

## KOPALA, VESHAPI, AND THE GIGANTOMACHIA: THE ETHICS OF DIVINE POWER IN GEORGIAN MYTHOLOGY

კოპალა, ვეშაპი და გიგანტომაცია: ღვთაებრივი ძალისა და ეთიკის დუალიზმი  
ქართულ მითოლოგიაში

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### ABSTRACT

This article investigates the mythological figure of Kopala within the context of Khevsurian and broader Georgian traditions, exploring his role, attributes, and associated sacred sites, such as Veshagurisgori, whose etymology remains uncertain. The study situates Kopala within a semantic and lexicological framework, examining connections between his name and various Georgian nouns, homonyms, surnames, and toponyms. Kopala is depicted as a male deity of might and magic, protector against devils, and a figure associated with mountains, witchcraft, and sacred rituals, suggesting parallels with the ancient Near Eastern cult of Cybele and Sassanian Iranian cult of Mythra.

The article further analyzes key mythological motifs, including the symbolic representation of Veshapi, the moral and ethical codes embedded in Khevsurian myths, and the role of heroes such as Tsiskari and Kviria. It traces comparative mythological patterns with Greek, Hittite, Norse, Hindu, and Mesopotamian traditions, highlighting recurring themes of divine-human interaction, limits of supernatural power, and the regulation of conflict according to unwritten ethical laws. The study also examines theological implications of mythic imagery, such as angels and devils before God, and draws parallels with apocryphal and biblical narratives, including the Testament of Solomon.

By combining linguistic, lexicological, and comparative mythological analyses, this research illuminates the intricate moral, social, and cosmological frameworks underlying Khevsurian myths, revealing how these narratives reflect communal values, ethical codes, and the mythic imagination of the Georgian highlands.

### Keywords:

Kopala; Khevsurian mythology; Georgian myths; Veshap/Vishap; Veshagurisgori; comparative mythology; lexicology; sacred sites; divine-human interaction; ethical codes; Cybele; ancient Near East; mythic heroes; Tsiskari; Kviria; Gigantomachia; Solomon's Testament; cosmogony; ritual practices.

**ნინო დამბაშიძე**

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**აბსტრაქტი**

კოპალას მითოლოგიური პერსონაჟი ხევსურულ და ზოგად ქართული მითოლოგიური ტრადიციის კონტექსტში, წარმოადგენს ავთენტურ და მეტად საინტერესო კომპლექსურ სახეს. სტატიაში წარმოდგენილია კვლევა მისი როლის, თვისებებისა და მასთან დაკავშირებულ წმინდა ადგილებს შესახებ, როგორცაა მაგალითად ვეშაგურისგორი, რომლის ეტიმოლოგიაც უცნობია. კვლევა კოპალას განიხილავს სემანტიკურ და ლექსიკოლოგიურ კონტექსტებში, იკვლევს მის სახელთან დაკავშირებულ სხვადასხვა ქართულ საკუთარ სახელებს: ჰომონიმებს, გვარებსა და ტოპონიმებს.

ხევსურულ მითოლოგიაში კოპალა წარმოჩენილია როგორც მამრობითი სქესის ღვთაება, ძლიერი და მაგიური ძალის მქონე, ეშმაკებისაგან დამცველი, მთებთან, ჯადოქრობასთან და წმინდა რიტუალებთან დაკავშირებული ფიგურა, რაც შესაძლოა ახლო აღმოსავლეთის უძველეს კიბელეს კულტთან და სასანური ირანის პერიოდის მითრას კულტთან ქმნიდეს პარალელებს.

სტატიაში აგრეთვე განხილულია სხვა ძირითადი მითოლოგიური მოტივები, მათ შორის ვეშაპის სიმბოლური მნიშვნელობა; ხევსურულ მითებში არსებული მორალური და ეთიკური კანონები და გმირების როლი, როგორცაა ცისკარი და კვირია.

კვლევა მიმოიხილავს შედარებით მითოლოგიურ სიუჟეტებს საბერძნეთის, ხეთური, ნორდული, ინდური და მესოპოტამიური ტრადიციებიდან, ხაზს უსვამს ღვთაებებსა და ადამიანების ურთიერთობის ფორმებს, ეთიკური რეგულაციებისა და ომის სამართლიანობის თემას. სტატია ასევე იკვლევს თეოლოგიურ ასპექტებს, როგორცაა ანგელოზები და ეშმაკები ღვთის წინაშე, და პარალელებს ბიბლიურ და აპოკრიფულ ნარატივებთან, მათ შორის სოლომონის აღთქმასთან.

ლექსიკოლოგიური, სემანტიკური და კომპარატიული მიდგომების კომბინაციით, ეს კვლევა გამოკვეთს ხევსურულ მითებში არსებულ ნარატივურ სისტემას, აშუქებს კავშირს ეთიკურ კოდებს, საზოგადოებრივ ღირებულებებსა და საქართველოს მაღალმთიანეთში მითოლოგიური მსოფლადქმის ფორმირებაში.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** კოპალა; ხევსურული მითოლოგია; ქართული მითები; ვეშაპი/ვიშაპი; ვეშაგურისგორი; კომპარატიული მითოლოგია; ლექსიკოლოგია; წმინდა ადგილები; ღმერთებისა და ადამიანების ურთიერთობა; ეთიკური კოდები; კიბელე; მითიური გმირები; ცისკარი; კვირია; გიგანტომაქია; სოლომონის აღთქმა; კოსმოგონია; რიტუალური პრაქტიკები.

## Etymology

Kopala has established Veshagurisgori—a location or shrine name with quite uncertain etymology. In Georgian, "Veshaguri" does not have a clear meaning, making it difficult to establish any definitive connection. However, Kopala himself occupies a vast semantic area in Georgian lexicology:

### Nouns:

**Kopi:** Lump (from a blow on the head).

**Kombali:** (Dogwood) round-headed cudgel, shepherd's crook.

**Kompali:** Dots on a cloth, or marks from chickenpox.

**Kopa:** A traditional container, typically crafted from lime wood, used for transferring crushed grapes into a pitcher. These containers generally held between five to ten liters. Additionally, "Kopa" was also used to describe a four-sided water-drinking device carved from alder wood, commonly placed at springs. This type of vessel is reminiscent of the "Kapillon," a wooden vessel specifically designed for drinking water. It was commonly found at village springs or at watering places along roads leading to pastures, known as Yalaghi—the summer grazing grounds for nomadic herdsmen. Robert Beeks interprets the etymology of Kopellos/Kupellos in Greek as "bulbous drinking vessel, beaker, goblet"<sup>1</sup>.

**Homonyms:** Koba: A male name. **Surnames:** Kobeshavidze, Kopaliani, Kobaidze, Kobalava, Kopaleishvili, Kopadze, etc.

**Toponyms:** Kobi.

## Attributes of Kopala

Kopala is a male deity distinguished by his might. He fights devils, and his weapon is an iron flail<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, he possesses magical powers and is associated with witchcraft. His association with rocks and mountains suggests a connection to the cult of **Khybal-Kudianis**, possibly linking him to the cult of Kybela/ Cybele in the ancient Near East<sup>3</sup>.

Kopala is said to have established **Veshagurisgori**, though the exact location of this site is unknown today. The surname "Veshaguri" is quite common in modern Georgia, but the etymology of the word remains uncertain—to my knowledge, there is no scientific research directly connected to this term. Assuming the cult's origins lie in the ancient Middle East, the etymology might share roots with ancient Greek, as we saw in the case of "Kopa."

<sup>1</sup> (Beekes, 2010, p. 804) (Beekes, 2010)

<sup>2</sup> (Holdsworth, p. 4)

<sup>3</sup> (Gambashidze N. , The pleiades in khevsurian cosmogony: the cult, service and ritual cuisine of kajetian women linking with dodonean cult, 2025)

Considering that Kopala is described as having herds of swine and being the "shepherd of swine,"<sup>4</sup> "Vesha"/"Vesa" could potentially be understood in connection with the Greek ὕς, ὄς ("swine, sow, boar") and ἄγος ("leader, shepherd") – Us+Agos Mountain.<sup>5</sup>

If this assumption is accepted, then "Veshapi" or "Gveleshapi," (gvel – a sanke; veshapi – a whale, big fish) traditionally interpreted as "the dragon" or "big serpent," could instead be understood as a "big swine" that leaves a large trail, symbolizing the aftermath of the "big fight" or Gigantomachia<sup>6</sup>. This interpretation suggests a scenario where the Khevsurian people replace the previous inhabitants of the Caucasian mountains.

