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A Brief Survey of the Monastery of St. George in H̄antz'a

1. The "Life of Grigol H̄antz'eli" as a Source for the Study of Monasteries of Tao-Klarjet'i

Introduction

Since the early 1960s the interest of art historians in the monasteries of the historic Georgian lands of Tao-Klarjet'i and Šavšet'i has been reactivated and is gradually increasing. However, most scholars seem to be attracted mainly to the large-scale churches and cathedrals built or rebuilt in the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Little attention has been paid to the earlier monasteries built or inaugurated at the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century by the tireless, enthusiastic, and long-lived pioneer Grigol H̄antz'eli, who arrived in Klarjet'i around 782, where he remained until his death in 861. Under adverse conditions he, almost single-handedly, began the construction of monasteries in a desolate land, devastated by the punitive raids of Marwan II Ibn-Muhammad in 736-738 and the cholera epidemic thereafter.¹

The biography of Grigol H̄antz'eli was written in 951 by Merčule, the renowned man of letters.² It contains the most extensive and detailed account of almost every aspect of monastic and secular life in Klarjet'i from the end of the eighth up to the middle of the tenth century found in any source. Merčule, being

1 *K'art'lis čovreba*, ed. S. Kaučišvili, vol. 1 (Tbilisi, 1955), 233-239, especially 239₁₁₋₁₂: 376₁₉₋₂₃; *Life* (see note 2): 257₉₋₁₁.

2 This work was rediscovered by N. Marr in 1902 in the Patriarchal library in Jerusalem and subsequently published along with a Russian translation: *Giorgij Merčul. Žitie sviatogo Grigorija Khanzijskogo, s dnevníkom poezdki v Šavšiju i Klardziju* [Giorgi Merčule, Life of the holy Grigol of H̄antz'a amended by the diary of the journey in Šavšet'i and Klarjet'i]. *Teksty i raziskanija po armjanogruzinskoj filologii*, vol. 7 (St. Petersburg, 1911); Latin translation by P. Peeters, *Analecta Bollandiana* 36-37 (1917-1919 [1923]): 207-309. Our quotation from the *Life of Grigol H̄antz'eli* derives from the revised edition of the *vita* by I. Abuladze, *Šromaj da moguač'ebaj ġirsad čorebisai c'midis da netarisa mamisa čuenisa Grigolisi arħimadritisaj H̄antz'isa da Šatberdisa aġmašeneblisai, da mist'ana ġsenebaj mravalt'a mamat'a netart'ai* published in *Dzveli K'art'uli aġiograf'uli literaturis dzeglebi* (Monuments of ancient Georgian hagiographic literature), ed. 1. Abuladze, vol 1 [Tbilisi, 1963], 248-319, hereafter cited as *Life*. The portion from Marr's Russian translation was translated by D. M. Lang into English, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints* (London, 1956), 135-153.

one of the brothers in Grigol's main monastery in Hantz'a and well endowed with literary as well as jurisprudential skills, appear to be a reliable authority, who was well acquainted not only with the events taking place in Hantz'a and in the monasteries of the neighborhood, but also with those at the court of Klarjet'i. Indeed, his biography of Grigol Hantz'eli is one of the most outstanding monuments of Georgian hagiographic literature and is a reliable historical source as well, skillfully illuminating the various aspects and events of monastic and secular establishments: 1. the selection and preparation of sites for the construction of monasteries and the building process itself; 2. the gradual development of the monastic colonization in Klarjet'i; 3. the significance of the monastic institution; 4. a clear formulation of theological canonical concepts; 5. the cooperation between secular authorities and the monastery, and 6. the sociopolitical aspects involved.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss briefly some of the above mentioned aspects of Merčule's biographic work which will facilitate the understanding of the essence of the monastic institution and the surviving architectural monuments themselves, particularly Hantz'a, and to discuss briefly my fieldwork there which, I hope, will complement Merčule's *Life of Grigol Hantz'eli*.

