



APOLON KUTATELADZE
TBILISI STATE ACADEMY OF ART
THE FACULTY OF RESTORATION/CONSERVATION,
ART HISTORY AND THEORY

Doctoral Programme:
Art History Research

RESUME
OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

CROSS-DOMED CHURCH AT HJABI
(A Monographic Research)

BY

KETEVAN ABASHIDZE

Submitted to Tbilisi State Academy of Arts, The Faculty of
Restoration/Conservation, Art History and Theory in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Art History.

© 2021 Ketevan Abashidze. All rights reserved.

Dissertation Advisor: Dimitri Tumanishvili+
Dr. Irine Elizbarashvili, professor
Dr. Samson leJava, professor

Tbilisi
2021

Our monographic work is dedicated to the main cross-domed church of the vast monastery complex in the historical Kvemo Kartli named after the Iviron Mother of God, which has been closely linked to the history of Georgia since the early Middle Ages to the present day. This historic territory of Kvemo Kartli is located today within the borders of the Republic of Armenia, about 350-400 m¹ from the current Georgian-Armenian border. The only village near the monastic complex, Akhkerpi (former Hujabi) is 1 km from the monastery, on the territory of Georgia and is a part of Marneuli region in terms of administrative division. Despite such geographical location, Hujabi monastery, as a result of the shift of the borders in 1921, was assigned to the Russian Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas in the village of Privolnoye of Alaverdi district of Armenia, 22(25) km away, across the Mount Lelvari.²

Written sources referring to the monastery and its churches are scarce. It is mentioned in the *Description of the Kingdom of Georgia*³ (1742-1745) by Vakhushti Batonishvili (Bagrationi), which tells that at that time, in the early 18th century, the monastery was "empty", that is to say abandoned: "Above it, there is a monastery with a dome, at a good place and now it is empty."⁴ The first historical source that mentions the village Hujabi is the book of the statistical description of Georgia of 1721, from which it is clear that there were two Georgian villages in the place of the present-day village Akhkerpi - Hujabi and Zemo (Upper) Hujabi, which belonged to Eliarashvili family, the gentry of the Georgian Queen.⁵

However, the lost history of the monastery can be read in its construction layers and architectural forms. The study of the monastic complex and its churches by the method of artistic and stylistic analysis in historical, geographical, theological, liturgical, palaeographic, geological, etc contexts may fill the information void. The goal of our research is to find the place of the cross-domed central building of the complex in the history of the Georgian architecture. Sadly, since 1921, the Soviet-style redistribution of territories has raised another problem - the national identity of the church has become disputable.

Today, the main task of Armenian and Georgian architectural historians is to determine the national identity of the Hujabi monastery complex in general, and for our own research in particular, of the cross-domed church of Hujabi.

Literary and archival written sources indicate that the dispute about which national architectural school this cross-domed church should belong to has been gradually gaining

¹ ხარაძე კ. ჰუჯაბი XX საუკუნის ტრაგედია, თბ., 2012;

² Ibid., p. 90–93; 96;

³ ვახუშტი. აღწერა სამეფოსა საქართველოსა (საქართველოს გეოგრაფია), თბ., 1941. შესავალი, p.XVII;

⁴ Ibid., p.37;

⁵ ვახუშტი ბატონიშვილი. „წიგნი საქართველოს სტატისტიკური აღწერილობისა მეთვრამეტე საუკუნეში: I, აღწერა მეწინავე დროშათა საბარათაშვილოსა და სომხითისა, შედგენილი მეფე ვახტანგ მეექვსის ბრძანებით ვახუშტი ბატონიშვილის და გივი თუმანიშვილის მიერ 1721წ.“, გამოც. ექვთიმე თაყაიშვილის რედაქტორობით, 1907. სოფელი ხუჯაბი, p.244, 246, 247, სოფელი ზემო ხუჯაბი-p.246, 247;

momentum in art history since the end of the 19th century.⁶ Today, both Armenian and Georgian sides consider the monastery complex and its main church to be examples of their own church architecture.

In the albums of both sides devoted to church architecture, issued by international publishers inclusive, one can find the Hujabi monastery complex, with the main discussion revolving around the cross-domed church.⁷ Armenian scholars do not dispute the confessional affiliation of the monastery and its main cross-domed church, in particular, claiming that Hujabi monastery complex was the abode of the Diophysite Armenians who lived at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries and during the first half of the 13th century. Therefore, its architectural and structural similarity with Georgian church architecture is considered natural. Thus, in general, along with frescoes and Georgian inscriptions, they consider the monastery a part of Armenian cultural heritage.

Identifying to which of the two great national schools of South Caucasian Christian architecture should the church in question be attributed, requires matching many parallel materials and considering their relationship with the architecture of the both sides; A spatial layout of the monastery complex should be considered; The churches and other buildings of the complex should be studied as a whole and the stages of construction determined by way of the construction layers examination; The churches should be studied from the architectural and typological perspective together with a detailed research of their artistic and aesthetic qualities. We chose to study the central cross-domed church of the monastic complex and give the research a monographic character. The present paper is only the beginning of the path.

As we have already mentioned, we are faced with the task of determining which of the two clearly distinguished great national schools of Christian architecture, Armenian or Georgian should the church in question be attributed to, and by which, Georgian or Armenian architect it was built. At the same time, we should underline the feature that is inherent for both schools - the construction of a church has never been decided by the will of just one architect, even highly educated and skilled. Always and especially during 12th and 13th centuries, the Georgian royal court, officials, mighty lords, and wealthy locals assigned the construction of churches to renowned masters of the ecclesiastical architecture, together with the masters of stone carving and fresco painting, with the consent of the Church. The church is a "theology" in itself, its spoken language being architectural constructions and carved decorative forms, which carry symbolic meaning; in their order and interconnection, the religious beliefs and worship (liturgy) are reflected.

⁶ Baltrushaitis J. *Etudes sur l'art Medieval en Georgie et en Armenie*, Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1929. p.3 5;

⁷Mepisashvili R., Zinzadze W., *Aufnahmen von Rolf Schrade, Georgien, Wehrbauten und Kirchen*, Leipzig, 1986. p.314,315; pl. 459, 461;

Donabedian P. "Parallelisme, convergences et divergences entre Armenie et Georgie en architecture et sculpture architecturale", Dans: *L'Armenie et la Georgie en dialogue avec L'Europe du Moyen Age a nos jours*, Paris, 2016. p.71, 76-77; Шахкян Г. *Каменные страницы истории*, Ереван, 1986. p.134–136, pl. 32, 16–18;

The cultures of both nations are strongly interlinked with religion and liturgy. Of course, the main customer and driving force was the church, hierarchically the high clergy, theologians, monks, and others - that is, the "earthly fighting church." They themselves were involved in the difficult and intensive process of church building as a kind of a "cosmic co-creation", in the course of which, they accumulated many centuries of tradition, experience, and knowledge. It is impossible for such issues to depend on the will of just one person.⁸ Therefore, under the school, we mean the national peculiarities, character, and feelings reflected in the works of art, the historically developed, established artistic and architectural forms that are based upon the religion confessed in the country, which further plays a crucial role in forming contemporary historical reality. Church construction, especially of those like Hujabi cross-domed church, required a great deal of effort and organization to be led by a powerful official or a lord, which also precluded anyone's solitary will.