This interpretation, however, stands in contrast to the traditional etymology of Veshap/Vishap, as provided by N. Marr, which has been considered a well-established understanding of the term. As Prof. Medea Saghliani interprets the word... *"Several scholars have expressed their views on the origin of the term for 'Veshapi.' Among them, Acad. N. Marr noted that the Georgian word for Veshapi - whale is derived from the Armenian root **kishap** (կիշապ) and is used to correspond to the Greek term **τό χέτοος**. In Armenian, this root generally refers to a dangerous animal or monster. When this word was intended to denote a large sea creature, the term for fish was added as a qualifier. Conversely, when referring to a dragon, the word 'odz' (ὀδ) was appended to the word for snake, similar to the Georgian usage.*

*In Georgian, the term for Veshap primarily refers to a massive sea creature, while the dragon is a signifier of a mythical monster*<sup>7</sup> (Marr N. Y. , Smirnoff Y.H, 1930). *In Old Georgian, the term for whale also carried the latter meaning* (Kerkadze, Animal Vocabulary in Old Georgian, 1974)<sup>8</sup>. *The word 'Veshap' is believed to derive from the Avestan root **višāpa** and is associated with the Armenian dragon. In Georgian, the term for the snake is considered a literal translation of **aži višapa**, where the second part, **aši**, is linked by most researchers to **apa**, meaning 'liquid' or 'water.' Thus, **Vishapa** translates to 'poison bearer' (Andronikashvili, 1966)<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, Melikishvili suggested that these stems might have been assimilated from the Hurrian language (Melikishvili, 1959:178).<sup>10</sup>*

Prof. N. Marr presents a vast linguistical and lexicological analysis about connection of Veshap / Vishap and makes semantic connection with underworld – snakes and wolves, the representatives

<sup>4</sup> Mythological figures associated with the "shepherd of swine" include Dumuzid (Tammuz) in Mesopotamian myth, a deity and shepherd who was the consort of Inanna/Ishtar. In Greek myth, Eubuleus was the demi-god or hero of the sacred swine of the Eleusinian Mysteries, whose animals were swallowed by the earth when Hades abducted Persephone. The term also indirectly points to Odysseus, who is a hero and the literal shepherd to King Laertes's swine in Homer's Odyssey. (Atsma, 2000-2017)

<sup>5</sup> Beekes, (2010), p. 1537

<sup>6</sup> (Gambashidze N. , Genesis of Society: Mythological Cycles of Tsroli, Anatori, Gudani, Ghalanguri, Mater Loci, Gigantomachia, and the Pirmze – Angel of Foundation (Corpus of Mythology of Georgian People), 2025); (Gambashidze M, Gambashidze N., 2023); (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 Paean, and Hellen of Troy, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> (Marr N. Y. , Smirnoff Y.H, 1930, p. 17)

<sup>8</sup> (Kerkadze, Animal Vocabulary in Old Georgian, 1974, p. 177)

<sup>9</sup> M. Andronikashvili, Essays on Iranian-Georgian Language Relations, Vol. I, Tbilisi, 1966

<sup>10</sup> Saghliani, (2023), pp. 174-175.

of Cult of Death, as well as totems of ancient solar religion<sup>11</sup>. *“Moreover, the language of the hissing group, Megrelian, which is closely related to Georgian, echoes the same term for “snake” (Georgian g-vel)—g-wer-i, corresponding to n-g+weri in some cases. Another language in the same group, Chan, which shows traces of particularly close contact with the Svan socio-economic formation (long separated from it), managed to transfer the designation of a snake, in the order of a totemic change, to a wolf in both varieties of the main part: the compound m-g+wer-i and the simple m-ger-i. The Megrelian socio-economic formation did not depart from its double, the Lazi, in this change, using the simple form ger-i to denote a wolf, thereby creating a problem for researchers: does the totemic name of the hero in the Megrelian fairy tale mean ger-i as “snake” (g+wer-i, n-g+wer-i) or “little wolf” (ger-i, m-ger-i “wolf”), even within this animal totem circle?”*

### Anointing with the black substance

Here we see the parallel with myths connected with witches and witchcraft (e.g., the myth 74. “The Witch Night 2”<sup>12</sup>). On the other hand, the hunter, captured by demons makes parallels with Cycle of Gakhua Megrelauri<sup>13</sup>.

### Tsiskari - The Morning Star

Tsiskari in Georgian 'door of the sky'—is the same as Venus, who, in Georgian mythology, is represented as a young hero. He brings freedom to the people by fighting the dragon and liberating the water spring for their use.

### Kviria

One of the most distinguished hero, who, along to God is the one who protects people from witchcraft: “On the third attempt, the woman shouted, “I confess, I cannot harm you. Let the Lord and Kviria be our intermediaries.” 72. Death of the Witch [Witches on the Arkhoti Valley]<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> (Marr N. Y. , Smirnoff Y.H, 1930) pp. 29-31.

<sup>12</sup> (Gambashidze N. , The pleiades in khevsurian cosmogony: the cult, service and ritual cuisine of kajetian women linking with dodonean cult, 2025); (Gambashidze Nino (Author), Gambashidze Maya (Editor), 2025)

<sup>13</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); (Gambashidze M, Gambashidze N., 2023); (Gambashidze Nino (author), Gambashidze Maya (editor), 2025).

<sup>14</sup> (Gambashidze N. , The pleiades in khevsurian cosmogony: the cult, service and ritual cuisine of kajetian women linking with dodonean cult, 2025) (Gambashidze M., Gambashidze N., June 2023) (Gambashidze M, Gambashidze N., 2023)

## Throwing in laps of the God- Facilitator

Here we witness the story of creation: the witches—presumably women with supernatural powers, or stars with tails (see: Witch Night 1)<sup>15</sup>—who gain their powers by anointing themselves with a black substance kept in the fireplace (akin to the Moirai in Greek mythology or the goddesses of fortune in Hittite mythology), take heroes to the God-Facilitator and burn them to ashes. Kviria, a distinguished character who is part god and part human, akin to Kurios in Greek mythology, is similarly burned down and thrown into the lap of the God. This narrative parallels the Hittite cosmogonical myth "The Story of Ulikummi: *"They gave birth to him; the goddesses of fate and mother-goddesses lifted the child up and placed him on Kumarbi's knee. Kumarbi rejoiced at the son and began to nurse him, calling him by his first name. Kumarbi spoke to himself: 'What name should I give him?' The son given to me by the goddesses of fate and the mother-goddesses sprang from my body like a knife. Let his name be Ulikummi! He shall ascend to the sky to reign, and Kumiya, the first city, will be destroyed! The weather deity must be defeated—crushed like salt<sup>16</sup> and trampled underfoot like an ant. The thin part of the strap must be snapped like a liler. All deities must be cast down from the sky like birds and shattered like empty jugs!"*<sup>17</sup>

## Foundation stone

The myth continues with the same system, as the myth of Ulikummi. Kopala, similar to Ulikummi<sup>18</sup>, is a "stone" raising from the water. He is Veshapi, the personified foundation idea for the new religion – protects his people from enemies. In Bible, the cornerstone is mentioned as a metaphor of Christ: "10. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 11. the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes' [Psalm 118:22-23]?" (Mark 12:10-11).

## Theological implications

The phrase "**Angels and devils are presented to God's face**" can evoke powerful imagery and multiple interpretations, depending on the context in which it is used. It suggests a scenario where both good and evil, represented by angels and devils, stand before the divine presence, possibly for judgment, accountability, or reflection.

