

THE PLEIADES IN KHEVSURIAN COSMOGONY: THE CULT, SERVICE AND  
RITUAL CUISINE OF KAJETIAN WOMEN LINKING WITH DODONEAN CULT  
ხევსურული მითოსის თანავარსკვლავედი და მისი პარალელი დოდონას  
კულტთან: ქაჯის ქალების კულტი, რიტუალი და სარიტუალო საკვები

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ABSTRACT

The oracle at Dodona, located in Epirus, Greece, is one of the oldest oracular sites in the ancient world, with its origins shrouded in myth and antiquity. According to Herodotus (Histories 2:54–57), the priests of **Egyptian Thebes** recounted a story in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC about two priestesses who were carried away from Thebes by Phoenicians<sup>1</sup>. One of these priestesses was **sold** in Libya and the other in Hellas (Greece). The narrative claims that these **women were the original founders of the oracular sites in these respective countries**. This myth suggests that the oracles at Siwa in Libya and Dodona in Epirus share an ancient and culturally significant connection, possibly linked through Phoenician mediation and the dissemination of religious practices.

The symbolism of the **black doves** is particularly intriguing. The doves are described as "black," a detail that invites various interpretations and symbolic readings. It is possible that the color "black" is associated with the "**pel-**" element found in the names of figures such as "Peleus" and "Pelops," which have connotations related to darkness or mud. This etymological connection may hint at a deeper, possibly forgotten, mythological symbolism that was retrospectively applied to the Dodona priestesses, known as "peleiades" or "doves." The term "dove" may have been employed metaphorically to describe these priestesses due to their perceived divine inspiration and oracular role.

In Khevsuretian mythology and liturgical practice, doves are considered oracular voices that announce the will of God regarding the establishment of shrines. The black doves likely represent the elderly women, priestesses of the Cybele/Kybele cult (represented as Khibal-Kudianis in the Tushetian mythological cycle about Doraiskheveli), who brought ancient healing wisdom that was later perceived as magical by the newer cult. However, they are regarded as evil; although, they are seen as helpers to the children of the new God.

The narrative of the black doves can be viewed as an attempt to synthesize religious practices with broader Mediterranean traditions. This integration of mythological elements also reflects a common practice in antiquity of using mythology to validate the **continuity and**

<sup>1</sup> **Priestesses carried from Thebes by Phoenicians** – the mythological parallel of Samdzivari and other Kajetian women carried from Kajaveti to Khevsureti makes an intriguing parallel. Also is interesting the idea of witch women Ali from Karzawa from Hittite ritual texts. (Mouton, .2013), (Gambashidze M, Gambashidze N., 2023)

**legitimacy of religious traditions.** By linking the origins of the Dodona oracle to a distant and respected source, such as Georgia, the narrative enhances the sanctity and authority of the oracle within the Mediterranean and Hellenic world.

In conclusion, the myth of the black doves (or pleades) is a rich narrative that offers insights into the cultural and religious syncretism of the ancient Mediterranean world. It illustrates how mythological stories were employed to establish connections between different cultural and religious traditions, thereby reinforcing the authority and sanctity of sacred sites like Dodona. The blending of Egyptian and Greek elements within these myths highlights the fluidity of religious identities and the permeability of cultural boundaries in the ancient world. The narratives serve as a testament to the enduring human fascination with the divine and the continual search for meaning through the sacred.

Kajetian women occupy a unique space within the religious and mythological canon of Khevsureti. They are at once a remnant of ancient celestial orders and a transformative force within Christian cosmology, traversing gender, species, and cosmic strata. Through their associations with birds, milk, ritual law, and ecstatic disappearance, they embody a matrix of sacred liminality—simultaneously inaccessible and indispensable, both dove and divinity.

**Keywords:** Khevsurian Mythology; Tushetian mythology; Cybele Cult; Dairy Products in Cult Cuisine; Pleades; Samdzimari / Samdzivari; Doraiskheveli.

## წიწი ღამბაშიძე

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## აბსტრაქტი

დოდონას საკურთხეველი, რომელიც საბერძნეთში, ეპიროსის რეგიონში მდებარეობს, ხმელთაშუა ზღვის აუზის ერთერთი უძველესი საკულტო ცენტრია. ჰეროდოტეს მიხედვით (ისტორია 2: 54-57), ეგვიპტის თებეს ქურუმებმა ძვ.წ. მე-5 საუკუნეში აღწერეს ორი ღვთისმსახური ქალის ამბავი, რომლებიც ფინიკიელებმა<sup>2</sup> მოიტაცეს თებედან. ერთი ამ ქურუმ ქალთაგან ლიბიაში გაყიდეს, მეორე კი ჰელინებს (ბერძნებს) მიჰყიდეს. ჰეროდოტეს მიხედვით, სწორედ ამ ქურუმ ქალებს დაუარსებიათ დოდონას კულტის ტაძრები ლიბიასა და საბერძნეთში. მითის მიხედვით დგინდება, ლიბიის სივასა და საბერძნეთის ეპიროსს შორის მჭიდრო კულტურული ერთობა, რასაც,

<sup>2</sup> ფინიკიელების მიერ თებედან ქურუმი ქალების მოტაცების ამბავს უნდა უკავშირდებოდეს სამძივარისა და სხვა ქაჯის ქალების მოტაცების ამბავიც. ამ კონტექსტში შეიძლება გავიხსენოთ ხეთურ სარიტუალო ტექსტებში ქარზაველი ალის მნიშვნელობა და ფუნქცია (Mouton, .2013), (Gambashidze M, Gambashidze N., 2023).

შესაძლოა, ფინიკიურ კულტურასთან რელიგიური კულტმსახურების მსგავსება განაპირობებს.