As a foreword to this many year's work, I have brought an excerpt from the review by Dimitri Tumanishvili, my teacher and mentor at all stages, of my MA thesis "The Architecture of Hujabi Monument" (1981):

"One of the most important issues of art history, in this case the Georgian art history, is to identify the peculiar marks that have developed over time... With the development of the art history, it has become increasingly obvious that it is impossible to draw a correct picture of the art development and the changes that took place, without taking into account the contribution of different peoples, which in turn requires the clarification of the national identity of art in different countries. The same applies to a particular monument because its historical place cannot be identified without having revealed its nature. Especially true this is for the monuments that have been built in the areas of ethnically diverse populations, places where cultures intersect, where the works of art bear the imprint of different peoples"

At the beginning of the study, I aimed to study the cross-domed church of Hujabi using the method of artistic and stylistic analysis available to art historians, as well as a wide range of comparisons with other churches in order to determine what era it can relate to based on its main features; how its architectural, constructive, artistic and decorative solutions connect it with churches that represent the general image of Georgian church architecture; what are the features that "betray" the Georgian origin of a cultural phenomenon at first sight; and are these features only liturgical features characteristic of the Diophysite Church or not. Among the peculiarities of the liturgical planning one should mention a door cut from the apse of the altar to the north to the prothesis, undoubtedly contemporary of the construction; or a low, one-

⁸ თუმანიშვილი დ., ნაცვლიშვილი ნ., ხომტარია დ. მშენებელი ოსტატები შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში, თბ., 2012. p. 61–151; თუმანიშვილი დ. კრებული „წერილები“ ნარკვევები“, თბ., 2001. ბასილი ზარზმელი ტაძართმშენებლობის შესახებ-p.40–56; ძველი ქართული მწერლობის ძეგლები V, ბასილი კესარიელის „სწავლათა“; ეფთვიმე ათონელისეული თარგმანი (გამოსაცემად მოამზადა, გამოკვლევა და ლექსიკონი დაურთო ც. ქურციკიძემ), თბ., 1983. p.23;... და სხვა;

step ambon, together with three low-set windows in the altar apse, also cut from the beginning of construction. Their low sit in relation to the interior obviously allows for the low rise of the ambon, which usually corresponds to the rule of the Constantinople Orthodox liturgy established in the 11th century. These two details make it absolutely indisputable that the church was planned for the Diophysite liturgy from the very beginning.



Hujabi Monastery is located in Bolnisi Gorge, close to the head of the river Poladauri, at the foot of Lelvari Mountain, a little North of it. Poladauri is the old Georgian name of this river. On the right bank of the Hujabi Water, one of its tributaries, there is a large monastery in the forest, on a purposely terraced rocky slope. Over the centuries, architects have formed two tiers on two different levels on the mountain slope, one above the other, and leveled out platforms for separate buildings of the monastery. The buildings of the monastery complex are vividly and conveniently integrated into the environment and immersed in nature. At present, two churches remain on the upper tier, and on the lower one there are the ruins of the thick wall with round towers, a two-story refectory and the remains of various outbuildings. On the upper tier, two churches stand side by side, about 25 meters apart. The church located to the north is damaged, modified, and disfigured in the course. It is a hall church built of goldish-white stone, with annexes from the south and north. To the south of it, in the center of the monastic complex, there is a large cross-domed church faced with pinkish violet andesitic tuff⁹ slabs.

The material used for the construction of the monastery buildings represents the layers of different centuries. For the circuit wall and other buildings of the complex, mostly less processed large blocks were used, as well as large cobblestones, from which most of the monastery cells were built. This patchwork, mixed masonry of a varied rhythm, character, and scale, as well as the diverse architectural type of the buildings (for example, the round tower is typical architecture of the late Middle Ages), bear traces of many renovations, apparently of different ages. Several types of building materials were used for the hall church, which also testifies to many construction and restoration stages. The main variety that has been used is sandstone. One of the most important periods is represented by travertine slabs of the facades. Travertine quarry is located higher on the slope, near Mgliskari.¹⁰ The first impression that Hujabi monastery complex makes is the color and size of the central cross-domed church.

The church is built of brick and is faced with smoothly hewn slabs of pinkish violet tuff. The relief decoration around the doors and windows and on the dome is made of golden sandstone together with the main violet tuff, with one or two green carved stones, below the dome,

⁹ ხარაძე ვ. ჰუჯაბი XX საუკუნის ტრაგედია, თბ., 2012. p.19–20;

¹⁰ ბერძენიშვილი დ. ნარკვევები, თბ., 2005. ჰუჯაბი, p.191;

imperceptibly incorporated into the base. The annex on the south side of the church was faced with green and goldish sandstone slabs, together with the basic violet ones. Violet andesitic tuff is of local origin, as even the platform on which the church sits is a mother rock of this variety, while yellow and green stones were brought from afar.

Bolnisi Gorge is known for tuff of the mentioned three colors,¹¹ which have been actively used in the church construction since the adoption of Christianity. Earle examples include Sioni of Bolnisi, Kvemo Bolnisi, Kvemo Mankhuti, Akvaneba (interior), Vanati (so-called three-church basilica), and others built in the 5th and 6th centuries. There are also several examples from the 12th and 13th centuries. The façade of the Tsughrughasheni church at the end of Bolnisi gorge is finished with the same type slabs as the Hujabi, with a different ratio of colors, though, where the main color is goldish, while the greenish stone was used mostly for the decoration around the doors and windows, and the violet is sparse. Another picture "painted" with the same colors can be seen on the facade of the church of Pitareti, near Bolnisi. The façade here is mostly pinkish-purple, with goldish yellow around the doors and windows, while on the dome, at the foot of the cornice, above the arch of the windows, green ornamental stones of different sizes, intermitted with burgundy and goldish stone carved adornment are forming a single colorful belt; The steps of the base of the south annex of the church are made of greenstone, as in the Hujabi. The portico of the Dmanisi church is finished entirely with green stone; etc.

The study showed that the type of stone used for the cross-domed church in Hujabi and the monastery complex in general, a characteristic natural resource of the Poladauri Valley, has been used by the architects of Bolnisi Gorge region for centuries. The variety of colors,¹² one of the characteristic features of Georgian ecclesiastical architecture in general, has become the hallmark of this particular regional school, and since the corresponding natural resource was in abundance, some especially colorful examples of church architecture have been produced during the 12th and 13th centuries. We believe that even only the aforementioned features and parallels clearly show the inherited features of the cross-domed church in Hujabi, both in the general Georgian and in the regional context. Particularly strong ties can be seen with Pitareti church, which may indicate to a common workshop or a master-to-apprentice relationship.

• • •

The historical Kvemo Kartli was called Gugareni in ancient times. According to Strabo, before 191 BC, it was captured by Armenians along with other lands. From the 4th to the 6th centuries,

¹¹ ხარაძე კ. ჰუჯაბი XX საუკუნის ტრაგედია, თბ., 2012. p.19–20;

¹² თუმანიშვილი დ. კრებული „წერილები“ ნარკვევები“, თბ., 2001. ნაირფერადოვნების შესახებ V-XIII საუკუნეების ქართულ ხუროთმოძღვრებაში, p. 90–100; აბაშიძე ე. ფერის სიმბოლიკა ჰუჯაბის ტაძრის ხუროთმოძღვრებაში, თბ., 2002. P. 27–29, 66–67; აბაშიძე ე. ჰუჯაბის ტაძრის მხატვრული სახის ერთი თავისებურება, ახალგაზრდა მეცნიერთა რესპუბლიკური კონფერენცია მიმდევნილი პროფესორ ლევან რჩეულიშვილის დაბადების 80 წლისთავისადმი, თბ., 1989. P. 10,11;

this area was a part of the Kingdom of Iberia both politically and spiritually; From the 6th to the 9th centuries, the province went through many hardships related to the Arab conquest. The unity of the country was broken up by the invaders, as they established emirates in the captured territories. Shida and Kvemo Kartli became parts of the Emirate of Tbilisi. According to historical sources, at the end of the 9th century, Guaram Mampal bequeathed one territory of Kvemo Kartli - Abotsi, to his wife's brother, the Armenian king...¹³ From here the Monophysite kings of Armenia began to invade the lands of Kvemo Kartli. In Georgian historical sources from the 11th and 12th centuries, the term Somkhiti (Somkheti being the name of Armenia in Georgian) settled to refer to these territories of Kvemo Kartli. Conversely, in the contemporary Armenian sources, the same territories are called Vrats-Dasht, which means in Armenian the Georgian Valley.¹⁴

In the last quarter of the 11th century, as a result of the Seljuk invasion, Somkhiti as a political entity no longer existed, like the statehood of Armenia.¹⁵ Between 1118 and 1123, Georgian King David the Builder finally recaptured this part of Kvemo Kartli (Somkhiti, Lore...) and from then up until 1921, Somkhiti, that is Vrats-Dasht or the Valley of Georgians, has always belonged to Georgia.¹⁶

...