1. **Judgment Day Imagery:** This phrase could be referencing the idea of a final judgment, where both the forces of good (angels) and evil (devils) are brought before God to account for their

<sup>15</sup> (Gambashidze N. , The pleiades in khevsurian cosmogony: the cult, service and ritual cuisine of kajetian women linking with dodonean cult, 2025) N. Gambashidze, 2025, The pleiades in khevsurian cosmogony: the cult, service and ritual cuisine of kajetian women linking with dodonean cult. (Gambashidze, 2017); (Gambashidze N. , Saneba of Tsroli - Cycle of Tsroli Mountain and Holy Trinity Shrine, 2023)

<sup>16</sup> (Marro Catherine, and Stöllner Thomas (editors), 2021)

<sup>17</sup> Gambashidze Maya, Gambashidze Nino, The Story of Ulikummi 2023, p. 309, §8, 98-116. (Gambashidze M., Gambashidze N., June 2023).

<sup>18</sup> (Gambashidze M, Gambashidze N., 2023) (Gambashidze M., Gambashidze N., June 2023)



actions. In many religious traditions, Judgment Day is a time when all beings, including supernatural ones, are judged according to their deeds.

2. **Symbolism of Duality:** The phrase might symbolize the duality of existence, with angels representing purity and righteousness, and devils symbolizing sin and temptation. Their presentation before God could signify the ultimate authority and balance that oversees both aspects of the universe.
3. **Narrative or Literary Device:** In literature or storytelling, this phrase could be used to describe a moment of truth or a confrontation between opposing forces, with God's presence being the ultimate arbiter or observer.
4. **Theological Reflection:** Theologically, it might suggest that nothing is hidden from God's gaze, and that both good and evil are within His purview. It could be a meditation on the omnipresence and omniscience of the divine, where all actions, intentions, and beings are seen and understood by God.

This phrase encapsulates the tension between good and evil and places it in the context of divine awareness or judgment, offering a rich ground for exploration in theological, philosophical, or literary discussions.

The idea that **angels and devils might have equal rights to approach God** is not commonly supported in mainstream Christian theology. Traditionally, angels are seen as God's messengers and servants, fulfilling His will and glorifying Him, while devils (or fallen angels) are typically depicted as rebels who were cast out of heaven and now oppose God's purposes. However, the notion of both angels and devils having access to God is reflected in some biblical texts, such as in the Book of Job, where Satan appears before God to challenge the faith of Job. This indicates that fallen angels might have some access to God, though they do so under different circumstances and with different intentions compared to faithful angels. Academically, this theme can be explored in terms of the broader theological concepts of divine justice and the role of free will, where both angels and devils are seen as operating under God's sovereign authority. However, the equality of their access or rights is generally not emphasized; rather, the focus is often on the contrast between their roles and ultimate destinies.

In the myth "**The Fraternized Brother Devi**", surprisingly we see the parallel of apocryphal text of Solomon's Testament<sup>19</sup>. Solomon is deeply engaged in the construction of the Temple, a task in which he is endowed with supernatural wisdom, often referred to as the spirit and glory of God. This divine immanence grants Solomon authority over the spirits of the air, the earth, and the underworld. The narrative begins with the sudden descent of the vampire spirit Ornias upon Solomon's servant. Seeking divine assistance, Solomon enters the nearly completed Temple and prays to the Lord Sabaoth. In response, the archangel Michael delivers a ring to Solomon, its stone engraved with a pentalpha. This ring bestows upon Solomon dominion over all demons. Armed with the ring, Solomon summons various demons, interrogating each about their names, the stars or constellations they are associated with, and the angels they are subject to. One by one, the demons are subdued and compelled to aid in the construction of the Temple. Ornias is the first to appear and is tasked with hewing stones. Following him is Beelzeboul, the prince and exarch of demons, who parades his

<sup>19</sup> (Clifford, 1984); (Conybeare, 1898)

subordinate spirits before Solomon. These include Onoskelis, Asmodeus—whose account aligns with the Book of Tobit—and others. Beelzeboul reappears, revealing that he is the last surviving angel who, according to the Book of Enoch, descended from heaven. He rules over all who dwell in Tartarus and has a child in the Red Sea. His subjugation is to Emmanuel and Eleeth. The narrative continues with the appearance of various demons, each with unique attributes and weaknesses. These include Tephkras, the demon of ashes; a group of seven female spirits representing the thirty-six elements (stoikheia) of the kosmokrator, or cosmic ruler of darkness; and others like the lion-shaped demon Leophoros and the three-headed dragon Koruphe. Solomon's power over these demons is repeatedly affirmed, as he forces them to contribute to the Temple's construction. The Queen of the South's visit and the episode of Adares, King of Arabia, follow, further demonstrating Solomon's dominion over the supernatural. However, the story concludes with Solomon's fall from grace. Led astray by his passion for a Shunammite woman, Solomon sacrifices to Moloch, losing the Spirit of God and becoming weakened, ultimately building temples to Baal, Raphan, and Moloch.<sup>20</sup>

### Unwritten Ethical and Moral Laws: Gygantomachia and the Battle Against Evil

Khevsurian myths offer a vivid insight into the moral code of their society. These myths reveal the unwritten laws that govern the daily lives of the community. At the same time, they serve to unify different groups and shape a collective national identity. The mountainous regions of Georgia, with their historical function as the defenders of the country's northern borders and guardians of its cultural heritage, were brought together by these shared narratives. The motto of the Khevsurian people, '*Andrezi martal as*' ("Andrezi<sup>21</sup> are true"), reflects this unity, an idea that resonates with other communities inhabiting the northeastern regions of East Georgia<sup>22</sup>.

**Law 1: "When the Devi fights a man, he has no right to use more force than a human has."** - This motif reveals a particularly compelling aspect of Khevsurian mythology — its deep concern with fairness and equilibrium in the relationship between divine beings and humans. Within these narratives, the Devi — a formidable supernatural entity — is bound by specific rules when confronting mortals, ensuring that such encounters remain just and do not result in the complete domination of the human adversary. This conception resonates with a broader mythological principle

<sup>20</sup> Conybeare, (1898) pp. 2-4.

<sup>21</sup> According to Z. Kiknadze's inaugural work "andrezebi - aghmosavlet sakartvelos mtebis religiuri tqmulebebi [Andrezes - Religious Tales of Eastern Georgian Mountains]" (Kiknadze, 2009) "Andrezi" refers to a corpus of mythological narratives transmitted orally across generations with remarkable stability. These narratives function as religious frameworks that shape the moral and practical dimensions of communal life — guiding decision-making, social judgment, everyday conduct, and responses to conflict. Comparable to the role of the Septuagint among the Jewish people, Andrezi serves as a foundational text of spiritual and cultural authority. However, unlike in the Jewish tradition, in the mountainous regions of Georgia the custodians of Andrezi (known as meandreze, or "keepers of Andrezi") are often women, selected for their exceptional knowledge of these sacred narratives. (Gambashidze N. , Saneba of Tsroli - Cycle of Tsroli Mountain and Holy Trinity Shrine, 2023); (Gambashidze N. , The Holy Garment of Christ: A Mythical Foundation of Legitimacy for the Royal House of Russia and its Impact on 17th-century Georgian-Russian-Persian Relations, 2023).

<sup>22</sup> (Gambashidze Nino (author), Gambashidze Maya (editor), 2025)



found in many cultures, wherein even the most powerful beings are subject to cosmic or moral constraints that regulate their actions. The notion of divine limitation — that supernatural entities must observe ethical or ritual boundaries when engaging with humans — recurs across diverse mythological traditions, reflecting a universal concern with balance between power and justice.

1. **Greek Mythology** – *The Twelve Labors of Heracles*: Heracles (Hercules) faced numerous challenges and opponents, many of whom were divine or monstrous beings. For example, during his battle with the Nemean Lion, he had to use his own strength and cunning rather than relying on divine help, demonstrating a limit imposed on divine intervention in human affairs.
2. **Norse Mythology** – *Ragnarok*: During Ragnarok, the final battle between the gods and the giants, the gods are portrayed as fighting the giants on equal terms. Despite their divine nature, they must engage in battle as equals, without using unfair advantages. This concept reflects a balance where gods are restricted in their interactions with mortal enemies.
3. **Hindu Mythology** – *The Ramayana*: In the Ramayana, the demon king Ravana is a powerful being with divine attributes, but he is bound by certain rules in his confrontations with Rama, the hero. Ravana, despite his strength and magical powers, must fight Rama using the same methods and rules as a mortal would, showing limits imposed on divine beings in their interactions with humans.
4. **Mesopotamian Mythology** – *The Epic of Gilgamesh*: Gilgamesh, a semi-divine king, faces various divine and supernatural challenges. For example, in his encounter with the Bull of Heaven sent by the goddess Ishtar, Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu must combat the bull without divine assistance, illustrating the concept of limits in divine-human interactions<sup>23</sup>.