Establishment of the Monastery

In approximately A.D. 782 when the blessed Grigol secretly fled to Klarjet'i in the company of three friends from K'art'li, which at that time was occupied by the Arabs, he arrived in the monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Opiza. Grigol soon decided to initiate his extensive monastic colonization and began by seeking a suitable location for the construction of his monastery, not an easy task in the mountainous region of Klarjet'i. Some of these difficulties are described in his *Life*:

"This solitary spot is well balanced by nature: for a man will be neither burnt by scorching heat, nor be discomforted by exceeding cold there. Because it is distinct from its neighboring land by being dry, untorrid, and exposed to the sun, the soles of man's feet will never be muddied while walking. The water is good and wood is plentiful. The sandy ground grows countless tall, dense forests and from them spring tasty waters: and thus God has endowed this land with a joyful nature. And it is pathless and inaccessible for those leading a worldly life, because the dwellings of these monks are located on the rugged high mountains, surrounded by gorges and waters flowing down from the frightening heights, but there is no pasture to be mown, nor wheat fields to be ploughed, and therefore food is brought on the backs of donkeys with great difficulty. Yet there is wine, which has been planted by the brethren with utmost toil and hardship, and there are also orchards, but the herbs of the fields

are abundant, and with all this, the hearts of these monks are fearless against the trepidations caused by unbelievers and non-Christians, and in the face of all kinds of troubles resulting from the animosity between the worldly rulers. And in this completely peaceful manner they exist in this place and glorify Christ.”³

Another paragraph reveals that despite numerous attractions, Hantza did not have all the requirements necessary for the existence of a monastery, and one of its shortcomings was the lack of arable land.⁴ Still the decision was made to build there.

Prayers were pronounced, the psalms of David (89:1-2, 65:11-13, 90:16-17, 121, 124:8) were chanted by the brothers, the sign of the cross was made on the spot designated for construction, and work began at once. First a wooden church was built, then monks' cells, and finally Grigol's own dwelling and a large hall to serve as a refectory, parts of which are still preserved (pl. 1, fig. 2).⁵ But the wooden church built toward the end of the eighth century must have disappeared in Grigol's lifetime since, roughly two decades later, before the death of Ašot Kuropalates in 826, it became necessary to build a new church, this time a masonry one.⁶

The success of Ašot I Kuropalates, in reestablishing the Georgian kingdom by acquiring or conquering territories under Byzantine patronage contributed greatly to the improvement of general conditions and seems to have attracted an increasing number of immigrants fleeing from Arab occupation. Consequently the number of monks in the monastery of Hantza must have increased, and some sixty years later, after Grigol's death, the necessity arose to build a new, second masonry church dedicated to St. George (pl. 1, fig. 2). This last building period, inaugurated by Ašot Kuhi (896-918), was completed only by his nephew Gurgen († 941).