From the beginning of the 11th century, when David the Builder returned the capital Tbilisi, the political center of the country shifted to Kvemo Kartli. It is known from historical sources that Jalal-ad-Din "set up his camp in Somkhiti, in the Bolnisi Gorge"¹⁷ during his expedition to Tbilisi. Since the 1220s, devastating Mongol invasions began in Georgia, followed by raids of various

¹³ ჯავახიშვილი ი. საქართველოს საზღვრები, ისტორიულად და თანამედროვე თვალსაზრისით განხილული, ტფილისი, 1919. (IV თავი. სამხრეთის საზღვარი. ქვემო ქართლი, გამყოფელი ხაზი საქართველოსა და სომხეთს შორის, p.16–35), §1. p.16–20; ხარაძე ვ. ჰუჯაბი XX საუკუნის ტრაგედია, თბ., 2012. ცოტა რამ წარსულიდან, p.39–47; ბერძენიშვილი დ. ნარკვევები საქართველოს ისტორიული გეოგრაფიიდან, ქვემო ქართლი, ნაკვეთი I, თბ., 1979. ეთნიკური გეოგრაფია, p. 103–114; p.103;

¹⁴ ბერძენიშვილი დ. ნარკვევები, თბ., 2005. (აგარანის საკითხისათვის, p.157–190), p.179; ბერძენიშვილი დ. ნარკვევები საქართველოს ისტორიული გეოგრაფიიდან, ქვემო ქართლი, ნაკვეთი I, თბ., 1979. (ტერიტორიულ-ადმინისტრაციული დანაწილება და პოლიტიკური გეოგრაფია.p. 42–101), p.57–58, 69; აბაშიძე ზ., ვაშაკიძე ვ., მირიანაშვილი ნ., ჭიჭიშვილი. ყოველი საქართველო (ქართული სახელმწიფოს ისტორიული საზღვრები უძველესი დროიდან დღემდე), თბ., 2014. P. 68–71, p.82–83;

¹⁵ აბაშიძე ზ., ვაშაკიძე ვ., მირიანაშვილი ნ., ჭიჭიშვილი. ყოველი საქართველო (ქართული სახელმწიფოს ისტორიული საზღვრები უძველესი დროიდან დღემდე), თბ., 2014. P. 83; ჯავახიშვილი ი. საქართველოს საზღვრები, ისტორიულად და თანამედროვე თვალსაზრისით განხილული, ტფილისი, 1919. (IV თავი. სამხრეთის საზღვარი. ქვემო ქართლი, გამყოფელი ხაზი საქართველოსა და სომხეთს შორის, p.16–35), §2. p.22–23;

¹⁶ ჯავახიშვილი ი. საქართველოს საზღვრები, ისტორიულად და თანამედროვე თვალსაზრისით განხილული, ტფილისი, 1919. (IV თავი. სამხრეთის საზღვარი. ქვემო ქართლი, გამყოფელი ხაზი საქართველოსა და სომხეთს შორის, p.16–35), §3–§8. p.23–35;

¹⁷ ქართლის ცხოვრება II. (ყაუხჩიშვილის რედ.), თბ., 1959. P. 183;

foreign invaders in the following centuries, which led to a gradual decline of Georgia's political power.



The road to Lore-Tashiri, a region bordering Armenia, ran along Bolnisi Gorge (the river Poladauri Gorge). The main road from the Georgian capital Tbilisi to Ani of Armenia passed through Dmanisi. Much longer, although more convenient for travel, it became the main foreign trade route over the centuries, thus being regulated and properly maintained. From Tbilisi to Anis the Tzopi-Sadakhlo road was also much easier to cross than the road through Bolnisi Gorge, that is, along the Poladauri river. The latter was difficult to pass, but much shorter and, naturally protected as it was locked by mountains. The gorge of the Poladauri River is still difficult to pass today and the Tzopi-Ofreti road to Hujabi along the Poladauri river is hard to navigate as it slopes steeply down the cliffs and is difficult to drive. When leaving Bolnisi along the gorge of the Poladauri river, i.e. from the village of Hujabi (modern vill. Akhkerpi) up the slope, the road goes along the left bank of the Poladauri to the Mount Lelvari, the historic Mgliskari (means “Wolf Gate”) cut through the rocks, which is an exit to another geographical region, Lore-Tashiri, a region bordering on Armenia.¹⁸

We think that the special strategic role and importance of this valley for the self-defense of an independent country like Georgia is quite clear. Exactly because of the political importance of this road, Bolnisi Gorge has always been a royal domain.¹⁹ Hujabi Monastery is located at the mouth of this important royal valley, in the geographical area of one of the most strategically important points of the country - the Kldekari (literally “the door in the rocks”, later called “Wolf Gate”), which locates about 13 km away. Kldekari is quite of size (about 80 m long)²⁰ and along with the natural passage, it also includes a portion hand-cut in the rocks. According to the research of N. Berdzenishvili, a Georgian historian, it had been functioning since early Christian times to the late Middle Ages inclusive. It was used in the 19th century too and even today there is the border checkpoint. On the way from Tbilisi to Lore, the Wolf Gate was actually the last

¹⁸ ბერძენიშვილი დ. ნარკვევები, თბ., 2005. ჰუჯაბი, p.191–193; მუსხელიშვილი ლ. ენიშკის მოამბე, „ბოლნისი“, III ტ., 1938. p. 315; აბაშიძე ზ., ვაშაკიძე ვ., მირიანაშვილი ნ., ჭეიშვილი. ყოველი საქართველო (ქართული სახელმწიფოს ისტორიული საზღვრები უძველესი დროიდან დღემდე), თბ., 2014. p.17;

¹⁹ იოანე ბაგრატიონი. ქართლ-კახეთის აღწერა, 1986. p.56; ბერძენიშვილი დ. ნარკვევები საქართველოს ისტორიული გეოგრაფიიდან, ქვემო ქართლი, ნაკვეთი I, თბ., 1979. p.46; 51; 81; მუსხელიშვილი ლ. დმანისი, კრებული, შოთა რუსთაველის ეპოქის მატერიალური კულტურა, თბ., 1938. p. 331; ბერძენიშვილი დ. ბოლნისის ისტორიული გეოგრაფიის კრებული, სიგკ. II., თბ.,1964. P. 39;

²⁰ ბერძენიშვილი დ. ნარკვევები, თბ., 2005. ჰუჯაბი, p. 192;

"gate" from the Georgian side, and as it can be seen from the documents, there was customs checkpoint there in the late Middle Ages.²¹

This geographical position of Bolnisi Gorge has ensured rapid changes in these lands, which in turn led to a change in the ethnic composition of the population. At different times, Orthodox Georgians lived in the gorge next to Orthodox, Georgianized Armenians, Monophysite Armenians and Monophysite Georgians. This area was especially deserted after the raids of Tamerlane. According to historians, due to the political situation, the influx of the Armenian population has become active since the 15th century. The current name of the village, Akhkerp, which means "White Bridge" in Turkish²², is a clear sign of the diversity of the population. This bridge still exists in this village on the Poladauri River, and together with other bridges with Turkish names such as Idkerp ("Dog Bridge") or Gochulu Bridge (with an inscription from 1651) indicating the existence of Turkish-speaking population in Hujabi at that time. The names that are still used today suggest that this population remained in this valley for a long time.