These examples highlight a recurring theme across different mythologies where divine beings must conform to certain limitations or rules when engaging with humans or other supernatural entities.

**Law 2: It is prohibited to use weapons** – Devil spirits fear iron. In the circle of Kaji women and Khybal-Kudianis<sup>24</sup>, the issue of weapons is addressed. Here, we see that Devis (enormous creatures covered in hair) are forbidden from using weapons when fighting humans.

1. **Greek Mythology** – *The Titans and the Gods*: The Titans, who are primordial deities, are bound by the constraints of the Titanomachy (the war between Titans and Olympian gods). After their defeat, the Titans are often imprisoned and are not allowed to interfere directly with the affairs of humans.
2. **Norse Mythology** – *The Giants and Gods*: The giants (Jotnar) in Norse mythology often challenge the gods in various ways, but there are specific rules and limits imposed on how they can interact with the gods and humans. For instance, during Ragnarok, the giants must

<sup>23</sup> (Gambashidze M, Gambashidze N., 2023)

<sup>24</sup> (Gambashidze Nino (Author), Gambashidze Maya (Editor), 2025); (Gambashidze N. , The pleiades in khevsurian cosmogony: the cult, service and ritual cuisine of kajetian women linking with dodonean cult, 2025); (Cholokashvili Rusudan, Kiknadze Zurab, Nino Gambashidze (Editors), 2024).

confront the gods and heroes without unfair advantages, similar to the concept of fighting on equal terms.

3. **Hindu Mythology** – *The Battle of the Gods and Demons*: In Hindu epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, divine beings and demons often face restrictions. For example, in the Ramayana, Ravana, despite his immense power, must engage in combat with Rama without using unfair advantages, including any divine weapons that could disrupt the balance.
4. **Mesopotamian Mythology** – *The Epic of Gilgamesh*: In this epic, Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu face divine and monstrous challenges without resorting to divine aid or weapons in their battles, highlighting the theme of facing supernatural entities on equal footing.
5. **African Mythology** – *The Shango Cult*: In certain African traditions, such as those involving Shango, the god of thunder and lightning, supernatural beings must follow specific rituals and rules when engaging with humans. For example, spiritual beings might be restricted from using their full divine powers in certain contexts, ensuring a fair balance in interactions.

These analogies reflect a widespread theme across various mythologies where supernatural beings are subject to specific rules or limitations when interacting with humans, often to maintain balance or fairness in their encounters.

## 1. Devil's Prisoner

### Devil's Prisoner<sup>25</sup>

Each night, without fail, Kopala crosses into Mtatusheti<sup>26</sup>, carrying fire with him, and then returns to his home.

He journeys to Mtatusheti because he founded<sup>27</sup> that place, raising Veshagurisgori and establishing it there.

In Veshagurisgori, the devils captured a hunter<sup>28</sup>, imprisoning him for three years.

<sup>25</sup> **Devil's Prisoner** – Narrator Gig. Aludauri. Recorder Goderdzi Arabuli. Village Khakhmati. 1985. TSUFA 27088.

<sup>26</sup> Mtatusheti – the Tushetian mountains – Region of North-Est of Georgia, bounding with Russian Federation.

<sup>27</sup> In the Andrezi narratives, the act of “founding a place” signifies the moment when a semi-divine being or saint establishes a sacred site — a locus of worship and communal identity. Such places serve as centers where the community presents offerings and seeks the protection and patronage of its saint. The people associated with these sites identify themselves as the “servants of the sacred place,” forming a distinct spiritual and social group. Examples of such communities include those devoted to Veshaguri, Lomisa, and other revered sanctuaries.

<sup>28</sup> The hunter's cult constitutes a widespread and significant element in Khevsuretian mythology. As I discuss in my article, “Sacred Crossroads of the Cults of Metallurgy and Agriculture: Exploring the Mythic Saga of Pirqushi and Its Indo-European Parallels — Zeus Keraunos, Hephaestus, Perkūnas, Apollo Paeon, and Helen of Troy”, this mythological motif is deeply embedded in the region's cultural and ritual landscape. Recent archaeological discoveries at Aškawt-i Daya (the Daya Cave) underscore the need for continued research to further elucidate the historical and ritual dimensions of this cult. (Gambashidze N. , Sacred Crossroads of the Cults of Metallurgy and Agriculture: Exploring the Mythic Saga of Pirqushi and its Indoeuropean Parallels – Zeus Keraunos, Hephaestus, Perkunas, Apollo Paeon, and Hellen of Troy, 2024); (Sajjad Alibaigi, Iraj Rezaei, Farhad Moradi, Seiro Haruta, John MacGinnis, Naser Aminikhah, and Shokouh Khosravi, July 2023)

The man later recounted, "It was as if I were at the Lord's court—at least, that's what the devils told me."

"How could I have known? They looked just like humans."

"They would take some black substance from the bottom of the fireplace, anoint themselves with it, and then disappear."<sup>29</sup>

"Once they were gone."

"I wondered where they went, so I took the substance and anointed myself with it. After that, I do not remember what happened."<sup>30</sup>

"When I regained consciousness, I heard them saying, 'It's the Lord's court.'<sup>31</sup>"

They fell upon me, covering me, and demanded, 'How did you get here? What did you want?'

"Who was covering you?"

"Those I was with—they covered me and hid me. When the morning star<sup>32</sup> was about to rise, I was no longer visible."

At first, the Khakhmati Cross was denied entry into the Lord's gates; Judas<sup>33</sup> prevented the Lord's creatures from entering the Lord's tent.

They led the Khakhmati Cross to Kopala but were unable to bring it to him.

They were shivering and trembling, terrified of Kopala.

"Who were shivering and trembling?"

"Those, my adherents."

Then they took Kviria, and the horizon shone brightly.

"They said – ha-ha" and brought him.

They completely burned him, reducing him to ashes.

<sup>29</sup> (Shin, 2023/12); (Sajjad Alibaigi, Iraj Rezaei, Farhad Moradi, Seiro Haruta, John MacGinnis, Naser Aminikhah, and Shokouh Khosravi, July 2023), etc.

<sup>30</sup> Anointing oneself with substances taken from the fireplace appears to represent an initiation ritual for a spiritually advanced individual. Evidence from the Daya Cave inscriptions in northern Persia indicates that such cultic acts were considered sacred and performed in secluded or remote locations. ( (Sajjad Alibaigi, Iraj Rezaei, Farhad Moradi, Seiro Haruta, John MacGinnis, Naser Aminikhah, and Shokouh Khosravi, July 2023) (Schwertheim, 1979); (de Blois, Nicholas Sims-Williams-François, 2018).

<sup>31</sup> (Genov, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Morning star – Tsiskari – is one of heroes of Khevsuretian mythology.

<sup>33</sup> **Juda** – In Georgian colloquial speech, "Judas" is a symbol of betrayal. This epithet is used to describe those who betray their faith, family, friends, or country. In the context of this narrative, "Judas" refers to creatures that were supposed to protect the heavenly gates—where all humans or God's creatures are meant to enter for protection. The term "tent" does not necessarily imply the outer world, nor does entering the "tent" signify death. On the contrary, all humans are privileged to live in the "tent" under the sky, where the luminaries guide their lives. The "Judas," or false luminaries—such as comets, referred to as Kudiani or "stars with tails"—mislead people, even though they were also created to support and defend (see the chapter: **Cycle f Witches, Khybal-Kudianis and Alis**). These false luminaries obscure the true stars, like Venus, which is part of the triad along with the Sun and Moon (as noted by Kikvidze, 1976).

The ashes flew into the lap of the God Facilitator<sup>34</sup>.

Only one piece survived, and it flew into the lap<sup>35</sup>.

