

## CONCEPT OF NATSILIANI IN KHEVSURIAN MYTHOLOGY

## ნაწილიანის კონცეფცია ხევსურულ მითოლოგიაში

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**ABSTRACT:**

This article investigates the symbolic function of light in Khevsuretian mythology, with particular emphasis on its association with the category of *Natsiliani*—individuals marked by divine favor. Drawing on textual analysis of several *Andrezis* (traditional mythological narratives), the study argues that light in these accounts functions as a semi-autonomous, active agent of divine presence, operating beyond mere physical illumination. Rather than being reducible to its physical source, light in Khevsuretian cosmology serves as a visible manifestation of divine will, selectively revealed to human beings as a means of communication, protection, or guidance.

The term *Natsiliani*, derived from the Georgian word “*natsili*” (“a part” or “a share”), designates individuals who possess a “share” in the divine realm. These individuals are born with distinctive corporeal signs—luminescent markings, bodily radiance, or other visual phenomena—which signify their sacred status and exceptional mission in the mortal world. However, these signs are often hidden from the general populace and perceptible only to those with heightened spiritual perception. This motif is exemplified in narratives such as ‘The Natsiliani’, where a character named Bobghiat Chuai is revealed to bear a radiant imprint resembling the sun and moon, and in Betsikua Natsiliani, where a newborn's eye emits a sun-like light perceived only by a spiritually attuned observer.

Beyond bodily marks, light also appears as an external manifestation of divine intervention in the broader landscape. In the myth ‘Transpassing of the Icon’, a mystical light arises from a sacred shrine, ascending into the heavens as a multi-colored celestial vision, interpreted as a threshold to the divine accessible during solstitial moments. In the myth ‘Gakhua in Betlemi’s Residence’, an icon designated as Natsiliani emits light autonomously, guiding its bearer across dangerous terrain and ultimately transforming into radiant doves enveloped in a golden shroud.

In the narrative of ‘Sparsangelozi’, light functions as both a concealment and navigational aid during an escape, mediated through an enchanted earring provided by an angelic figure.

The article contends that in Khevsuretian mythological thought, light embodies an ontological bridge between material and spiritual realities. It demarcates the exceptional from the ordinary, signals divine presence, and mediates human interaction with the sacred. Natsiliani individuals, as bearers of embodied light, assume a mediatory role within the community, their distinction not only physical but cosmological. These mythological constructs reflect a sophisticated religious system in which visible light serves as the index of invisible divine agency. The study thus contributes to a deeper understanding of Caucasian vernacular cosmologies and the culturally specific modalities through which divine election is articulated and socially enacted.<sup>1</sup>.

**KEYWORDS:** Khevsuretian mythology; divine light; Natsiliani; embodiment of the sacred; Caucasus cultural traditions; religious symbolism; initiatory signs; folklore and spirituality; myth and identity; comparative mythology; sacred marks; embodiment; divine election; Andrezis; mythological narratives; Georgian folklore; religious symbolism; semiotics of light; traditional narratives.

### ნინო ღამბაშიძე

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### აბსტრაქტი:

სტატიაში განხილულია ხევსურული მითოლოგიური გადმოცემების კონტექსტში სინათლის სიმბოლური ფუნქცია. ამასთანავე განსაკუთრებული ყურადღებაა გამახვილებული „ნაწილიანთა“ ფენომენზე — ის პირები, რომელთა ღვთიური ნიშანი მათ გამორჩეულობას ადასტურებს. რამდენიმე მითოლოგიური გადმოცემის ტექსტური ანალიზის საფუძველზე, ნაშრომი ამტკიცებს, რომ სინათლე ამ გადმოცემებში წარმოჩინებულია, როგორც ნახევრად ავტონომიური, აქტიური ღვთაებრივი ძალა, რომელიც სცილდება მხოლოდ ფიზიკური გამორჩეულობის ფუნქციას. ხევსურული კოსმოლოგიის შესაბამისად, სინათლე არ შემოიფარგლება მის ფიზიკურ წყაროზე დამოკიდებულებით; იგი გვევლინება ღვთიური ნების ხილულ ნიშნად, რომელიც შერჩევით ეძლევა ადამიანებს ღვთის ნებისა და ძალაუფლების გამოვლენად — გზის ჩვენებისთვის, დაცვისა და სულიერი კომუნიკაციისთვის.

ტერმინი „ნაწილიანი“ მომდინარეობს ქართული სიტყვიდან „ნაწილი“ — „მონაწილე“, „წილის მქონე“. ასე მოიხსენიებიან პირები, რომლებსაც ღვთაებრივ სამყაროსთან აქვთ წილი

<sup>1</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, გვ. 323-358)

მინიჭებული. ისინი იბადებიან განსაკუთრებული სხეულებრივი ნიშნებით — სხეულის ნათებით, ბრწყინვალე ან ფერადი ანაბეჭდებით, რომლებიც მათი წმინდა სტატუსისა და განსაკუთრებული მისიის მაჩვენებელია მატერიალურ სამყაროში. ამ ნიშნების ხილვა ყველასათვის ხელმისაწვდომი არ არის; მხოლოდ სულიერად აღმატებულ, ფაქიზი აღქმის მქონე პირებს ძალუბთ მათი გარჩევა. ამ მოტივს ვხვდებით გადმოცემებში, მაგალითად, „ნაწილიანი“, სადაც ბოზლიათ ჩუაის მხარზე მზისა და მთვარის მსგავსი ბრწყინვალე ანაბეჭდია აღმოჩენილი, და „ბეწიკუა ნაწილიანი“, რომელშიც ახალშობილის თვალიდან მზის სხივივით ბრწყინვალე ნათება გამოდის, თუმცა ამას მხოლოდ ერთმა სულიერად მგრძნობიარე ქალმა შეამჩნია.

გარდა სხეულებრივი ნიშნებისა, სინათლე ღვთიური ჩარევის გარე ნიშნადაც გვევლინება. გადმოცემაში „ხატის გადავლა“ სალოცავიდან ამომავალი მისტიკური ნათება ცისკენ ადის და მრავალფეროვან ციურ რკალად იქცევა — ეს მოვლენა ღვთაებრივ სამყაროში შესასვლელი კარია, რომელიც წელიწადის ბუნიობის პერიოდებში იხსნება. გადმოცემაში „გახუა ბეთლემის სახლში“ ხატი, რომელსაც თავადაც „ნაწილიანის“ სტატუსი გააჩნია, ავტონომიურად ასხივებს ნათებას, რომელიც მის მატარებელს საფრთხეებით სავსე გზაზე მიუძღვება და ბოლოს ოქროს ქსოვილში გახვეულ ნათელ მტრედად გარდაიქმნება.

გადმოცემაში „სპარსანგელოზი“ სინათლე ერთდროულად დამალვისა და მიმართულების მაჩვენებლის ფუნქციას ასრულებს გაქცევისას — მისი წყარო ანგელოზის მიერ ბოძებული ჯადოსნური საყურეა.