Describing Somkhiti in the 1740s, Vakhushti Batonishvili emphasized that the Armenians living there were Georgians in "character and behavior".²³ Despite the difficult historical events that took place in the late Middle Ages, as a result of which the population of Georgia periodically decreased, these lands have always remained under the direct control of the Georgian kings, and it is clear that they controlled the Kldekari Pass on the Mount Lelvari. In the 1721 book of statistical descriptions, in Hujabi and Zemo Hujabi, the villages of the royal nobility of Eliarashvili, some of the listed surnames may have Armenian origin, but with Georgian suffix - "shvili".²⁴ These names are no longer found in Akhkerpi today. The present population has been relocated from Karabakh to the villages devastated by Russian policy in the 1830s. According to archival documents, the lands of Hujabi in the 19th and early 20th centuries belonged to the Counts Melikishvili until the loss of independence and the establishment of Soviet regime.²⁵

There are several versions as regards the origin of the name Hujabi. In Armenian, "Khuchap" means quick and fuss,²⁶ while in Arabic, the word Hujab is a plural form of Ejib, and the latter means the keeper or keeper-in-chief of the king's door²⁷ and also the King's spokesperson.²⁸ Thus, both the word Ejib, and the position of Ejib at the royal court, were well-known to

²¹ Ibid., p.193–195;

²² მუსხელიშვილი ლ. ენიმკის მოამბე, „ბოლნისი“, III ტ., 1938. p. 314;

²³ ვახუშტი. აღწერა სამეფოსა საქართველოსა (საქართველოს გეოგრაფია), თბ., 1941. p. 37;

²⁴ ვახუშტი ბატონიშვილი. „წიგნი საქართველოს სტატისტიკური აღწერილობისა მეთვრამეტე საუკუნეში: I, აღწერა მეწინავე დროშათა საბარათაშვილოსა და სომხითისა, შედგენილი მეფე ვახტანგ მეექვსის ბრძანებით ვახუშტი ბატონიშვილის და გივი თუმანიშვილის მიერ 1721წ.“, გამოც. ექვთიმე თაყაიშვილის რედაქტორობით, 1907. p. 244, 246, 247;

²⁵ ხარაძე კ. ჰუჯაბი XX საუკუნის ტრაგედია, თბ., 2012. p.43–62;

²⁶ Ibid., p.223-224;

²⁷ ქართლის ცხოვრება I. (ყაუხჩიშვილის რედ.), თბ., 1955. p. 439; ქართლის ცხოვრება II. (ყაუხჩიშვილის რედ.), თბ., 1959.p.363;

²⁸ სულხან-საბა ორბელიანი...I; ლექსიკონი ქართული I, თბ., 1991. p.251;

Georgia and go down the depths of the centuries.²⁹ The name of the monastery mentioned by Vakhushti Batonishvili (Bagrationi) in his geography of Georgia as Hujabi and the name of the village recorded in the statistical description of 1721 – Khujabi, as based on the etymology of the word Hujab, seem to reflect the centuries-old historical reality for both the village and the monastery.

Turns out that if the word Hujab is plural for Ejib, that is the gatekeepers³⁰ or the gate guards. It should have meant exactly the border troops that the country and the king were supposed to have kept stationed there, around the Wolf Gate pass. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that such a powerful country as Georgia was in the 12th and the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, had no border guard formation around such an important road and passage. One should assume that the guards of the Wolf Gate, the keepers of the door, or the aforementioned Hujab, should have been stationed there. The name of the village Hujabi, therefore, seems to indicate the duties and responsibilities of its inhabitants.

The strategic location of the monastery complex, the number, size, and layout of its buildings create an interesting picture when considering all this in the context of one ancient manuscript. We mean a Typikon of one of the monasteries of the age of Queen Tamar.³¹ According to the postscript to the manuscript, it was found by one of the landowners in the lands of Counts Melikishvili, in the gorge below the monastery, badly damaged (the text is incomplete, and the name of the monastery is not readable).³² It should be noted that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, before the Sovietization of Georgia, the Hujabi forest and the monastery complex located in its depth belonged to the counts Melikishvili of Borchalo and that monastic life was restored there since 1905.³³ The text speaks of a monastery near Bolnisi, which overlooks the gorge. There are suggestions that Akhtala, or Tsugrugasheni, or Bolnisi are meant... We believe that the content of the Typikon can equally apply to Hujabi monastery, as well as to other monasteries in this area.

The typikon dates from between 1191 and 1212.³⁴ It mentions the "kings equal to God" together with the royal family and Ioane Mkhargrdzeli. The text says that the royal family (!) often visited the monastery accompanied by the royal guard and "big and small" guests (as well as novices). The monastery was on an important road and it must have been big enough to host so many visitors. Obviously, on the important "royal" road near Bolnisi, along with the other

²⁹ ქართლის ცხოვრება I (ყაუხჩიშვილის რედ.), თბ., 1955. p. 439, ჯუანშერი, ცხოვრება ვახტანგ გორგასლისა, p. 186, 189;

³⁰ ბერძენიშვილი დ. ნარკვევები, თბილისი, 2005. ჰუჯაბი, p. 194; მუსხელიშვილი ლ. ენიმკის მოამბე, „ბოლნისი“, III ტ., 1938. p. 384;

³¹ კაკაბაძე ს. მეფის თამარის დროინდელი ერთი მონასტრის ტიპიკონის ნაწყვეტი, წერილები და მასალები საქართველოს ისტორიისათვის, წიგნი I, თბ., 1914. p.72–73;

³² Ibid., p. 71–75;

³³ ხარაძე ვ. ჰუჯაბი XX საუკუნის ტრაგედია, თბ., 2012. p. 49 - 56;

³⁴ ბერძენიშვილი დ. ნარკვევები, თბილისი, 2005. ახტალის მონასტერი, p.202;

above-mentioned churches we can also think of the Hujabi ... and then, the orthodox kings of the orthodox country could not have ignored a monastery so large and important as Hujabi. If the historic passage through the rocks on the mount Lelvari was the physical gateway to the country, the Hujabi Monastery was the spiritual one. Exactly this road, an important highway, has always and unconditionally made the Bolnisi gorge a royal domain.

We can not confirm that the said typikon was written for Hujabi alone. It is important to note that it could be attributed to almost all churches and monasteries in this area, as they were closely related during the reign of the "righteous" kings called the "Sword of the Messiah", which is confirmed both geographically and historically, as well as by their architectural, constructive, artistic and aesthetic similarities. Here is the list of the churches near Bolnisi, which are marked by this similarity a) Cross-domed churches - Kojori Kabeni, Pitareti, Tsughrughasheni, Hujabi , Akhtala, Hne-Vank (dome 1154), etc; B) Hall churches - Kojori cabeni, Thedoretsmida, Kazreti, Tserakvi...; C) Far from Bolnisi - Gudarekhi, Lamazi Sakdari, Betania, Blue Monastery... Kvatakhevi, Kartlis Metekhi, Ertatsminda, Ikorta and others. This is a non-exhaustive list of the churches with which the character of the planning and construction of the Hujabi Church and the whole monastery complex is common in different aspects.

• • •

The cross-domed church of Hujabi has not been specially studied monographically. In the art history literature, it is often cited by various scholars as a parallel to a number of churches, and consequently, the fact of its existence and date of construction is to a certain extent supported. In the academic works, this monument was first mentioned by Jurgis Baltrushaitis in his *Etudes sur l'art Medieval en Georgie et en Armenie* (Paris, 1929-1938), where it is brought as an example of Armenian architecture.³⁵ Vakhtang Beridze criticized this work in his review (*Ars Georgica* II, 1942) where he mentions Hujabi among others.³⁶ In his book *Some Aspects of Georgian domed Architecture*,³⁷ in the chronological list of monuments built from the 9th to the 13th centuries, Hujabi is referred to as a monument of the first half or middle of the 13th century. Gerge Chubinashvili has mentioned it several times in his research *The Architecture of Kakheti*, where it is brought as a comparison in a discussion of Pudznari church.³⁸ In the essay "On the question of the national form in the architecture of the past", Pitareti, Betania, Kvatakhevi, Akhtala, and Hujabi are named as one group of monuments.³⁹ Rene Schmerling has conducted a study about the monuments of the 12th -13th centuries, where Hujabi is also

³⁵ Baltrushaitis J. *Etudes sur l'art Medieval en Georgie et en Armenie*, Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1929. p.3 5;

³⁶ ბერიძე ვ. „ქართულ ხელოვნება – ARS GEORGICA“, II ტ., თბ., 1948. p.147–160;

³⁷ Беридзе В. Некоторые аспекты грузинской купольной архитектуры, Тб., 1976. p.72;