"Do you mean Judas?"

"Yes, Judas, and he was also completely burned."

And the God-Facilitator became angry, asking, "Why did you throw it into my lap?"

I looked around and realized I was left alone. Everything around me had been reduced to ashes, including all those who had been hiding me.

They asked him: "Why did you do this?"

"I did this because they were all my servants. It had been three years since he was their prisoner. My servants had stolen from me."

And he forgave them, saying, "You should not have thrown him into my lap."

Then they asked me, "What have you left at home that is most precious?"

I remembered that I had a newly married bride at home<sup>36</sup>.

I was about to say this but then remembered and told myself, "No, you should not say whatever you are thinking about."

"What else did you leave at home, anything of value?"

"A pair of bulls<sup>37</sup> and Veshagurisgori," I replied.

<sup>34</sup> Morige Gmerti – God –Facilitator, or God on Duty – the supreme divine figure of Khevsuretian mythology. (Cholokashvili Rusudan, Kiknadze Zurab, Ratiani Irma, Oniani Otari, A. Papirze, Gambashidze Nino (Editor), 2024); (Kiknadze, 2009); (Gambashidze Nino (author), Gambashidze Maya (editor), 2025) (Gambashidze M. , 2013).

<sup>35</sup> The image of a fragment of the burned hero flying into the lap of the divine facilitator echoes ancient Anatolian mythology—specifically the episode in which Ullikummi leaps into the lap of the Father-God. (Gambashidze M, Gambashidze N., 2023); (Gambashidze M., Gambashidze N., June 2023)

<sup>36</sup> There were no newly married brides in ancient Roman Mithraism, as the cult was exclusively for men. However, the term "Nymphus," meaning "bridegroom," was the second of seven grades of initiation, representing a male initiate who was seen as a spiritual "bride" or youth preparing for a deeper connection with Mithras. This initiate symbolically took on the role of a "bride" in a spiritual sense, undergoing rituals and receiving symbols like a veil, lamp, and mirror to represent purity, enlightenment, and self-examination. (Octavia, n.d.); (Azimi); (Griffith, 1996)

<sup>37</sup> Bulls occupy a central place in many ancient mythological systems. In Mithraism, the act of slaying the bull constitutes the primary cultic image: the god Mithras is depicted killing a single sacred bull in the ritual scene known as the tauroctony. This motif, foundational to the Mithraic cult, symbolizes creation, fertility, and the triumph of spirit over animal nature, although its precise interpretation continues to be debated among scholars. (Clauss, 2000, p. 80); (Beck, Roger , 1984, p. 2073). A pair of bulls in ancient cultic contexts often recalls the Apis cult of ancient Egypt, where sacred bulls were venerated as incarnations of the god Ptah. These animals were selected according to specific physical markings, kept in luxurious conditions, and, upon death, mummified and interred with great reverence in monumental burial sites such as the Serapeum of Saqqara. The mother cows of these divine bulls were likewise held in high esteem and received ritual veneration. (Dodson, 2005, pp. 72–102.) In Minoan civilization, the bull served as a potent symbol of strength and fertility. In the mythology of Crete, the "Cretan Bull"—a white bull that emerged from the sea—figures prominently in the legend of the Minotaur. The Minoans also practiced a ritualized activity known as bull-leaping, a ceremonial sport that likely held deep religious and symbolic significance, embodying themes of renewal, vitality, and the sacred interplay between human and animal forces. (Harrison, 2019); (Britannica, 1 Nov. 2011)

"That pair of bulls will be mine," said Kopala. "And the Veshagurisgori will remain with you and your family."

I remember they bound me to the horse's stirrup.

Then consciousness returned to me. I was lying in my bed in Veshagurisgori and was surprised at how I had ended up there.

First, my mother came to my bed<sup>38</sup>.

"Is he at home?"

"Yes, he is back home; he has woken up at home."

I remembered that I had been bound to the horse's stirrup.

I woke up and found myself in bed.

Firstly, my mother came.

I awoke and wondered, "How did I get here?"

Then I remembered everything that had happened to me.

"My son, my son," she said, and when I responded, she was overjoyed.

She had been without her son for three years.

Apparently, the young bride was the first to come into the bedroom in the mezzanine<sup>39</sup> and saw me sleeping in the bed.

She checked to make sure it was her husband.

Then she went downstairs and told the mother-in-law, "Go upstairs and check who is sleeping in your son's bed."

When the mother reached the mezzanine, she found me there.

Now that place, the Veshagurisgori belongs to Kopala.

He (Kopala) did not leave it; he could not give up the mountain.

He started building the fortress. Kopala went and appeared as if he were a shepherd.

<sup>38</sup> The precise nature of Veshagurisgori remains unclear. It may denote a location atop the mountain Veshagusri, with "Vesha" potentially deriving from *veshapi* ("whale") and "Gori" or *gora* meaning "mountain." If the site functioned as a small chamber or cave where a priest retreated following initiation—analogueous to Mithraic caves—its use by a mother and newly married bride presents a striking divergence. In classical Roman Mithraism, women were excluded from the cult, which was exclusively male. Yet the Mithraic grade of *Nymphus*, or "bridegroom," illustrates a symbolic parallel: a male initiate was ritually conceptualized as a spiritual "bride," a youth undergoing preparation for a deeper union with Mithras. Through rites involving items such as a veil, lamp, and mirror, the initiate assumed the role of a "bride" in a symbolic sense, signifying purity, enlightenment, and self-examination. The presence of women at Veshagurisgori thus suggests a localized reinterpretation of initiatory symbolism, blending communal and protective functions within the ritual space.

<sup>39</sup> A traditional Khevsur home often accommodated multiple families or households. Architecturally, Khevsur fortresses exhibit regional distinctions between *Pirikita Khevsureti* (Shatil–Arkhoti) and *Piraketa Khevsureti* (Aragvi Gorge). Towers in Pirikita Khevsureti feature stepwise cylindrical roofs and follow the Tush tower style, whereas those in Piraketa Khevsureti adopt the Mtiuluri style. Specialized compact houses were constructed as three-story terraced stone structures, designed to shelter both humans and livestock. The roof of each ground floor served as a courtyard for the floor above, while the third floor accommodated a threshing area and additional utility rooms. The ground floor, typically containing the fireplace (*kera*), was known as the *shinasi*, whereas the upper floor, where men slept and hay and agricultural products were stored in woven baskets, was referred to as the *cherkho*. (Pshav-Khevsureti, n.d.)

He said, "Share the fortress with me; let it belong to both of us, and I will help you."

He could not recognize who he truly was, considered him a regular shepherd, and agreed.

The Tushetians say, "We took the foundation stone, which connected one corner to another, and placed it to create the foundation for the wall."

The wall encloses a space, with the interior being about the size of a storage room<sup>40</sup>.

I placed that stone.

Then he forced me to the river, perhaps he was suspicious.

He gave me a narrow-necked flagon, a large copper vessel for carrying water.

I filled it with water, [and after drinking it], I transformed into a deer. I appeared to him as a deer, with the narrow-necked flagon hanging from my antler<sup>41</sup>.

They shot arrows at me.

He was Kopala, but they did not know who he was.

He struck their fortress with the whip and exterminated the devils.

Now they are serving corvée to him.

They pay tribute, coming and bringing offerings.

Some shepherds died far from home, struck by lightning, while others were drowned in water.

Thus, the men from Liqoki should serve there.

Instead, in our Cross Shrine (in Khakhmati Cross), whoever had any female to be anointed<sup>42</sup>, daughters, or sisters-in-law, all should be anointed

## 2. Establishing Kopala in Liqoki<sup>43</sup>

In Liqoki, there is one very high mountain – Karatistsveri<sup>44</sup>.

The mountain's pick has a small plain on the top.

From one side it looks over Bulaurta, the village in Pshavi, and from another side is the Liqoki gorge.

<sup>40</sup> The Kopala-s shrine – Veshagurisgori seems to be a purposely built small room (size of storage-room), associating with the cave.