დოდონასთან დაკავშირებულ მითებში ჩვენთვის განსაკუთრებით საინტერესო **შავი მტრედის** სიმბოლიკაა. მათი „სიშავე“ არაერთ ინტერპრეტაციასა და სიმბოლურ დატვირთვას შეიცავს. შესაძლოა, შავი ფერი (რომელიც ბერძნულად **pel-** ფუძით გამოიყვამა), იყოს მითიური გმირების **პელეგისისა** და **პელოპისის** ფუძე, რომლებიც სიბნელესა და მიწისქვეშეთს უკავშირდებიან. ეს ეტიმოლოგიური კავშირი, შესაძლებელია მიგვანიშნებდეს დაფარულ, მივიწყებულ მითოლოგიურ სიმბოლურ კავშირზე, რომელსაც მოგვიანებით დოდონას ქურუმი ქალები დაუკავშირდნენ. ამ ქურუმ ქალებს ჩვენ ვიცნობთ როგორც „პლეადებს“, „თანავარსკვლავედებს“ და „მტრედებს“. ტერმინი „მტრედი“ შესაძლოა მეტაფორულად აღწერდეს კიდევაც ამ ქალების როლს: მათს ღვთაებრივ წარმომავლობას და წინასწარმეტყველების უნარს.

ხევსურულ მითოლოგიურ სისტემასა და ლიტურგიულ პრაქტიკაში, მტრედები მიიჩნევიან წინასწარმეტყველების მომტანად, ანგელოზებად, ღვთის წარმოგზავნილებად. ისინი განუცხადებენ ადამიანებს ღვთის ნებას, სალოცავის (ჯვრის) დაარსების ადგილის შესახებ. შავი მტრედი, დიდი დედის (კიბელეს) კულტის მსახურ მოხუც ქალს განასახიერებს (მაგალითად თუშურ მითოლოგიაში დორაისხეველის მსახური ხიბალ-კუდიანები<sup>3</sup>), ვინც ფლობს კურნების უძველეს ცოდნას, სიბრძნეს – რამაც მოგვიანებით მაგიის ჯადოქრობის მნიშვნელობა შეიძინა. ისინი ეშმაკეულ, ბოროტ ძალებად მიიჩნევიან, მაგრამ ამავდროულად, ღვთის შვილთა თანაშემწეები და მათი დამხმარეები არიან.

შავი მტრედების, თუ თანავარსკვლავედის (პლეადების, ხომლის) შესახებ გადმოცემები ხმელთაშუა ზღვის აუზის კულტურათა ფართო კონტექსტში უნდა განვიხილოთ. მითოლოგიური ელემენტების ურთიერთკავშირი უნდა ასახავდეს ბრინჯაოს ეპოქის კულტურათა რელიგიური ტრადიციების გადმონაშთს; მათს უწყვეტობასა და ლეგიტიმაციაზე მეტყველებს.

დოდონას კულტის არსებობის გამოძახილს უნდა წარმოადგენდეს ხევსურეთში შემორჩენილი და მყარად ფესვგადგმული კულტი ქაჯის ქალებისა. ეს გადმოცემები ნათელს ჰფენენ ხმელთაშუა ზღვის აუზისა და ბერძნული სამყაროს ამ ბუნდოვანი პერიოდის კულტურასა და რწმენა-წარმოდგენებს.

და ბოლოს, მტრედების, პლეადების, ხომლის შესახებ მითები გვეხმარება უფრო ღრმად ჩავიხედოთ ხმელთაშუა ზღვის აუზის რელიგიურ სინკრეტიზმში. მის მაგალითზე ვხედავთ და მითოლოგიური გადმოცემების მეშვეობით ვამყარებთ კავშირს დროითა და სივრცით დაშორებულ კულტურებსა და ტრადიციებს შორის. შესაბამისად, შეგვიძლია გავიაზროთ დოდონას კულტის მნიშვნელობა და სიწმინდე. ეგვიპტური და ბერძნული ელემენტების გახსენებით და ხევსურულ მითებთან დაკავშირებით ვცდილობთ ქართველურ ტომთა იდენტობის დადგენას და ძველ მსოფლიოსთან მათი კულტურული მიკუთვნებულობის საკითხისათვის ნათელის მოფენას. ეს გადმოცემები მოწმობენ ადამიანის მუდმივ მცდელობას ერთ სისტემად აღიქვას სამყარო, მიწიერი და ზეციური და ამოხსნას ყოფიერების განმსაზღვრელი დაფარული საიდუმლო.

<sup>3</sup> დორაისხეველისა და ხიბალ-კუდიანების შესახებ იხ. (Gambashidze Nino (Author), Gambashidze Maya (Editor), 2025, გვ. 57-72)

ამრიგად, ხევსურული მითოლოგიური კანონის (ანდრეზის) მიხედვით, ქაჯის ქალებს განსაზღვრული აქვთ მკაფიო რელიგიური ფუნქცია. ისინი ერთდროულად წარმოადგენენ უძველესი კოსმოგონიური წესრიგის უმაღლეს ღვთაებებს და, ამავდროულად, ქრისტიანულ ეპოქაში ინარჩუნებენ სრულიად განსაკუთრებულ ადგილსა და ფუნქციას - იცვლიან სქესს, ხორციელ-უხორცო მდგომარეობას, გადაინაცვლებენ მიწიერსა და ზეციერს შორის. ისინი ასოცირდებიან ფრინველებთან, რმესა და რმის პროდუქტებთან, სარიტუალო კანონთან და გარეგნულ მორთულობასთან. ამრიგად, ქაჯის ქალები დგანან ხილულისა და უხილავის ზღვარს შორის, ისინი არც მიწიერნი არიან და არც ღვთიურნი - ერთდროულად მიუწვდომლებიც და აუცილებელნიც ადამიანური ყოფისათვის, - ერთდროულად ღვთაებანიც და მათი განსახიერება მტრედებიც.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** ხევსურული მითოლოგია; თუშური მითოლოგია; კიბელეს კულტი (ნაყოფიერების დიდი დედის კულტი); რმის პროდუქტები საკულტო სამზარეულოში; პლეადები (შვიდი და, შვიდი ვარსკვლავი; სამძიმარი / სამძივარი; დორაისხვეელი (დემონური ქალური ფიგურა თუშურ ფოლკლორში).

