

Observations on the Georgian Monastery of Yalia (Ġalia) in Cyprus

One of the most significant events in the spiritual life of Georgia was the bold revival of monastic life and the emergence of numerous monasteries toward the end of the tenth and during the eleventh century. These were not only in the homeland (e.g. Tao, Klarjet'i, Šavšet'i) but beyond its borders : in the Holy Land, in Syria, Palestine, Sinai, Antioch on-the-Orontes, Constantinople, Athos (Greece) and even in Bulgaria (Bačkovovo)¹. Most of them were new settlements, rapidly expanding and becoming centers of learning and literary activities. Their locations are known to us through historical sources, namely patristic literature, or through numerous lengthy 'testaments' and colophones contained in these manuscripts copied in their scriptorias. In addition evidence of their existence was gathered through archeological investigations². Yet there exists a number of medieval monastic centers whose exact location remains unknown even though they are mentioned in these literary sources. One of them is the monastery of Ġalia (or Žalia) in Cyprus. The existence of Georgian monasteries on Cyprus, however, is known beyond doubt. For instance, the chronicler of the Georgian King David IV, the Builder (1089-1125), in enumerating his monarch's achievements, says that David has endowed with numerous gifts and privileges not only the monasteries in their fatherland proper, but also Georgian monasteries in far away places : Greece, Bulgaria, Palestine, Jerusalem, Syria, Black Mountains ... and Cyprus³. Other sources are more specific; in the "Life of our Blessed Father John and Euthymius", written between 1042 and 1044 by their devoted disciple Giorgi At'oneli (George from Athos), he relates the Byzantine Emperor Basil's II unsuccessful attempt to persuade Euthymius (one of the founders of the monastery at Iberon on Athos)

1 W. Djobadze, *Materials for the Study of Georgian Monasteries in the Western Environs of Antioch on-the-Orontes*, CSCO 372, Subsidia 48, Louvain 1976; L. Menabde, *Dzveli K'art'uli mcerlobis kerebi*, II, Tbilisi 1980.

2 For instance in the western environs of Antioch (W. Djobadze, "Vorläufiger Bericht über Grabungen und Untersuchungen in der Gegend von Antiochia am Orontes" *Istambuler Mitteilungen* 15 (1965) 218-242.

3 *K'art'lis Čhovreba* ed. S. K'aučičšvili, vol. I, Tbilisi 1955, 352-353.

to take over the vacant seat of the deceased archbishop in the church of St. Epiphanius in Salamis on Cyprus⁴.

Other scanty references concerning the Georgian monasteries in Cyprus can be gathered from other European sources, such as pilgrims' and travellers' reports from which we learn that the Georgians had established a monastery in Mazoto near Alamino in southern Cyprus⁵. In another instance the pilgrim Jacob von Bern, who visited Cyprus in 1346, tells us that in Famagusta (Famagost) the Georgians were celebrating the mass in accordance with Greek customs⁶.

The Georgian chroniclers lauding Queen Thamar (1184-1213) as a benevolent and generous protector of churches and monasteries at home and abroad, emphasize that she supported numerous monastic establishments and also beautified that of Ġalia (ღაღია) on Cyprus which she rebuilt, bought land for their income, enriched and embellished it as it is befitting for an honorable monastery⁷. On another occasion the monks from Cyprus (presumably from Ġalia) are mentioned among the visiting monks from various Georgian monasteries such as Antioch, the Black Mountains and other holy places, being generously rewarded by Queen Thamar with numerous gifts, gold and precious ecclesiastical objects for use in their monasteries⁸. A confirmation of these Georgian sources is to be found in a document from Vatican (No. 1298) dated February 3, 1306 which mentions three Cypriot monasteries; and according to which the superior of a monastery called *Yal* or *Yail* (situated NE of the Kirsofon [Khrysokhou] Bay between the towns *Yailia* and *Finekli*) is a Georgian⁹. This was confirmed in the summer of 1981 after I located the monastery of Yailia and surveyed its remains. There is no doubt that *Yail* (*Yailia*) is a synonym of *Ġalia* (ღაღია) or *Žalia* (ჯაღია) mentioned in the Georgian sources¹⁰. This monastery is located above a fertile valley and the town Yalia, some seven kms. east of the northern shores of Khrysokhou Bay on a hill on the

4 *Dzveli k'art'uli agiograf'iuli literaturis dzeglebi*, ed. I. Abuladze, vol. II, Tbilisi 1967, ch. XVIII, p. 69. For the Latin translation of this "Life" see P. Peeters, "Histoires monastiques géorgiennes" *AnBoll* XXXVI-XXXVII, 1917-1919, appeared 1922 in Bruxelles, ch. 33, 40-41.

5 H. Hackett, *A History of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus*, New York 1972, p. 523 (reprint of the 1901 ed.); L. de Mas Latrie, *Histoire de l'Île de Chypre* I, 112.

6 R. Röhrich and H. Meisner, *Deutsche Pilgerreisen nach dem hl. Lande* Berlin 1831, 52, 178.

7 *K'art'lis Chovreba* ed. S. K'auhčšvili, vol. II, Tbilisi 1959, 81, lines 12-14 and p. 141 f.