<sup>41</sup> The association of Kopala with Mithraism is evident in this passage. The priest-hunter, who anoints himself with ashes from the fireplace mixed with oil, enters a trance and transforms into a deer—the very animal hunted by Kopala. Nevertheless, he remains alive and conveys a message to the people about who and how they should serve Kopala. A distinguishing feature from Mithraism is found in the final sentence: all women belonging to the congregation are to be anointed. In other words, all become “deer”—victims of Kopala—thus forging the community; by serving Kopala, they gain his protection. (Skupniewicz, 2025/January)

<sup>42</sup> **Anointing with Blood** - The Khevsuri ritual involves applying the warm blood of a sacrificial animal to a person, the house, the cross's flag, the craftsman's bench, and all objects deemed impure or unclean. This practice is believed to purify them. Terms associated with this ritual include: "Man's Guardian Angel" or "Angel Standing and Walking on a Man" || "Angel standing upon a man's head" || "Baptistry" or "Angel Protector" or "Hand-to-Hand Baptismal Font", || "Counting the House" or "Counting of leaved “cold” House" || "counting the sleeve" or "Crossing the Threshold". Source: Nini Arabuli. Blog for Myth Liga. (Arabuli, 2022).

<sup>43</sup> **Establishing Kopala in Liqoki 1** – Ochauri M 15, Notebook 11.

<sup>44</sup> (Gambashidze N. , Saneba of Tsroli - Cycle of Tsroli Mountain and Holy Trinity Shrine, 2023)



This mountain, Karatisveri, marks the boundary between the Pshavians and Khevsurians, and more precisely, between these two villages.

Like the inhabitants of Bulalaurta in the summer, the Liqokians bring their flocks of sheep to this mountain, setting up their tents on its slopes and at the summit for pasture.

The shepherds from both villages would come here and meet on the mountain slopes, approaching from either side.

Before the establishment of Kopala's shrine atop Karatistsveri, there lived a young boy in Liqoki and a young girl in Bulaurta.

They were both very young and deeply in love with each other.

They were like brother and sister.

One day, they took their cows to the summit of Mount Karatistsveri.

They heard a sound resembling a squeal. From above, they saw a silver chain and bowl flying toward them.

At first, they were very scared, but then they approached the items that had come from above.

At that moment, they could still hear the squeal and clatter.

The girl took the chain, and the boy took the bowl.

The Khevsurians used to say that they were able to see and approach the items because they were still very young and pure. Had they been exposed to worldly experiences that could compromise their purity, they would not have been able to see or touch the holy artifacts.

They brought the artifacts back home with them.

Although they promised each other not to tell anyone about this event, neither at home nor elsewhere.

The girl hid the chain in a bread box, while the boy stored the bowl behind the door of the upper room and covered it with some cloth to keep it hidden from everyone.

When night fell, a terrible squeal was heard in both families, but they could not understand where the sound was coming from.

The girl and the boy had given their word to each other, and for that reason, they did not confess or say anything about the occurrence.

Next day, they met each other atop the mountain and shared what had happened.

They decided that if it happened again, there should be a serious reason for it, and they should inform their parents about what occurred.

On the following night, the terrible sounds were heard again in both families.

The girl and the boy were compelled to tell their parents about the occurrence and show them the artifacts from the sky.

Both parents went to the fortune-teller, who told them to cut the chain into two parts: one part should be buried where it was first found, and a small tower should be built there.

The bowl should be buried nearby, and another tower should be built over it.

The parents did as the fortune-teller advised.

Once a year, in July, they celebrated the festival atop the mountain.

The girl kept the other part of the chain in Bulaurta. The Karati Cross acknowledged her as His sister, and she served as the 'Mode'.<sup>45</sup>

The girl remained where the chain was, and Karatistsveri and Mater Loci kept her there, entrusting her with the responsibility of safeguarding the holiness.

He<sup>46</sup> himself has a good relationship with her, as he considers her his 'Mode'—sister. Therefore, they maintain a close bond and frequently visit each other.

As the fortune-tellers and priests say, every seven years, a serpent emerges from the Karati Cross and enters the Mater Loci tower in Bulaurta.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> **Mode**—discussed in the article 'Women of Kajeti' (Gambashidze N. , The pleiades in khevsurian cosmogony: the cult, service and ritual cuisine of kajetian women linking with dodonean cult, 2025)—refers to the women servants of the crosses, who are desexualized figures. They appear as women, and even the heroes may fall in love with them and attempt to marry them; however, they do not engage in sexual relations with humans. Males who even consider them in a sexual manner often face severe punishment, sometimes even death. In the myths of Western Georgia, a similar figure is Dali—a long-haired, beautiful woman who seeks to tempt and seduce the hero, typically young boys embarking on their heroic adventures.

<sup>46</sup> In the narration, it is not entirely clear who the subject of this sentence is. Logically, the boy should be understood as the subject since, from the beginning, we know they were close friends and loved each other as brother and sister. However, once the occurrence of the silver chain and bowl falling from the sky takes place, the narrative shifts focus away from the boy; he becomes less relevant to the unfolding events. Through his involvement, the most significant occurrence unfolds—the revelation of the Great Mother Kybele/Cybele, who identifies her new servant: the young girl. This girl embodies the meaning and purpose for the communities of Liqoki and Bulaurta, granting both villages the legitimate right to be integrated into the broader Khevsurian cultural identity, and even more so, into the Eastern Georgian cultural unity.

<sup>47</sup> Comparing this passage with the article **Pirqushi the Healer** reveals another intriguing aspect of the symbolism surrounding the serpent and the tower. (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) The tower, constructed from stone, and the serpent, symbolized by the silver chain, together represent an ancient agricultural ritual. In this symbolism, the serpent fertilizes the tower, which in turn gives rise to a new order. This new order is codified in Andresi, representing the unchangeable law that teaches the community the boundaries of belief, how to adhere to these rules, and the consequences of disobedience.

The number seven, central to this ritual, was not chosen arbitrarily; it was deliberately selected due to its association with strength and danger. Although the exact reason for this remains unclear, similar associations with the number seven appear in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. Additionally, the number seven could symbolize an indefinite quantity and was often used in a symbolic sense. It also conveyed intensity or quality rather than strict numerical quantity. In some contexts, it might be interpreted as "maximum," though it more frequently indicated fulfillment, completion, or the end of a cycle. In many traditions, counting often ends at seven, occasionally followed by an uncertain "eight," serving as a subtle extension or "echo" (Kapelrud, 1968; Clifford, 1984).

Several scholars have proposed a seven-year cycle for Baal, which appears plausible when the number is taken literally. However, even a cursory examination of how the number seven is used in Ugaritic texts reveals that it frequently carries broader symbolic meanings, particularly those related to intensity and completion. This raises doubts about the existence of a rigid seven-year cycle in the Baal texts (Kapelrud, 1968). The recurrence of the number seven in Ugaritic mythology suggests that it was used to signify something more than

This vision is revealed only to us, the 'Holy Men,' while those who are impure are unable to perceive it.

### 3. Establishing Kopala in Liqoki 2<sup>48</sup>

When here was established the veneration of icons, it was a woman – Nino<sup>49</sup>.

She went and died inside of the Cross (shrine), in the main hall<sup>50</sup>. Nobody was able to move her body. Even when they brought bulls and tied them with ropes, they still could not move her from the spot. Later, the Cross revealed its will: "Bury her near my shrine." Thus, she was laid to rest at the Karati Cross. She was a young girl, a shepherd, when the Cross

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a fixed temporal period; rather, it represented a deeper, symbolic meaning associated with cosmic or ritual completeness.

The absence of a seven-year cycle does not necessarily confirm the existence of an annual cycle in Ugaritic cult practices. However, Ugaritic myths, like those of Assyria, Babylonia, and Israel, were not merely stories for entertainment; they were embedded in cultic ceremonies. The texts strongly indicate that they were recited during ceremonial events that were intertwined with the daily life of ancient Middle Eastern communities. A cult focused solely on a seven-year cycle would have been insufficient, as these rituals were concerned with everyday agricultural life—plowing, sowing, watering, fertility, harvest, and the ongoing cycle of the seasons. The Baal-Anat texts are intimately connected with the daily lives of the Ugaritians, reflecting their struggles, battles against harsh conditions, and occasional encounters with dangerous threats. It is this close connection with the rhythms of life that compels the conclusion that these texts represent a yearly cycle, not merely because of isolated expressions, but due to the overall picture presented by the texts.