## Introduction

In the mythological landscape of Khevsureti, the Kajetian women have a distinct place, shrouded, or misted over narratives about St. George of Khakhmati (the Khakhmati Cross). Their names are almost taboo, their cult and religious practices are also not widely discussed. The cult of Kajetian women are practiced in homes, around the fireplace, administered by the elder women (mothers in law, Great mothers, keepers and defenders of household) and the young women (new brides) are their companions.

**In this article are presented attempts to understand, interpret and consequently to rebuild the cosmogony of East Georgian mythology, which has preserved ancient cult of Great Mother.**

## Discussion and Results

The word Kaj, which appears to be the common name of the oracle women in Khevsuretian mythology can be originated from Muslim tradition and its etymology could be understood as:

1. borrowed from Turkish and means “oily part of milk which rises to the top”, the best part of something”<sup>4</sup>
2. Another source of this term can be also the Muslim tradition, where “Kaji” means “A Muslim Magistrate”.—It is defined in the glossary attached to the study dealing with Gujarat Folk tales composed by Gujarati poet Jhaverchand Meghani (1896-1947);
3. Kājī (काजी):—(nm) a Muslim judge or magistrate; one who performs the ceremony of Nikah in a Muslim marriage; —[ki mullā] ?, ([āpa kauna haim] ?) What is your locus standi ? How dare you interfere? What business have you to intrude? -[jī dubale] ([kyom]), [śahara ke amdeśe] to be worried about affairs that are not one’s concern.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> for the etymology of **Kajmak** see:

<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/kajmak#:~:text=Polish->

,Etymology,Ottoman%20Turkish%20%D9%82%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%82%20(kaymak).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/kaji>

The names of Kajetian women are also mysterious – Samdzivari / Samdzimari is their leader.

The figure of Samdzivari emerges as a liminal and multivalent presence—at once celestial and terrestrial, feminine and androgynous, protector and enigma. Embedded in the oral traditions surrounding the Khakhmati Cross and the sacred narratives of Kajaveti, Samdzivari is both a symbolic and functional node within the cosmological and social imagination of the highland communities. Her story unfolds through a polyphonic tradition of sermons, oracles, and ritual songs, where ambiguity becomes a narrative device and theological principle alike<sup>6</sup>.

According to one account preserved in the sermon of the Tsoili shrine, Samdzivari is introduced as a Kaji woman who states:

*“I used to go to Kajaveti, tending the herd,” suggesting a repeated ritual journey<sup>7</sup>.*

Later, having been rescued by St. George of Khakhmati, she reflects:

*“I used to go to Kajaveti and bring goods from there”<sup>8</sup>.*

This grammar of recurrence (expressed in the past continuous) resonates with the pattern of periodic descent and ascent characteristic of divine intercessors. However, narrative contradictions emerge when these accounts are juxtaposed with other traditions—particularly the “Andrez” cycle and ritual songs—which describe a one-time expedition by the Khakhmati Cross without mention of Samdzivari<sup>9</sup>. This discrepancy implies her preexistence in Kajaveti, where she may have awaited liberation, thus casting her as a figure of latent divinity or detained sanctity.

Two opposing traditions encapsulate the tension surrounding her origin. One tradition portrays Samdzivari, along with figures such as Ashekali and Mzekali, as captives forcibly taken from Kajaveti by the Khakhmati Cross, which promised them the status of “Children of God”<sup>10</sup>. Another interpretation suggests a more voluntary or redemptive release, paralleling Nestan-Darejan’s transformation in *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*—a woman imprisoned by fate and custom, ultimately elevated through divine intervention<sup>11</sup>. This ambiguity reflects not only narrative variation but also theological multiplicity: the myth oscillates between captivity and agency, conversion and assimilation.

Her rescue by the Khakhmati Cross follows a mythic archetype reminiscent of Indo-European dragon-slaying tales, where the hero saves a maiden and initiates her into a new religious or Cosmo-political order<sup>12</sup>. Yet, Samdzivari’s role diverges from passive femininity. Rather than merely being a bride or disciple, she is made “sister” to the Khakhmati Cross—an act that redefines kinship and sanctity in ritual terms<sup>13</sup>. This elevation mirrors practices in Hittite and Near Eastern traditions, where female divinities (such as the ones who raised Ullikummi) participated in divine governance<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Gambashidze, N. (2023). *Saneba of Tsoili - Cycle of Tsoili Mountain and Holy Trinity Shrine*.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Baliauri, M., & Makalatia, N. (1989). *Ethnographic Records of Eastern Georgia*.

<sup>10</sup> Gambashidze M, Gambashidze N., 2023, *Ancient Anatolian Myths and Tales* (Gambashidze M, Gambashidze N., 2023), (Gambashidze M., Ghambashidze N., 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Rustaveli, Shota. *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*, trans. Lynn Coffin (2015).

<sup>12</sup> Gamsakhurdia, Z. (1981). *The Hero and the Dragon in Caucasian Folklore*.

<sup>13</sup> Ghambashidze M., Ghambashidze N., (2023), *Story of Ullikummi* (CTH 345 pp. 306-316 (Ghambashidze M., Ghambashidze N., 2023)

<sup>14</sup> Powers, D. (1981). “Judicial Hierarchies and State Formation.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23(2), 315–316.