8 *Ibid.*, 142.

9 J. Richard, *Chypre sous les Lusignan, Documents chypriotes des archives du Vatican* (XIV et XV^e siècle). Institut français d'archéologie de Beyrouth (1962) 75 note 2; see also N.G. Kyriazis, *Tà χωρία τῆς Κύπρου*, Larnaca 1952, 96-97.

10 Djobadze, *op. cit.* 77 note 82. P. Ingorok'va (*Giorgi Merčule*, Tbilisi 1954, 165f.) suggests that the term "Ġalia" derives from the Georgian "Ġele" (= stream, small river) or "Ġali" (a river in Megrian dialect).

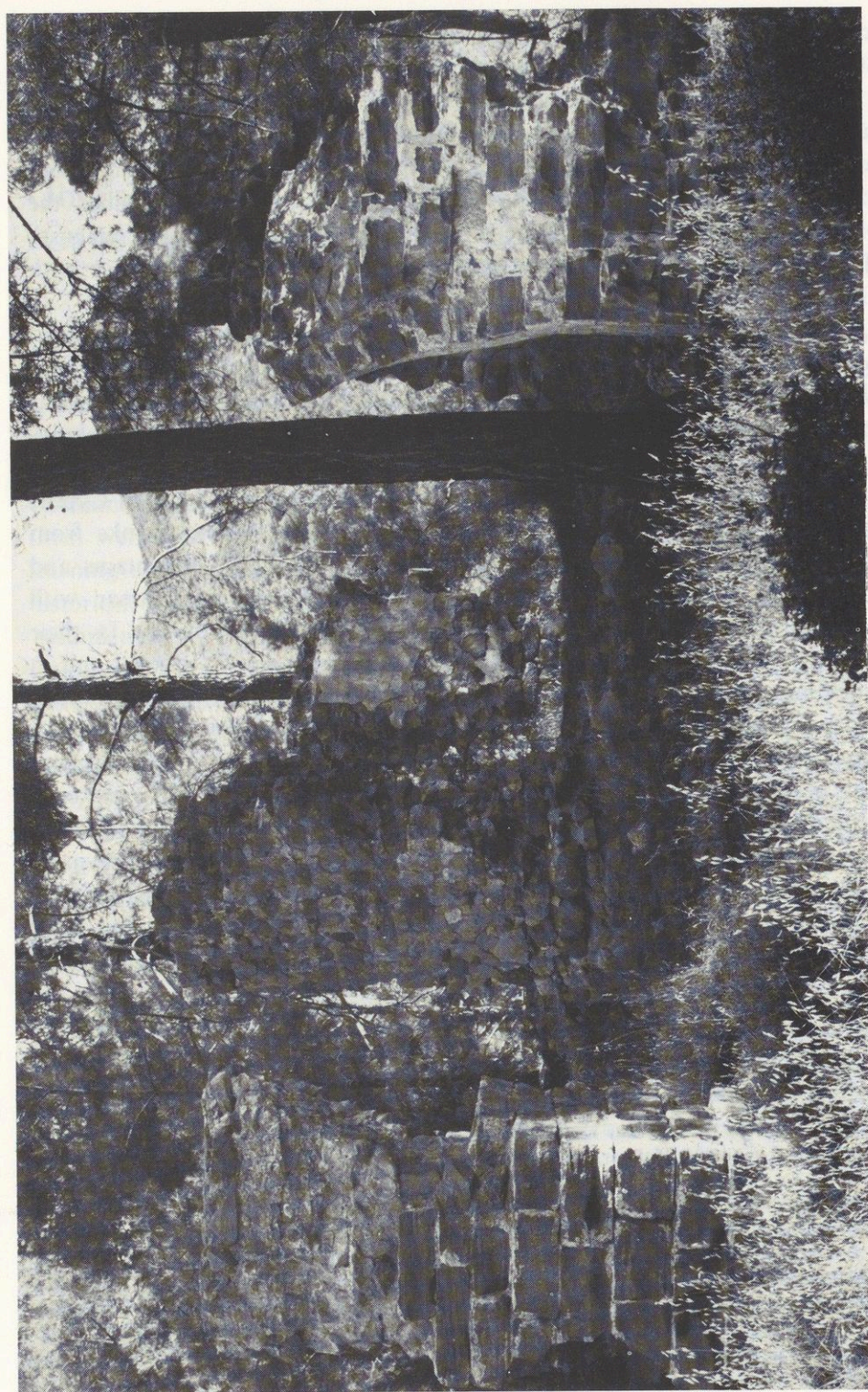


Fig. 1.

