul Khan-Saba, S. Iordanishvili (editor), (1949)

root *tsor-* means submersion, which covers the semantics of the Svanetian word for "avalanche". The Svanetian *ch-al-* is derived from *o – a* (compare *gom-i : g al*) and though *r / l* characteristic phonetical processes. The Kartvelian **tsor – "to fell in, deepen, fall apart"*. Georgian: *tsor-*, Svanetian *ch al- // ch l *chor-*¹⁹.

In conclusion, the *Andrezi* of Saneba in Tsroli can be interpreted as a representation of the fundamental understanding of the creation of the universe by the Khevsurian people:

The Creator, in their perception, is the one who sends them water in the form of rain to bless their fertile fields. When they disobey, He sends avalanches as a means of punishment.

In the past, people obeyed the Creator and lived in purity. However, as time passed, they lost the custom of purity and the associated rituals. Consequently, the Saneba (the Holy Trinity) departed from the people and returned to the place of its origin – the peak of the mountain. Now, people must exert effort to reach it and seek its blessings.

Thus, the series of the Tsroli Mountain make similarities to Greek mythology, and, in particular, to the Zeus.

Apparently, the mythological cycle is representation of Georgian history, reflected in people's memoirs.

Text: **The Saneba of Tsroli**^{20and 21}

1. The Cross of the Saneba of Tsroli is revered in various locations, with its primary chapel and residence situated atop a lofty mountain called Tsroli.
2. The priest offers praises to the Cross with the words:
3. "Flying angel, Lord of the Saneba of the Cross of Tsroli."²²
4. Before the Saneba of Tsroli was established, it resided in a field near a village.
5. Upon its founding in the field, people were strong believers.
6. People of plain (males of plain) During holy days, the people of the plain observed fasting for several weeks, before they were going to visit the holy place, either for festival was coming soon, for the whole month they maintained themselves "clean".
7. They would not come close to those, who were known as not pure; neither would they come close to women. If something like this would happen, they would obtain to going to the holy Cross²³.
8. If they were coming to the church without cleansing procedures, they would be punished severely. Failing to adhere to these practices meant exclusion from the church and condemnation for them and their descendants.
9. Over time, people began to neglect these rules. A few started attending the church without purification, setting a precedent that others followed.

¹⁹ Chukhua, M. (2003). p. 330

²⁰ **Tsroli** - is a mountain located in Georgia, specifically in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region within the Dusheti municipality. Situated on the principal ridge of the Caucasus, it is part of the Tusheti-Khevsureti area, and it marks the headwaters of the Aragvi and Arghun rivers of Khevsureti. Tsroli is positioned to the east of the Kalothana pass, within the Khevsureti region, and it boasts an elevation of 3441 meters.

²¹ Ochiauri M 17. Notebook 1.

²² In Georgian: "Mp'rinao angelozo, batono sanebav c'rolisverisao". The suffix "-o" is the Vocative case determinant in Georgian. Thus, the sentence "mp'rinao angelozo, batono sanebav c'rolisverisao" (Flying angel, our Lord, Saneba) – is an appeal in the prayer – a human addresses the deity.

²³ The Cross - **Jvari**– In Eastern Georgia, mostly in mountainous regions, "Jvari" means the sacred place, where the community would gather for diverse rituals. "Jvari" would unite those, who had obligation to serve various rituals, according to their belonging to community, or to clan. The families were assigned various professions during serving the "Jvari".

10. They did not abstain neither communicating with unrespect people, nor being with women. Entertainment and interaction with women became commonplace.
11. Even physical cleansing was disregarded as people approached the Cross in a state, daring even to touch sacred vessels and precious items.
12. Consequently, the Cross of Saneba grew displeased²⁴ with its servants and withdrew from the valley and went to the mountains for defending its purity.
13. Even in the mountains, the Cross did not stay within the village; instead, it settled atop the high mountain of Tsroli.
14. During this era in Khadu, there lived a man named Kera²⁵ from the Chargali²⁶ origin.
15. Kera was a man from Chargali. He had a fondness for Ukan-Khadu as his place of dwelling, which was unoccupied at the time.
16. Kera learned of the establishment of the Cross of Saneba through a vision: at night, he witnessed the peak of Tsroli Mountain illuminated consistently.
17. At first bewildered, he eventually decided to investigate the source of the light.
18. Upon reaching the mountain's summit, Kera saw an angelic figure perched on a high rock with the face of a dove²⁷, gazing at him.
19. This sight overwhelmed Kera, causing him to lose consciousness.
20. Later he has told others, that when he awoke, he found himself kneeling at the very spot where the angel had been.
21. On the following day, Kera constructed a tower at that location.
22. Initially building the tower, he later added a hall and a facility for brewing beer²⁸.
23. It was only then that the holiday of the Cross of Saneba of Tsroli was officially established.

²⁴ Gatsqr (გაწყრ) – became furious, was angry. Here we see the personification of the mountain.

²⁵ Kera, Qera – a proper name of a man. Qera (adj.) – blond, yellow-haired. Qeri (noun) – Barley. A heady plant with a loose head and keeled seeds, used for animal (and sometimes human) food and for making beer. *SOURCE: Georgian Language Dictionary.*

<https://www.ganmarteba.ge/word/%E1%83%A5%E1%83%94%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98>

²⁶ The village **Chargali** is situated in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region, within the Dusheti Municipality, as part of the Magaroskari community, nestled in the scenic Charglula river gorge, at an elevation of 1200 meters above sea level.

²⁷ In almost all tales of Mountainous Georgia, the deity is represented in the image of dove. However speculative can be the understanding of this image, it can be referred to the Bible, where the lord has sent a dove as a sign of ending the flood. For Georgians the image of dove became a symbol of the God, or his angel, who would appear to humans as a Lord's messenger, who would announce, or make visible to them the wish of the Creator of his blessing of civilized life, in contrary of wilderness, where a human is undefended from external forces. For this reason people of Georgia wished and tried to become servants of some holy force. Otherwise the character Kera (Qera) who was a stranger, would have hard time to find legitimation to be integrated into the population of local clans, or families.

²⁸ Facility for brewing beer is a must to exist in all mountainous regions of Georgia. Whereas in plain regions rituals can not be held without wine, in mountain regions were and barley are the main sources for celebration of festivals.

Sajanghe's Sheltered Kists²⁹ and ³⁰

The Sajanghe grove is located on the slopes of the Tsroli Mountain, near Batsaligo³¹ village. It is a sacred place, where no human can entry with dishonorable thoughts – even for killing of the enemy. The word **Sajanghe** is an adjective, produced from the noun *janghi* – mist, fog, dark cloud, something heavy covering the sky; it has somehow a firm substance, which can not be divided, or cut. As Vazha-Pshavela – the prominent Georgian poet of the end of 19thc. describes *Janghi* in his poem “Host and Guest”³²:

“But the dark mist will cover the sight.
Curly, black in color,
will cover the view
The fate predestinated by the destiny-creator.
Ensconced like a curse or spell.
It shall not be broken by a blacksmith's hammer,
Nor can the a prayer can relief from it
It will not be touched by hand”.

The affixes sa---e is attributes that create a noun into an adjective³³ and³⁴.

²⁹ Ochiauri. M 15. Notebook 16.

³⁰**Kists** (The same as Chechens) are residing in Georgia, primarily in the Pankisi Valley. They identify themselves as "kistye" or "vei nakh," with the latter translating to "our people." Chechen, Ingush, and Kist communities use this term to distinguish themselves from other inhabitants of the mountainous Caucasus region. The Kist dialect of the Chechen language is commonly spoken among Kists. The historical ties between the Kartvelian and Vainakh tribes can be traced back to ancient times. Ancient Georgian sources mention vineyards belonging to the Nakhchi, Ghlighves, Dzurduks, and Durdzuki. These wine-growing tribes stood alongside Georgian kings in battles for centuries. King Tamar held a special place in the hearts of the Kists. Bridges and other structures, as well as daughters, were often named after her. Additionally, a beautiful flower bears the name Tamar. Vainakhs periodically settled in Georgia, ultimately leading to their assimilation. The last significant wave of settlement in Georgian territory occurred in the early 19th century. During their time in Georgia, some Kists practiced Christianity, while others followed Islam. However, the majority adhered to traditional beliefs and customs. After the XV c, Islam gained predominant influence among the Kist population. In Georgia, Kist villages line the narrow gorge of the Alazani River, nestled closely together. Originating from the northern slopes of the Caucasus range, they are an integral part of the Chechen community. They inhabit areas along the river, including the villages of Duis, Jokolo, Birkiani, Omalo, Dumasturi, Zemo Khalatsani, Shua Khalatsani, Kvemo Khalatsani, Tsenubani, and Dzibakhevi. Additionally, Kists coexist with Georgians in Koreti and Kvareltskalsi. As of the 2014 population census, 5697 Kists were recorded as residents of Georgia. (Source: <http://pop-stat.mashke.org/georgia-ethnic-loc2014.htm> (qarTvelebi, 2014).