ნაშრომი ასკვნის, რომ ხევსურული მითოლოგიური მსოფლმხედველობის ფარგლებში სინათლე წარმოდგენილია როგორც ონტოლოგიური ხიდი მატერიალურ და სულიერ რეალობას შორის. იგი გამოყოფს გამორჩეულს ჩვეულებრივისგან, აღნიშნავს ღვთაებრივ ყოფნას და შუამავლის როლს ასრულებს ადამიანსა და წმინდა სფეროს შორის. ნაწილიანი პირები, როგორც ხორცშესხმული ნათების მატარებლები, მნიშვნელოვანი მედიატორული ფუნქციით სარგებლობენ თავიანთ საზოგადოებაში; მათი გამორჩეულობა მხოლოდ ფიზიკურით არ შემოიფარგლება და კოსმოლოგიურ მნიშვნელობას იძენს. ეს მითოლოგიური კონსტრუქციები ასახავს დახვეწილ რელიგიურ სისტემას, სადაც ხილული ნათება უხილავი ღვთიური ძალის მაჩვენებლად გვევლინება. ნაშრომი, ამგვარად, ხელს უწყობს კავკასიური კოსმოლოგიისა და ღვთიური გამორჩეულობის კულტურულ-რელიგიური ფორმების ღრმა გააზრებას.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** ხევსურული მითოლოგია; ღვთიური ნათება; ნაწილიანი (ან ნაწილიანნი); კავკასიური კულტურული ტრადიციები; რელიგიური სიმბოლიზმი; ინიციაციური ნიშნები; ფოლკლორი და სულიერება; მითი და იდენტობა; შედარებითი მითოლოგია; წმინდა ნიშნები; ანდრეზები; მითოლოგიური გადმოცემები; ქართული ფოლკლორი; რელიგიური სიმბოლიზმი; სინათლის სემიოტიკა.

As evident from Andrezis, where the concept of light is directly or indirectly represented, it is depicted as distinct from its source. It serves more as a symbol of divine grace or fortune than as an autonomous entity. It is the emblem that sets apart earthly creations—whether human, animal, or even inanimate objects.

Some individuals are more fortunate than others—they are born with a distinctive 'mark' upon their bodies. This mark is referred to as 'Natsiliani' in the Khevsuretian dialect. 'Natsili' in Georgian denotes 'a part' or 'a share,' thus 'Natsiliani' can be interpreted as 'one who possesses a share.' A share in what, precisely? From the context, it becomes apparent that such individuals have a 'share' in the divine, being born with a special purpose in the world. They have the opportunity to emerge as leaders among mortals, illuminating for them that physical existence is not the sole form of reality.

For example, in Andrezi of "*Treasuries from Gveleti I*": "*The priest left his final testament to his grandson regarding the treasury: 'When the sun's initial ray touches the wall, the light will reveal to you the location of the treasury.'* Here, we discern the role of light—it acts as a messenger of divine intent, a tangible manifestation bestowed upon humanity. Light grants humans the ability to perceive what lies concealed from our physical senses—the relics intended to serve as intermediaries between mortals and the spiritual realm."

In another myth, "Transpassing of the Icon"<sup>3</sup>, we see the mission of that light: it is clearly the proof of divine exictance. "*I was returning from Dusheti, and darkness had already descended; nightfall was upon me. As I approached the shrine's grounds, I removed my hat and sought mercy. Atop the mountain lay the shrine of our Icon, and suddenly, a mysterious light emanated from it, illuminating the area before swiftly vanishing. The light, brilliant and white, captivated my gaze. As it ascended toward the heavens, its brilliance intensified, resembling a rainbow with interwoven white and red streaks that adorned the sky like celestial belts. That very night, I experienced a profound dream: a figure, appearing as an angel, approached me and spoke, 'You have traversed the threshold of the divine. Fortunate indeed is the soul that passes through those luminous belts. They are visible to mortals when they traverse that sacred space.'* This phenomenon occurs twice annually, during the Winter and Summer solstices."

In the Andrezi "The Natsiliani"<sup>4</sup> we see: "*There was a man from the village of Guro named Babghiat Chuai. We all held him in high regard, for he was remarkably handsome and courageous. All Gergetian Babghias are handsome; they possess a distinct appearance that sets them apart from others. We spent much time together, even sharing sleeping quarters at night. While we would remove our clothing, he always kept his shirt on, never once removing it. I once asked him, 'Why don't you undress? Aren't you bothered by fleas? They trouble me greatly.'* On one occasion, as he began to undress, his shirt accidentally lifted, and suddenly, the entire room was bathed in light, as if a mirror's reflection had penetrated the darkness of the building. Later, upon his passing, we noticed a remarkable imprint on his shoulder: the reflection of the Sun and the half Moon, captured in blue."

<sup>2</sup> (Gambashidze N. (author), Gambashidze M. (editor), 2025, p. 54),

<sup>3</sup> (Cholokashvili Rusudan, Kiknadze Zurab, Nino Gambashidze (Editors), 2024, p. 28)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 20

Here, we observe that 'Natsiliani' individuals stand out from others in every aspect. The *light* they carry makes it evident to others that among them resides someone exceptional, someone who can bestow divine blessings. In daily life, such individuals are distinguished, but not everyone can discern their true nature. Only those who possess the skill of understanding can recognize their exceptional qualities. This ability is bestowed upon individuals for a reason. From this account, we learn that the Babghias, by virtue of their family name, possess distinctive appearances, yet only perceptive individuals can perceive that they are initiated into something extraordinary.

In the Andrezi "Betsikua Natsiliani"<sup>5</sup> The notion of 'Natsilianis' being concealed from ordinary people becomes more pronounced in this account: "*Bubika learned from his mother that Mzia hailed from the Khosiauri family in the village of Khakhabo. Mzia recounted the birth of her first son: 'When Ivane was born (his true name was Ivane, but since he was very small, he was nicknamed Betsikua—teeny), after three days, I noticed he could not open one eye. When I attempted to open it, the eye shone like the sun's rays. When other women came to see the child, none could perceive his exceptional nature. Only one woman, named Uzha, remained silent, murmuring only, 'My dear eyelet,' repeatedly. For this reason, we chose her as the baby's godmother, as nobody should know about Betsikua being a Natsiliani, and Uzha would not disclose it to anyone.*"

Thus, the 'Natsiliani's are shining, at least one of their parts makes it obvious that they are initiated people. So, what is this *light* that makes them distinguished? What is its nature? In the Andrezi "Gakhua in Betlemi's Residence"<sup>6</sup>, we comprehend that the light shines independently, serving as a reflection of the divine nature inherent in physical items, such as an icon, as illustrated in this particular case: "*As Gakhua returned from Gergeti, the icon guided him in flight. This icon was 'Natsiliani' and emitted light even at night, illuminating the path for Gakhua. 'Upon reaching the Khoristskali River,' Gakhua recounted, 'terrible sounds resonated, and the icon ascended to the mountaintop. It transformed into doves, radiating light. They brought forth an unearthly gold shroud and enveloped the icon with it.'*