³⁸ Чубинашвили Г.Н. Архитектура Кахетии, (ტექსტი), Тბ.,1959. p. 424;

³⁹ Чубинашвили Г.Н. Вопросы истории искусства, т. I, Тб., 1970. К вопросу о национальной форме в архитектуре прошлого, p.. 290.

discussed. This study exists as a manuscript and has not been yet published. Patrick Donabedian, a French scholar of Armenian descent considers Hujabi church to be a Georgian monument and writes in his most important and extensive work on the comparison, similarities, and differences between Georgian and Armenian churches: “ As regards Hujabi church, it seems that this church finds its place more among the purely Georgian monuments” (K.A.).⁴⁰ Recently, Neli Chakvetadze's research on the mural painting of Hujabi was published, where King Lasha-George IV is suggested to be the donor of the church. My study shares this view.⁴¹ I should also mention a special work *Hujabi - a tragedy of the 20th century* by Koba Kharadze, Doctor of Geography, in which the fate of the Hujabi Monastery is discussed in more detail based on archival documents...⁴²

• • •

The period when Hujabi church was built is a long and important one in the development of Medieval Georgian architecture. The 10th-13th centuries are the period of the second heyday of Georgian architecture.⁴³ The style of architecture of this period is characterized by artistic and architectural features that can be described as "baroque" or picturesque and decorative.⁴⁴ Churches built in the 12th century and in the first half of the 13th century continue this path of development, however, the diversity and quest for novel architectural solutions typical for the previous period is no longer characteristic.

The leading architectural type of the cross-domed church is an inscribed cross or cross-in-square plan (*croix inscrite*), where the dome rests on the endings of the walls that separate the altar from the pastophoria on the east, and on the two free-standing, mostly octahedral piers on the west. The altar is tripartite and has two triangular niches on the east façade respectively. This architectural composition started to develop and form from the 10th and 11th centuries, from the cathedrals of Samtavisi and Samtavro of Mtskheta, while from the beginning of the 12th century it became canonical. Since the 12th century, almost all important domed churches

⁴⁰ Donabedian P. “Parallelisme, convergences et divergences entre Armenie et Georgie en architecture et sculpture architecturale”, Dans: L’Armenie et la Georgie en dialogue avec L’Europe du Moyen Age a nos jours, Paris, 2016. p.71;

⁴¹ ჩაკვეტაძე ნ. XII-XIII საუკუნეების მიჯნის სამეფისკარო მოხატულობები სამხრეთ საქართველოში, ჰუჯაბის ეკლესიის ფრესკები, ივ. ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, ხელოვნების ისტორიისა და თეორიის ინსტიტუტი, კონფერენცია, ძველი და თანამედროვე ხელოვნება, ახალი ხედვა, 2015.;

⁴² ხარაძე კ. ჰუჯაბი XX საუკუნის ტრაგედია, თბ., 2012.;

⁴³ ბერიძე ვ. ძველი ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრება, თბ., 1974. p. 17;

⁴⁴ Чубинашвили Г.Н. Вопросы истории искусства, т. I, Тб., 1970. Кумурдо и Никорцминда, как пример разных этапов развития Бароккального стиля в грузинском искусстве, p. 236–261 (p.250); (Грузинская средневековая архитектура и три ее величайших кафедрала, (1925), p. 262–278;

have been built according to this scheme. They are also similar in artistic design, construction character, and other signs and in the art history are called Betania-Kvatakhevi group. These churches are Ikorta, Kvatakhevi, Betania, Tsughrughasheni, Pitareti, Blue Monastery, Akhtala, and others.

These similarities are a) Architectural type: cross in a rectangle (See above); Churches of this type are not built in Armenia; b) Construction technique: The Hujabi church is built of brick and the facades are faced with hewn stone slabs. This technic combines two construction traditions of architecture, which can be found in Georgia since the early Middle Ages. The cross-domed churches in the 12th-13th centuries were built, on the one hand, only with bricks, as the large cross-domed church of the Mother of God of the Shiomghvime Monastery (now converted into a basilica), built by David the Builder, or Kintsvisi and Timotheubani of the turn of the 12th-13th centuries ... On the other hand, there are churches built of stone and brick, where the facades are faced with smoothly hewn stone slabs: Tighva (brick), Ikorta (brick), Kvatakhevi, Betania (brick), Kojori Kabeni and Kanchaeti Kabeni, Pitareti, Tbilisi Metekhi (brick), Blue Monastery (brick), Kardanakhi All Saints (brick) and others. It should be noted that many of these are built in the previous centuries and remodeled and faced later on.

Building with brick has a much deeper tradition in Georgia, the best examples being churches in Gurjaani (8th or 9th centuries), Ozaani (9th century), Sanagire (10th century), and others. c) The nature of artistic decoration: the churches are richly decorated with carved ornaments. The dome is fully ornate, while the carved decoration on the facades is only around the door and window openings. Unlike the cross-domed churches of previous centuries, the continuous decorative arcade of the façade around the church is no longer present. Consequently, the façades of the side walls are mostly devoid of decor; d) Decorative and artistic system: the general principle of distribution of decoration has been established, where the lower part of the sidewalls of the cruciform church is presented with large "bare" pauses and rare carved ornamental inserts around small windows; a sharp decorative emphasis is made around the church door opening, which is mostly preceded with richly decorated portico. The energy restrained in the lower part is released like a spring upward, first into the carved gables (the arms of the cross) and then into the powerful, ornate forms of the Calvary cross that adorn the spaces between the twin windows.

This composition, rich in various decorative elements (cones, roses ...) fills the gable space, creating an impression that it is short of room and is trying to "breakthrough" the gable crest, pushed by the arm of the Calvary cross (Betania, Kvatakhevi ...). Then this energy "erupts" with full force on the dome, fully enclosing the neck and cornices of the dome with ornamental jewelry "knitted" into the decorative arcade, leaving no free space. Thus, the restraint and

simplicity of the lower part of the church are replaced by upheaval on the dome.⁴⁵ This scheme, which is common to the churches of the named period, has undergone some evolution. e) Polychrome: Mainly, there are two-or-three-colored stones used on the facades of the temples and their decorations. f) All these cross-domed churches are the main churches of large monastic spaces. Unlike the large cathedrals of the previous period, they are modest in size and mostly stand alone in the forest, adorned with carved decoration, colorful ornaments, and profiles. We call them the "Royal Court-Worthy".

These features are equally applicable to the buildings of other architectural types of the period (both ecclesiastical and secular). The churches of the Betania-Kvatakhevi group are actually closing this era of Georgian architecture.⁴⁶

Hujabi Church is a typical building of this leading architectural type of the cross-domed churches of the 12th century and the first half of the 13th century.



At the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, another group of churches emerged in the evolutionary line of Georgian architecture, which have similar features within the same pictorial-decorative style. In art history, they are called the Safara-Zarzma group and represent a new phase in the line of development of the pictorial-decorative style of architecture. These churches are Safara, Zarzma, Chule, Tiseli, Khobi, Tsaishi, Gergeti Trinity, and others.⁴⁷

The research showed the unconditional similarity of the architectural and artistic solution of the Hujabi with the churches of the Betania-Kvatakhevi group. However, there are some similarities with the younger Safara-Zarzma group too.