A striking feature of Samdzivari's representation is the fluidity of her gender identity. In household visions and shrine encounters, she appears as a woman—engaged in domestic activities, adorned with ornaments, and echoing the roles of mortal femininity<sup>15</sup>. However, in intimate moments with suitors, her physicality defies binary categories. Her breasts, though visible, lack substance; when approached with erotic intention, she disappears entirely<sup>16</sup>. This performance of inaccessibility enforces ritual boundaries and affirms her transcendence of human desire.

Her celestial counterpart is found among the Pleiades, whose movements and seasonal associations mirror her ritual logic. Samdzivari, like her stellar sisters, is both guide and guardian—a bearer of moral codes and cosmic timing. The practice of Stsorphroba, where women regulate social interactions during calendric rituals, reflects Samdzivari's mythic authority to determine the conditions of desire and union. Her vanishing after romantic overtures functions as a mythic injunction: the sacred cannot be possessed without consequence.

The Kajetian women—including Samdzivari—are not merely spirits or saints; they are divine agents, comparable to angels. To ordinary people, they appear as **doves**, while to the spiritually distinguished heroes (the community leaders, defenders and priests, “Mkadres”), they assume human forms and inspire both awe and longing<sup>17</sup>. The dove, as in the cult of Dodona, becomes a theophanic medium—leading the devotee to sacred sites, healing ailments, and conveying divine will<sup>18</sup>.

This symbolic avian embodiment may find its material correlate in the biological phenomenon of crop milk. In dove and pigeon species, both males and females produce a nutrient-rich secretion from the crop—a sac-like extension of the esophagus—that serves as the sole sustenance for newly hatched squabs<sup>19</sup>. Crop milk, which lacks carbohydrates but is high in fat, protein, and immunological compounds, offers a remarkable analog to divine nourishment<sup>20</sup>. It includes antibodies (IgA), antioxidants, and carotenoids like xanthophylls, which support early development<sup>21</sup>. The production of crop milk is hormonally regulated by prolactin and begins just prior to hatching, ensuring untainted delivery by abstaining from other feeding<sup>22</sup>. This biological specificity also dictates avian reproductive limits—most pigeons raise only two squabs, correlating divine fecundity with restraint<sup>23</sup>.

The dual image of divine constellations – Samdzivari and her “sisters” find analogies in Dodonean Cult, where two black doves are serving as prophets of Dodona. In the Dodonaean tradition, as further described by Herodotus, tells of **two black doves** that flew from Thebes in Egypt, one to Libya and the other to Dodona. The dove that arrived at Dodona settled on an **oak tree** and, speaking with a human voice, declared that a place of divination dedicated to Zeus must

<sup>15</sup> (Gambashidze N. , Sacred Crossroads of the Cults of Metallurgy and Agriculture: Exploring the Mythic Saga of Pirqushi and its Indoeuropean Parallels – Zeus Keraunos, Hephaestus, Percunas, Apollo Paeon, and Hellen of Troy, 2024)

<sup>16</sup> (Gambashidze N. (Author), Gambashidze M. (Editor), 2025)

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Levi, W. (1977). The Pigeon. Sumter, S.C.: Levi Publishing Co.

<sup>20</sup> Davis, W.L. (1939). "The Composition of the Crop Milk of Pigeons." *Biochemical Journal*, 33(6), 898–901

<sup>21</sup> Gillespie, M. J. et al. (2012). "Functional Similarities between Pigeon 'Milk' and Mammalian Milk." *PLOS ONE*, 7(10): e48363

<sup>22</sup> Silver, R. (1984). "Prolactin and Parenting in the Pigeon Family." *The Journal of Experimental Zoology*, 232(3), 617–625.

<sup>23</sup> Blockstein, D. E. (1989). "Crop Milk and Clutch Size in Mourning Doves." *The Wilson Bulletin*, 101(1), 11–25.

be established there<sup>24</sup>. The inhabitants of Dodona, recognizing the divine nature of the message, founded the oracular shrine accordingly. Meanwhile, the dove that flew to Libya instructed the Libyans to establish an oracle of Ammon, also sacred to Zeus. This story, narrated by the Dodonaean priestesses—**Promeneia**, **Timarete**, and **Nicandra**, among others—served not only as a foundational myth for the oracle but also as a confirmation of its connection to ancient Egyptian religious practices.

In Khevsurian mythology, the priestesses are: **Samdzivari / Samdzimari**, **Ashekali**, **Mzekali**, **Shukai**, **Gandzai**, **Amenkali**, **Simenkali**. Samdzivari is their leader, the chief priestess, the only one, who speaks, others are not speaking (“they did not learn Georgian, and because they are dumb” – as the Khevsuretian tradition interprets their silence).

Mythic association of Samdzivari and other Kajetian women with milk is thus deeply embedded in both ritual practice and alimentary symbolism. In regions under Turkic cultural influence, including parts of Georgia, dairy products such as kaymak (also kaimaghi, sarshir, qashta) serve as central ritual and celebratory foods<sup>25</sup>. In Khevsureti, the equivalents—ghala and erbo—are intimately tied to shrine offerings and seasonal festivals<sup>26</sup>. Kaymak, produced by skimming and fermenting milk fat, is a food of prestige and spiritual value, its etymology tracing back to the Turkic verb kaymak, meaning “to mold” or “to melt”<sup>27</sup>.

Across Central Asia, the Balkans, and the Caucasus, kaymak variations carry deep regional meaning: in Serbia, Bosnia, and Albania, it accompanies meat dishes; in Iran and Iraq, it is served for breakfast; in Adjara (Georgia), it is eaten with cheese and bread in highland villages<sup>28</sup>. The product’s luxurious texture and preservation of milk’s sacred top layer (“sarshir” in Persian) align with cosmologies where divine nourishment is both literal and symbolic<sup>29</sup>.