After establishing the nature of *light*, particularly its independence from its source, the Andrezis present examples of its usage. Previously, we associated *light* with divinity or the exceptional abilities bestowed upon individuals within a family or clan for specific reasons. Now, let us examine the practical applications of light. In the myth of "Sparsangelosi (The Persian, or the main angel),"<sup>7</sup> we encounter:

"*When the Persians took hostages, among them was a woman with a baby from Khevi, East Georgia, who was deeply distressed. On the festival of Athenogenes, she dreamed of becoming an 'Angel of Tsveti.'* At that moment, an angel appeared to her and said, '*Rise, do not weep. Take my earring from the shelf and go directly to Khevi. In the daylight, I will shield you, and no one will see you, but at night, take my earring, and its light will guide you.'* Immediately, a bull appeared. The woman, as '*Sparsangelosi' mounted the bull's horn as on a throne and continued her way.*"

In this myth we witness several layers and intertwining of different historical epochs:

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 20

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p. 23-24.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p. 202

a. The woman traveling upon the bull's horn evokes the ancient myth of Io, who fled from Zeus by transforming into a cow and sought refuge in the mountains of Caucasus. The bull represents a well-established hypostasis of the supreme God in the cult of metallurgy, while the Mother-Goddess, seated on the throne, originates from the cult of agriculture. The synthesis of these two cults can be found in this myth, as 'Sitting on the horn' can be interpreted as a remnant of ancient beliefs. By incorporating these elements into Christianity, the myth emphasizes the importance and strength of the ancient cult of the Mother-Goddess, who wears jewelry that shines in darkness and brings light to the world. Residing on the bull's horn is a widespread symbol of the mother goddess, well-known in the pre-Hittite culture of the Bronze Age. As Alfonso Archi interprets the figurines of the bull and a woman sitting on the throne, *"In the first case there is a consolidation of a supreme male deity in the figure of a bull, which will remain common to most of the cultures of the ancient Near East with the animal of the Storm-god, and also of Zeus in the classical world. In the second case there is the emergence of a divinity in human form. Two figurines of steatopygous women sitting on a throne flanked by two leopards can only be representations of the Mother-goddess (Mellaart 1967, 182-84, Fig. 49-53)."*<sup>8</sup>

b. The journey to Khevi in this myth reminds us of the importance of this region in spreading Christianity to the mountainous regions of Eastern Georgia. The miracles associated with the main shrines of Mtiuleti and Khevi are linked to significant trials in the history of their congregations. *"It is possible that these trials even form the basis of their creation and formation as a church because where there is no trial, there is no salvation; Salvation is a change of re-creation and rebirth, revival."*<sup>9</sup>

To illustrate that captivity and death are equal events, it is not necessary to invoke an old myth; this revelation stems from a completely non-mythical, existential feeling when a person fully experiences the ordeal of captivity. This notion is corroborated by a passage from Nikoloz Baratashvili's private letter: "...you know, our women consider captivity and death to be the same thing, especially Lek'i's captivity" (May 2, 1848). This idea later Baratashvili developed in his poem "Faith of Kartli", in the literary character of Salome, the wife of Solomon Lionidze: *"May the Lord take my life before I consent to live in captivity or as a prisoner. What joy can one find abroad, living like an orphan? What honor does the gentle nightingale retain when trapped in a cage? But when a man is among his comrades, even adversity seems as light as a song! What significance does fame hold for a man? What if freedom is forfeited? In distress, one seeks solace in diverse forms: the moon sees into the soul, and the heart echoes the response of the heart! Why do we cast our gaze upon others?"*<sup>10</sup>

For a profound reason, Baratashvili venerates women: "Oh, you women, eternally blessed are you!" In these words, one can discern the traditional reverence of the Georgian nation towards women, who were regarded as the pillars of national ideals, the strength of families, and responsible for giving birth to and raising the heroes who later molded the national identity<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Archi, 2023, p. 38

<sup>9</sup> Kiknadze Z. , Georgian Mythology, 2007, p. 61

<sup>10</sup> Nikoloz Baratashvili, P. Ingorokva (editor), 1972

<sup>11</sup> For discussion about Natsiliani and more parallels in Khevsurian Mythology, see: (Gambashidze N. , Khevsuretian Heroes: The Rise of Pirqushi and Gakhua to Immortality (Corpus of Mythology of Georgian People), 2025). p. 75.

The icon emerges from hell, from the underworld, liberated by captured and enslaved individuals. Similarly, in tales, a heroic figure frees a beautiful woman from the captivity of a dragon or a witch. Thus, iconographically, the icon embodies a female archetype, as Khati herself is a captive. She must liberate herself first in order to emancipate her people. Moreover, she must remain in captivity to save her people; she must confront the dragon, delve into its lair, and rescue those consumed by its belly. Initially, the icon must secure her own liberation, and this self-redemption mirrors the crucifixion in a foreign land.

To return back to the discussed Andrezi, as a result of the shining of the earring, the woman reached the village Sno during the Athenogenes festival in Khevi and promptly proceeded to the shrine of the 'Angel of Tsveri.' *There, she sacrificed the earring to a sacrificial male sheep, offered the bull, and honored the "Sparsangelosi" (The Angel of Persia), establishing herself there. Since then, according to local accounts, the "Athenogenes Angel of Tsveri" came to be known after the Persian Angel - "Sparsangelosi."* However, for unspecified reasons, the "Sparsangelosi" did not remain there continuously and would occasionally fly away. On one occasion, it flew towards K'huro, but a hunter named Gurapet found it and returned it to its place. As a result of this deed, Gurapet earned a share at the shrine and was eventually appointed as the priest in charge of serving the shrine, for which he was awarded the head of a sacrificial male sheep.<sup>12</sup>

Another intriguing symbol in this myth is the golden earring, concealed within the icon, which emits *light* in the dark night and guides the escaping woman. This symbol appears to be deeply rooted in Georgian literary tradition. In Shota Rustaveli's "The Knight in the Panther's Skin," during the episode of Nestan-Darejan escaping the threat of marriage to the son of the deceitful king of Gulansharo, a city of merchants, her patron, the wife of the supreme Vizier, Patman Khatun, presents her with earrings. Upon Nestan's arrival at the king's palace, she sits upon a golden throne and wears a crown adorned with large rubies. She is guarded by the king's eunuchs. Despite feeling desperate, Nestan resolves to take action because "*No one who is wise will commit suicide. When necessary, one must rely on their own intellect and logic to find the path to survival.*"<sup>13</sup> Nestan negotiates with the eunuchs and entices them with the promise of the crown and earrings, thus evading her impending marriage to the prince of Gulansharo. She arrives at the palace of Patman, requests a horse, and swiftly departs, escaping her predetermined fate.

In the next Chapter "Story of Kajis capturing Nestan-Darejan"<sup>14</sup>, The Kajis recount how they wandered through the fields on a dark night, hoping to encounter travelers whom they could rob. Suddenly, they observed a light shining as if the sun were illuminating the plain. They began to investigate, assuming it was either the Aurora star or the Moon. Upon reaching the source of the light, they discovered a wondrous woman of unbelievable beauty. They gazed at her in awe as her radiant face twinkled, enveloping the surroundings.