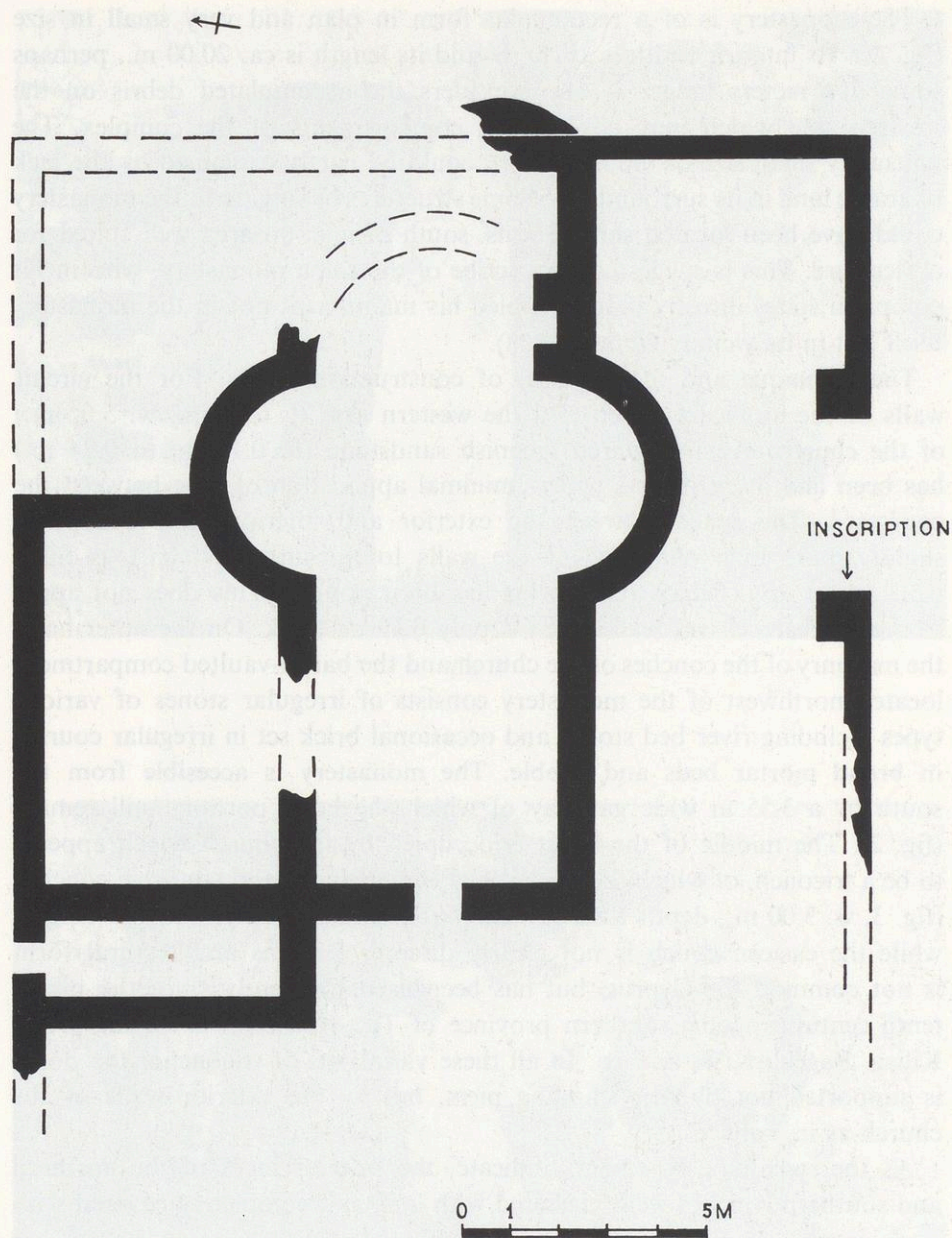


Fig. A.

right bank of the mountain stream Yalia. Completely overgrown by a pine tree forest (fig. 1), it lies in ruins, although three portions of the conches of the church as well as both sides of the southern (and only) gate stand up to three meters high.

The monastery is of a rectangular form in plan and very small in size (fig. A). Its interior width is 16.30 m. and its length is ca. 20.00 m., perhaps some five meters longer if one considers the accumulated debris on the western side which may cover some compartments of the complex. The unusually small size of the monastery could be partly explained by the lack of arable land in its surroundings. Some structures belonging to the monastery could have been located some 3 kms. south of it in an area well suited for agriculture. This is suggested by a scribe of the same monastery, who in his colophon states directly that he copied his manuscript not in the monastery itself but in its vicinity (*Infra* p. 208).

The technique and the material of construction varies. For the circuit walls of the monastery itself and the western arm (l. 6.35 m., w. 5.05 m.) of the church, evenly squared greenish sandstone (h. 0.15 m. to 0.24 m.) has been laid in even rows with a minimal application of lime between the courses¹¹. The space between the exterior and interior faces occupying slightly more than one third of the walls total width (0.70 m.), is filled with gravel upon which the mortar has been poured. This does not apply to the southern circuit wall which is only 0.49 m. thick. On the other hand the masonry of the conches of the church and the barrel-vaulted compartment located northwest of the monastery consists of irregular stones of various types including river bed stones and occasional brick set in irregular courses in broad mortar beds and rubble. The monastery is accessible from the south by a 3.55 m wide gateway of which the large portions still remain (fig. 2). The middle of the court is occupied by the church which appears to be a triconch, of which the portions of the northern and southern conches (fig. 3, w. 3.00 m., depth 1.80 m.) are partly standing up to 3.00 m. height, while the eastern conch is not clearly discernible. This architectural form is not common for Cyprus, but has been used frequently since the ninth-tenth centuries in the southern province of Tao (Georgia) in Ortuli, Dort-Kilisa, Bağçali-Kişla and Isi. In all these variations of triconchoi the dome is supported not by free standing piers, but by the exterior walls of the church as in Yalia^{11a}.