**Samzivari/Samzimari** – a mythological personage, female, who is closely connected with St. George’s cult. The personal name Samzivari is well known in Georgian medieval history. Samzivari was a well-known feudal family in Georgia during the 12<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The name is derived from their estate, Samdzivari Khevi (Samtskhe). There is a belief that the feudal lineage of the Torelis traces its origins to the Samzivari family. In the 1180’s, Samzivari came under the control of the noble Jakeli family in Samtskhe. Kravai Jakeli married one of the brides from Samzivari. It appears that Samzivari, alongside the Jakelis, aligned with the rebellious Yuri Andrievich, the Russian prince and first husband of King Tamar. Following the suppression of the rebellion, they sought refuge in Shaharmen (ruler of Khlat) along with Guzan Taoskareli, a participant in the uprising. In the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, Samdzivari is still noted in Samtskhe. One significant event involves their engagement in the struggle against the Mongol prince Tegudar, who rebelled against Abagha Khan. Tegudar came from Likht-Imereti, where Davit Narin was buried, to raid Samtskhe-Javakheti. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the list of princes of Samtskhe-Saatabago

<sup>24</sup> (Gambashidze N. , Sacred Crossroads of the Cults of Metallurgy and Agriculture: Exploring the Mythic Saga of Pirqushi and its Indo-European Parallels – Zeus Keraunos, Hephaestus, Percunas, Apollo Paeon, and Hellen of Troy, 2024, pp. 323-358)

<sup>25</sup> “Kaymak Recipe.” Retrieved 11.09.2024.

<sup>26</sup> “Kaimaghi.” Georgia Travel, 5 December 2022

<sup>27</sup> “kaymak.” Nişanyan Sözlük. Retrieved 13.02.2025.

<sup>28</sup> Vrzić, N. (2000). “Sve srpske kašike.” NIN, 28 December; “TOP 10 ‘MUST TRY’ FOODS IN ADJARA.” gobatumi.com, 5 January 2018

<sup>29</sup> “kaymak in Romanian.” Glosbe. Retrieved 2025-02-02.

mentions Samzivari as an extinct feudal family in Samtskhe. Their estate was taken over by the Gogibashvili family during that period.<sup>30</sup>

According to one tradition, Samdzivari, Ashekali and Mzekali are taken from Kajaveti by force. They used to say: "*Kill us here immediately, we are not going with you (the god's Children)*" they did not want to go together with them, until the Khakhmati Cross did not promised them to give their existence share in the territories of Khakhmati and to "empower them" with his own powers. He promised them, to have similar rights of the God's Children and be established in Khakhmati. In other words, they would be shrines themselves. By this promise and conditions let the Kaji women to be withdrawn from Kajaveti, and Samdzivari was their leader.<sup>31</sup>

According to another tradition, which seems to be based on the words of the elders, „*Beg to them, you, the hostages, freed*" is an explanation, "Sisters" of the Khakhmati Cross are rescued from Kajaveti, similarly to Nestani (One of main heroes of the Rustaveli's poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin". This is also what they say: "The poverty of Kajaveti really means like this, as if those who were burdened were taken, and these angels rescued them and took with them." But Andrez does not know how these women got into captivity.

In fairy tales and heroic epics, the woman, the beauty, is usually the fiancée of the hero. The hero brings his bride from Kajaveti, the crystal tower, the underworld, where the beauty does not want to stay, and helps his chosen one, teaches him the way and to get out of the foreign country. The Andrez is a sacred story, because it refers to the foundation of a cult, that is why a redeemed woman, even if she is a beauty (as Kaji's woman is considered), cannot be the bride of her redeeming hero, because this hero is a child of God, an angel, a fleshless being.

St. George of Khakhmati brings captive women as his sisters in Khakhmati. Among them first and main is Samdzivari, and the Samdzivari speaks her sermon like this:

"George took me,  
I was a Kaji woman?  
Christ the Lord baptized me,  
I became a shrine for the fleshly beings."<sup>32</sup>

As we can see, rescuing from Kajaveti has a distinct aspect: it means changing the religion, converting to Christianity. More precisely, the rescue is followed by conversion to the Christianity of the virgin.

About Samdzivari, people tell more:

"*She, Samdzivari, used to be the daughter of the king of Kajaveti. There was also a dragon. The dragon was eating one human from the village, the person was brought and left near the water. Once, Samdzivari was brought there. When St. George, came and saw this, he said to her: "I will rescue you, tell your father to let you to come with me."* [Samdzivari advised him]: "*Was yourself in the water nine times and make three sacrifice*".<sup>33</sup>

We fill in this episode according to another record (the version is the same, Khakhmaturi, but slightly different). "...Then our George hit a spear for a whale and brought Samdzivari. Brought her to his cross, baptized Samdzivari on his law. A veil was placed and the people could no longer

<sup>30</sup> Encyclopedia, Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia, IX, 1985, p. 49

<sup>31</sup> Ochiauri Al., Legends about Khevsuri Gods and Goddesses, 1938, pp. 107-108

<sup>32</sup> Ochiauri Al., 1938. p. 113

<sup>33</sup> Ochiauri T., mit'ologiuri gadmocemebi aghmosavlet sak'art'velos mt'ianet'shi - [Mithological tales of East georgian Mountain Regions], 1967, p. 193.



see the Samdzivari"<sup>34</sup>. It is not difficult to see the main miracle of St. George in this story. The narrative is firmly associated with a well-known motif, which has initially connected to the famous St. George from Cappadocia and has been established in his biography.

The holy knight will rescue the daughter of a pagan king from the dragon, to whom she is brought. As a result of this miracle, she will be converted to Christianity, later her father, the king and the rest of the population will follow her example.