To summarize the aforementioned, the function of *light* in the Khevsurian mythological system is to safeguard believers from both physical and spiritual adversaries, represented by the devil.

<sup>12</sup> Shota Rustaveli Institute of Literature, 2023, p.202.

<sup>13</sup> Rustaveli, 1956 – Chapter "Story of Nestan-Darejan, told by Patman Khatun". Verse 1191. (Sherman, 2009)

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* Verses 1225-1228

Samdsimari/Samdzivari adorns pendants, necklaces, or beads symbolizing the sun, depicted as circular with "beams" composed of various metal or stone gems, which serve as amulets or representations of the supreme god and deities<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, Selene, the goddess of the moon, was revered through crescent earrings adorned with intricate granular work.<sup>16</sup>

The oldest representation of symbolic meaning of *light* is the Chronicles of Kartli – the text of XI c.: “*Then a ray of sunlight [šuk’i mzisa] entered the window and seized him around the waist; it drew him up and brought him out the window. When he had come out into the field, he saw the Sun bending down. He stretched out his hand, wiped the dew off the Sun’s face, and anointed his own face. P’arnavaz awoke, he was astonished, and said: “The dream means that I should go to Spahān [i.e., Isfahān], and there I shall find good [fortune] [ket’ili]”*<sup>17</sup>.

In essence, the *light* functions as a belt or girdle, signifying not only protection but also royal authority. It is noteworthy that P’arnavaz was raised in the North Caucasus, as his mother rescued him and his three sisters from the vengeance of Azo, a nobleman of Mtskheta. It is believed that the myth of P’arnavaz reclaiming his royal power and liberating the Georgian people from Persian domination has deeper, more ancient roots preserved in North Caucasian mythology. These roots are depicted in the series of Andrezi narratives about the women of Kajeti/Kajaveti.

### Ashekali

Definition of “Ashekali” is not that clear. Ashekali, a woman brought from Kajaveti, settled in Motsmao village in Khevsureti. She was known for her wisdom and was believed to possess the ability to determine the day of a person's death. Ashekali had a unique ability to make herself invisible by using a cover (or a veil), and she sometimes fortune-told people. There is a story where Ashekali jumped into the Aragvi River and appeared to have been lost, carried away by the water. During this time, the Russian army was stationed on the riverbank in Zhinvali, and Ashekali found herself beneath the army. Astonishingly, when she emerged from the water, the army was surprised and even frightened, as she appeared dry despite being submerged. Ashekali passed through the ranks of the army without anyone obstructing her.

Ashekali claimed to have been a champion of the Khakhmati Cross for three years. Giorgi of Khakhmati, whom she mentioned, had a distinctive red horse and a white mark on its forehead. Whenever Giorgi rode, a misty cloak would follow him, invisible to others but visible to Ashekali. She described how Giorgi's horse would be taken to a unique stable, so pristine that even Ashekali hesitated to enter. The horse, always harnessed, would be released when someone sought St. George's help. The mist would envelop the horse and its rider, making them disappear as they went to aid someone in need.

<sup>15</sup> (Gambashidze N. , THE PLEIADES IN KHEVSURIAN COSMOGONY: THE CULT, SERVICE AND RITUAL CUISINE OF KAJETIAN WOMEN LINKING WITH DODONEAN CULT, 2025)

<sup>16</sup> Singapuri, 2019

<sup>17</sup> Stephen H. Rapp Jr., 2017, pp. 206-207

One day, Ashekali failed to open the stable door in time, and the mist-covered the area. This incident led to her removal from the leadership position, and she lost the ability to see the Khakhmati Cross and the horse with the white mark. Despite this, Ashekali continued to hear the footsteps of the horse as it went to help others. In the later years of her life, Ashekali remained sought after for her divination skills, with people from Pshavi and Khevsureti regularly visiting her for fortune-telling. She continued practicing divination until her old age, never abandoning her abilities until her eventual death<sup>18</sup>.

To attempt to interpret the **etymology** of Ashekali, it should be said that the word is a composite of two words: **Ash** and **kali** (a woman in Georgian). There is no Georgian etymology for **Ash**, but we can find this root well understood in Indo-European languages.

The common English name for the tree, "ash," has its roots in the Old English term "æsc," which is connected to the Proto-Indo-European term for the tree. Simultaneously, the generic name has Latin origins, derived from a Proto-Indo-European word associated with birch. Intriguingly, in both languages, these terms also carry the secondary meaning of "spear," reflecting the historical use of ash wood for crafting spear shafts.<sup>19</sup>

The Ash-tree (ip'hani, kopiti) is closely connected to St. Georges' cult in Khevsureti. This type of tree is always connected to St. George (or supreme God, the Supreme Judge), in context occupying the person's house and the private property becoming the belonging to the shrine (Cross, in Khevsurian dialect). When the Ash-tree grows inside the fireplace of the family, it means, the 'Mother loci' has revealed its wish to be settled in that place and the family has to move away from there. Disobedience will ultimately bring the family to death.<sup>20</sup>

In Greek mythology, the Meliae are nymphs connected with the ash tree, potentially with a specific association to the manna ash (*Fraxinus ornus*), similar to dryads being nymphs linked to the oak. These nymphs are mentioned in Hesiod's *Theogony*.

In Norse mythology, the colossal evergreen ash tree known as Yggdrasil, often referred to as "the steed (or gallows) of Odin," plays a pivotal role. This sacred tree is nourished by three mystical springs and serves as the Axis Mundi, supporting the nine interconnected worlds of the cosmos within its roots and branches. Interestingly, the name "Askr," denoting the first man in Norse myth, literally translates to 'ash,' emphasizing the significance of the ash tree in the mythological narrative.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Source: Kiknadze Z. , mitologiuri entsik'lop'edia akhalgazrdebistvis. t' III, kartuli mitologia [Mythological Encyclopedia for Youth. vol III, Georgian Mythology], 2004

<sup>19</sup> Source: (Mallory, J. P.; Adams, Douglas Q., eds., 1997, p. 32)

<sup>20</sup> "In Khevsuretian tradition, doves are considered oracular beings that reveal the will of God in the establishment of shrines. For example, the Mkadre is the priest, who has a white piece of cloth on his shoulder, to meet the dove – a God's messenger. Earlier beliefs involved the appearance of an ash tree in the fireplace and a serpent emerging from its roots, symbolizing divine manifestations of Mater Loci (The Angel of Foundation) . (Discussion about "Mkadre" and his function in Khevsuretian religious hierarchy, see: (Gambashidze Nino (author), Gambashidze Maya (editor), 2025)Tbilisi. pp. 20-21.