As the remaining fragments indicate, the interior faces of the northern and southern conches were plastered with lime and completely covered with

11 The broad lines of lime visible between the courses are the result of later repairs made to fill the broken edges of the all too brittle sandstone.

11a E. Takaišvili, *Arkheologiuri ekspedicia Kola-Oltiši da Čangliši, 1907 cels* (Archeological Expedition in Kola-Oltisi and Čangli in 1907) Paris 1938, for Ortuli p. 38 pl. 23c; Dort-Kilisa p. 12f pl. 23b; Bağçali-Kişla p. 52 pl. 23a; Isi *Idem.*; 1917 *C'lis arkheologiuri ekspedicia Samhret' Sakart'veloši* (Archeological Expedition in Southern Georgia) Tbilisi 1960, 72 pl. II 4-3.

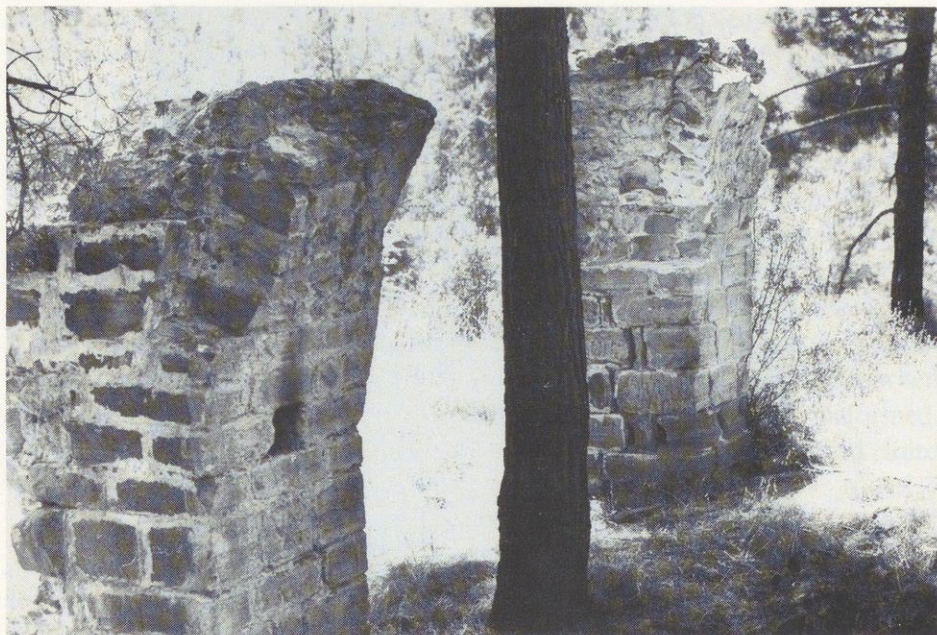


Fig. 2.

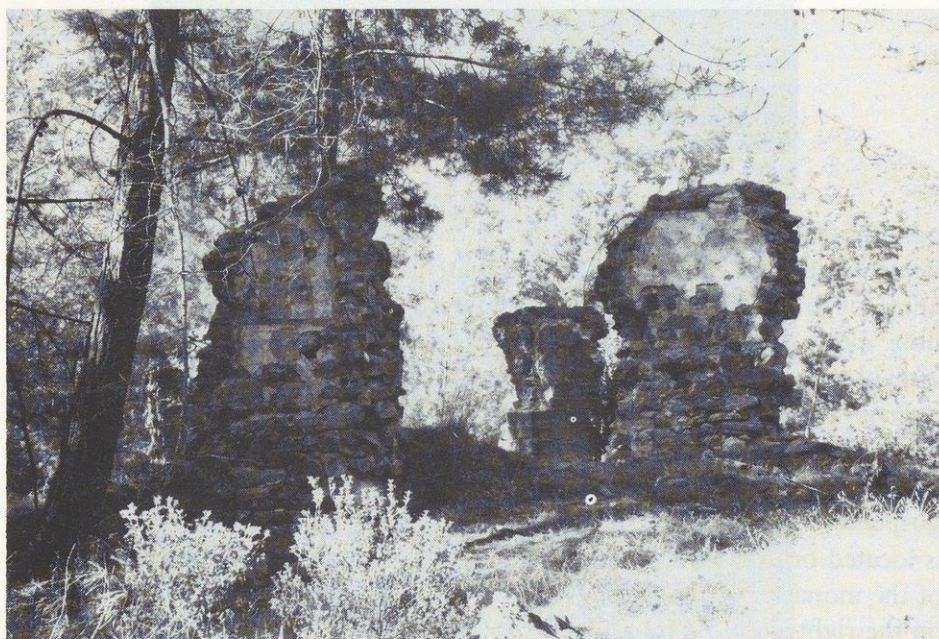


Fig. 3.