It is very possible, the episode about Samdzivari's rescue from Kajaveti is a Khevsurian variant of the St. George's story; it has roots in the established canonical version of the hagiographical text and thus cannot be considered as a local, independent variety.

The Khakhmati Cross – The St. George of Khakhmati, repeats the archetypical behavior of his famous alias. Kajaveti is substituted by the pagan city, which the holy hero rescued from the dragon and converted to Christianity. The fact of rescuing, is the equivalent to the conversion to Christianity, in this Andrez.

Identity of Kajaveti and the pagan city of Lasia is more vivid on the scale of identity of Kajaveti and Kisteti. Since Kisti people, and, generally all neighboring Muslim people of North Caucasus are confronted by the Christian Khevsurians, on the terms of the religion – as believers to non-believers, because they are followers of St. George's religion and as the testimony to this are "Servants of the Cross", as the ancient Georgian Historian recalls.

On the contrary to the pagan city that was converted by St. George, Kajaveti remains unchanged; but instead the daughter of Kajavetian King – Samdzivari was risen on the range of God's Children with the help of St. George and thus holds a unique place among other God's children. She was brought as fraternized brother (or sister) of the cross of Khakhmati and has been firmly connected to St. George's cult: "Samdzivar-George are as one"<sup>35</sup>

On the contrary to the converted pagan city, Kajaveti remained the same. Instead the daughter of Kajavetian king Samdzivari was risen to the range of God's Child and took a unique place among the God's Children. She was introduced to the Khevsurians Pantheon as "brother" (with male characteristics). The congregation is not against her, being a woman and recall upon her as "St. George and she are one, Children of God". When the Khakhmati Cross is mentioned, in the minds of the believers have one image with two faces – on is "George of beautiful grooves" and "Samdzivari with beautiful hand ornate with beads, with buttoned neck". The congregation visions in one image of divine being the unity anima-animus. "Towards Kajaveti the horsemen was gone, player of balls<sup>36</sup> in the groove" – he is an orphan animus and returns from there with his anima, to unite with her in the Cross of Khakhmati.

The Khakhmati Cross acts in all cases as one, with a complex nature, female-male unity and not as single male and a single female. The female is shown through its male revelation, what is distinguished among other God's children. For example of this is the poem:

"Where are you going you, the free-will Khevsurians, as the fast wind?  
The Gudani Cross leads you and shouts good news<sup>37</sup> ,

<sup>34</sup> Bardavelidze V. , 1982, p. 79

<sup>35</sup> Ochiauri T. , From the History of the Ancient Beliefs of Georgians, 1954, p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> Ball playing, as a variety of military game, is one of main testimony of the horsemen's or knight's magnificence, his skillfulness.

<sup>37</sup> Or as a bull, since "Khari" is a bull in Georgian and thus a sacred animal. on the other hand, "Khareba" means telling good news; "Sakhareba" – The Gospel; "Khareba" – the Annunciation.

The Khakhmati Cross comes after you, crying as a woman”.<sup>38</sup>

The male is reviled in female exhibition, as the oracles of Samdzivari are persuading us, where her strange story is told.

The Samdzivari's oracles and her Andrezi supplement each-other. Both of them open her nature and meaning of her reveal in the congregation.

There is one Andrezi, where Samdzivari reveals to one young man as a real woman, leaves in his house, takes care of his house. People are doubtful, that she is not an ordinary woman, or is not a woman at all. Samdzivari will do a miracle and will disappear.

“The khakhmati Cross appeared to Kholiga in Kistani as a woman. She wanted to get under the ghee-barrel a golden ring and bracelet. She came as a woman, as if she were Juat Elene. The mother in law thought she was her son's woman. I am not sure how long did she stay there. Once she told to mother-in-law “I want to go home, make “Masantos” for me”<sup>39</sup>. “Do them yourself” – answered the mother-in-law. She noticed the woman was not quite ordinary. The mother-in-law went somewhere. When she returned, a big pot was boiling, four or five liters. The butter was boiling in it. She looked inside the barrel and noticed it was missing only one fingerprint. The bracelet and ring were taken out. The mother-in-law could not say anything. But the young woman taught her – “do it in this way, this is my rule” and put her finger two or three times in the barrel.

Thus she revealed herself and could not hide any more. First she went to the castle, in Lebaiskari, brought the “Masantos” there. Then she flew away to the Tsova's River. Settled there, from there she jumped over and came here. Kholiga got shocked – “apparently she is not a woman”. He fondled her breasts, but she had as a woman, did not show the feminine body. He told his mother – “She does not seem to be a woman”.<sup>40</sup>

The ephemeral husband and mother-in-law of Samdzivari are ensured, “Juath Elene” is not a real person; even more: she is not an ordinary woman at all. The mother-in-law sees her strangeness in her action – the false “Juath Elene” bakes masantoos” with one fingerprint butter. She guesses something, but is very careful woman and does not say anything.

The “husband” Kholiga understands more. He notices that his wife is not “Juath Elene”, even more, she is not a woman” “Kholiga got shocked”, i.e. Kholiga was suspicious, his wife looks like a woman, but without a feminine attributes.

From this story we do not see whether they had marital relations. Kholiga was just surprised because his wife had no breasts “She did not look like a woman”. This is typical sign of Samdzivari's apartness and nature in her Andrez.