*The cult of the oak tree appears to be linked to the cult of metallurgy, which supplanted an earlier agrarian tradition associated with the Great Mother, Kybele/Cybele. The presence of black doves likely represents elderly women—priestesses of the Kybele/Cybele cult—who are depicted as Khibal-Kudianis in the Tushetian mythological cycle of Doraiskheveli. These women carried ancient healing wisdom, which, under the influence of newer religious traditions, came to be regarded as magical. However, they were not seen as malevolent but rather as guardians and helpers to the followers of the new God.* **Invalid source specified.**

<sup>21</sup> **Invalid source specified.**

The term "ash" in its first sense, referring to the "powdery remains of fire," traces its origin to Middle English "asshe," derived from Old English "æsce." This can be traced back to the Proto-Germanic \*askon, which is also found in Old Norse, Swedish, Old High German, German, Middle Dutch, and Gothic languages. The ultimate root is the Proto-Indo-European \*as-, meaning "to burn, glow." Interestingly, the Spanish and Portuguese words "ascua," referring to "red-hot coal," are borrowed from the Germanic languages.

In its second sense, "ash" refers to a popular type of forest tree found in Eurasia, North America, and North Africa. The Middle English term "asshe" comes from Old English "æsc," and the Proto-Germanic \*askaz and \*askiz, which is also present in Old Norse, Old Saxon, Middle Dutch, and German. The root of these words is the Proto-Indo-European \*os-, signifying "ash tree." The wood of the ash tree, known for its toughness and elasticity, was preferred for spear-shafts. Consequently, in Old English, "æsc" could also mean "spear," especially in poetic contexts, such as "æsc-here" for a company armed with spears and "æsc-plega" for war, literally translated as "spear-play." The Old English runic letter "Æsc" also bore the same name.<sup>22</sup>

The ash tree holds significant cultural and mythological associations in proto-Indo-European and Indo-European societies, particularly among the Vikings and in British folklore. In Gaelic, it is called "uinnseann" (pronounced ooshin). In Viking mythology, the ash tree, known as Yggdrasil or the World Tree, stands on an island surrounded by the ocean, with its trunk reaching the heavens, roots delving into the Underworld, and branches extending across the Earth. Odin, the chief god, sacrificed himself on Yggdrasil, gaining wisdom and knowledge of the Runes.

Both Odin and Thor, the god of thunder, possessed magical spears made of ash wood. The connection between the words for ash and spear is evident in linguistic influences, seen in place names like Port Askaig and the term "Aescling," referring to the Vikings as "Men of Ash."

The Gaels also revered the ash tree for its protective qualities. In Irish lore, three out of five legendary guardian trees were ash. Ash trees were believed to protect the purity of springs on the Isle of Man. In British folklore, the ash was considered protective and healing, especially for child health. Newborns were given ash sap, and ailing children were passed through a cleft in an ash tree for healing.

While there isn't a clear religious connection, the association of Ash Wednesday with the word "ash" is apparent. In parts of England, children used to bring black-budded ash twigs to school on this day. Ash wood is highly valued for its strength, toughness, and elasticity. It was used for chariot and coach axles, oars, tool handles, and weaponry. Ash coppices well, providing straight poles for various purposes. The wood's density makes it an ideal fuel, reflected in its Latin species name "Fraxinus," meaning firelight. Traditional Yule logs were often made of ash, and to this day, ash remains highly valued as firewood, burning for a long time with intense heat, whether seasoned or green.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> **Invalid source specified.**

<sup>23</sup> Darwin, T. (1996) *The Scots Herbal: the plant lore of Scotland*. Mercat Press.

Fife H. (1994) *Warriors and Guardians: native highland trees*. Argyll Publishing. **Invalid source specified.**

Frazer, J. (1993) *The Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion*. Wordsworth.

Mabey, R. (1996) *Flora Britannica*. Sinclair-Stevenson: London. **Invalid source specified.**

In Georgian the Ash-tree is called Ip'hani // Kopiti (Fraxinus). In Georgia, there are three species of Ip'hani: Common Ip'hani (Fraxinus Excelsior): This is a tall, straight-bodied tree reaching heights of 30-40 meters. It is widespread in almost all regions of Georgia and thrives in well-lit areas of lowland and mid-mountain mesophyll forests, often alongside other broad-leaved species. It can be found in mountainous areas up to 1800-2000 meters above sea level. Fraxinus Coriariaefolia: This species grows in the forests of Kakheti and Tush-Pshav-Khevsureti and can also be found in the wild, such as in the Khudadov forest in Tbilisi. Fraxinus Oxycarpa (Fraxinus oxycarpa): Predominantly distributed in the forests of Western Georgia, it is also cultivated in the Tbilisi area. In addition to these native species, Georgia hosts 24 exotic species of Ip'han. The wood of Ip'hani is of high quality, and its bark contains tannins, while the leaves contain vitamins and essential oils. Ip'hani trees are commonly used for greening garden parks, forest parks, and streets.<sup>24</sup>

Regarding the question of etymology of "Ip'hani" tree, the Kartvelian \*Dzel- "tree"; Georgian "Dzel" "tree". Zan. (Laz.) ja // nja, jal-ep'h-e "trees", Megr. Ja // nja, jal-ona "alley", o-jal-esh-i = sazdel-is-i (Odjaleshi, the grape breed). The Svan equivalent has not yet been identified, although the unity of Georgian-Zan roots is known from N. Mari's researches<sup>25</sup> and <sup>26</sup>.

As my mother<sup>27</sup> recalled, when the family moved from Imereti to Tbilisi in 1930-ies, her grandmother, Olga Turmanide brought the tree Kopiti - Ash-tree and planted in the front-yard of the family house. As my mother remembers, the grandmother knew nothing about symbolism, but did this by innertion, just was sure that there should be an Ash-tree for the family's prosperity and peace.

As for Ashekali, it is possible the deity, or "nymph", associated with St. George's cult, which is Christianized metallurgy cult, and thus closely connected to the "Iron Age" migrations of all nations, including Indo-Europeans in their search for the iron ores. Connecting the female mates of St. George of Khakhmati to trees brings us to the idea of pre-Hellenic religions of Asia Minor, in particular, with conquering the Troyan kingdom by the heroes of Aegean world – Achilles, Odysseus and others.

## Mzekali

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Milliken, W & Bridgewater, S (2004) Flora Celtica: plants and people in Scotland. Berlin: Edinburgh. **Invalid source specified.**

Paterson, J.M. (1996) Tree Wisdom. Thorsons: London.

Vickery, R. (1995) A Dictionary of Plant Lore. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

<sup>24</sup> Imedadze, 1980, p. 284.

<sup>25</sup> Klimov, 1965, p. 237.

<sup>26</sup> Chukhua, 2003, p. 493.

<sup>27</sup> **Manana Chirakadze**, born in 1943, held a PhD in Linguistics and Archaeology. Her familial lineage traces back to notable individuals: Father's Side: Grandfather: Archpriest Parmen Chirakadze, who was exiled in 1937 to Kazakhstan due to Stalin's oppression of religious figures. Grandmother: Ekaterine Ioseliani, born in the village of Kvilishori, Tskaltubo municipality (Imereti). Father: Grigol Chirakadze, a Medical Doctor, Professor, and Dermatologist known for inventing healing methods for leprosy. Mother: Nino Chantladze, also a Medical Doctor and Dermatologist. Mother's Side: Grandfather: Giorgi Chantladze, a Railway Engineer. Grandmother: Olga Turmanidze, descended from the distinguished Turmanidze dynasty of doctors.