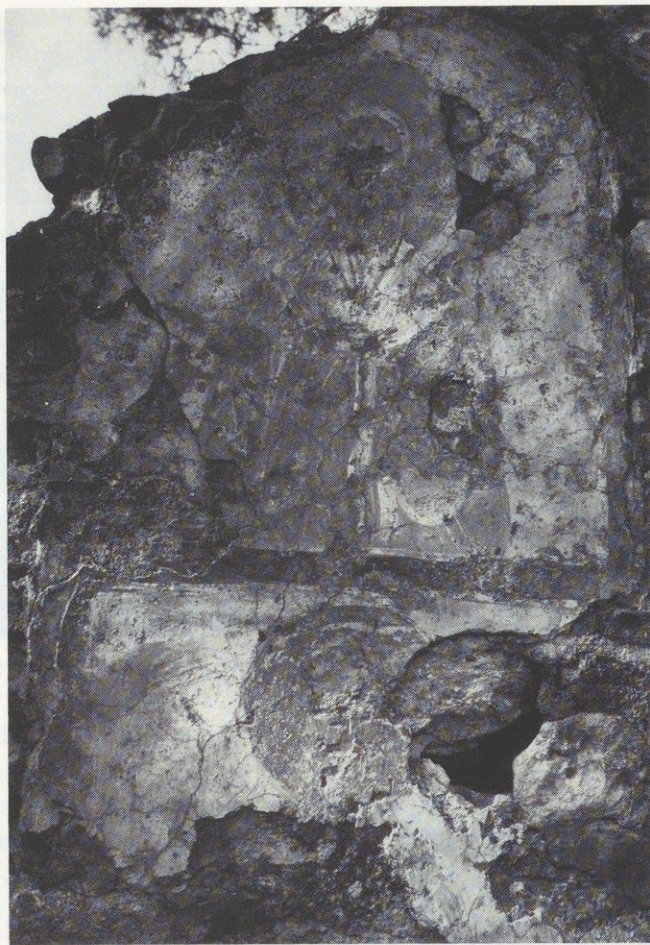


Fig. 4.

paintings now washed off to such a degree that the identification of the depicted themes can be made only with strong reservations. On the wall adjacent to the eastern side of the southern conch are depicted two bearded holy men in half figures, one above the other (fig. 4). Each of them is individually framed by 0.06 m. wide purple stripes. Both figures wear a *pallium*, the one above has a purple one while the other's is green in color. The second fragment located on the southern conche suggests the *entombment* (fig. 5), and the remains of the northern conch appear to represent some gospel scene (fig. 6). A very small but better preserved fragment of a painting is located on the western face of the barrel-vaulted compartment northwest of the monastery. It depicts a military saint (fig. 7) with a red coat fastened on the right shoulder by a purple fibula encircled by white pearls. The coat is floating backwards. The most significant find was a few laconic Georgian

supplicatory inscriptions in *mrgwlovani* (capital) letters carved on the western jamb of the southern gate ca. 1.50 m. high. The concave carving is rather shallow and the inscriptions are distributed in four courses (fig. 8). The letters on the first course are smaller in size (h. 0.06 m. to 0.07 m.) and some of them are weathered beyond recognition. On the second course all four letters are considerably effaced but still legible. The letters on the third course are in better condition, being carved deeper and larger in size (h. 0.10 m.). On the fourth course there are only two, widely spaced letters. No abbreviation sign was used and no intervals are left between the words.

The distribution of the inscriptions suggests that they are not contemporary with the monastery and could have been executed much later, when the surfaces of the stones were already weathered or purposely deformed. This is attested to by the horizontal grooves on the second and third