³¹**Batsaligo** - a village nestled in the heart of Georgia, within the Dusheti municipality and belonging to the Khevsureti community. Located on the north-western slope of the Khevsureti Aragvi watershed, it sits gracefully above the Khevsureti Aragvi, alongside its left tributary, the Gudaniatskali River. Positioned on the left bank, Batsaligo boasts an elevation of 2160 meters above sea level, providing residents and visitors alike with stunning panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

³²Vazha-Pshavela. “Host and Guest”.

³³ Maka Labatryava, (2019), p. 47.

³⁴ One group of derived nouns expresses purpose or belonging. To create these names, the "sa-" prefix is used, along with the "-e," "-o," and, rarely, "-ur (-ul)" suffixes: sa-katm-e, sa-kur-e, sa-sadil-o. Nouns formed with the suffixes sa-e, sa-o, sa--ur are adjectives, some of which have been transformed into nouns: sa-kur-e, sa-tval-e, sa-keel-o, sa-krebul-o, sa-feh-uri, etc. Some names, depending on the context, are sometimes used as a noun, sometimes as an adjective: sa-patardzl-o (bridal) and (bride). Among the confixes, the most frequently found is sa-o. It is attached to almost any name, whether originally Georgian or of foreign origin, and mainly produces adjectives. Sa- -o can be attached to nouns, both simple and compound, and complex stems (sa-babshv-o, sa-sopl-o, etc.), adjectives (sa-apparent-o...), pronouns (sa-chem-o, sa-imis-o...), Sa- -o can be added to a numerical noun (sa-erd-o), conjunction (sa-tana-o), particle (sa-tu-o), verb (sa-shina-o). The affix sa- -o will also be attached to verb stems (sa-rch-o, sa-bch-o...).

The sacred grove – is a universal constituent of any cult and religion. These groves are present in various cultures worldwide. They served as central elements in the mythological landscape and cult practices of Celtic, Germanic, and Ancient Greek, Near Eastern, Roman, and Slavic polytheism. Additionally, sacred groves can be found in diverse locations, including India, Japan (known as sacred shrine forests³⁵), West Africa, and Ethiopia (referred to as church forests). Examples of sacred groves encompass the Greco-Roman temenos, various Germanic terms for sacred groves, and the Celtic nemeton, which was primarily but not exclusively associated with Druidic practices. In the course of the Northern Crusades in the Middle Ages, conquering Christians frequently erected churches on the sites of these sacred groves.

In the mythological cycle of the Tsroli Mountain, it is evident that the sacred Sajanghe Grove once existed, providing shelter for the Kists. Presently, this woodland cannot be located, and within the bounds of our knowledge, there is no data confirming its existence. Whether the grove was a tangible reality or an imaginary sacred wood is intriguing. The narrator, without a doubt, asserts the existence of such a place, given the presence of a shrine that commands respect from people of all faiths, be they Christian or followers of other religions.

Text: Sajanghe's Sheltered Kists

1. In Khevsureti, near Batsaligo, lies Sadghvebelat³⁶ Mountain.
2. Once, a group of Kists sought refuge here.
3. They were burglars and took cover within the woods.
4. Local shepherds spotted their presence and raised an alarm in the village, proclaiming, "Kists have concealed themselves in these specific locations."
5. This news spread quickly among the villagers, sparking concern and discussions. The Kists, too, learned of the commotion and hastily retreated to Khadu.
6. Among the Kists was Paresha, hailing from Netkha village.
7. Netkha had the responsibility of providing tribute to the Cross of Saneba. Due to this, Paresha had interacted with the elders of Khadu village on multiple occasions.
8. He was also aware that within the Sajanghe forest resided a sanctuary of the Saneba Cross, a place the Khevsurian people wouldn't dare enter.
9. The Kists managed to evade the Khevsurs for a considerable distance, even enduring shots fired at them. They eventually found refuge in the Sajanghe forest unharmed.
10. Conserving ammunition, the Kists refrained from using their firearms.
11. Though the Khevsuris observed their retreat into the forest, they hesitated due to their fear of the Holy Cross³⁷.

This suffix is often attached to ethnonyms, surnames, and produces place names: sa-kartvel-o, sa-ma-chabl-o, sa-guram-o, and sa-ingil-o. Sa- -o can be attached to both monosyllabic and polysyllabic stems ending in any vowel or consonant. Sa--e is usually attached to the stems of nouns: sa-kats-e, sa-tav-e, sa-nerge. Sa--e is most often attached to one- or two-syllable stems (sa-kur-e, sa-kats-e, sa-login-e, sa-maril-e, etc.).

³⁵ Moore G. Athernton C. (2020)

³⁶ **Sadghvebeli** (სადღვებელი. gen. სადღვებლ-ის) – a wooden, or clay centrifuge, where whole milk or cream was collected and by constant mixing the butter was separated. Sadghvebeli was one of the most important tool in home.

³⁷ Here we might see the recall of historical epoch, when Kists unconsciously remembered their Christian background. In reality there are many stories, when being a strict defenders of Islam, many individuals from Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia kept in their families some Christian artifacts and cherished them, as the memories of historical unity with the Georgian Kingdom. One such person met my father – a historian and archaeologist Guivi Gambashidze during his archaeological expedition in Dagestan. This person was newly returned from exile from Kazakhstan, where he, together with all his nation was exiled after Stalin's order. He met my father with a big respect and showed him a copy of Psalm manuscript in Georgian of IX c. As he said, he perfectly knew it was a Christian artifact, but this was the only remnant that he kept during all years of his exile. After few years, two young men came to Tbilisi, found my

12. Instead, they stationed themselves at the forest's edge, engaging in deliberations regarding whether to venture inside. Opinions were divided, with some advocating entry while others abstained due to the revered Cross.

13. During this time, Bataka, a man from Chkhuba³⁸ and ³⁹ village, approached them.

14. The Khevsurian community turned to Bataka as an oracle, beseeching guidance from the Cross of Saneba about entering the forest. Bataka preached:

15. "The Ghlighves people are weakened by me, as I have bounded them. They are not able to move either hands or legs and are unable to resist any longer. Enter the forest and bring them out as captives."

16. The Khevsurian population rallied upon Bataka's words, ensured that their sentiments were echoing the call of the Saneba cross.

17. Devat Shisiya and Tsikath Khtisiya approached the Ghlighves and conveyed a message, urging their surrender.

18. Paresha knew Georgian and they offered: "Come and capitulate, or we will kill you all".

19. We will ensure safety in exchange for surrender, promising that no harm would befall them, and they would be allowed to return home in peace.

20. Paresha, proficient in both Georgian and the language of Khadu, responded to the emissaries:

21. "I will only surrender if Gamikhardi himself comes forward, vouching for our safety. Only then will I leave."

22. Khtisia declared, "I am Gamixardi."

23. A Kist named Berda questioned Iman Paresha, "Is this truly him?"

24. Paresha retorted in Georgian with sarcasm, "Certainly, he's not Gamixardi. This man is deceiving us."

25. In a swift motion, Khtisia raised his sword, but Paresha's gun discharged in time, the bullet finding its mark in Khtisia. Another gun fell, and a second Khevsurian met his demise.

26. At that moment, Tsova⁴⁰ Baichauri was nearby; a Kist lunged and fatally struck Tsova Baichauri with a dagger.

father and said – the old man passed away and ordered his sons to go to Georgia and to give this manuscript to my father, since he knows how to take care of this precious gift.

³⁸**Chkhuba** is a village situated in eastern Georgia, specifically within the Dusheti municipality, Mtskheta-Mtianeti district, and the Khevsureti community. Positioned on the northwestern incline of the Khevsureti Aragvi watershed and adjacent to its left tributary, Gudanišckali, it is found on the left bank of the Gorshegmiskali River. The village sits at an elevation of 2040 meters above sea level and is located approximately 75 kilometers away from Dusheti.

³⁹**ჭ'xubioneli** – The inhabitant of the village Chkhuba identifies themselves using the suffix "-ion," which signifies their origin in the Khevsurian dialect. In the Kartlian dialect, and consequently in the literary Georgian language (as the Kartlian dialect forms the basis of the Georgian Literary dialect, known as Kartuli Ena), a similar semantic is conveyed through the suffix "-eli." The presence of both suffixes to denote the origin of the protagonist suggests two possible explanations: a) the storyteller may have been educated, and the influence of literary language affected their original dialect. b) The storyteller might have intentionally used literary language to ensure that the listener (in this case, the folklorist) could comprehend the story.