In the literature dedicated to the Georgian art history, in the line of architecture of the middle of the 13th century there is another small group of churches, a kind of intermediate link, which have transitional features between the groups as they show the tendency to violate the long-established standards in architecture and even pave the way for a new phase.⁴⁸ These churches are: Ertatsminda of the mid-13th century,⁴⁹{28} Kardenakhi Sabatsminda of the late 13th century,⁵⁰{24} Metekhi of Tbilisi of the 1280s,⁵¹{27.28.} Gudarekhi belltower of 1272,⁵² etc. The

⁴⁵ ბერიძე ვ. ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრების ისტორია, I-II ტ., თბ., 2014. I ტ. p. 328; თუმანიშვილი დ. კრებული „წერილები“ ნარკვევები“, თბ., 2001. ქართული ტაძრის გარე სახის ერთი თავისებურებისათვის, p. 82–89;

⁴⁶ ბერიძე ვ. ძველი ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრება, თბ., 1974. p. 60–62; ბერიძე ვ. ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრების ისტორია, I-II ტ., თბ., 2014. I ტ., p. 305–333;

⁴⁷ Ibid, გვ.333–334; {27}.ბერიძე ვ. ძველი ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრება, თბ., 1974. p. 62–63;

⁴⁸ გომელაური ი. ერთაწმინდის ტაძრის არქიტექტურა, თბ., 1976. p. 58–60;

⁴⁹ ბერიძე ვ. ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრების ისტორია, I-II ტ., თბ., 2014. I ტ. p. 327,329;

⁵⁰ Чубинашвили Г.Н., Арх. Ках..., გვ.426–428;

said changes already began in the Betania-Kvatakhevi group, from the churches of the turn of 12th-13th centuries and the first quarter of 13th centuries, Pitareti, Tsughrughasheni, Fudznari, Kartlis Metekhi, Akhtala... the Hujabi church also belongs there.

In the architecture of the Hujabi church, such signs of transition are: a) low dome, b) Increased spatial expression of the cross in the body of the church - at the expense of lowering the lateral premises in relation to the cruciform main body immediately under the dome. Consequently, the cross is spatially better expressed both in the exterior and interior. To some extent, such a solution shortens the dome. The examples are the church of Fudznari in Tianeti (beginning of the 13th century), St. George's Church of Gelati (beginning of the 13th century) and others. We called this solution the *Expressed Stepped Spatial Separation of the volumes*. It has been a regular feature of the cross-domed churches in the second half of the 10th century and the 11th century, the examples of which are Oshki, Alaverdi, Svetitskhoveli, Samtavisi, Samtavro. Whereas, in the Betania-Kvatakhevi group, this way of the spatial distribution of volumes, when the cross is clearly expressed, is seen in the churches towards the end of the period, and looks like a reminiscence of the old and forgotten; c) The traditional triangular niches of the eastern façade in Hujabi, which housed windows of the altar, are very small, windowless and placed on either side of the three central windows. Here, the architect deviates from the traditional pattern of decorating the eastern façade leaving the triangular niches without windows and placing them next to the windows. We see that the architect abandoned the traditional composition without hesitation since the functional solution seems more important to him. The fact is, that the church is built at the foot of the mountain and is sort of a "sunk" into the slope, which prevents the sun's rays from reaching the interior in the morning. The new solution provides more light to the altar than if the windows were arranged on the sides of the niches. These small niches, if removed altogether, would obviously slightly unload the wall mass, but they were not discarded by the artist entirely, because for him the triangular niches on the eastern façade are an established rule corresponding to the symbols of Georgian church construction and decoration - a kind of an unchanging architectural "law". Similarly, some churches of the Betania-Kvatakhevi group have small niches on the eastern façade. First of all, it refers to the churches in close proximity, like Tsughrughasheni, Pitareti, Betania ... d) The windows in the arms of the main body are made shorter, while the distance between them is increased - a solution that dims the light and makes its distribution over the interior more tranquil. e) The windows on the dome are shorter in relation to the elevated cruciform main body of the church and also set lower, closer to the dome belt. It is more visible in the interior. The dome itself is narrow and short, so these windows can't let in as much light as they do in the churches of the Betania-Kvatakhevi group. Dimming of the light by the way of downsizing

⁵¹ ბერიძე ვ. ძველი ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრება, თბ., 1974. P. 63; ბერიძე ვ. ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრების ისტორია, I-II ტ., თბ., 2014. I ტ. P. 327-329;

⁵² ბერიძე ვ. ძველი ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრება, თბ., 1974. P. 62;

the windows characterizes the churches of the Safara-Zarzma group, but here we see only the beginning of this path. The decrease in solar lighting in the interior is characteristic of the churches at the end of this particular epoch, Tsughrughasheni, Pitareti, and others. F) The shortening of the dome is strongly felt on the exterior as well, therefore, for the pendentives, on the outside, the architect found a rather rare solution, seen in the early cross-domed churches in Georgia, like those of Vachnadziani,⁵³ Nikortsminda⁵⁴ and Mokvi.⁵⁵ Usually, the exterior of the pendentive looks like a small hut with a gable roof. In Hujabi Church, the roofs of these constructive elements correspond directly to the arched shape of the pendentive. Accordingly, they are mono-pitched, triangular in shape, with a tip pointed downwards between the arms. The upper angles of these downward triangles connect below the dome, above the crest of the gable roof, in between the dome and the arms. This solution directly adheres to the constructive form but has been used very rarely. In the case of Hujabi, it is a sort of a decorative effect in the hands of the artist, who removes the traditional "huts" and opens the view to the base of the dome, so that the dome is visible in its entirety. Under the dome and above the shoulders, these interlocking triangular roofs unfold like flower petals. This method visually lengthens the short dome, making it more important and diversifying the aesthetics of the church. Thus, when looking at the church, the low height of the dome is not felt at all, especially since its decorative roof is visible from all sides. In addition to the bright color of the carved adornment (the roof cornices are mainly carved from golden stone), the terrain on which the church is built allows viewers to approach both from below and from above (from the east, the road runs at the level of the dome base). The emphatically decorative function of this structural element is observed in the churches of the same era - Tsughrughasheni,⁵⁶ Akhtala,⁵⁷ and Ertatsminda.⁵⁸

The listed features, together with several others, indicate the transitional position of Hujabi thereby placing the church at the end of the Betania-Kvatahevi group. It should be noted here that a constructive approach like that used in Hujabi is not found in the church architecture of Armenia.



⁵³ Чубинашвили Г.Н. Архитектура Кахетии, Тб.,1959. Р..301,302,303,304,305,306;

⁵⁴ Чубинашвили Г.Н. Вопросы истории искусства, т. I, Тб., 1970. Кумурдо и Никорцминда, как пример разных этапов развития Бароккального стиля в грузинском искусстве, pl. 102,103;

⁵⁵ Рчеулишвили Л. Д. Купольная архитектура VIII-X веков в Абхазии, Тб.,1988. Мокви, Р.. 55, 56, 57; ил.18. Р.. 55, 56, 57; ил.18.

⁵⁶ ზაქარაია პ. ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრება XI-XVIII სს., თბ., 1990. P. 125; შენიშვნა 28. p.254;

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 145; pl. XLIX;

⁵⁸ გომელაური ი. ერთაწმინდის ტაძრის არქიტექტურა, თბ., 1976. pl. 4(2); 9(1); 22(2);

At the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries and in the first half of the 13th century, the quality of carving on stone declines, it is no longer deep, delicate and pictorial; The figures have lost their plasticity and flexibility, are much too detailed, sometimes noticeably blurred, unevenly distributed and asymmetric; The number of motifs is significantly reduced, the same motif is repeated over and over; To achieve the effect of diversity and artistic dynamism, in the decoration of one window one can see the use of two or three motifs at the same time (Pitareti), or one ornamental motif is being displayed with different stones in the decoration of one window (Hujabi, Betania, Tsughrughasheni, etc.). In a word, the mastery of stone carving is in crisis. The ornaments of the churches created during this period are no longer as vivid, delicate, and lively as they used to be in Bagrati, Nikortsminda, Samtavisi, Samtavro...⁵⁹ But the creative impulses from previous centuries are still alive. In the churches built during this time, the pulse for praising God's name is expressed by enhancing the color component.

As mentioned above, since the 12th century, a large part of the churches, especially in Kvemo Kartli, seem to all at once dress in "purple", into which goldish and greenish-emerald stones are "woven" like precious gems. This applies to David Agmashenebeli Church of ShioMghvime, Kintsuisi, Timotesubani, Pitareti, Tkemlovani (Koziba Monastery, Shida Kartli), Lamazi Sakdari, Thedoretsmida, Hujabi, and others. On the facades of churches, the use of different colors of facing slabs, arranged in subtle harmony, comes to the fore. Now the color begins to "speak", becomes an expression of the beauty of the House of God - Pitareti, Tsugrugasheni, Hujabi and others. Among the churches of this period, Hujabi is one of the most colorful churches ... On its facades, the stones of different colors fuse into each other like the watercolor on a wet paper (dome and east window ...) as if the architect, like a painter with a brush in his hand, paints the colorful picture of the church. But, this is not just a random emotional scattering of colors on facades. The architect uses colors with a certain system that conforms to the pattern set for the churches of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th century described above – decorations are mostly reserved for the spaces around the doors and on the dome.