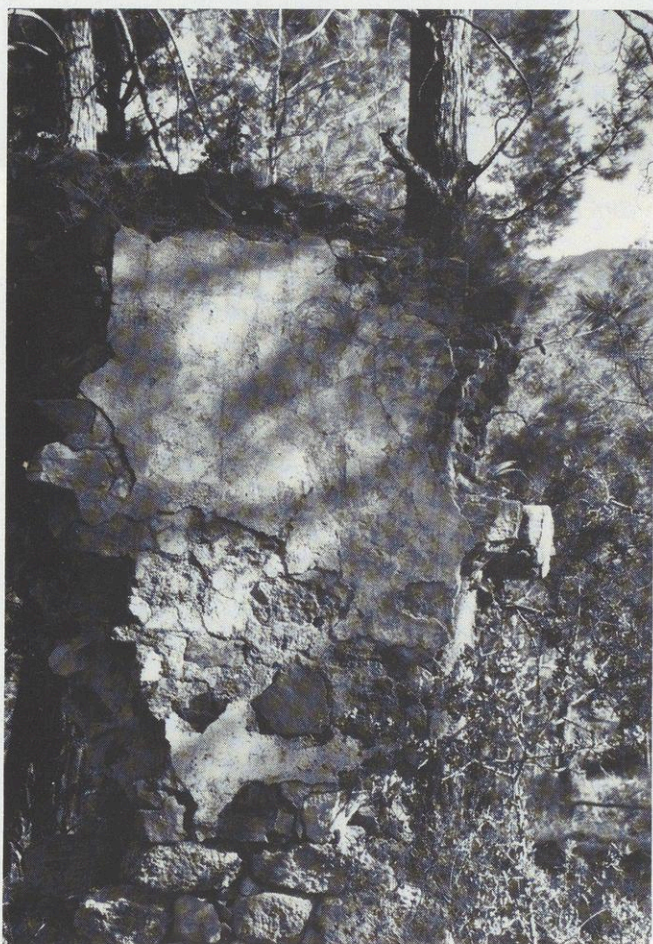
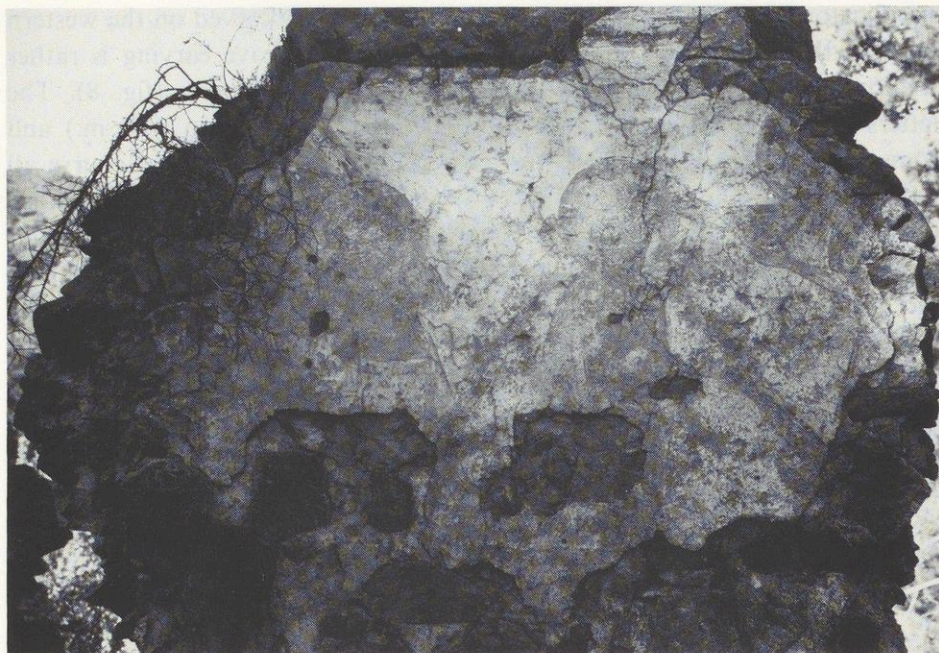
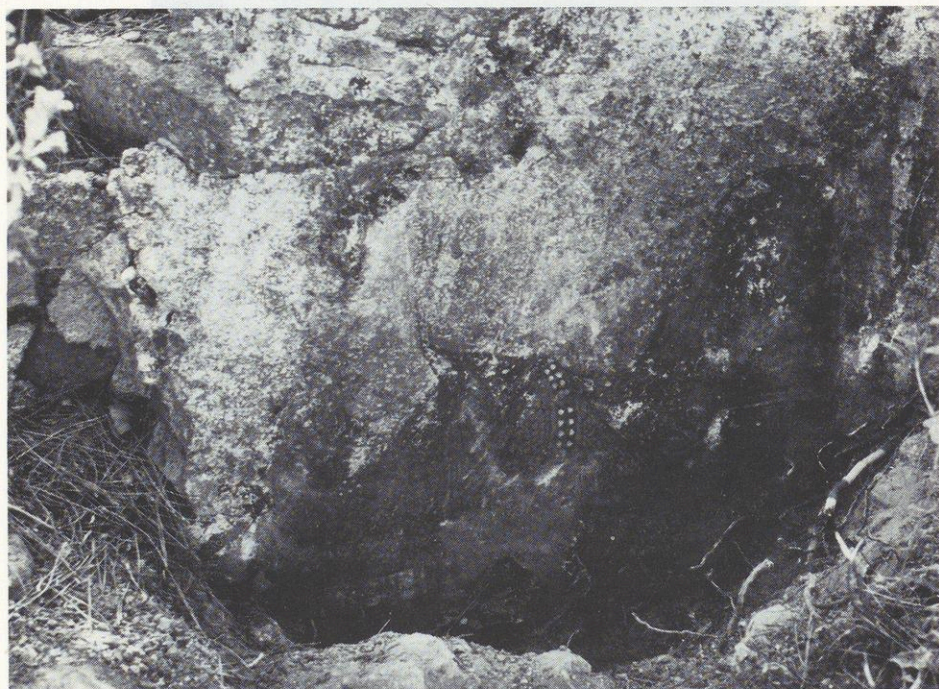


Fig. 5.

*Fig. 6.**Fig. 7.*

courses; particularly on the third course, where the inscription had to be squeezed into the lower half of the block. Furthermore, the paleographic symptoms and the difference in size of the letters suggest that the inscriptions were carved in different chronological sequences by different hands. For instance, the last letter "n" on the second course is distinctly angular, while the same letter on the third course is consistently rounded in three instances. Likewise the letters of the first course are smaller (h. 0.06 m.) than those carved on the third course (h. 0.10 m.). The inscriptions of the first line are too fragmentary and some letters too weathered to allow a meaningful reconstruction and interpretation. In the second line instead of "Kvirike" one may suggest any other proper name which begins with the letter "K" and ends in an "e", such as Kirile or Konstantine. I do not understand the meaning or purpose of the two widely spaced letters in the fourth line. In fig. B. I am offering a facsimile of the inscriptions made on the site: on its right is the solution of abbreviations in modern Georgian script (*mhedruli*), and below these lines is the translation of the inscriptions in English.