⁴⁰**Tsova, Tsovatushi** - The Tsovatush, commonly abbreviated as Tsovabs or Batsbes, constitute a sub-ethnic group with a strong Georgian national identity, totaling around 3 thousand individuals. Historically, they resided within the territory of Tusheti. Later on, like the Tushes, they established settlements in lowlands in Alvani. The Tsovatush people are bilingual, proficient in both Georgian and the Tsovatush (Batsb) language, which belongs to the Vainakh subgroup. Orthographically, the correct spelling of this ethnonym is "Tsovatushi" or "Tsovatush" (without a hyphen). However, in scientific literature, including the KSE (Kartuli Ena, or the Georgian Language Encyclopedia), the incorrect spellings "Tsovatush" or "Tsovatush" are often encountered. The Tsovs are bilingual, speaking both Georgian and Tsovatush (Batsb), a language related to Ingush and classified within the Nakh language group. In terms of habitation, the Tsovs, much like the Tushes to some extent, traditionally led a nomadic lifestyle, focusing on sheep-

27. Simultaneously, Devath Shishya eliminated a Kist with a rifle.
28. Paresha remained concealed near the Cross of Saneba, preventing the terrified Khevsuris from approaching to retrieve the deceased.
29. Throughout the night, Paresha remained in his covert spot, departing only under the shroud of darkness. He traversed the Tania-Ghele⁴¹ Mountain, returning home unscathed.
30. Once the tumult subsided, Paresha recounted his daring escapade to familiar companions, regaling them with the tale of Sajanghe.
31. He shared, "There, near the tower, I unearthed a stone that revealed a mobile cross within.
32. I retrieved three gold coins, offered homage, and implored for aid.
33. The Cross of Saneba shielded me, rendering me invisible to pursuers.
34. My exit remained undetected by the Khevsuris, and thus, the Saneba cross bestowed salvation upon me.
35. After that, every year Paresha slaughtered a sacrificial animal for the cross of Saneba.
36. Khevsuris mourned the fallen, praising their valiant entry into Sajanghe even in the face of sacrifice.
37. However, Prophet Bataka faced censure for his lack of command over the Cross of Saneba, misleading the people and contributing to their demise.
38. And the Khevsurian mourners were speaking badly about Kists and did not praise them.
39. Amid the mournful cries for the Khevsurians, one Khevsurian woman's voice stood out.
40. Her assessment was candid and direct, speaking unflinchingly to all present, even in the face of death.
41. When other Khevsurian women's lament encompassed the slain Khevsurians and disregarded the Kists. Paradoxically, the Kists had emerged victorious, yet this woman wept with unwavering conviction.
42. As other women ceased their wails, she stepped forward and proclaimed⁴²:
- a. Blessed be the mothers of Kists,
 - b. Gathered in Sajanghee's embrace.
 - c. Khevsurian warriors are mourned by women,
 - d. With great praise and grandeur bestowed,
 - e. Yet Kists, have fought quite well,
 - f. Were not with bounded hands, as was promised.
 - g. You have brought three dead each;
 - h. But the Ghligvians marched over the mountain and took three swords with them.
43. Paresha claimed the swords of the fallen Khevsurians, taking all three as trophies.
44. Following a joint negotiation, the Khevsurian community retrieved the swords, offering Paresha a bribe.

herding as their primary agricultural activity. This practice led to the establishment of villages in both mountainous and lowland areas. *Mountain villages included: Indurta, Mozarta, Etehi, Nazarta, Tsaro, Shavtskala, and Sagira* (though it was destroyed due to natural disasters in 1861). Lowland residents were found in: *The Pankisi Valley: Omalo, Khalatsani, Batsra, Birkiani, and others. The Alvan Valley: Bakhtrioni, Tsitsalkure, Mukhrovani, Gurgalchala, Okhtvala, Alon, Lafankur, and Baichlakure.*

⁴¹**Ghele** (ღელე) – source, river.

⁴²The significant role of women in folk heritage is readily apparent. One could speculate that the roots of the 19th-century Georgian poet Vazha-Pshavela's (Luka Razikashvili) poems, "Aluda Ketelauri" and "The Guest and the Host," can be traced back to this tradition. In the first poem, the protagonist Aluda makes a sacrifice for a non-Christian Kist Mutsal, who stood out due to his personal characteristics. In the second poem, the non-Christian Kist woman Aghaza grieves for the enemy of her family, Zviadaur, who had killed her husband Jikola's brother. She does so, surpassing all societal stereotypes and prejudices of the community to which she belongs. In general, the inclusion of a woman in mythological heritage, who defies the resistance of her community, despite their ideological and religious beliefs as outlined in semi-liturgical religious texts like *Andrezi*, is a noteworthy aspect worth mentioning.

45. The Khevsurians were taken aback by the outspoken woman's lament and resolved to expel her from their midst.

46. "She does not deserve to be with us. She praises and laments for the Ghlighves, and disregarded our dead". She eulogized the deceased enemy while remaining silent about the deceased Khevsurians.

47. But the woman's husband and his brothers were so influential in the community that nobody could dare to say anything against her.

48. In the aftermath, Prophet Bataka faced condemnation.

49. He defended himself, asserting, "It was the will of the Cross that compelled me to utter these words."

The Leader of the Cross of Saneba⁴³

"For the first time, when Morigé sent the Khtishvili children from heaven, then he settled them in Tsroli..."⁴⁴ Andrezi tells us about the appearance of God's children in this world, on the land of men. Tsroli is erected between the sky and the earth - one of the private, very common aspects of which is the mountain itself.

Since the children of God are settled on Tsroli, we can consider it as the Olympus of God's children, if there is not one obstacle: unlike Zeus, the Caucasian Father of Gods and Men, the god on duty, the father of God's children and the creator of the world, does not have a throne on Tsroli. He has never left his door in the sky, near which the tabernacle of the only Son of God is standing. "Glory... to Great Kviria, Makarvesa of Khtit Maghli!" (Glory to Great Kviria, the owner of the temple by the might of supreme Lord)⁴⁵, this is how they praise him.

Tsroli is also not similar to the pantheon of Greek gods in that it was the temporary abode of the children of the gods, it was the middle way between heaven and earth, and Tsroli fulfilled this function. Rather than landing in the realm of the plains, in the abode of men, the God on duty had to lodge them first on this middle road, from where they should have heard the doomed cry of men.

After that they had to leave Tsroli and engage in a life and death battle with the Devas. And so it happened that all the children of God had their own way to their own place, which God on duty had given them in advance. The trinity of Khaduites, coming from Tsroli, "holding on to the ankle" shows the prayer niches along the way, climbs to the top of the mountain and inherits the name of the cross "covered in frost, shrouded in fog"⁴⁶. In this way, other children of God will also visit the holy mountains of their parishes, the places of the first language of the crosses, which look down on the land and water of their parishes.

It seems that Tsroli has been clothed with holiness in the eyes of Georgians since ancient times. In the place where the Trinity Cathedral stands today, tradition sees the footprints of Andrew the Apostle: the first apostle raised the cross here, thus giving the beginning to the sacred history of the place⁴⁷.

In the course of time, the sanctity of Tsroli was strengthened by the fact that during times of hardship, the treasure of Svetitskhoveli of Mtskheta was kept in the Trinity Cathedral, including the vine cross of St. Nino.

The status of Sakhizari, the greatest Christian place, was assigned to the Tsroli, the Holy Trinity. As P. Umikashvili recalled about Tsroli: "Khevsurians' blood is worth the blood of three men." We are Tarkhan of King Vakhtang Gorgasali. We always use a guard at the throne - in winter and summer. We are servants built by the King of the Trinity. We are the mercy of Bagrationis"⁴⁸.

⁴³ Ochiauri. M17. Notebook 10.

⁴⁴ Ochiauri A. p. 118.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 14.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 178.

⁴⁷ T. Sanikidze (1975), p. 93.

⁴⁸ kartuli khalkhuri peozia . Vol. I, Tbilisi, 1972, p. 371.

In Tsroli, as in Svetitskhovli's shelter, the scarcity and grace of Svetitskhoveli itself is embodied in the form of its treasure and the cross of Saint Nino. The historical fact that Tsroli was included in the patronage of Svetitskhoveli of Mtskheta has such an understanding in the religious consciousness of the congregation. They start their history from Vakhtang I Gorgasali, and they attribute the construction of the temple to the Andrezi era of Tamar (it should be noted that in the consciousness of the Sakmo (Parish of the Saneba of Tsroli), the era of Tamar, as the initial age, precedes the era of Vakhtang I Gorgasali). The holy strength of the Trinity of Tsroli is announced:

“The Holy Trinity is great,
To the end of the sky...”

These words of praise also inform us that the Trinity shrin of Gergeti stands in the middle of the country and from here spreads its nimbus towards the four corners of the world. That is why it is not surprising that the congregations of the Cross Pass consider Gergeti as the "homeland" of their patron God's children.

V. Bardavelidze confirmed Tsroli towers in Lower Khevsureti (on Barisakho, Buchukurti, Ukenakho and Oherkhevi mountains), the construction of which is connected with the transfer of "linen" (meaning silver cup-treasure) from Tsroli⁴⁹. Tsroli is a source of strength and power for them, as it can be seen from the following song, where the servant from Khadu Trinity is praised:

“Son of Meshvela Milkhuri, light breeze of Tsroli,
Screaming hall breaker, bring me the luck,
Seeking the envy of the twelve,
Bring me the bullet”⁵⁰.