<sup>48</sup> **Establishing Kopala in Liqoki 2** - (Ochiauri T. et al, 1970) pp. 161-163

<sup>49</sup> In this myth, the narrator intertwines elements from both pre-Christian and Christian eras. According to the *Chronicles of Georgian History*, Christianity was introduced to Georgia by St. Nino, a 14-year-old girl from Cappadocia. Through her preaching, King Mirian of Georgia declared Christianity as the state religion of the Georgian Kingdom (Bagrationi, 1973; Sciences, 2014). It is beyond the scope of this discussion to delve into the profound impact of Christianity on Georgia's political, cultural, and religious development. However, it is evident that the narrator understands the significance of Christianity in shaping Georgian identity, as they demonstrate an awareness of Georgian history. This is particularly noteworthy, considering that the myth was recorded in 1970, during a time when the Soviet regime had banned all religions, promoting Atheism as the official ideology.

In addition to this historical knowledge, the narrator draws from oral tradition—specifically Andrezi—which recounts the establishment of a pagan shrine and the worship of a supreme deity, honored as the protector and governor of the community. This synthesis of oral heritage and historical awareness demonstrates a nuanced understanding of Georgia's pagan past and its Christian transformation. Therefore, this myth provides further evidence supporting the identification of Kopala with the female goddess Kibele (Cybele), suggesting a continuity of sacred feminine archetypes within the cultural and religious evolution of the region.

<sup>50</sup> Traditionally, the place of St. Nino's death is Bodbe (in the Signaghi municipality), as attested by the 10<sup>th</sup> -century text *Life of St. Nino*. However, the narrator is aware that within the tower, which simultaneously serves as a shrine, a female deity had been established. As a result, the narrator merges these two figures—St. Nino and the female deity—presenting a fusion of two distinct traditions. These traditions, in reality, have no direct historical or chronological connection, but within the narrative, they are blended into a singular, cohesive myth. (Gambashidze N. , *From Nobles to Servants: Women's Role in Georgian monogamy –a Historical Analysis through Literary Sources*, 2023)

choser. The icon came above from sky. When she died, her hair was saved<sup>51</sup>, and she had silver coins in her mouth<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> St. Nino's hair is preserved as a sacred relic at the Sioni Cathedral in Tbilisi. According to the Chronicles of the Georgian Kingdom, St. Nino had a dream in which the Mother of God appeared to her and gave her a cross made from vine branches. When St. Nino entered Georgia, some wild men broke the cross. In response, she cut her own hair and bound the cross with it, symbolizing her devotion and the strength of her faith. The story of St. Nino's cross is a significant part of Georgian Christian tradition and one of the most cherished legends in the country. St. Nino, often referred to as Nino of Cappadocia, is credited with converting the Kingdom of Iberia (modern-day Georgia) to Christianity in the early 4th century. Her cross, bound with her own hair, is a deeply symbolic object in Georgian Christianity, known as the Grapevine Cross or "Nino's Cross" (Georgian: ნინოს ჯვარი, Ninos Jvari).

According to tradition, St. Nino received a vision from the Virgin Mary, who instructed her to travel to Iberia to preach Christianity. In this vision, Mary handed Nino a grapevine cross, symbolizing her mission. To make it wearable, Nino bound the cross with strands of her own hair, creating what would become a revered object in Georgian religious culture.

The cross itself, fashioned from grapevine branches, carries deep spiritual meaning. Grapes are a symbol of fertility, wine, and the Eucharist in Christian symbolism, connecting her mission with Christ's sacrifice. The binding with her hair suggests a personal sacrifice and dedication to her faith and mission, expressing humility and devotion.

As St. Nino traveled across Georgia, performing miracles and preaching the gospel, her simple cross became a symbol of the new Christian faith. She gained the favor of King Mirian III and Queen Nana, rulers of Iberia. The legend tells that when King Mirian was struck blind during a pagan ritual, he prayed to Nino's God, and his sight was miraculously restored. This event led to the king's conversion to Christianity and his decision to declare Christianity the state religion of Iberia in 326 AD, making Georgia one of the first countries to adopt Christianity officially.

The Grapevine Cross is still one of the most revered relics in Georgia. Today, the original cross is believed to be housed in the Sioni Cathedral in Tbilisi. The cross represents not only Georgia's Christian faith but also the humility, devotion, and missionary spirit of St. Nino, who is often affectionately called "the Enlightener of Georgia."

(Rayfield, 2012), Donald Rayfield's **"Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia"**: This modern historical account of Georgia provides context on the role of St. Nino and her contribution to Georgian Christianity, as well as her importance in shaping the nation's identity.

(Patriarchate, 2003): **Georgian Orthodox Church resources**: The Georgian Orthodox Church venerates St. Nino and preserves many of the traditions related to her life and miracles. Various religious websites and texts published by the church contain details about her life and the significance of the grapevine cross. The official website of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and materials from the Patriarchate of Georgia, are valuable resources for this information.

(Rapp, 2017): **Stephen H. Rapp's "The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes: Caucasia and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Literature"** : This work places the Christianization of Georgia, including St. Nino's mission, in the broader context of the political and religious changes in late antiquity.

Academic articles and church histories: Scholarly works on Georgian Christianity and the conversion of Iberia provide more detailed explorations of St. Nino's story, including journals on Caucasian history, hagiography, and early Christian missions. (Ghambashidze, 2017), (Gambashidze N. , From Nobles to Servants: Womens's Role in Georgian monogamy –a Historical Analysis through Literary Sources, 2023), etc.

<sup>52</sup> Discussion about Death cult see in chapter: **"Cycle of Witches, Khybal-Kudianis and Alis"** (Gambashidze Nino (Author), Gambashidze Maya (Editor), 2025)

She was revealed to people as the Cross, guiding and ensuring that the villages settled farther from Bulaurta.

When it became possible to herd the cattle and sheep, the young boy and girl set out as shepherds.

While herding, they built a small tower using rocks.

When they returned the next day, they found an icon affixed to the tower. It appeared to be a flying cross<sup>53</sup>.

When the cross descended from the sky, it was accompanied by a chain that hung down from above.

The children were very surprised and took the icon with them.

If you spread your hands, you can see how large the chain was that they took with them; the remaining part broke off and disappeared into the sky. The children began to quarrel.

The girl returned to Liqoki.

Later, she said, "We cast lots: we took a bowl full of water, and whichever side it nibbled at would receive the cross, while the other would get the chain."

The bowl tilted toward the Liqoki side, and the girl received the cross.

Later, the girl became a fortune-teller and began conveying the Lord's will to the people.

When the people learned about her, they decided to kill her. The woman hid in various places, always carrying the icon with her.<sup>54</sup>

The icon flew away but continually returned to her.

The woman was free from menstruation; she neither married nor gave birth to any children<sup>55</sup>.

The icon demanded tribute from the Tushetians. It traveled to Kakheti, to the vineyards, and received grapes as tribute.

The woman followed the icon wherever it traveled. She remained devoted to it, moving from place to place, never leaving its presence.

The woman walked on foot, while the icon flew ahead of her, guiding her on her journey.

The icon showed her the way, leading her as she followed its path.

The woman didn't know where Tusheti was, but the icon guided her, showing her the direction as she followed it.

In Tusheti, all the villages and settlements offered tribute: some gave sheep, while others presented silver as their offering.

<sup>53</sup> Information about "flying cross", see in chapters about **Mkadre** and **Gakhua**. (Gambashidze N. , Khevsuretian Heroes: The Rise of Pirqushi and Gakhua to Immortality (Corpus of Mythology of Georgian People, vol. 2), 2025)

<sup>54</sup> Here again, the narrator conflates the myth with the story of St. Nino. By confusing "the Cross" with "the Icon," the narrator clearly demonstrates an awareness of the historical narrative surrounding the conversion of Georgia, including the fact that St. Nino hid until she was welcomed by the royal family in the palace. (Gambashidze N. , From Nobles to Servants: Women's Role in Georgian monogamy –a Historical Analysis through Literary Sources, 2023)

<sup>55</sup> The term "**Boseli** (noun) 'stable' - **mebosleoba** (verb)"

Didoians<sup>56</sup> also were converted to Christianity by this icon, gave them the right religion.