1. And (?) isans ... (?)
2. May God forgive Kvirike
3. May God forgive Mat'e. May Nikoloz be forgiven by God.
4. P t'

It is difficult to ascertain the date of these inscriptions. Professor Basil Ciskarišvili of the National Museum of Georgia in Tbilisi kindly informs me that they could not have been executed before the thirteenth century. This date, according to him, is indicated by the narrowing of the closely spaced letters, as for example on the left block of the third course. Such an argument would be admissible if the mason had sufficient suitable surfaces for the inscriptions which, however, was not the case. Nonetheless the thirteenth — fourteenth centuries seem to be a likely date for the execution of all the inscriptions.

The laconic nature of these inscriptions does not permit us to identify the persons named in them. Yet in one case one is tempted, to associate the "Nikoloz" mentioned in the third line, with Nikoloz Dvali, who was martyred in Jerusalem in 1314, and whose "life" was written soon after his death in the first quarter of the fourteenth century¹². In this "life" it is told that Dvali was repeatedly thrown in jail by the Arab authorities for the frequent abuse of "Mohammedan religion", and each time he was freed by the brethren and the Metropolitan of Jerusalem. Eventually, for reasons of his safety, Nikoloz was sent to Cyprus where he spent some time in great

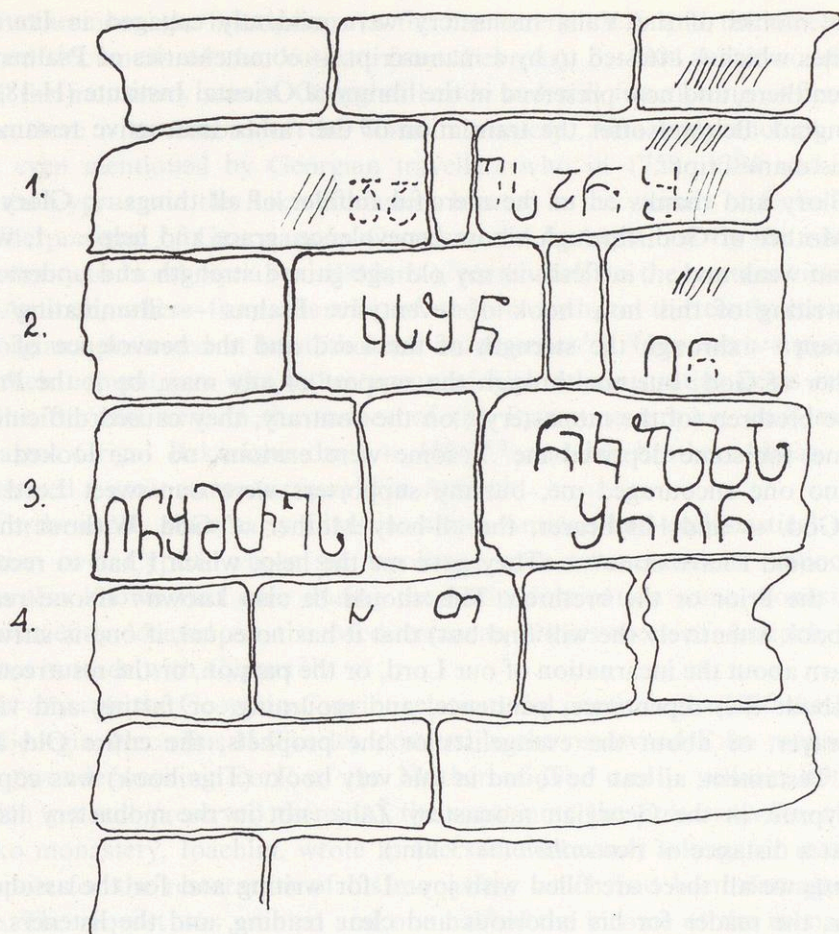
12 *Dzveli k'art'uli agiograf'iuli literaturis dzeglebi*, ed. I. Abuladze, IV, 1968, 119-124.



Fig. 8.

devotion and labor, and commissioned an icon of John the Baptist, who told him in a dream to return to Jerusalem and to fulfill his ardent desire to give his life for Christ¹³. Unfortunately, the author of the “life” does not reveal the name of the Cypriot monastery where he may have settled, but it is quite probable that it could have been the monastery of Ġalia, since it was, among the Georgian monasteries in Cyprus, the only one specifically identified in literary sources. If Nikoloz Dvali and Nikoloz mentioned in our inscription are identical, then the inscription could have been carved during the activity of Nikoloz Dvali in this monastery. This possibility is also suggested by the chronological affinity between the date of the inscription suggested above (fourteenth century), and the martyrdom of Nikoloz Dvali in 1314.

13 *Ibid.*, 348-351.



1. და ისან შ(ეუნდვე)ნ?