Mkadre, who will reach Bethlehem by the grace of God's children, must elucidate the cross to exercise his abilities, for he is by nature an angelic being—a "flying angel." The revealed cross will support and guide its leader (the paradoxical relationship between the cross and the ruler: the leader of the cross is, in fact, led by the cross). One of the earliest Asia Minor variations of this paradigm is recorded in Roman writings. The people of Tyre placed a statue of Apollo on a pedestal with a chain because one of them had a dream that God intended to leave the city in distress. When Alexander the Great captured the city, Apollo was unchained and was called as "Alexander's friend."

The legends of chained cross icons are rooted in elementary phenomena: as dynamic beings, they defy gravity; they do not adhere to the laws of gravity. Like balloons filled with air, they constantly strive upward, even beyond the human sphere, so as not to burden humans or become burdensome themselves. However, the parish (Sakmo) might speculate that the unveiled cross will depart the human world or attempt to free itself, risking tearing apart like Amiran (equal to Prometheus – the protagonist who was chained to Caucasus). Yet, according to the Andrezi, the Sakmo cannot recall the cross ever displaying its destructive power, except for the initial case when it destroyed the hearth with the emergence of an Iphani (Franxius).

Typically, the bearer of the cross stands on the ground, subject to the force of gravity. Legendary fighters, however, possess the ability to levitate from the cross. On Gakhua, on the Gudani cross, it is said that he flew with the cross. Similarly, it was recounted about the deacon of Dumatskho (Gudamakari) Holy Mountain, the lynx—with a flag on his shoulder—from the summit of the Holy Mountain to the place of icons, “It was flying”(Georgian Folk Proze. vol III, p. 30-32). Yet, man is corporeal, and even if robust, he cannot always sustain a state of weightlessness. When the body becomes heavy, the soul can no longer support it, cannot pull it any longer.

Mkadre, who, due to spiritual decline or physical weakness, can no longer bear the "flying cross"—a being that presented itself as his guide (indeed, he was created as his guide)—is a tragic figure. Man, being corporeal, cannot endure crucifixion in his finite being; he is prone to falling. The cross will single him out, lift him up, but man will fall; such is the rhythm of his life—rise and fall, as depicted in Vazha-Pshavela's "Snake Eater." Although Mindia is not a hand of the cross, he possesses unmistakable qualities and skills of a preacher and a herald. The cross is revealed in his person (i.e., he is crucified) in the form of divine knowledge and authority, which required care and protection from the contaminated sphere of the world,

⁴⁹ Bardavelidze (1982), p. 34.

⁵⁰ Archives of Folklore Cathedra of Ivane Javakhishvili State University, No. 25441.

demanded self-sacrifice, and the "surrender of the village" from a person, which he was unable to fulfill. The memory of some congregations has preserved anecdotes of faithful soldiers leaving the village or town to follow the cross, reminiscent of Abraham forsaking his village and following the mysterious voice to an unknown land. Often, when due to the decline of sanctity, the cross retreats and takes flight to the mountains, it is pursued by the lone ruler from the unsanctified church, chosen by sanctity, akin to the righteous Noah—the hero of the flood before the universal catastrophe.

The shepherd is a potential leader because, like the cross, he serves as a guide for his flock, leading them to greener pastures in pursuit of sustenance. Simultaneously, the shepherd must inhabit a distinct physical reality — the lofty mountains. During this time, his soul is truly "larger than the stars," and his dwelling becomes a symbol of earthly sublimity. Moses, chosen by God as his "leader" and preacher, experienced this while shepherding, reaching the summit of Mount Sinai.

It's not a coincidence that the Begoth shrine, one of the Khadu shrines, features a sheep. After appearing as a dove, injuring a hunter in the shoulder, and getting lost from the flock amid village noise, the shepherd encountered him in the mountains and brought him to his final abode. The shepherd's hand wrapped his wounded arm in gold.

Text: The Leader (Gamdzgho⁵¹) of the Cross of Saneba⁵²

1. Once, the parish from Khadu, his family name was Bachuaisdze. He was the leader of the Cross of Saneba and it was coming upon his arm. The Cross was made of silver and had a silver chain.
2. When the cross was coming from air and was sitting upon the shoulder of the leader. For this reason he always carried the special piece of cloth (Sakadri⁵³) with him.
3. He was aware of the imminent arrival of the Cross. Thus, he would retrieve a piece of cloth (Sakadri) from his pocket and drape it over his shoulder. When the Cross arrived, it would settle on his arm, now adorned with the cloth (Sakadri).
4. The leader would avert his gaze to avoid disturbing the Cross with his breath, as the earthly breath of a mortal being might startle the spirit. And so, he communicated with it.

⁵¹ The verb "**Gazgola**" (გაძღოლა) translates to "to lead." The subjective participle, "**gamzgho**" (გამძღო), refers to somebody who leads the community, often in the role of a priest. Historically, in the feudal hierarchy of medieval Georgia, people from mountainous regions, primarily in northern Caucasus such as Khevsurians, Mokheve, Rachians, and Svanetians, were tasked with defending the northern borders from invasions by non-Christian tribes considered "barbarian". Due to this responsibility, they were exempt from the burden of paying taxes and did not have feudal rulers. Communities were led by spiritual leaders who were chosen from among themselves based on personal characteristics. It was essential for everyone to trust the chosen leader, believing that they had a better understanding of what was in the best interest of the community.

⁵²Ochiauri M 17.

⁵³The verb "**Kadreba**" (კადრება) translates to "to dare." There are two participles associated with it:

- a) **Subjective - "Mkadre"** (მკადრე) – refers to the person who dares. The "Mkadre" is the individual tasked with carrying out the liturgy. Although this position or honor was occasionally passed down from father to son, the crucial factor was that the person must be deserving of such an honor.
- b) **Indirect Objective - "Sakadri"** (საკადრი) – denotes something (rarely someone) designated for daring. The "Sakadre" is a clean piece of cloth, typically white or golden, used exclusively for this purpose. The "Mkadre" would have prepared it for special occasions, anticipating the arrival of the Holy Spirit or an angel to convey the will of the Creator. Both participles have been established as terms within regular liturgy.

5. Once the Cross came to him and he talked with it. The Cross revealed to him to bring two Dasturi⁵⁴ with him and to follow It to ḡliḡvi⁵⁵ (In those times the Cross of Saneba was getting a tribute from two villages Khamkha and Netkha)
6. "My tributors do not provide the assigned tribute on time, and we must go there and ensure they pay what is due." The Gamzgo, accompanied by two other men, followed the cross.
7. The Cross flew ahead, and the men followed. They would rest where the Cross rested, and when the Cross settled for the night, they would do the same.
8. When they reached Ghlighveti, the cross continued to fly ahead, clearly visible to everyone.
9. Upon witnessing this, the people of Ghlighves were filled with astonishment and began to believe in the power of the Cross. They were so profoundly frightened that they hastily collected all the tribute they owed and handed it over to Gamdzgho.
10. They brought forth all the sheep and goats they had set aside for sacrifice. Some even brought bulls. Every single animal was offered as a sacrifice to the Cross of Saneba.
11. On their return journey, the Cross once again led the way, and they followed it back.
12. During their return, they encountered a remarkably beautiful Ghlighves woman, and the Makdre had improper thoughts about her.
13. Because of this, the Saneba Cross felt offended. It said, "When I came so close to his shoulder, how could he dare to entertain thoughts about a woman?!" As a result, it flew far ahead and never approached the Mkadre again.
14. They could only watch it flying in the distance, and they followed its path.
15. On its way back, it first rested at Kalothana⁵⁶.
16. Later on, a praying niche for the Saneba Cross was established at this location.
17. From here, it flew and then came to rest on the peak of Mount Tsroli. Where it was already established.
18. As it approached this spot, it became visible and settled down. Now, the Saneba Cross is adorned and worshipped there.

⁵⁴**Dasturi** - The servant of the cult of cross-icons in the mountains of Eastern Georgia, known as Dasturi, was referred to as Mujiri in the "cross language". As per the explanation provided by Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, Mujiri translates to "Keeper of wheat". The Dastur was chosen through the inspiration of the Cross preacher, and sometimes through a ballot for a term of one or two years. Evidence of this appointment could be found in the testimonials of Khutsesi or Khevisberi, the subordinates. The Dastur's responsibilities included overseeing the agricultural aspects related to the Cross or the icon - from cultivation and sowing of the estates, to harvesting and settlement. This also encompassed tasks such as brewing beer for ceremonial purposes, ensuring the provision of ritual bread "Kada-puri" for the day, and assisting Khevisberi in the sacrificial slaughters. As a testament to their qualification, men who had been members of the congregation for one or two (rarely three) years stood as candidates for the role of Dasturi. In certain prominent shrines, they were named by the preacher, while in other places, they assumed their positions in a prescribed order. The Dasturi upheld chastity, refraining from consuming forbidden foods (such as pork and chicken), avoiding entry into the homes of newlywed women and cattle stalls, and abstaining from conjugal relations. In the hierarchy of icon servants, following Khevisberi, the Dasturi held a central role in both establishing and maintaining the property holdings of the Shrine. (Kiknadze Z. , qarTuli miTologia [Georgian Mythology], 2007)

⁵⁵**ḡliḡvi - The Vainakhs** (known as Вайнахи in Russian, and referred to by various names in Georgian history such as **Ghlighves, Dzurduks, and Kists**) are a people indigenous to the North Caucasus. Presently, this group is recognized by different names, including Chechens (Nokhchi), Ingush (Ghalgha), as well as their related Batsbi and Kist communities (with the latter primarily residing in the territory of Georgia). All of these ethnic groups have their own distinct languages.