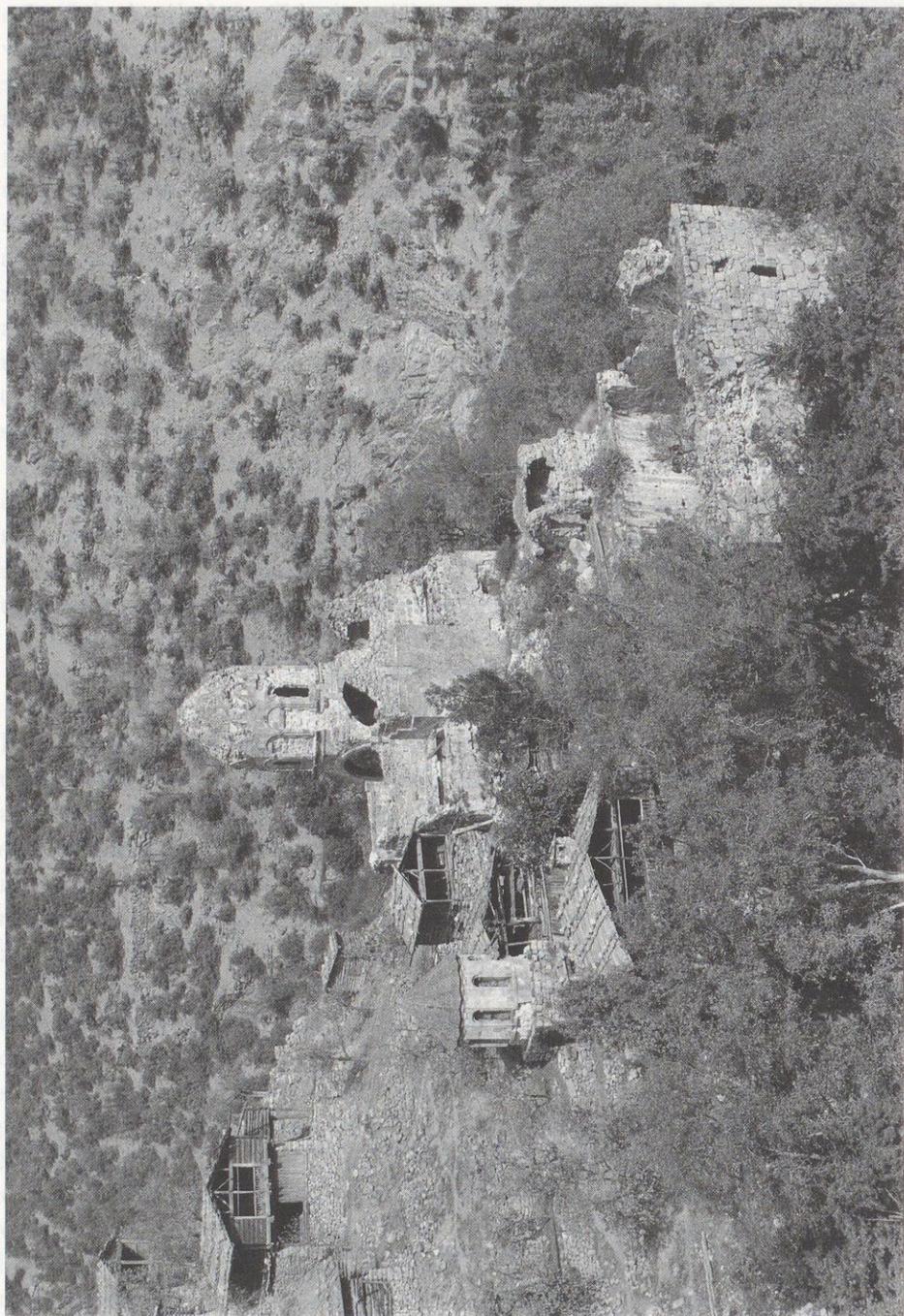
An inquiry into the circumstances under which the three major building activities were carried out in Hantza leads to instructive results: The first church was built, without any outside help, by the monks themselves under great hardship with rudimentary tools and unskilled masons, both provided by the

³ *Life*, 269⁷⁻⁴².

⁴ *Life*, 262³²⁻³⁸. In fact the scarcity of land seems to have been the cause of lengthy disputes among the monasteries. In one instance the dispute between the monastery of Opiza and the neighboring Midsnazoroi over the definition of the boundaries of arable land reached such magnitude that it required the intervention of King Bagrat IV (1027-72): see E. T'akaišvili, *Sak'art'velos sidzveleni* (Antiquities of Georgia), vol. 2 (1909), 1-5. It is instructive to note that in dealing with this complex matter, not only were the necessary documents brought into court, but also the "icons of the holy apostles Peter and Paul and the relics of the holy apostle Bartholomew", which were used to strengthen the oath and to confirm the authenticity of the charters presented: see M. Surguladze, "Iuridiul mtkicebat'a ori sahe mep'et'a siglebis mihedvit'" (Two concepts of a jurisdictional act pertaining to ruler's charters), *Mravalt'avi* 8 (1980): 31-33.

⁵ *Life*, 256²⁷⁻⁴⁰, 257¹⁻¹¹.

⁶ *Life*, 261²⁰⁻²⁴.



pl. 1 General View of the Monastery, Looking Northeast.

brothers of the monastery of Opiza. This was perfectly compatible with the extreme difficulties that the newly arrived monks and secular authorities encountered in the desolate area. Nevertheless, early in the administration of Ašot Kuropalates, the economy of the country must have improved, as the construction of the second and third church in Hanzt'a and the gradual establishment of eleven more monasteries seem to imply.

Patronage and Cooperation between the Monastery and Secular Authority

A task of such magnitude could not have been carried out without material support from the secular authorities of Klarjet'i. A description of the construction of the first masonry church in Hanzt'a indicates that it was accomplished through the patronage of the local nobleman. Gabriel Dap'ančuli, who not only endowed Grigol with generous donations but assigned him his own master masons.⁷ This provides us with the first example that demonstrates the close cooperation and material support extended by a secular landlord to a monastic community in Klarjet'i. But it appears that Dap'ančuli's benevolence was not gratuitous, as revealed in the following benefactor's address to Grigol Hanzt'eli.