2. კ(ვირიკე)ს შ(ეუნდვე)ნ

3. ლ(მერთმა)ნ შ(ეუნდოს)
შ(ა)თეს

4. 3 თ

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ლ(მერთმა)ნ

ნიკ(ო)ლ(ო)ზს
შ(ეუნდვე)ნ ლ(მერთმა)ნ

Fig. B.

The monks of the Yalia monastery were evidently engaged in literary activities which is attested to by a manuscript — commentaries of Psalms — written there, and now preserved in the library of Oriental Institute (H-18) in Leningrad. Below I offer the translation of the rather instructive testament of this manuscript:

“Glory and thanks ... to the merciful fulfiller of all things ... Glory to the Mother of God, through whose benevolence, grace and help ... I, who am but weak and ... in flesh, in my old age gained strength and undertook the writing of this holy book of seventyfive Psalms — illuminating the ignorant — through the strength of the Lord and the benevolence of the Mother of God; but not through the support of any man, be it the Prior or the brethren (of the monastery); on the contrary, they caused difficulties for me, for some deprived me ... some were envious, no one looked for me, no one encouraged me, but my supporters were our sweet Lord — our God, — and His bearer, the all-holy Mother of God. Without them what could I have done? ... They gave me the help, which I had to receive from the Prior or the brethren. This should be also known: If one reads this book attentively (he will find out) that it has no equal, if one is striving to learn about the incarnation of our Lord, or the passion, or the resurrection or (about the) repentance, penitence, and mourning, or fasting and vigil, or prayer, or about the evangelists or the prophets, the entire Old and New Testament, all can be found in this very book. (This book) was copied in Cyprus, in the Georgian monastery Žalia, not in the monastery itself, but at a distance of two *milion* (= 3 km.).

Thus we all three are filled with joy: I for writing and for the assiduous labor, the reader for his laborious and clear reading, and the listeners for the fulfillment of that which was read, so that for your piety I also may attain salvation. Amen”¹⁴.

It has been suggested that this manuscript was written towards the end of the tenth century¹⁵. If this date is correct it would be safe to assume that at this time the monastery of Ġalia already existed and was engaged in literary activity and even had a scriptorium. However, the scribe of the testament does not offer the precise location of the scriptorium, saying merely that it was three kilometers distant from the monastery. This could have been only between the sea and the monastery in the lower valley of the Yalia Greek, an irrigable fertile land well suited for agriculture.

In regard to the duration of the monastery we can say that it continued to exist until the thirteenth — fourteenth centuries, because sometime during the reign of Queen Tamar (1184-1213) the monastery was restored.

14 Th. Žordania, *Kʻronikebi* II, Tbilisi 1893, 128, 130, 131.

15 *Ibid.*, 130.

Furthermore, the inscriptions in the monastery itself, and the aforementioned document of the Vatican from February 3, 1304 leave no doubt that the monastery was in Georgian hands and still functioning. After this date there is no record of the Ġalia monastery. Amazingly enough, it is not even mentioned by Georgian travellers who in 1758, 1784 and 1820 visited Cyprus and the Kiko monastery located in the vicinity of Ġalia¹⁶.

The presence of Georgians in Cyprus could be explained by the island's proximity to North Syria (ca. 100 kms.), particularly to the western vicinities of Antioch, where from the end of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries Georgians possessed at least thirteen monasteries¹⁷. They were supported by their compatriots who either occupied high administrative posts in this region or who were in the service of the Byzantine empire, such as the sebastos Grigol Bakurianis-dze (+ 1086)¹⁸ and his brother Abbas, who possessed a great estate (κτῆμα)¹⁹ in Antioch.

Furthermore, since early Christian times Antioch had ecclesiastical jurisdiction over Cyprus whose metropolitans were consecrated in Antioch²⁰. It is also known that even during the Latin domination some monasteries conveniently located on the Mediterranean shores west of Antioch were active in trade with Cyprus²¹.

At any rate the Georgian-Cypriot relations did continue. In 1780 the King of Georgia, Heraclius II (Erekle), donated to the renowned Kiko monastery the "wonderworking icon" of the Mother of God and a vellum, both of which are still preserved there. At the same time the *protosynkellos* of the Kiko monastery, Ioachim, wrote to the same monarch asking for material support for the restoration of his monastery which had been damaged by fire. The request was granted and one half of the income of the monastery in Vardzia (in western Georgia) was donated to the Kiko monastery²². Eventually Ioachim arrived in Georgia in 1780 and was received by King Heraclius II, and finally settled in the Vardzia monastery, where he continued his literary activity²³.

16 Menabde, *op. cit.*, 252f.

17 Djobadze, *op. cit.*, 86-107.

18 *Typicon Gregorii Bacuriani*, ed. M. Tarchnišvili, CSOC 144, Louvain 1954, chaps. I 10; II 14.

19 *Ibid.*, chap. II 19.

20 G. Downey, "The Claim of Antioch to Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction over Cyprus", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 102 (1958) 224-228.

21 C. Cahen, *La Syrie du nord à l'époque des Croisades et la principauté franque d'Antioche*, Paris 1940, 324.

22 Menabde, *op. cit.*, 253 note 7.

23 S. Djik'ia, *An Eighteenth Century Turkish Educational Book* (Institute of Oriental Studies) I (Georgian), Tbilisi 1954, 187-207.