There are crosses carved between the twin windows on the south and west facades of the Hujabi cross-domed church. This richly carved composition is made entirely in yellow stone; The cross of the south façade is different and is immediately perceived from afar. The relief cross erected between the two windows on the façade rests on a rectangular base of red stone. It is the only red stone in a composition centered around two windows and made of golden stone. Above the crossbar of the cross, there is another, relatively short goldish crossbar. Against the backdrop of dark the violet facade, of a clotted blood color at some places (eg, around the

⁵⁹ ბერიძე ვ. ძველი ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრება, თბ., 1974. P..48,60,62–63; ბერიძე ვ. ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრების ისტორია, I-II ტ., თბ., 2014. I ტ., p.242, 310–345;

intersection of the cross), this golden-luminous composition looks especially intense. The red stone of the cross base in the goldish composition is clearly a symbol of Golgotha and the life-giving blood of the Savior shed on it, while the "extra" crossbar, which is more clearly visible from afar than the main one, should be depicting the tablet nailed above the head of Christ with an inscription containing the personality and the guilt: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John XIX. 19).

The idea of presenting the almost identical windows (the difference is only in the ornamental motifs) as united (a common base) and paired is not foreign to Georgian architecture. In different variations they are found since the early Middle Ages a) two equal coupled windows under one large arch (Shatberdi / Yeni-Rabat, 10thc.); B) A unifying pillar erected in the center, between the two windows (Ukangori, 9th century; Tskhinvali, 9th century; Tsirkoli, 8th century; Oshki. 963-973); C) A cross on the top of a pillar erected between a pair of windows (Church of the Assumption. 10thc.), and others; Certainly, this composition can be found beyond Georgia, too. For example, on the West facade of the St. Catherine's Cathedral of the Justinian era on the Mount Sinai...

Two equal windows joined by a cross symbolize the victory over the evil and the unification of two divided worlds, heaven and earth, the visible and the invisible, which was fulfilled by the cross on Golgotha; Symbolically, this also implies the two, divine and human natures of the Christ, that coexisted without intermixing, as Jesus Christ was fully man and fully God.

The composition depicting a cross erected between the coupled windows, as it is in the Hujabi, is found in many variations on the facades of the churches of the 12th and the first half of the 13th century. This is a kind of epoch-making seal "engraved" on the churches, mainly on the south and west facades of Betania, Kvatakhevi, Pitareti, Tsughrughasheni, Hujabi, Akhtala, Kartlis Metekhi, Ertatsminda, Fudznari, and others ...

One circumstance should be mentioned in particular: these cross-domed churches marked with mutual resemblance are not only built in the same epoch and represent a single chain in time but, importantly, most of them also show a kind of regional unity and are linked geographically, while the churches of Tsughrughasheni and Hujabi belong to the same Bolnisi gorge (ie the gorge of river Poladauri), as they close the gorge on both ends. This is how the unified artistic taste has spread from Samtavisi and Samtavro to the territories returned after the 12th century. The King, Sword of the Messiah returned to the capital Tbilisi and with him returned the political center of the country. In Kvemo Kartli, the process of reviving the churches and monasteries abandoned and ruined during the Arab rule began, and naturally, construction of cross-domed violet-purple churches that bore the cross in their very shape gained special spiritual significance. The Calvary Cross between the paired windows had a special religious significance: this local "brand" of Georgian ecclesiastical architecture, in this freshly returned lands, was a symbol of true faith.

Thus, we think it is clear that the churches built in the 12th century, at the turn of 12th-13th centuries, and even more so in the first half of the 13th century are links of a single continuous historical, political, geographical, architectural, decorative and aesthetic chain. The cross-domed church of Hujabi is one of these links and a very important one, at that.⁶⁰



We mentioned from the very beginning that the Hujabi Church was built near the road to Lore-Tashiri, a region bordering on the country of Armenia, and apparently this area was also distinguished by a diverse population. Naturally, this should somehow be reflected in the face of local architecture. Thus, the study indicated that the small triangular niches in the east are represented without their traditional relief shafts; The “hat” -top of the niches is made of one stone (slab) and is aligned with the wall. The “hat” stands out only for its golden color. The arch of the triangular niche is carved deep in the top. The surface of the facing slab is decorated with a shallow arch carved in the shape of an oriental "helmet". This motive and other oriental motives began to appear in Georgia from that time.⁶¹ Here, this new decorative motif is only lightly touched upon. However, from the helmet-shaped arch, the decorative trefoils characteristic of Georgian churches and iconostasis “grow” converging from three sides - top, left, and right; They cover and "lock " the small conches in the depths of the small triangular niches. On the dome, between the cornice and the arcade of the windows, on the so-called forehead of the dome, there is a large relief image of a lion... The discussion showed that the use of these new motifs is not just an imitation of the existing images, the architect converts them to the Georgian style, processes them, and thus adapts them to his monument. As the national identity of the church is still disputed, in order to better highlight the national face of the Hujabi Church, we devoted a part of the paper to comparing the Armenian and Georgian church architecture and highlighting their characteristic features.



Until 1921, Somkhiti and Lore, the aforementioned territories of Kvemo Kartli, belonged to Georgia undisputedly. The situation changed under the crucial historical events unfolding in the world in 1914-1918. The First World War and the peace treaties that followed (Brest, Versailles, Saint-Germain, Sevres), as well as the concurrent changes in Tsarist Russia, the bourgeois revolution of February 1917, and then the October Bolshevik coup, changed the world having established a “completely new system of relations between the countries of the world and the

⁶⁰ აბაშიძე ქ. ჰუჯაბის ივერიის ღვთისმშობლის მონასტერი, ლევან რჩეულიშვილი 100, სამეცნიერო კონფერენციის მასალები, თბ., 2009. P.70-83;

⁶¹ ბერიძე ვ. ქართული ხუროთმოძღვრების ისტორია, სტ., თბ., 2014. გვ.367;

borders between them."⁶² Determining Georgia's borders fell in the scope of interests of major players, mainly Turkey (Ottoman Empire) and Russia.

The statehood of Georgia was restored on May 26, 1918, with the declaration of the Act of Independence. As an independent country, the Democratic Republic of Georgia from the very beginning was faced with the difficult task of establishing state borders with neighboring countries - Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

Naturally, the ethnographic principle of the border delimitation with the predominant ethnicity of the inhabitants as the top criterion was unacceptable for the Georgian state, as it precluded and rejected other historical, natural-geographical, cartographic, strategic, economic, and other valid criteria of dispute resolution.⁶³

In the Georgian-Armenian diplomatic dispute, the Armenians used to support their claims by referring to the fact that many Armenians lived densely in the disputed areas of Borchalo, Akhalkalaki, Batumi district, etc. They refused to take into consideration that the immigration of the Armenians to Georgia in large numbers, which began in the 1920s and 1930s, and their settlement in the disputed areas above was the result of the Russian imperial policy, which ran against the interests of Georgia; and then, they (Armenians) needed access to the Black Sea.⁶⁴

In 1918, the Armenian army began military operations to seize Lore and Borchalo. Georgia broke off diplomatic relations with Armenia, and the Georgian military launched retaliatory actions.⁶⁵ The conflict ended with the intervention of representatives of the British and French missions in the Caucasus. The peace conference, held in Tbilisi on January 17, 1919 legally signed the end of the war, and with the participation of a foreign mission, a buffer zone, the neutral zone of the Borchalo district (or Lore Neutral Zone) was created.⁶⁶

Usually, a border between two states is set in accordance with cartography landmarks and passes through major ridges and large watersheds (rivers, etc.). In the given case, the Lore Neutral Zone (or the Neutral Zone of Borchalo) was supposed to be temporary, aimed just at calming the situation and, therefore its demarcation line was also temporary – “drawn in the air”. Boundaries around this buffer zone were hastily adopted to defuse tensions between the two nations and were not established according to generally accepted cartographic, geographical, historical, economic, and other valid criteria.