⁵⁶**Kalothana**, also known as **Kalotanisghele**, is a mountain pass situated in Georgia, within the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region and Dusheti municipality. It is positioned on the eastern side of the Caucasus, at the source of the Khevsureti Aragvi River, standing at an altitude of 2978 meters. The pass is constructed using clays and sandstones, and the surrounding area of Kalothana is enveloped by picturesque alpine meadows. A pedestrian pathway leads from the Aragvi valley in Khevsureti to the Arkhotiskali river valley. (enciklopedia, 2018)

19. From here, it flew away to Tsina Khadu⁵⁷. Since then, the Saneba Cross has also been venerated at that location.

20. From there, it flew and came to rest at Machekha Oak. It is revered here and is referred to as "Valley Saneba."

21. From there it went to the forest and settled there. Later there was built a Kvrivi⁵⁸ and nobody could go there except for Gamdzgho.

22. Initially, it had come from Tsroli and settled on the peak of Tsroli. This is why it is said: "The Holy Saneba of the peak of Tsroli, with an ice bed, covered in misty veils." It is a perpetually frozen and mist-shrouded mountain.

23. On the opposite side of Khadu, Zais was established, and it has its Khodaburis⁵⁹ located there. They brought a Kisti man to serve as its Gamdzgho, and his descendants continue to live there to this day. They carry the name of this place as their family name: Zaiel. The Zaiel family members are always the leaders of the shroud.

24. At those times when the Saneba Cross was approaching the shoulder of the Gamdzgho, there was a guest within the Saneba Cross named Gakhua Megrelauri.

25. The Gudani⁶⁰ Cross was approaching Gakhua's shoulder, while simultaneously, the Saneba Cross was coming to rest on its Mkadre – Bechuta's shoulder.

26. Both crosses were brought to the shroud's residence, with the Gudani Cross positioned on the right side and the Saneba Cross on the left.

27. For a while, the Gudani Cross stood, but then the Saneba Cross caused it to fall to the left.

28. Gakhua Megrelauri laughed and remarked, "The Saneba Cross couldn't tolerate having the Gudani Cross on its right, so it switched places with it."

29. After Megrelauri Gakhua departed, he took the Gudani Cross with him, and the Saneba Cross returned to its own residence, flying there.

30. The people of Khadu believed that Gakhua had taken their Cross with him, so they followed him. When they reached him, they inquired, "Why did you take our cross with you?"

⁵⁷ The village **Khadu** is in eastern Georgia, within the Dusheti municipality, Mtskheta-Mtianeti district, and the Khevsureti community. Situated above the Gorshegmiskali River, it stands at an elevation of 2000 meters above sea level. Ukhnakhadu is approximately 78 kilometers away from Dusheti. (Makalatia. 1984. p. 16)

⁵⁸ **Krivi/Mkrivi** - is a dense area within the icon (cross or shrine), accessible only to the designated servants of the shrine (such as the elder, deacon, Khevisberi, and Dasturs). It is off-limits to the rest of the worshipers. On one side, Sajare is in contrast to Krivi, and on the other, it signifies a place that is muddied or considered impure. Sajare is where regular worshipers sit during holidays, while Nalakhi is a path where the entire village walks, potentially making it dirty or muddy from foot traffic. Some Kvrivis within the shrine are so daunting that even the "servants of the icon" hesitate to enter. In many cases, these are the remnants of old structures overgrown with ancient trees, whose original purpose may have been abandoned or lost over time. This is often seen in worshiping niches of ancient churches or monasteries where monks once spent the night. The term Kvrivi - "dense," as explained by Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani, conveys the idea of being "empty and without holes." According to the explanatory dictionary of the Georgian language, it means "full and charged" with something that cannot be physically penetrated. In the context of Kvrivi, this physical impenetrability takes on a religious significance. Within the icon's premises, there are towers constructed to serve as Kvrivi, symbolically embodying the concept of steadfastness.

⁵⁹ **Khodaburi** - Khodaburi is the name of the estate, which the village plows and harvests collectively. (ოზიაური, 1988, p. 184). "Khodaburi" is the name given to the agricultural estate, which is cultivated collectively and the harvest is used for beer. (ibid. p. 24)

⁶⁰ **Gudani** is a village situated in eastern Georgia, specifically within Khevsureti, Dusheti municipality of the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region (Khevsureti community). It is located on the southern slope of the primary ridge of the Caucasus, on the right side of floodplain of the River Gudanitskali, which is a left tributary of the Khevsureti Aragvi River. Positioned along the Barisakho-Shatili highway, the village stands at an altitude of 1720 meters above sea level and is approximately 75 kilometers away from the city of Dusheti. Just 200 meters northeast of the village lies an important religious site - the Gudani Cross.

31. Gakhua responded, "How can you accuse me of such a thing? I am just a mortal human, and that cross is the Creator's son. How could I possibly know where it went?" Hearing this, they left him and returned home.

Miracles of Tsroli Mountain⁶¹

In this myth we see the dichotomy of rituals held in New Years Eve and description of celebration in Khevsureti. Worship is conducted at designated times and locations, with the religious calendar holding significant importance for the worshipping community. Worship is closely linked to pivotal moments in society's life, especially during hunting, planting, and harvesting seasons. The commencement of the year, typically aligned with the spring or fall equinox, or the summer or winter solstice, is considered particularly auspicious for worship. Additionally, the start of the new moon, occasionally the full moon, or the week is viewed as propitious for acts of worship. Special celebrations rooted in the community's geographical or historical context also serve as fixed occasions for worship.

In communities with a structured worship framework, the day is often segmented into designated periods for worship, as seen in Christianity among monastic communities and in Islam. Days commemorating the birth, such as December 25 in Christianity, or death of the religion's founder – Easter – hold special significance for worship.

The organization of worship time recognizes the potent manifestation of the holy during fixed occasions. For instance, on New Year's Day in various ancient societies and some contemporary communities, worship is seen as a recreation of the cosmos itself. Through the recitation of the world's creation myth, worshipers are transported back to primordial time, connecting with the origin of natural and historical existence and participating in the world order's renewal.

In ancient Middle Eastern societies, such celebrations were fundamentally significant. The Babylonian Akitu festival, occurring in spring, marked the rebirth of nature, the restoration of kingship by divine authority, and the assurance of the people's life and destiny for the upcoming year. The agricultural cycle, involving soil preparation, planting, watering, harvesting, and waiting for the earth's readiness for planting, played a crucial role in these seasonal festivals. The world aged, fertility diminished, but at the designated time, new life stirred, and nature was ready once again to yield its bounty.

Originally rooted in nature, the festivities of Khevsureti were predominantly nature festivals but later became linked with historical events within the community. The barley harvest in summer, for instance, became connected to the **Atengenoba**⁶².

Worship is conducted in designated places that acquire sanctity and appropriateness through the manifestation of the divine at those locations. These sacred places often hold natural and historical significance for the community, including springs, river crossings, threshing areas, trees or groves used for communal gatherings and public affairs, hills or mountains providing safety from adversaries, and similar locales. Mountains, in particular, hold a special significance, as they are believed to draw the worshipper into a closer connection with the heavenly realm.

⁶¹ Ochiauri. M 17. Notebook VIII.

⁶² **Atengenoba** is a Christian holiday established to honor the martyred Greek priest Athenage (Athinogenes) of Sebastya in III-IV cc. This observance was widespread in Georgia and Armenia and was part of the cycle of mobile holidays. Traditionally held in June-July, precisely on the 98th day after Easter, known as the "Rose Day," it is still observed in the mountainous regions of Eastern Georgia. In Khevsureti and Khevi, it is referred to as *Atengenoba*, in Tusheti as *Atengenoba*, and in some areas named after the icon associated with the day (Lasharoba, Tamaroba, Seroba, etc.). Due to the assimilation of Christianity with local customs in the mountainous regions, the mountain-dwelling Atengen has little resemblance to the Christian holiday beyond the shared name. It has evolved into a typical folk celebration, occurring on various days in the latter half of June. During the Atengenoba festival, people sought to protect the icon through offerings and the performance of relevant rituals. (T. Ochiauri. "Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia" 1975. p. 226)

A center for worship takes on a distinct character when it is recognized as the regular manifestation site of the divine. In certain religious traditions, like the Tsroli Mountain cycle, it symbolizes the earth's center, often described as the "navel" of the earth—a meeting point of God and humanity, heaven and earth. The preservation of the sanctity of such a location becomes crucial, requiring officials to safeguard the holy site and guide worshippers in appropriate acts of worship for the deities associated with that place. Additionally, the site must be demarcated, and its sacred boundaries clearly identified. A holy place, initially marked by a sacred stone for offerings and sacrifices, may evolve into a temple or a dwelling for the god.