<sup>38</sup> Shanidze, 2009, p 171. (Shanidze a, Topuria V. Gujejiani M., 1939)

<sup>39</sup> **Masanto** – a ritual cookie. In the oracle here is used “the good-news cookie” (Dolidze, 1975, pp. 22-24). The resiepe: “Ingredients: 1 liter of water; 200 grams of all-purpose flour; 200 grams of ghee; Salt (to taste). Preparation: \*In a pan, fry the all-purpose flour on low heat for 15-20 minutes. \*Slowly add boiling water and salt to the flour while constantly mixing. \*Continue boiling the mixture with constant stirring until the flour is fully liquefied, and the consistency allows the wooden spoon to stand in a vertical position. \*Serve the dish very hot, accompanied by ghee.” (Source – Elene Barbakadze – my Facebook friend, who said it was her grandmother's recipe).

<sup>40</sup> T. Ochiauri, “*From the history of the ancient beliefs of Georgians*”, publishing house of the Academy of Sciences of the SSR of Georgia Tbilisi., 1954. p. 45.

“Some Buleola lived with Samdzivari, instead of his lawful wife. He fondles her breasts, but cannot find anything, she was like a man and he turned away”<sup>41</sup>. “She should not be a woman” awakes the terrified husband, who could not do what he ought to do as a husband.

In one story we read: “When you sleep with a woman and what happens, I was going to do but she got lost, woman and man are risen, but she was lost”<sup>42</sup>. “She was lost” says the rejected man and mean the woman was disappearing, because Samdzivari is not objectifying for male-female relations.

From this story we do not understand, what purpose Samdzivari has when she appears in the humans’ house. Is she there just because, she wants to surprise the old woman and her son? Or she wants to give the rule of making three fingerprints in Masanto, as she makes her oracles to say:

“I baked the joyful cookies,  
Three times I trusted the holes in it”

It is hard to believe this action is only her inappropriate behavior, being converted to the true believe, the former devil. Here are some texts of Samdzivari’s oracles, which were revealed by T. Ochauri and included in her research<sup>43</sup>.

The story of Samdzivari while her being in a mortal’s house is shown in different side and presented. We have the poetic text, where there is represented the idea, quite in a stingy manner, that strengthens the expressiveness, is retold the actions of Samdzivari, how she behaves in her chosen “husband’s house”. The woman takes care of household: “I was busy with a sieve and through”, “bringing home the herbs: Anthriscus and Rumex Scutatus”<sup>44</sup>. She ornates herself and coquet as a female: “I dressed myself in pleated dress, with bright ruffles” “on my ears I put the earrings, dressed in rouched cloth”, “I covered my head with a kerchief”. The purpose of these actions are obvious and her efforts are awarded, as is revealed in her oracle’s words:

“Saghira from Abuleti  
Liked me, a woman, as his wife  
I tendered him, I lay with him  
I burned him with my breasts which I took off”

Although we know from oral tradition, that Samdzivari’s breasts was like of a man’s. But this have no continuation. Samdzivari brings her victim to the threshold and leaves him there, herself backs out – she does not let the fleshly to overcome the boundary, as soon as the male makes an attempt. This is not directly presented in the fortune-teller’s words – “he wanted to marry me, or “he wanted me as his wife” or “he was going to marry me”. As a result Samdzivari runs away and leaves the young man surprised and the mystery comes to the end – it becomes obvious that Samdzivari was here, her footprints and other remnants reminds about her. Here is one typical oracle’s saying, where this story is told in a short form.

“In the fortress of Abuletauris’  
I had laid my bed in sunshade

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* p. 49.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p. 45-47.

<sup>44</sup> Both of these herbs are used in culinary and medicine. Both of them are practiced to heal diarrhea. Both of them are used for curing the “Celiac Disease”, also known as gluten enteropathy, is a chronic inflammatory condition affecting the small intestine, primarily impacting the intestinal mucosa. The damage is triggered by proteins found in certain cereal crops.

Kholiga Abuletauri  
 Was going to marry me.  
 On the place from where I flew away  
 Even today one can see my footprints,  
 I have left the cheese and bread in the riverbed,  
 The hand soap I left in the spring source,  
 He run after me, being sinful<sup>45</sup>.

From here we can clearly see, that the marriage bed in the sunshade of Abudelaury's fortress is not designated for fulfilling the groom's and bride's joining purpose – it is not their marriage bed. Samdzivari avoids staying close with her groom – she does not allow he to come closer then she gives permission; thus the guest runs away without looking back and all their relation is stopped. The young man has been punished for showing exaggerated passion, since it is considered as breaking the law, he is punished for being sinful and thus ashamed – as it is seen from the words: "He run after me being sinful".

Here what says angry Samdzivari about the young man, who, in his turn understands that he has sinned and for this reason their relations has been ruined: he desired what was impossible for him even to think about. For this reason says Samdzivari about the young man – "he followed me as if he has sinned." The moral prohibition of sexual relations has its representation in physical impossibility of the act. In prosaic Andrezes, as we see, the young man cannot see the female characteristics of Samdzivari and on the edge of their closeness the woman disappears. This strangeness of Samdzivari's physical appearances is exposed in Samdzivari's fortune-tellers words: "I walked as a woman...", "then I showed myself as a woman...", "I walked as a female...", "I dressed as a woman...", etc. This only means that Samdzivari, as a holy person, as a "Cross", as an angelic creation, is not female and she (or he, or even it) behaves as a woman when it is needed.

Why would Samdzivari behave in this way? What her behavior means? Her actions are very hard to understand, or to be interpreted in ordinary, casual way. Her actions are as strange to be understood, as the custom of the - Khevsurian communities – "Stsorphroba", initiator and founder of which can be considered to be Samdzivari in her sermons. This idea is developed by G. Japaridze in his article "The Holy Tablets"<sup>46</sup>.