This military “airborne” demarcation line mainly enclosed the forests that were the scene during the hostilities. Thus, the demarcation line of the neutral zone" (about 25 km) was conditionally drawn along the forest margins, which are clearly not a stable border between the

⁶² აბაშიძე ზ., ვაშაკიძე ვ., მირიანაშვილი ნ., ჭეიშვილი. ყოველი საქართველო (ქართული სახელმწიფოს ისტორიული საზღვრები უძველესი დროიდან დღემდე), თბ., 2014. p. 112;

⁶³ Ibid., p. 125;

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 126–128;

⁶⁵ Ibid., გვ.128;

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.129– 131;

two countries...⁶⁷ A few months later, in August 1919, the British withdrew troops from Borchalo and Meskheta, and in July 1920 they left Batumi. Britain avoided problems with Bolshevik Russia. "The British withdrawal from the Caucasus meant giving up this country when Russia was already approaching it from the north, and new Ottoman troops were mobilized from the south. The still weak Georgia needed help."⁶⁸

On April 27, 1920, the Soviet government established itself in Azerbaijan, on November 29, 1920 - in Armenia ... On February 11, 1921, the 11th Red Army launched hostilities against Georgia from Armenia. On February 25, the Soviet government was established in Georgia too...⁶⁹

From that time on, the issue of the Georgian-Armenian border has been staying open. The "airborne" demarcation line that confines the temporary neutral zone established in January of 1919 along the margins of the forest is still "temporary". The Georgian Communists decided to demarcate the border in compliance with the proletarian internationalism: " Armenia had very little forested area while being in a bad need of timber and therefore Armenians demanded that the northern part of the buffer zone was handed over to them and that the line drawn around the forest was established as a border with Georgia." By this "international brotherhood" criterion, the villages at the northern foot of Mount Lelvari remained part of Georgia, while the surrounding agricultural lands and forests were transferred to Armenia. Here we should note that the Armenian population lived only across the Lelvari ridge, on the south side, 20-25 km away... the borders were being revised and changed almost on an annual basis... and yet, the issue of the temporary border is still unresolved...⁷⁰ in this circumstances, nobody remembered the Hujabi monastery complex of Ivron Mother of God on the mountain slope in the gorge of Hujabis Tskali, the tributary of the Poladauri river, 350–400 m from the forest margin (set as the temporary border), left within the Republic of Armenia, together with the Orthodox Russian nuns who lived there since 1905. The nearest settlement to the monastery is the village of Akhkerpi, north of it. In the past, there were two villages, Hujabi and Zemo Hujabi. They were located 1 km from the monastery, within the borders of Georgia. Yet, despite such a situational location, from the Soviet times, the Hujabi Monastery has been deemed located on the territory of the Socialist Republic of Armenia, attributed to the village of Privolnoe together with the forest (?!),⁷¹ which is spread on the other side of the mount Lelvari, in 20–22 km from the monastery.⁷²

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.143–144;

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 130;

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 134, 131, 132;

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 141–148;

⁷¹ ხარაძე კ. ჰუჯაბი XX საუკუნის ტრაგედია, თბ., 2012. P.90-93;

⁷² აბაშიძე ზ., ვაშაკიძე ვ., მირიანაშვილი ნ., ჭეიშვილი. ყოველი საქართველო (ქართული სახელმწიფოს ისტორიული საზღვრები უძველესი დროიდან დღემდე), თბ., 2014, p. 146–147;

As mentioned above, during the Soviet period, the temporary border of the neutral zone of Lore, or Borchalo, has caused many problems and was reconsidered many times.⁷³ However, the “international brotherhood” always reminded that Armenia had very few forests and needed help in this regard. At that time, the participants of this dispute did not even remember the historical reality and the religious aspect. None of the representatives of the cultural community were informed about the case and were not invited to the discussions. It should be noted that not a word was said on either side about the spiritual, artistic, and cultural values of the monastery complex and its buildings. As it is clear from the archival documents, the monastery was recalled in 1934-1936.⁷⁴ Prior to that, it appears that the Hujabi monastery⁷⁵ has been functioning as revived by Russian mothers in 1905 for the icon of the Iviron Mother of God, ... In 1934, when the issue of handing over the monastery to Georgia arose because it had natural, geographical and economic proximity to the Republic of Georgia and the transfer would be more suitable for both the nuns and the village Akhkerp ... no one reckoned at that time with the history, the more so religion (it was even dangerous!), and the proposal was rejected by Armenia on the grounds that they were planning to convert the monastery either into a sanatorium or a farm (pigs or bees ...) or pull it down and use the building materials...⁷⁶ At that time, this was the attitude towards the cultural heritage and religion on part of both Georgian and Armenian communists ... As a result, in 1935 the Armenian side closed the monastery with the aggression usual for the communists and kicked out the nuns that moved to a small hut in Akhkerp ... The situation remains the same to this day.

• • •

The issue of borders will be repeatedly revised by countries in the future, based on the political situation, but this is not a scientific problem at all. Scientists have another task to study the historical and cultural contacts of the border regions and the cultural heritage of each bordering country. Obviously, in the areas with ethnically diverse populations, cultural overlap looks natural, but it is imperative to consider how a particular political situation affects the cultural heritage of ethnically diverse population, as well as the ethnicity and religion of the majority of residents at a particular time.

The church is badly damaged today. The building is wrapped in trees. It has been dilapidating for 30-40 years right in front of us and is now on the verge of complete destruction. This cultural heritage has two "masters" and yet the church is about to disappear!!!

⁷³ ხარაძე კ. ჰუჯაბი XX საუკუნის ტრაგედია, თბ., 2012., ჰუჯაბის პრობლემა საბჭოთა წლებში, p. 63–94;

⁷⁴ Ibid., p..84–93;

⁷⁵ Ibid., ჰუჯაბის ბედი XXსაუკუნის გარიჟრაჟზე, p. 49–51;

⁷⁶ Ibid., ჰუჯაბის პრობლემა საბჭოთა წლებში, p .84–93;

Today, the reality is such that from Armenia, to which the monastery belongs since 1921, there is currently no direct route to the monastery otherwise than passing through Georgian territory. Across the mountains, to the naturally enclosed Hujabi area, there has never been another way from Armenia and neither is at present; It is also clear that cutting a new road across the Lelvari ridge would be too burdensome ... as it has been for centuries, such a road remains through the rocky passage on Lelvari Mountain crest, the historic path that goes through the pass known as the Wolf Gate, then proceeding along the left bank of the Poladauri river to the territory of Georgia. It was an old shortcut via Bolnisi Gorge from Armenia to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. According to the Georgian chronicle *Kartlis Cxovreba*, Jalal-ad-Din entered Georgia in this way in 1226. On the right bank of the Poladauri river, which runs along the edge of a nearby forest currently belonging to Armenia, now only a footpath remains.

From the Wolf Gate passage in the cliffs, where a temporary border checkpoint operates today, one has to cross the border via a motor road, which operates since the Soviet times, and get to the territory of Georgia; Then, down from the very first settlement, 1 km south of Akhkerpi (the former village Hujabi), one can reach the monastery by crossing the "the forest margin", that is, again crossing the border between the two countries (!). From the village Akhkerpi which is on the territory of Georgia, the border is close, yet impossible to cross otherwise than via the checkpoints above.

Thus, I think that for the physical salvation of the church, academic opinion and political will must be reconciled between the two countries, the research and conservation and restoration works must be carried out jointly. The question of the national belonging of the church and the monastery complex in general, as a work of art, pertains to the field of the academic thought. To identify to whom, Georgian or Armenian architect we owe this or that example of medieval art requires a joint effort by not only the art researchers but also by representatives of number of historical and literary fields - linguistics, theologians and paleography experts. All parties should cooperate closely. a complex approach to each issue is required. The involvement of international academic circles is especially important.