The selection of places for worship is influenced by various factors. Shrines or temples may be constructed to commemorate specific experiences of community leaders. Moreover, places acquire sacred status through their association with holy individuals.

In this context, it is noteworthy to connect the winter celebration with the fertility season—a celebration that combines the enduring cold with the fire that lights the candles. "A temple," akin to a beer-brewing hall, equipped with all necessary amenities, where the wood is still hot and coal is burning, represents a fusion of several layers of New Year celebrations.

Text: Miracles of Tsroli Mountain

1. In times long past, there existed the hall and beer-brewing structure of the Saneba Cross on the slopes of Tsroli Mountain. People from Khadu and Kalothana would gather there for festivals both in winter and summer.

2. Surprisingly, upon arrival, the attendees experienced neither cold nor avalanches. Despite the absence of a forest for firewood they managed to cook meat (usually beef) within the hall without any visible fire.

3. Even the footprints of the sacrificial animals (typically bulls or male sheep) brought here would not imprint on the snow.

4. Strangely, the animals led themselves, guiding the way to the Tsroli Mountain, unaffected by blizzards that might be raging elsewhere.

5. During these festive occasions, meticulous preparations were made: the boiling pot, beer-brewing facilities, the hall, and all the essentials required for the celebration.

6. On New Year's Eve, the Mekvle⁶³, a designated ritual leader, would come to spend the night there as tradition dictated. Prior to the establishment of the Saneba Cross, the Mekvle would remain confined within his home, refraining from venturing outside.

7. Armed with only a single candle, he would spend the night within the hall. Contrary to expectation, the environment was so warm that the Mekvle would sweat profusely throughout the night, despite the freezing conditions outside. The very stone and ground exuded warmth that was palpable to the touch.

⁶³**Mekvle** - A "good-footed" neighbor was invited to welcome the New Year, as per old beliefs, in the hope that they would bring prosperity to the family for the year ahead. The term "Mekvle" (family killer) was also used to refer to a family member, typically an older man, who would go around the house with a blackboard in the morning and then bless the family. Mekvleoba is a custom involving the blessing of the family and the performance of specific rituals by the Mekvleoba, aimed at ensuring a bountiful harvest, happiness, and good fortune in the coming year. Initially, when the calendar new year coincided with the start of the agricultural year - the commencement of the agrarian calendar - one of the primary responsibilities of the Mekvle, the first pilgrim of the new year, was to conduct ritual plowing and sowing, signifying the inaugural steps of the agricultural cycle. In the vestiges of this tradition, elements were retained until recently, often in the form of mixing grain within the household or family by the Mekvle. Over time, the pilgrimage lost its original purpose of commemorating the deceased, and it persisted primarily as a term for a "foot-happy" pilgrim or a "foot-taker." In ancient times, bulls, sheep, or horses, closely associated with agrarian cultures, would participate in hunting activities alongside people. (ზედეგენძე, 2014, p. 370)

8. Accompanied by a Sepe (baked bread), in accordance with Mekvle customs, the candle would miraculously light on the candles upon the Sepe-bread.
9. If any villager was impure, had transgressed, or bore treachery, their candle remained unlit unless the Mekvle beseeched the Saneba Cross on their behalf. He implored, "Blessed Holy Saneba, I beseech you to forgive this sinner, to show mercy upon him. Let the candle serve as their penance. We both stand as guarantors before you, as Mekvle-and-prisoner."
10. Confession was expected from the sinner, and the Mekvle himself confessed his own transgressions, after which the candles were ignited. Some candles ignited while others did not.
11. Upon the arrival of the Saneba Cross, a radiant illumination enveloped everything, though ordinary individuals were unable to perceive it – as recounted by the elders.
12. During those times, people meticulously adhered to all the established rules, often subjecting themselves to self-discipline and maintaining a high level of purity.
13. The Khelkatsi (guardians) of the Cross refrained from proximity to women, and neither the Dasturi nor Khelosani dared to tread the same path as women. They not only refrained from walking near women but also avoided the pathways frequented by women.
14. Khutsesi, the sequestered figure, remained secluded in the ceiling.
15. His chosen dwelling was off-limits to both men and women.
16. He conducted baptisms during all celebrations.
17. Over time, such stringent practices waned, and faith dwindled, causing the "Children of God" to decline as well.
18. The ability to cook meat without fire and candles lighting on their own faded away.
19. The biting cold and blizzards deterred people from ascending the mountain.
20. Consequently, they ceased ascending and constructed a prayer nook below the village instead. They only scaled the summit once a year, during summer, for the Atengen festival. Summer's mild weather allowed for the ascent. Other sacred days found their observance in the cross-adorned niches near the village.
21. From then on, the hall, beer-brewing installations, and meat-cooking apparatus vanished. Their whereabouts remained a puzzle, for it seemed as though an invisible shroud had concealed everything, obscuring the truth.
22. Legends speak of an avalanche bringing forth a piece of a wooden door with intricate "butterfly" carvings, a thick pine board, which was briefly kept in the Jvari (niche-church) but also disappeared.
23. One day, a hunter named Mangia, hailing from the Kanan family in the village of Guro, found himself lost in the dark night after a prolonged hunt.
24. Seeking shelter, he stumbled upon a hollowed-out space and decided to spend the night there.
25. In his dream that night, he encountered a luminous figure riding a white horse. His own radiance matched that of the horse, so bright that it was hard to gaze upon him.
26. He held a whip in his hand and gently touched me with its tip, saying, "Why have you come here? What is your purpose?"
27. In the same dream, he saw a male sheep with four horns, and another figure instructed him to bring this sheep for sacrifice.
28. When Mangia woke-up, he was so warm that he sweated and it was dawn already, the Sun was rising.
29. Upon waking, Mangia realized it was already morning, despite the deep night when he entered his shelter. Overflowing with awe, he swiftly rose, offering prayers and vowing to present the four-horned sheep as a sacrifice during the Atengen festival. Upon sunrise, he found himself within the hall.
30. Astounded, Mangia recounted, "Where I slept, chairs were strewn about, incense filled the air, a tripod stood by the fireplace with a hanging chain and a suspended pot."

31. All necessary implements for cooking and brewing were neatly arranged – copper pots, plates, and even a generous stock of firewood beneath the pot.

32. Wooden frames held lathba⁶⁴ sacks and leather fasteners secured their openings."

33. Upon encountering this astonishing scene, Mangia felt a mixture of reverence and regret for having entered the sacred space of the Saneba Cross due to the darkness of the night. He begged for forgiveness and said: "Forgive me Cross of Saneba that I have entered your Kari⁶⁵ and Kamala⁶⁶, for the reason of night darkness.

34. And for Atengen festivals I will return to you and you should know I will return a male-sheep with four horns and one another gift".

35. Later he shared his experience with the leaders and chiefs of the Holy Cross. However he had forgotten the exact location of the hall and beer-brewing facilities.

36. Folklore suggests that the "Sons of the Lord" had shrouded the site with an invisible veil, rendering it impervious to sight or sound.

The Salt Vedza

Salt has always played a central role in human history. Its significance in preserving and seasoning food, its importance in medicine, religious practices, and even as a form of currency in some cultures underscores its value. The story of salt is deeply intertwined with the story of human civilization. Its impact on various aspects of life has left an indelible mark on our history and development as a species. As far back as 6050 BC, salt has been an important and integral part of the world's history, as it has been interwoven into countless civilizations. Even today, the history of salt touches our daily lives. Salt was highly valued and its production was legally restricted in ancient times, so it was historically used as a method of trade and currency.

Salt played a crucial dual role in Mesopotamian civilizations. On one hand, it was essential for various human activities, both in diet and industry. However, the abundant presence of salt in the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, coupled with extensive irrigation practices, led to the salinization of agricultural lands. This complex relationship with salt highlights its significance and challenges in the context of ancient Mesopotamian societies⁶⁷.

"Salting the earth," or the act of spreading salt on the sites of conquered cities, is a ritual that originated in the ancient Near East as a curse on re-inhabitation⁶⁸. It became a well-known motif in folklore during the middle ages⁶⁹. One notable example is the salting of Shechem, as described in the Biblical Book of Judges 9:45. In the ancient Near East, various texts from cultures like the Hittites and Assyrians mention the ceremonial spreading of salt, minerals, or specific plants associated with desolation over destroyed cities⁷⁰. This practice was observed in cities like Hattusa, Taidu, Arinna, Hunusa, Irridu (Chavalas), and Susa⁷¹.