Thus can be interpreted the mystery of Stsorphroba. Here is not an attempt of researching the historical roots of this strange custom, but this analogy gives us an opportunity to connect reality with the mythical interpretations. The fundamental description of this custom – the Stsorphroba has studied and researched by the distinguished folklorist – Natela Baliauri in her fundamental work "Stsorphroba in Khevsureti"<sup>47</sup>. As we can see from this research, Stsorphroba was a firmly established system of relations among the parish members during even in decadence of existence of community-parish culture – where there was considered even minor details and possible cases. In this custom the initiator is a woman – she invites a male for relations for talks and meetings (in particular laying/sleeping with him) and she sets the rules, makes borders for his

<sup>45</sup> Since in Georgian there are not pronouns for genders, and even more, subject and object of the predicate are not always definite, the translation may be a matter of subjective interpretation. Thus the words "momdevdes shanacodvarobita" – can mean two things: 1. he (the groom) run after Samdzivari, full of sinful thoughts; 2. She (Samdzivari) run full of sinful acts, which she has done, by promising the groom to become his bride and did not fulfil her promise, thus endangered his life in moral, or otherwise matters.

<sup>46</sup> Japaridze, 1984, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Baliauri, 1991.

actions, tames his passion and eliminates even minor attempts to overcome the prohibited moves from his side. It makes impressions, as if these relations are regulated by women and the custom itself is invented by the women, similarly to the believe of Khevsurian Andrezes, that a woman stands behind or as a foundation of the genesis of institution of sermons, or fortune-telling of the cross.

It is mandatory rule between the Stsorpheri couple –the sexual relations are fully prohibited, as well as the legitimate marriage. Whoever attempts to overcome this rule is considered as contravene of the rule, of a law and will be punished by ostracizing from the community, from the parish, the same way, as would be punished the guilty in incest. During their mutual “laying-standing” (as the locals call the custom of Stsorphroba), as soon as the woman notices that the male looks at her “in a different way”, loves her, the woman leaves the Stsorpheri’s bed and goes, never returning back, never looks at the young man again. The fleshly woman acts as Samdzivari, repeats the archetypical behavior, to abolish the male’s desire. The young man cannot love his Stsorpheri, as a female – this warning is heard in Samdzivari’s words, which repeatedly is heard in multiple sermons as caution: “Imeda of Abuletauri liked me as a woman”, “Gakhua Megrelauri wanted to marry me”, “Imeda Abuletauri called me for marriage”.

The rebuked intonation of these words prohibits marriage of Stsorpheri couple and establishes the rule of their pure relations. Samdzivari could have said “This is my rule”, as she said about the handprints on the Masantos in Kholiga of Kistani’s house: “Do it further in this way, its my rule” and disappeared. This is all the treasury of Kajaveti, each item of which is sacred in its nature and has a cult purpose.

### Women of Kajeti 1 <sup>48</sup>

Then we captured three very beautiful women of kajis: samdzivari, mzekali and ashekali. They resisted us and said, "Kill us here; we will not come with you."

Finally, St. George promised them, "If you come, I will patronize you; you will be my sisters, and I will be your brother. I will protect you with all the might I possess, share my power with you, and provide you with lands. I and my servants will pray for you, just as they pray for me, and they (my servants) will consider you as my sisters."

They answered, "We don't know Georgian; how can your fortune-teller understand what we say?"

St. George promised them, "My fortune-teller will speak your language, and he himself will translate what you are saying."

With this condition the women agreed and came with us.

### Women of Kajeti 2 <sup>49</sup>

Khevsurians say that the women of Kajeti – samdzivari, ashekali, and mzekali learned a little bit of Georgian, but amenkali and simenkali did not learn a word.

<sup>48</sup> Al. Ochiauri, M 15

<sup>49</sup> Al. Ochiauri, M 15



They remain silent all the time and do not interfere in anything. They just remain there and occasionally follow them when they go anywhere.

The Khakhmati Cross used to travel in dark.<sup>50</sup>

It is said, as if one woman from Gudani had said: "I have lost a cow, a white cow. I have looked after it everywhere in dark, but could not find it. Finally I have begged to the Khakhmati Cross, to help me to find my cow alive."

On the next day the woman went and saw her cow gave birth to the calf.

The cow itself was white and the calf was white as well, as a snow.

"When I came closer" – used to say that woman, - "I saw there one woman dressed in white, who was shining as a sun and I could not watch her.

I understood she was the Khakhmati Cross and I hid myself.

She understood that I had come and disappeared.

Then I came close to the cow and brought it with its calf home. When the calf grew, I sacrificed it to the Khakhmati Cross."

Khevsurians believe, that the Khakhmati cross defends and patronages the cattle.

So people address it quite frequently for defending the domestic animals for protection.

For example, when a cow, horse, goat, or sheep stays outside at night, people will immediately invoke the Khakhmati Cross, saying, "Oh great Khakhmati Cross, help me! Do not let my cattle die." They promise to offer sacrificial animals or masantos, depending on the value of the cattle left outside.

Finally they will fulfill the promise.

Also, if they have exceptional calf, or foal, or any other distinguished goods, they would offer it to the Khakhmati Cross.

People have a custom of naming a distinguished cow after the Khakhmati Cross, especially when the cow suddenly stops giving milk. In such situations, they attribute the issue to the "evil eye" or a malevolent gaze, and also consider the Khakhmati Cross as a potential cause. They believe that invoking the Khakhmati Cross in these instances will bring about a cure.

They name cattle after the Cross, thus it is quite frequent in Khevsureti to see a cow with a nickname "Khakhmata".

When a cow, bearing the nickname of the Khakhmati Cross, resumes giving milk in the spring, and the ghee-making process begins, a special sweet ritual bread is prepared using the ghee.

<sup>50</sup> "zep'irad siaruli" – making oral steps – an idiomatic expression in Georgian, meaning walking in dark, without ability to walk where the subject steps. "If a man does not look ahead, or walks in the dark with his guts, they will say, he takes a step by mouth, he walks with a step by mouth. In another way, the oral step is called the oral walk."

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