"Now we possess the material wealth and you possess the spiritual wealth. We shall blend these with each other. You shall let us partake in your holy prayers in this life and thereafter, and after our death honor us by burying our bones with your bones, and by establishing in your monastery our commemoration for eternity, and we solemnly swear to you, we in our lifetime and our children from generation to generation, to protect the brothers and your monastery forever from hardship."⁸

Indeed, Merčule adds that in accordance with this agreement the males of the Dap'ančuli family, buried in Hanzt'a, were still commemorated in their prayers up to that day. A similar agreement was reached during the construction of a nunnery at Gunat'le by the salvation-seeking Dap'ančuli for the female members of his family, who found their eternal resting place there.⁹

On another occasion Ašot I Kuropalates, hearing about the lack of fertile land, donated a large estate, including Šatberdi, to the rapidly expanding monastery of Hanzt'a. Patronage toward the monks was continued after Ašot's death († 826). When Grigol decided to build a monastery in Šatberdi as a dependency of Hanzt'a, Ašot's son, Bagrat Kuropalates (826-878), granted him additional estates and all the essentials that were needed for the construction of that monas-

7 *Life*, 260₂₄₋₂₆.

8 *Life*, 260₄₋₉.

9 *Life*, 260₁₀₋₂₃.

tery.¹⁰ Likewise, the second masonry church at Hantz'eli was built with the material aid of Ašot Kuhi (896-918), who "overwhelmed the monastery with abundant donations and after his death was buried there."¹¹

Cooperation between the state and the monastery continued inasmuch as Ašot I, Grigol Hantz'eli's contemporary and the towering figure of his time, must have realized that the restoration of statehood was possible not only through his political success but also by fostering monasteries, which became the centers of learning and absorption of Byzantine culture.

Mutual respect between state and church was also reflected in the ideological sphere. A dialogue between Ašot and Grigol records Grigol as saying, "Since you, the kings, are empowered by God to govern our country, in the same way divine benevolence shall reflect your rule upon us."¹² Ašot's response thus praises Grigol: "To the kings of Israel God sent from time to time prophets, to bring them glory and to defend the law, to help the believers and denounce the infidels. In the same way God has made you eminent in our time to bring glory to Christians and to constantly intercede for us before Christ and His saints."¹³ Thereupon Grigol replied, "Monarch, you who are called the son of the prophet David, and anointed by God, may Christ the God confirm you in the inheritance of David's kingdom and virtues. Therefore I make this pronouncement: May the rule of your children and their seed never be removed from this land for all time, but may they stand firmer than immovable rocks and mountain, and be glorified forever."¹⁴

This sacred formula of the divine derivation of the Georgian rulers, which simultaneously we encounter in Constantine Pophyrogenitus¹⁵, and which may have been employed sporadically before, represents the final redaction of the ideological foundation for the ruling house of Bagratians's claim to be the most ancient and most authentic dynasty in the world, and should be ascribed to Grigol Hantz'eli.

The striving to reestablish the ancient concept of a ruler's divine derivation as formulated by Grigol Hantz'eli is reflected also in assimilating the ruler's secular residence – his palace – to a sacral structure, a church. For instance, the Georgian term *tadzari*, which since the fifth century A.D. has been applied to the palaces of sovereigns, or residences of the upper aristocracy in Georgian litera-

10 *Life*, 273₉₋₁₀, 375 38.

11 *Life*, 277₁₂₋₁₄.

12 *Life*, 266₁₀₋₁₂.

13 *Life*, 262₂₀₋₂₅.

14 *Life*, 262₂₅₋₃₁.

15 *De Cer*, chap. 45.

ture, as in the "Martyrdom of St. Šušanik" by Curtaveli¹⁶ and even in Merčule's biography of Hanzt'eli¹⁷, gradually comes to be used to denote a church.¹⁸

Building Process and Materials

Merčule provides us with abundant information concerning the building process of the monasteries and materials used. As we see in Hanzt'a, Parehu^{54t'a}, and elsewhere, the monasteries of Klarjet'i were built on specially levelled platforms generally located on the sunny southern slopes of the steep mountains, their forms and dimensions being determined by topographical exigencies. The preparation of these platforms was extremely difficult, and the biographer of Grigol has the following to say in this regard: "Arsen, the prior of the monastery, began with the construction of a beautiful new church on the declivity of a very steep, craggy mountain which was levelled off by using stone and firm mortar with such long and hard labor that after the platform was levelled and the buttressing wall was built, it seemed as if the construction of the church itself had been completed."¹⁹

Our survey proves the quotation to be true and, at the same time, reveals that the space between the declivity and the retaining wall was not completely filled with soil (*infra* pp. 157, 160).