Mze – in Georgian means “the Sun”, “kali” – “a woman”. Thus, “Mzekali”, being a popular Georgian female name, means “Woman Sun,” “Sun’s daughter”. Thus, this character shows similarity to Helen of Troy, whose name, is closely connected to “the Sun” and also the Ethnonym Hellins-Greeks are interpreted in scientific publications to be connected with Helios.

Formally, Helen lends herself to three protoforms: \**Swelenā*, \**Selenā* and \**Welenā*, whereby the morpheme *-(e)-nā* confers active voice, passive voice, or both, depending on the root *and* the context.<sup>28</sup>

For morphological, mythological and typological reasons, one cannot investigate the name and nature of Helen without investigating her future husband—formally her masculine doublet, the Priamid Helenos \**(S)(w)elenos*: he is the Seer (Welsh *gweled* ‘see’), the Torch (Hekabe’s dream = masc. of ἑλένη), the Cheater (Greek ἐλεφάρομα), the Suitor (Sanskrit *vara-*), and the Abductor (Lithuanian *Vėlinas*). In the Late Bronze Age, the Mycenaeans were fond of supernatural couples formed from homogeneous roots, e.g., *Zeus* and *Diwija*; *Poseidaon* and *Posidaēja*. Arguably too, *Helen* and *Helenos*, a.k.a. *Alexandra* and *Alexandros*, were once homogeneous couples with homogeneous epithets. Centuries later, when such onomastic duplicates fell out of fashion,<sup>29</sup> *Alexandros* became differentiated from *Helenos*; *Alexandra* (Kassandra), *Helenos*’s twin sister, became differentiated from *Helen*. Likewise, “Mze” and “Mzekali” once doubled male-female couple of Supreme God, later, in monotheistic religious system separated from each-other and gained independent functions – male Protector who rides a red horse with white mark on his forehead and his servant, devoted woman, who is in charge of the stable. After misdemeanour she is the protector of humans, the fortune-teller.

## Shukai

In Georgian, "Shuki" translates to "Light." The mythological figure Shukai is associated with illumination. Shukai is among the seven "Kajetian women" believed to have been introduced to humanity by St. George of Khakhmati. Samdzimari/Samdzivari stands out as the primary figure among these seven. As previously discussed, Samdzivai-Samdzimari is intertwined with the ancient solar religion, which evolved during medieval times into the Christianized semi-pagan beliefs of Khevsureti.

Gandzai

<sup>28</sup> *-(e)-nā* and the masculine equivalent *-(e)-nos*, are rare in Greek, e.g., τέμενος, παρθένος, ὠλένη. It can be analyzed in three ways. The first option is to view the first syllable in *-(e)-no* as a former laryngeal, in which case, *-no* corresponds to the familiar verbal adjective: see Drinka 2009; Brugmann analyzed *-eno* as a variant of *-no* (1905:334); *-(e)-no* can also be the thematization of the suffix *-en-*, as it appears in the Greek athematic ἀρσέν-ες ‘males’ (I thank Andreas Kyropoulos for this analysis, personal communication, April 23, 2016). The third option is to view *-eno* as a phonotactic variant of the productive Greek suffix *-ano* (e.g., στέφω ‘wreath’, ‘encircle’ vs. στέφ-ανος ‘that which surrounds’, ‘wreath’) in assimilatory contiguity with an *-e-* root: thus, ἑλένη ‘torch’ would stem from a hypothetically original ἑλάνη, which is also attested (Lubotsky 2007); this *-ano* too can be active or passive, e.g., ἀπίθ-ανος either ‘unconvincing’ (active) or ‘unconvinced’ (passive).

<sup>29</sup> There are still holdovers in the Classical period, e.g., Ἐνυάλιος and Ἐνυώ; Dione remains a concubine of Zeus, mother of Aphrodite.

Gandzai is a female name in Khevsureti<sup>30</sup>. Etymology of this name is very simple and straightforward – Gandzi, a Persian word, meant ‘treasury’, or ‘place for keeping yield’. In all mythological systems, around shrines, there always is supposed existence of the Crypts, ‘treasury’ – the closed and well protected place, where the liturgical artifacts and donated jewelries are kept. In Khevsurian mythology treasuries from kajeti/Kajaveti usually include: “the cattle; a bell equipped with nine clappers; a golden lute featuring nine strings, as well as a grindstone and a razor”<sup>31</sup>; the golden sieve<sup>32</sup> and women. One of these women is called Gandzai – supposedly she is the patron or representation of all physical goods that is given to people, whether mystical or real. Also worth to mention the historical mission of mountainous regions of Georgia, and, in particular Khevsureti – the main treasuries were brought to there when invasions in lowlands endangered it. For example, the Mount Khvamli is supposed to be the treasury of Georgian Royal family: The prominent Georgian historian and geographer, Vakhushti Bagrationi describes another significant mountain of Georgia – Khomli / Khvamli<sup>33</sup> and tries to establish the spiritual and material function of the mountain for the country: “*West to Rioni Gorge, under the Caucasus mountain chain, there is a very high mountain - Khomli. It gained its name because of its high, equal to plead name. There is a cave curved in the midst of the mountain, which is inaccessible for the enemies, shelter for the treasuries of the kings. From Gorda, up to Caucasus Mountains, is located the Lechkhomi region which is named after the Khomli Mountain – Lech-khomi. When the country will get into a great necessity, the Khomli Mountain will rescue it?*”<sup>34</sup> Thus, Gandzai, along with other women of Kajaveti, can be understood as one of stars, or planets, along with Samdzivari, Ashekali, Mzekali, Amenkali and Simenkali – the pleades that surround the God’s Son – St. George.

### Amenkali

<sup>30</sup> Chincharauli, 1960

<sup>31</sup> **Kampeign against Kajaveti III** - Narrator Mamuka Qetelauri, Recorder Goderdzi Arabuli, Biso, 1985, TSUFA 27123

<sup>32</sup> **St. George of Khakhmati in Kajis’ Blacksmithery** - Shanidze A, qart’uli khaklhuri poezia – khevsuruli [Georgian Folk Poetry – Khevsurian] 2009, p. 594-595

<sup>33</sup> **Khomli** - Georgian Synonym of Pleads – the Kimah constellation (Job 9:9) or Kesil constellation (Isaiah 13:10), is used as an acronym for the mountain in Khvamli, also known as Khomli, is a limestone massif situated in Georgia, specifically in Lechkhumi, within the western part of the region near the administrative border of Tsageri and Tskaltubo municipalities. The massif reaches a height of 2002 meters above sea level. It constitutes a double crest and is primarily composed of Cretaceous limestone. Approximately 300 meters to the south lies the Simkali slope, home to the historical Khvamli Sakhizari - a refuge or shelter cave. The northern slopes of both crests are marked by numerous karst funnels, enhancing the geological features of the area. Notable among the caves in the vicinity are Tekenteri, accessible through a beech hole, and the Boga ice cave. Surrounded by a mixed forest, Khvamli provides a picturesque natural setting. Its diverse geological formations and historical caves contribute to its significance in the region.