⁶⁴**Latba** (Tush. Khevs.) - A large gauge-shaped vessel, both wooden and copper, used to hold juice during beer distillation. Latba was made from copper plates, just like a beer pot. (See Kettle of beer). Wooden Latba was made in the shape of a boat, from lime or alder wood. (Nadiradze E, et al., 2011, p.610).

⁶⁵**Kari** – in Georgian means a door. But often it is used in the meaning of house, residence. E.g. Mep'his Kari – Residence of a king.

⁶⁶ Shrine stones with hidden marks and the similarity of these marks with the talismanic symbols of the Kabbalah, "Kamala" and Kabbalah, stories about the storage of the ark "Holy Cross" and the biblical "Ark of the Lord" and others. Here a casual similarity is less conceivable, since we are dealing with faith. A deep study, what is needed is a common opinion, where the knowledge of various specialists, experienced, will give us the correct conclusion. (Gigauri, 2013)

⁶⁷ Ridley, R. T. (1986) pp. 140-146.

⁶⁸ Gevirtz, Stanley, (1963) pp. 52-62.

⁶⁹ Stevens, Susan T. "A Legend of the Destruction of Carthage", *Classical Philology*. 83 (1) doi: 10.1086/367078. JSTOR 269635. S2CID 161764925, 1988, pp. 39-41.

⁷⁰ Weinfeld M. (1992) p. 110.

⁷¹ Encyclopedia (1995) pp. 7-8

The role of salt in the Bible holds significance in understanding Hebrew society during both the Old and New Testament periods. Salt served as a vital component in various aspects of life, including as a seasoning, preservative, disinfectant, part of ceremonial offerings, and even as a form of currency. The Bible makes numerous references to salt, often using it metaphorically to represent qualities such as permanence, loyalty, durability, fidelity, usefulness, value, and purification. The Bible contains various symbolic uses of salt. It is depicted as a symbol of friendship in Numbers 18:19 and 2 Chronicles 13:5, as sharing salt was a sign of camaraderie in many cultures. The term "salt land" symbolizes desolation and barrenness, as seen in Psalms 107:34, Job 39:6, and Jeremiah 17:6. Additionally, salt was used in rituals to consecrate defeated cities and deter their repopulation, as described in Judges 9:45.

In childbirth, newborns were rubbed with salt, as referenced in Ezekiel 16:4, highlighting the cultural significance of salt even in this aspect of life.

In the New Testament, in passages in the Sermon on the Mount reference salt and light as parallel and equally valued phenomena. Matthew's account differs slightly from that of Luke and Mark. Matthew 5:13 refers to his disciples as "the salt of the earth." This meaning is paralleled in the following verse, Matthew 5:14, in the symbolism of the "light of the world." Another view is that the Salt and Light passages refer to a duality of roles in the disciples, to be like a light from a city, visible from all over the world, and to be spread out like salt: to congregate and spread. Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree in the discussion of salt "that has lost its taste." This is a reference to salt that is contaminated with other minerals, causing a weakness in flavor or a bland, unpleasant taste. It may be a symbolic reference to the possibility of abandoning or deviating from the Gospel, especially due to the adulteration of its teachings. Another interpretation is that in a world filled with sin and deceit, it is possible for one to become contaminated and thus unsuccessful at being an effective disciple. Therefore, this verse serves as a warning for disciples to be on their guard; to be in the world, but not of the world.

Mark 9:49 speaks about the salting of the condemned, which is a rhetorical device indicating the severity of the punishment. Mark 9:50 reads in part: "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another." The salt in this verse refers to the goodwill that "seasons" positive relationships between people. This is also a play on the covenant of salt, indicating friendship and compassion. Colossians 4:6 uses the metaphor of salt seasoning speech to indicate speaking with intelligence and consideration.

The Caucasus has long been considered as one of the famous ore mountains of the ancient world. As a central fold mountain of the TEMB (Tethyan Eurasian Metallogenic Belt) it is considerably rich in mineral resources. This is a basic precondition that has influenced how societies approached this region in (pre)history and even in modern times^{72and 73}.

In the sentences 10 and 11 of the given text, the narrator employs rhetorical figurative storytelling, building up to a climax. The storyteller skillfully depicts the gradually worsening situation, highlighting how the divine blessing, represented by the presence of the salty water, was lost. This loss was significant as it held regional importance, affecting the wealth and well-being of the community. The storyteller asserts that natural resources are provided to humans for their prosperity and happiness. Therefore, it is not surprising that earlier in the story, the Khevsurian, known for their shrewd and ambitious nature, were eager to arrange marriages with people from Khadu. In this sense, this story can be seen as a simplified version of the Bible's Genesis. Indeed, the parallel between the story and the biblical narrative is striking. It mirrors the portrayal of an idyllic existence in paradise, followed by the introduction of sin through a woman's involvement, resulting in the "spoiling" of everything and the subsequent loss of paradise.

Additionally, the significance of the salty water can be likened to passages in both the Old and New Testaments

⁷² Marro Catherine, Stöllner Thomas. "From generalists to specialists? Transcaucasian Communities and their Approach to Resources during the 5th and the 3rd Millennium BCE", Book Title: "ON SALT, COPPER AND GOLD" 2021. pp. 445-476.

⁷³ *ibid.* p 401.

Text: The Salt Vedza⁷⁴

1. In ancient times, a salt spring known as Vedza was present in Khadu.
2. People would boil⁷⁵ the water from this spring to extract salt. It was not only adherents of specific faiths, but also individuals from various beliefs and religions who would come here to collect salt. This practice led them to offer tribute as a sign of gratitude.
3. Those from different religions paid with one sheep for each family as a fee for permission to boil or purchase the salt.
4. However, people of our faith had a distinct payment system.
5. They offered one week's worth of butter, commonly referred to as "Saturday Butter." This butter was accumulated from the milk produced by their family's cattle over the course of a week, from one Saturday to the next.
6. The Khevsurian people were eager to arrange marriages for their women with individuals from Khadu, largely due to the presence of salt in the latter region.
7. They would say, "I need not travel far for salt."⁷⁶
8. The salty source was situated further up, closer to Khorkhisa, within a forest where the spring emerged.
9. This location was deemed sacred to the Cross of Saneba and demanded the highest level of purity. Women and participants in community gatherings were strictly prohibited from approaching it.
10. Domestic animals, such as horses and dogs, were also prohibited from coming here, and married men or those who had been intimate with women were similarly restricted.
11. A guardian was designated to protect the Vedza, and the "Lord's Sons" also appointed their invisible guardians.
12. As time passed, individuals who were not ritually purified started visiting the area, eventually leading to the departure of the "Lord's Sons."
13. The situation worsened to the extent that a woman from the community dared to visit the site, and shortly after, the Vedza spring mysteriously vanished.
14. Despite the efforts of Khadu residents to restore the Vedza to its original location, including numerous animal sacrifices like bulls, male sheep, and calves, the spring remained lost.

⁷⁴**Vedza** – Mineral water. Salty water, Sour water (Orbeliani, Sul Khan-Saba, S. Iordanishvili (editor), 1949, p. 119)

⁷⁵ Here, we observe the representation of an alternative method for salt production—boiling saltwater—a practice closely linked to metallurgical traditions. Many cultures trace their origins to miraculous waters, and Georgian culture ties the establishment of its kingdom to the "boiling water." Legend has it that after King Vakhtang I hunted a pheasant, it fell into the fresh (non-salty) waters of the river Mtkvari, known as Kura (Kurios or "pure, divine") in Greek tradition. This name later became universal. The extraction of salt from seawater has been known since the third millennium B.C. (Historical Notes on Salt and Salt-Manufacture by L. G. M. Bass-Becking, *The Scientific Monthly*, Vol. 32, No. 5, May 1931, pp. 434-446). The connection between solar distillation and water purification has historical roots, with figures like Alexander of Aphrodisias and Aristotle contributing significantly. Alexander, a Greek general, advocated using the sun's power for water purification, while Aristotle detailed the distillation process in his comprehensive work, the "Meteorologica Encyclopedia" (Wielchelm Von Moerbeck, ed. Gudrun Vuillemin-Diem, 2008, *Meteorologica: Translatio Guillelmi de Morbeka*). Aristotle's insights laid a theoretical foundation for distillation, influencing its understanding and application in subsequent eras.

⁷⁶ In Georgian folklore we find another verse about making journey for the salt - *"I'll journey to Aghzevan for salt, bringing back the crystal salt. I'll first approach my mother, then turn to my son and wife."* Kağızman, known as Aghzevan in Georgian and historically referred to as Kağızman, is a city and district situated in the Kars Province of Turkey, historically was an Armenian territory. The name Aghzevan in Georgian denotes "the place where table salt was taken," highlighting its historical association with salt extraction. This location served as an import source for salt to Georgia.