In examining the technique of construction one can distinguish two distinct building periods. The first, encompassing the end of the eighth century and the ninth century, is characterized by the use of large, uneven or roughly squared blocks including boulders which are often set in uneven courses with a minimal amount of mortar and frequent fillings. In all instances, the poured core between the external and internal faces of the wall is minimal.

In the second period the size of the block is standardized (ca. 0,25×0,30 m) and set in mortar in strictly even courses. In some instances the faces of the blocks are smoothed, perfectly squared, and fitted with such accuracy that the mortar between the margins is invisible.²⁰ All this points to the rapidly improving economic conditions in the principality of Klarjet'i as well as to the perfection attained in masonry skills. Indeed, in this period appear such renowned master masons as Amona, the builder of the last church in Hanzt'a, who is praised by the prior of this monastery as the "builder with wisdom". But not all

16 Abuladze, *Dzeglebi* 1: 16¹⁴⁻¹⁹, 17¹⁻², referring to the palace of high state functionaries.

17 *Life*, 262⁴, referring to Ašot's palace; and 270¹¹, referring to the residence of the feudal lord.

18 On this material see also I. Djavahišvili, *Masalebi K'art'veli eris materialuri kulturis istoriisat'vis mšeneblobis ḡelovneba dzvel sak'art'veloši* (Materials for the History of Material Culture of the Georgian Nation: vol. 1, The Art of Construction in Ancient Georgia [Tbilisi, 1948]), 13, 74.

19 *Life*, 277⁴⁻⁷.

20 This is particularly applicable to the south wall of the church in Hanzt'a (pl. 2) and the drum (pl. 10).

of the materials were provided by the surroundings of the monasteries. In Hantz'a the lime and even the stones, which were purchased by the builders by weight²¹, were brought from "faraway places" on barely accessible, precipitous trails on the backs of men, rather than by using sleds or pack animals, as one would expect.

Conditions and Monastic Life

We also get a glimpse of the brethren's everyday life in Hantz'a. Strict regulations were indeed observed, and on this account we read: "In those days of our blessed father, Grigol, the rules for his disciples as well as for himself were very severe. In the monk's cells were small bedsteads with a minimum of bedding and just one water jug in each. They had no other luxury in the way of eating or drinking apart from what they ate at the common table, and this was all they had to live on. Many of them did not drink any wine at all, while those who did, partook of it in strict moderation.²² There were no chimneys in the cells, because no fires were lit. Nor did they light candles at night.^{22a} Yet the night was spent chanting psalms and the day in constant reading of books and in prayer. As David says: 'Yet the Lord will command his loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me' (Ps. 41:8).

The monks also performed charitable duties which included maintaining an orphanage, and consoling and providing alms for the needy. A certain amount of goods called "share for the poor" was designated for distribution among the indigent, because, as Grigol would say, nobody cares for the poor except Christ.²³

Grigol was known as a strict, unswerving autocrat and moralist. On one occasion, when Ašot Kuropalates introduced a concubine into his castle with whom he committed adultery, Grigol became greatly upset, severely rebuking the sovereign and persuading the woman to leave Ašot and enter a nunnery. Grigol interfered in Ašot's personal life to such an extent that the king eventually

21 *Life*, 277⁷⁻¹¹.

22 *Life*, 266³⁷⁻⁴⁰, 267¹⁻⁷. See also 294¹²⁻¹⁴, 275²¹⁻²³, 253¹¹⁻²³. During Lent Grigol himself ate only a little raw cabbage, and on ordinary days he lived on a little bread and water. He never touched wine from his childhood days on (*Life*, 267⁸⁻¹², see also 284²³⁻²⁸). Restraint from taking nourishment is attested also in the "Life and Activities of Ioane and Euthime" written by Giorgi Athonite in 1042-44. Here we are told that customarily on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Euthime ingested only a little bread and water, and during the rest of the week he partook of the meals in the refectory. See Abuladze, *Dzeglebi*, vol. 2, (1967) 74¹³⁻¹⁴.