<sup>34</sup> Vakhushti Batonishvili – Description of Georgian Kingdom. Tbilisi 1941. p. 148

Amen – is the well established word for ‘truth’ is part of all biblical religions and part of speech for Jewish, Arab and European languages. ‘Amen’, a word originating from Biblical Hebrew, features prominently throughout the Hebrew Bible as a confirming response, notably following blessings. Its root, א-מ-ן, is shared among several Semitic languages, including biblical Aramaic, and carries meanings such as ‘being firm’, ‘reliable’, ‘faithful’, and ‘believing’ in Hebrew. The term was integrated into Greek from early Church Judaism and subsequently entered various European languages.

From Hebrew, amen found its way into the Arabic religious lexicon, aligning with the Arabic root أ م ن, reflecting similar meanings to its Hebrew counterpart. Commonly used in Christian and Islamic prayers to signify complete affirmation or deference, amen also appears in religious texts, including Arabic translations of the Bible and after recitations from the Quran.

While some suggest external etymologies linking amen to the Egyptian god Amun or the Hindu Sanskrit word Aum, these theories aren't recognized in standard etymological references. Notably, the Hebrew word begins with aleph, while the Egyptian name starts with a yodh.

In the Hebrew Bible, amen appears 30 times, particularly in Deuteronomy, with the fixed phrase 'Amen, Amen' occurring five times. Its distinct usages include initial amen, detached amen, and final amen.

In the New Testament, the Greek ἀμήν is used as an expression of faith or as part of liturgical formulas, often preceding sayings of Jesus. Unlike its Hebrew counterpart, Jesus uses amen to emphasize forthcoming statements. The term appears frequently in the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John.

In Christianity, “**amen**” serves as a concluding word for prayers and hymns, signifying strong agreement. Its use traces back to apostolic times, with the congregation responding "amen" to benedictions after the Eucharist celebration.

For congregation, it is very important, to be sure, their religion is true. Truth, is one of the fundamentals of society’s well-being, along with other aspects which are discussed previously. So, ‘truth’ needs its own patron. As mentioned earlier, The term "*Andrezi*" essentially refers to something verbal, whether oral or written. It embodies the weight of a testament passed down from a father-ancestor to their descendants, demanding the unwavering fulfillment of its contents. “*The narratives found in Andrezi are foundational, rooted in the religious or secular institutions of society, behavior, morality, formal or informal relationships, and all that constitutes the existence and functioning of a historically evolved community of people. "Andrezi martal as" (Andrezi is true) - these words essentially encapsulate this concept*”<sup>35</sup>. They represent the faith of a member of the congregation who harbors no doubt about the truth of *Andrezi* passed down through generations, as everything around them, from the landscape to current events, affirms the authenticity of *Andrezi*.

This makes us to think, that truth, firmity in believe is represented in the figure of Amenkali – she is responsible for looking forward of keeping the ancestor’s believe and liturgy unchanged, or pure. Purity of the society largely depend on the fulfilling the laws, determined by the religion unchanged.

<sup>35</sup> Z. Kiknadze. Shota Rustaveli Institute of Literature- *Georgian Folk Prose – Mythology*, vol III. 2019. p. 5.

Amenkali is one of the stars in the Pleiades constellation according to Khevsurian cosmogony, which the Khevsurians inherited from their previous culture, traditionally regarded as Kajis or devils in modern Khevsurian belief systems.

### Simenkali

Simenkali is a doublet of Amekali. In Georgian, we frequently observe cases of related eponyms undergoing slight syllabic changes. For instance, Aisi-Daisi (down and dusk) and Ali-Dali (Fire, as an eponym) and Dali (a mythological figure of a forest female spirit in Svaneti). In the Georgian language, [a-] as a preverb signifies rising up. In the case of Amenkali, the word "Amen" is inherited in the Georgian language from Hebrew, likely through Greek during the Christian era, yet speakers "Georgianized" it to the extent of referring to the deity with the compound of Amen and kali (a woman) - Amenkali.

If the speculative interpretation of Amenkali as a patron of truth is accepted, then her parallel - Simenkali - should represent something semantically opposite. In this scenario, it seems most logical that false or invented notions oppose truth. In other words, the deity who patronizes invention or craftsmen could be called Simenkali.

To delve further into speculation, the seventh member of the Pleiades constellation - Simenkali - could be regarded as the patron of art or craftsmen, those who fashion tools of gold or copper. "Sina/sima" in Georgian refers to copper or wire, [sinas sch'eds sinis mch'edeli] - the copper smith creates the copper wire (or chain).

Similar to the nine Muses in Greek mythology or the Moyres - deities of fate - the Pleiades of Kajetian women collectively embody the concept of patronizing humans, serving as mediators between people and "god's children" - the invisible spirits - and guardians of all aspects of humanity.

#### 1. Ashekali<sup>36</sup>

Ashekali was originated from the village Motsmao<sup>37</sup>.

Her being was divided: one side was inhabited by the influence of the Devils, while the other was graced by the presence of Angels.

Ashekali possessed remarkable skills as a fortune-teller; she could accurately predict the lifespan of individuals down to the very detail.

Occasionally, she draped herself in a marvelous veil, rendering herself invisible to all who beheld her. At other times, she revealed herself to people, making her presence known.

<sup>36</sup> **Ashekali** – Recorder Al. Ochiauri. M 17. Notebook 34.

<sup>37</sup> **Village Motsmao** – is located in Eastern Georgia, within the Dusheti municipality (Khevsureti community). Situated on the eastern slope of the Gudamakari Ridge, it rests on the right side of the Datvisishkevi River, which is a tributary of the Aragvi River in Khevsureti. At an elevation of 1480 meters above sea level, Motsmao lies 58 kilometers from Dusheti.

Once, Ashekali leaped into the swift mountain river at the base of the village Motsmao and vanished beneath its surface. Water enveloped Ashekali, and everyone believed she had perished.

During those times in Zhinvali<sup>38</sup>, the Russian troops were encamped along the riverbank, and Ashekali emerged from the water precisely at the edge of their camp.

Then she emerged from the water and walked among the Russian soldiers on land.

When the soldiers saw Ashekali emerge from the water without any clothing, they were greatly astonished and frightened, exclaiming, "What has emerged from the water?"

Uncovered and without clothing, Ashekali walked amidst the soldiers as they divided into two lines, allowing her passage between them.

Ashekali would often say, "I served as a groom at the Cross of Khakhmati stable."

St. George of Khakhmati was known to ride a red horse adorned with a white mark on its forehead.

Wherever he went, the horse faithfully trailed behind him at all times.