15. A fortune-teller then delivered a message: the Saneba Cross was dissatisfied with the lack of reverence shown by the people, which led it to relocate the Vedza spring far away from Khadu's access.

16. When asked about the new location of the Vedza spring, the fortune-teller's reply suggested that it was now situated at the periphery of the territory belonging to non-believers⁷⁷. This area was considered so sacred that even Khevsurian people would not venture there. Consequently, the people of Khadu found themselves without a salt source.

17. In response, a lament was sung:

18. In Khadu, salt is lost,

19. And women from Gudani and Chormeshavi vanished as well.

20. Despite this setback, the residents of Khadu clung to the hope that the Vedza might return. They maintained a guardian at the site, watching for any sign of the spring's resurgence.

21. Additionally, a festival was established: every Mariamoba (St. Mary's Day on August 28), people would gather at the Vedza location to celebrate.

22. In observance of the prescribed tradition, they would offer sacrificial animals, brew beer, and engage in prayers throughout the night.

The Story of a Blacksmith from Mitkho

Any cult can not exist without its priest – the blacksmith is a mandatory attribute for the metallurgy cult. In ancient Greece, Hephaestus (also known as Hephaestus) was revered as the god of fire, metallurgy, and blacksmiths. Renowned for his formidable skills and abilities, he held the esteemed role of the divine blacksmith, crafting masterworks from metal. Hephaestus was not limited to weaponry; he was the creator of some of Greek mythology's most iconic weapons and armor, such as Hermes' helmet and Achilles' shield. His influence extended beyond the forge, making him a significant figure in the pantheon. During the middle Ages, blacksmiths held a distinct and elevated status, considered "superior to other artisans" due to their unique ability to seemingly play with fire. Their skill set allowed them to control and subdue the hazardous element, manipulating iron with remarkable ease and dexterity. This mastery over fire and ironwork set blacksmiths apart and contributed to their esteemed position in medieval society.

The presented myth, culminates the cycle of establishing the shrine of Tsofli Mountain with inhabiting the blacksmith in it. As we see from the text, the blacksmith is brought from Chechnya. It can be a reflection of the historical events happened back in IV c. A.D. when Vakhtang I, Gorgasali was firming the northern borders of Georgian Kingdom and finding political and military support from the people of North Caucasus, as it is reflected in one of folk verses:

“Lord loved King Vakhtang⁷⁸

He heard bell toll from the sky,

He stood his foot on the top of Elbrus,

And the tall mountains bowed down their heads”.

Text: Story of a blacksmith from Mitkho⁷⁹

⁷⁷ In this passage: “periphery of the territory belonging to non-believers” - we can trace the historical events of trespassing the Armenian territory to Turkish Empire. Apparently Armenia and Khevsureti had historical connections, the mythological cycle of “Somkhos Cminda Giorgi” (Armenian Saint George), which is widely worshipped in Khevsureti, should be remnants of the cultural and economic relations, which, might be connected with salt trade as well.

⁷⁸ Vakhtang I, Gorgasali - (Georgian: ვახტანგ I გორგასალი, Romanized: Vakhtang I Gorgasali), a member of the Chosroid dynasty, served as the king of Iberia. His reign spanned the second half of the 5th century and the initial quarter of the 6th century, with his birth estimated around 439 or 443 and his death around 502 or 522.

⁷⁹ For centuries, the Chechen communities in the mountains maintained relations with Georgian mountaineers from Khevsurian, Pshavi, and Tush. Migration between Malkhist (Mitkho) and Maist communities was reciprocal. As the

1. Back in the days when people used to boil salt, an incident occurred when the boiling pot was damaged.
2. Unfortunately, our village lacked a blacksmith.
3. Saneba Cross provided guidance that they should seek help from a village named Mitkho, where a skilled man named Khaiauri resided. He hailed from the Arlo village.
4. Equipped with the necessary tools, he was brought in to mend the pot. The salty water and the location were under the domain of Saneba Cross.
5. The villagers compensated him for his work, after which he departed for his home.
6. To reach Mitkho from our village, one had to traverse the mountain. A specific spot on this route was known as Mačareli⁸⁰.
7. As this man reached Mačareli, an unforeseen event occurred – he suddenly lost his sight, rendering him immobile, unable to proceed uphill or downhill⁸¹.
8. Fortuitously, he had his horse with him, which steadfastly remained by his side, recognizing his predicament.
9. Word of the man's plight reached Khadu, and a group was dispatched to locate and rescue him. Upon finding him, they brought him back to Khadu.
10. Beseeching him to inquire about Saneba Cross's intentions. The fortune-teller conveyed the message that Saneba Cross demanded the man to forsake his homeland and remain in Khadu; otherwise, his blindness would persist.
11. The man initially grappled with the weight of this monumental decision but, upon repeated affirmation of Saneba Cross's wish, he resolved, "I would rather stay here with sight than return home in blindness."
12. The village turned to a fortune-teller.
13. Consequently, he chose to settle near the Zais Cross, adjacent to Khadu.
14. Saneba Cross gifted him a piece of the Lord's wheat fields, known as "Khodabuni." On this land, the man erected his dwelling.
15. The field was christened Zais, and its residents came to be known as Zaieli.
16. The male members of this lineage were dedicated servants of the Cross, functioning as intermediaries between Saneba Cross and the people of Khadu.
17. The Cross shielded them, and anyone who dared to offend the Zaieli family faced dire consequences, such as severe illness or calamity. This instilled a sense of reverence, leading everyone to treat the Zaieli clan with utmost respect.
18. At least one male from this family is entrusted with serving Saneba Cross.
19. They autonomously manage the Cross's service without soliciting external opinions.
20. Their responsibilities encompass acquiring essential construction materials, copper utensils, safeguarding them, as well as overseeing the Cross's belongings and treasury.

Chechen population migrated to the mountainous regions of Georgia, Georgian mountaineers also undertook similar migrations. In the Georgian mountains, one can still find many families with Chechen origins. During the reign of Saurmagi (Noble and Lord of Kartli in IV c. A.D.), Dzurdzüks migrated in a coordinated group to the mountainous regions of Georgia, while subsequent migrations were primarily individual. However, in the mid-19th century, the Chechen (and Ingush) settled densely in the Pankisi Valley in Georgia.

⁸⁰ Mačareli – (adj.) from Ačara, Ačarian. Source: Amirejibi R., Apridonidze Sh, Reyfield D (Cheif Editor), et. al. – *Comprehensive Georgian-English Dictionary*. 2006. London, Garnet.
<http://www.nplg.gov.ge/gwdict/index.php?a=term&d=46&t=124868>

⁸¹ The parallel between the myth of King Mirian of the 3rd century A.D. and the conversion of Georgia to Christianity is indeed intriguing. In the myth, when King Mirian raised the Mountain of Tkhoti, he experienced a moment of blindness or an eclipse, during which he lost his sight. Despite fervent prayers to pagan gods, his vision remained obscured. It was only when he turned to Christ, the Lord of St. Nino that his eyes were opened, and his sight was restored. This narrative echoes a transformative experience, symbolizing the shift from pagan beliefs to the acceptance of Christianity, with the intervention of the Christian deity bringing clarity and illumination to the king.

21. Whenever matters arise concerning alterations in village regulations, a representative from the Zaieli family invariably participates in discussions.

22. Their in-depth understanding of rules and ordinances makes them adept at mediating disputes or addressing legal matters.

23. Even in the case of a conflict between two individuals, the intervention of a Zaieli member ensures peaceful resolution through mediation.

Conclusion:

In conclusion it can be said that:

1. Myths reshape, simplify, clarify, and amplify experiences; to claim them merely 'reflect' experience is insufficient.

2. Clarification not only coexists with ambiguity but can intensify it (e.g., mountain “Tsroli”).

3. Perceptions reimagined in mythology influence everyday life, even if the process is challenging to define.

4. Rituals express behavior through symbols with a comparable 'selectivity,' akin to myths. These two symbolic languages contrast with and complement each other.

5. Predominantly, our evidence, whether mythological or not, bears the imprint of the city or village. Mountains, unsettling for those in settlements, are meant to be observed from a distance, visited briefly, and then left.

6. While oppositional analysis is valuable, it must not overshadow the nuances of individual texts. Georgian mythology encompasses a remarkable array of voices.

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⁸² The series of the Folk prose: 1. shota rustavelis saxelobis literaturis instituti – *qartuli khalkhuri proza – cxovelta eposi* [*Shota Rustaveli Institute of Literature- Georgian Folk Prose – the Animal Epic*], vol I. 2019. acad.ge; 2. shota rustavelis saxelobis literaturis instituti – *qartuli khalkhuri proza – mitologia* [*Shota Rustaveli Institute of Literature- Georgian Folk Prose – Mythology*], vol III. 2019. Acad.ge; 3. shota rustavelis saxelobis literaturis instituti – *qartuli khalkhuri proza – eteriani* [*Shota Rustaveli Institute of Literature- Georgian Folk Prose – Etheriani*], vol IV. 2019. acad.ge

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