The villages subordinate to the Karatitsveri shrine prepared for Atengenoba<sup>57</sup> and proceeded to celebrate the festival.

The icon and the woman were also present.

The Karatitsveri communities came to Hegho<sup>58</sup>.

They became unenchanted. When they came, the charms disappeared.<sup>59</sup>

She was the first to establish the tradition of fortune-telling in Khevsureti, particularly in Gudani and Khakhmati.

The woman went to the shrine of the Icon to pray.

Later, she built a church with a hall and established the celebration of various festivals, including Atengenoba, Ascension, and others.

People were not fond of the woman, questioning, “Who is she? How can she dare to ascend atop the Karatitsveri?”

The icon extinguished those people.

On the Shrine's side were the Chetkho community, who were wiped out.

Others included the Kvationis, Natsionis, and Marnaulnis clans. These family groups surrounded the Shrine.

They prohibited the woman and the icon from entering the shrine.

Nowadays, their properties belong to Kopala, the Icon.

The woman did not serve as a priest; she only practiced fortune-telling.

<sup>56</sup> (Gambashidze Nino (author), Gambashidze Maya (editor), 2025)

<sup>57</sup> (Gambashidze N. , Khevsuretian Heroes: The Rise of Pirqushi and Gakhua to Immortality (Corpus of Mythology of Georgian People), 2025) (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 Paean, and Hellen of Troy, 2024)

<sup>58</sup> **Hegho Fortress-Village and Its Tragic Demise:** Where the Larevaniskali and the river Kvakhidi merge, the Pirikita Alazani emerges. It is precisely at this confluence that the historic settlement of Hegho [Egho] in Tusheti is located. **The Tower of Girevi and the Hegho Complex.** Here lie the remnants of battle towers, residential structures, and tombs [kaldiamebi]. Though now abandoned, the village has a fascinating and tragic history. In summer, the overseers of the Girevi community visit the towers, as the community flag of Upper Tusheti [Pirikiti] is stored in one of the battle towers. Hegho, along with Girevi-Chontio, becomes part of the Madoloba festival, a ritual tied to St. John the Baptist, with some traditions connecting it to the church of Upper Alvani. (source: Mtiebi, 2016)

<sup>59</sup> **Mokhibvla – to enchant:** It (the poison or curse) will enchant, poison, harm, or sicken. “If the crosses are set over the wounded, they will save him, but if the crosses are laid upon him in anger, then they will cause the wound to be enchanted” (Ethn. Med. V, 50). The Shubnuri (icon) helped, and the herb was enchanted. Whatever grazed the herb, all perished (Ethn. Myth. 12, 134). The blacksmith was enchanted by the khedji sina (Khevsurian poetry, p. 595). To enchant: (the healer) does not trust the river water, fearing that the wound might be enchanted (Ethn. Med. IV, 40). Kopala forgave them and removed the enchantment from the herb and madness from the people (Ethn. Myth. 12, 134). Enchanted: Those who are enchanted by the machil-devil are bound with the flag of Karati by the Khevsurs (S. Makal. 233, 21) (modern M. Janashv.: mohiblai, St. Ment.: enchantment). Source: (Chinchauruli, 2005) pp. 569-570.



#### 4. Establishing Kopala in Liqoki 3<sup>60</sup>

Once, a Khevsurian boy met a girl from Pshavi who was herding sheep on the mountain where the shrine now stands.

They fell in love with each other.

One day, a golden chain fell from the sky.

Both of them grabbed the chain, unwilling to let go.

Finally, they decided to cast lots.

The chain went to the boy, who hid it in his bread sack<sup>61</sup>.

When he returned home, a scream was heard coming from his sack.

His mother, alarmed by the sound, tried to find out what had happened.

She opened the sack, and suddenly a bird leaped out and flew away, disappearing into the sky.<sup>62</sup>

For this occasion, a special festival was established in Karatitsveri, and specific treasures, including dishware, were created and dedicated to the shrine.

A similar story is told about Saneba as well, with the only difference being that the woman who was menstruating is said to have touched the chain.

As a result, the chain did not transform into a bird but simply disappeared back to where it came from.

#### 5. Establishing Kopala in Liqoki 4<sup>63</sup>

A young Khevsurian boy fell in love with a girl from Pshavi.

They discovered a golden chain, and after casting lots, it was awarded to the boy.

The boy took the chain home in his sack.

His mother was unaware of its presence, so when she opened the sack, the chain flew up into the sky.

<sup>60</sup> **Establishing Kopala in Liqoki 3** – (Ochiauri T. et al, 1970), pp. 100-101.

<sup>61</sup> **Bread sack** – To understand the symbolic meaning of the bread (wheat) sack, refer to the chapter titled “Guda – the Sack,” which discusses the etymology of the Gudani settlement. Additionally, the chapters “Cycle of Gudani Cross” and “Cycle of Pirimze – Angel of Foundation” present the etymologies of the toponyms Guda (the sack) and Gudamakari.

<sup>62</sup> **Sacred bird** – As in many other sacred locations, such as Saneba, Gudani, and Tsroli, the physical representation of God or a saint is often depicted as a bird (typically a dove). The symbolism of the dove originates from the Bible, where a dove brought Noah the olive branch, signifying good news, peace, and the possibility of life being reestablished after the flood. This enduring symbol has been integrated into these local traditions, reinforcing the connection between divine intervention and new beginnings. (Gambashidze N. , Saneba of Tsroli - Cycle of Tsroli Mountain and Holy Trinity Shrine, 2023).

<sup>63</sup> **Establishing Kopala in Liqoki 4** - (Ochiauri T. et al, 1970), p. 96.

The boy was taken to Tusheti. Since then, many disasters have befallen Khevsureti, and even the elders were unable to emerge.

When they believed the boy was a holy person, the Khevsurians built the Karati Cross in his memory.

Soon, the saint returned to Khevsureti and restored order and a good way of life.<sup>64</sup>

The boy passed away while standing near the church.

In memory of this event, the festival of the Karati Cross was established in Khevsureti, later extending to Tusheti, where beer is brewed, and guests are welcomed to celebrate the occasion.

## 6. Establishing Shubnuri Cross 1<sup>65</sup>

Shubnuri is depicted with the image of a serpent<sup>66</sup>.

It has transferred from Tusheti.

A Tatar<sup>67</sup> man traveling from Tusheti encountered several shepherds from Liqoki on the mountain, who attempted to kill him.

He pleaded, 'Brothers, I beg you not to kill me.'

He said 'Dzi mao' instead of 'Dzmao' (brother), as he was not fluent in Georgian.

Since he was so fast to say 'brothers', the shepherds took him and gave him place where he settled<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> At this point, I have no information about the person referenced here. After further inquiries, it may be possible to identify the exact historical character to whom the narrator is alluding. Though this figure might not be connected to a specific historical event. The narrator could be referring to an abstract person, such as a saint or holy figure, whom they associate with the peace and prosperity of the Khevsurians.

<sup>65</sup> **Establishing Shubnuri Cross 1** – Ochauri M 15. Notebook 11.

<sup>66</sup> **Serpent** – a snake, as a deity is a common figure in Anatolian mythology. For reference see: (Gambashidze M., Gambashidze N., June 2023), (Gambashidze M., Gambashidze N., 2023).

<sup>67</sup> The character 'Tatar' is referenced in myths related to pandemics in Khadu. For more information on the term 'Tatar,' see comments 113, 125, 126, and 165.

<sup>68</sup> Giving place to settle to 'tatarian' – the story is common in Georgian historical chronicles (Bagrationi, 1973).

[https://www.theoi.com/Georgikos/EleusinosEubouleus.html#:~:text=EUBULEUS%20\(Eubouleus\)%20%2D%20Greek%20Demi,%2C%20and%20Plouton%20\(Haides\).](https://www.theoi.com/Georgikos/EleusinosEubouleus.html#:~:text=EUBULEUS%20(Eubouleus)%20%2D%20Greek%20Demi,%2C%20and%20Plouton%20(Haides).)

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