While others could not perceive their presence, I alone had the ability to see them.

As St. George made his return, we could discern the sounds of the horse's breathing, followed by the appearance of misty clouds. However, George himself remained unseen.

When St. George returned to his residence, the mist clouds dissipated, vanishing into thin air.

He would proceed to his dwelling while the horse remained in the stable.

I would take the horse into the stable and untame it. The stable possessed a distinguished aura, causing me to feel uneasy whenever I entered.

The horse was exceptionally pure and clean, shining brightly to the point of dazzling my eyes. It stood proudly on its hind legs.

No one besides myself could perceive the stable or the horse within it.

The horse remained saddled at all times, and whenever someone called upon George for assistance, the wind carried the call to him. In response, the horse would swiftly burst out of the stable, with St. George of Khakhmati Cross mounted upon it. In an instant, they vanished into the rising mist cloud, hurrying to aid those in need.

They would swiftly return before long.

The inside of the stable was exceptionally bright and luminous, capable of blinding the human eye.

The horse had no need for food or water. Remained without food.

Finally, St. George became angry with me for some reason and expelled me from the stable.

The reason for George's fury was rather inconsequential: somebody had called for my assistance.

When I returned, the veil no longer concealed me, and I discovered neither horse nor stable. Later, I learned that George was angry with me, and as a result, I lost access to the stable—I was unveiled, and since then, I have not seen either the Khakhmati Cross or his red horse with the white mark.

But occasionally, I could hear the rhythmic sounds of his trot, signaling his rush to someone's aid. The rumbling was so intense that one might believe the mountains themselves were about to crumble."

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<sup>38</sup> **Zhinvali** is a town in Georgia, situated within the Dusheti Municipality in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region. It is located on the banks of the Aragvi River and is home to one of the largest hydroelectric power stations in Georgia.

Finally, Ashekali became a renowned fortune-teller. People from Pshavi and Khevsureti sought her out to discover their future. Crowds gathered at her door; Ashekali could accurately predict the lifespan of individuals with certainty.

Ashekali passed away at a very old age, never relinquishing her fortune-telling practice until her death.

## 2. Women of Kaji 3<sup>39</sup>

When the God's Children triumphed over Kajaveti, they brought six women from there as trophies. Three of them underwent baptism, while the remaining three did not.

The baptized women would express, "We were fond of Megreleri Gakhua and engaged in playful interactions, harboring a desire for marriage with him."

The baptized women from Kajetian origin are Samdzivari, Ashekali, and Mzekali.

These women are known for their intelligence and compassion towards humanity.

They have a strong inclination for assisting those in need.

They are revered collectively with the Khakhmati Cross, drawing worshippers from different faiths.

## 3. Women of Kaji 4<sup>40</sup>

St. George has arranged multiple campaigns against the Kajis; his aim was to defeat them.

He appeared in front of them in different ways – as a man, as a worker, to find out their way and lifestyle.

He brought five women from there.

He captured five women and brought with him.

He brought them in as victims, along with the cattle.

Their names were Samdzimari, Ashekali, Mzekali.

I do not know names of others,

The shrine has not revealed the names of others.

Now they are addressed as "maidens" – sorority sisters, and are regarded as the children of God.

Samdzimari is their leader. She serves as the primary defender.

When she learns, she will inform the other children of God [if something bad happens].

She has the veil.

She covers herself with a veil, enters the house, and listens to what is being said.

Then she will directly convey the message to the Children of God.

She appeared to Megreleri as a real woman, in flesh and blood, and sewed the embroidered shirt for him.

<sup>39</sup> Al. Ochiauri M 15.

<sup>40</sup> Narrator – Giorgi Arabuli (51 years old), Recorder – Tinatin Ochiauri, Datvisi, 27.07.1962. TSUFA 29990

Megrelauri was charmed by her, liked her very much, and desired to marry her.

The women worked at his place herself and told him everything.

Only later he found out that she was not a woman.

Inside Megrelauri's former residence is her shrine.

She has exterminated Megrelauri's family.

Megrelauri has shared his soul with the King Erekle<sup>41</sup>.

Someone advised King Erekle: "You have sinned multiple times; you need to confide in someone who is faithful to God's children and share your soul with him. He will take half of your sins upon himself."

<sup>42</sup>.

And he [King Erekle] appointed this man – Gakhua.

Erekle said: "We have supported each other three times<sup>43</sup>, and now take as much gold and silver as you can carry as a gift."

Gakhua and his friends reached benches of Ghule<sup>44</sup>.

They carried sacks filled with gold and silver, accompanied by his friends.

Across Ghule, in Srelovani<sup>45</sup>, above the forests was lying a snake.

Gakhua kneeled and begged the snake to go away.

The snake slithered into the forest and disappeared.

We saw there the snake.

Gakhua said, "I have sinned. My fate is sealed, I am doomed, because I have shared sins."

When he returned to the village, he buried all the treasuries: icons, bowls, bells, and other goods he had saved in the ground, saying, "I am going to die with my wife and children," and buried everything.

And indeed, his family was exterminated.

The following year, all of them passed away.

<sup>41</sup> **Erekle II**, king of Kakheti from 1744 to 1762 and later king of Kartli-Kakheti until 1798, played a crucial role in Georgia's history. Initially supported by Nāder Shah, Erekle later sought independence from Persian influence. He attempted alliances with Russia but faced challenges in Russo-Persian dynamics. Erekle's reign marked a period of internal reform and external diplomacy. He aimed to centralize power, reduce aristocratic influence, and align Georgia with Christian Europe. Erekle II's efforts culminated in the Treaty of Georgievsk with Russia in 1783, establishing Georgia as a Russian protectorate. However, Russian aid was unreliable, and Georgia remained exposed to Persian threats. Following Erekle's death in 1798, Georgia's fate shifted. Tsar Paul I annexed Kartli-Kakheti in 1801, ending Georgia's independence and Persian involvement in its affairs. Erekle's legacy lies in his attempts to navigate Georgia's geopolitical challenges and secure its sovereignty amidst regional power struggles.

<sup>42</sup> Regarding soul sharing see: Michael James Winkelman, (2009), "Shamanism and the Origins of Spirituality and Ritual Healing" Equinox Publishing Ltd 2010,1 Chelsea Manor Studios, Flood Street, London SW3 5SR. USRNC 3.4, pp. 458-489

<sup>43</sup> Literary translation – loading on onselve's back three times, as a sign of ritual of "soul sharing."

<sup>44</sup> **Ghule** is a village situated in eastern Georgia, within the Dusheti municipality of the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region, part of the Khevsureti community. It is positioned on the southern slope of the primary Caucasus range of Tushet-Khevsureti, along the left side of the Khevsureti Aragvi River. The village is located at an elevation of 1680 meters above sea level and is approximately 71 kilometers away from Dusheti.

<sup>45</sup> **Srelovani** River, is located from Shatili to Barisakho footpath, near village Guro, there is a waterfall "Natsvetari of Guro" – Guro's droplet. In 2017 there was a big avalanche, which, I think shows well the area.

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