22a *Life* 294^{13, 14}. Toward the end of the tenth century the same restriction was practiced in the Iviron monastery on Athos, where only the scribes were allowed to buy oil to light their lamps at night for reading and copying manuscripts (I. Abuladze, *Dzeglebi* II. 79⁸⁻¹¹.)

23 *Life*, 276¹¹⁻²⁴.

became aware of this shameful conduct and ruefully said, "Happy is the man who is no longer alive."²⁴

Importation of Sacral Objects

Sacral object and regulations were, of course, needed for the proper functioning of the monastery, and these had to be imported from the holy places in Syria, Palestine, and Constantinople. Once Grigol journeyed with his cousin Saba to Constantinople, where they worshipped and prayed in all the sacred shrines. Returning to Hanzt'a he brought numerous holy relics, icons, and a variety of *eulogia*.²⁵ The church council that was called together in Javahet'i from 845 to 850 by Guaram Mamp'ali suggests that not only icons, manuscripts, and other holy objects were imported from Constantinople to Klarjet'i but also new, progressive ideas²⁶ attesting to an eagerness to transplant from the famous localities of Greece exemplary customs compatible with Christian teaching.

On another occasion Grigol asked a friend who was travelling to Jerusalem to copy for him the *typicon* in the lavra of the Holy Sabas²⁷, which he eventually had adapted for his own monastery.

Learning and Literary Activities

Learning and literary activities in eighth- and ninth-century Klarjet'i were, naturally, exclusively associated with the local monasteries. In the school of Hanzt'a, for instance, the brothers were taught conduct and general behavior as well as the psalms of David, which had to be chanted according to strict rules. They also learned foreign languages (Greek and Aramaic), theological and secular literature, and philosophy.

Already at the very outset literary activities were cultivated. Original works were written in their scriptoria and various translations were made from Greek, Syrian, and Arabic literature. Some of them are lost and we know of their existence only through such literary sources as the "Teachings, Wonders, and Miracles" of Mik'el Pareheli (founder of the monastery of Pareht'a) written by his disciples toward the end of the ninth century. Other manuscripts such as the

24 *Life*, 296₆₋₄₃, 297₁₋₄₁. On this account see also M. T'archnišvili, "Das Verhältnis von Kirche und Staat im Königreich Georgien." *OrChr* 39 (1955), 83-85.

25 *Life*, 266₁₆₋₁₈; 265₁₈₋₁₉. This is not an isolated example of the importation of holy objects. In the twenties of the eleventh century the Catholicos Melchisedek went to Constantinople before the Emperor of the Greeks, Basil II, who received him kindly, and gave him adornments for the church, icons, crosses, and priestly garments, and he [Melchisedek] returned to his country and parish. Kauhčišvili, *K'art'lis čovreba* I:282_{10, 15-18}, 294₁₋₃.

26 *Life*, 289₂₈₋₃₃.

27 *Life*, 264₇₋₂₂, 265₂₆₋₃₁.

"Mravalt'avi", which contains fifty-two different works and was copied by Grigol Hantz'eli's student Makari in 864, are now preserved in Sinai.²⁸ Hantz'eli himself wrote a *menaion* as well as a number of hymnographic works. Merčule's biography of Grigol was written in Hantz'a, and in Šatberdi, also built by Grigol Hantz'eli, Sop'ron Šatberdeli wrote the *Adiši* Gospels in 897.

Without a doubt the scriptoria of the monasteries of Klarjet'i played a significant role in the regeneration of learning and in the transition of Hellenic culture into Georgia.

2. Archaeological Evidence

According to Merčule, among the monasteries built by Grigol Hantz'eli, Hantz'a is – aside from Opiza – the oldest, largest, and perhaps, culturally most significant, since it was the seat of Hantz'eli himself. Like most of the monasteries in this area, it is located on a high plateau among steep mountains, above the old road on the right side of the Imerhev River. The monastery can be reached on foot in two to three hours on a stretch of the old road which reaches from Šavset'i through Opiza, Jmerki, Doliskana, Sveti, and perhaps beyond Mamac'minda (fig. 1). A short cut leading straight up from the Imerhev River and the modern road is more difficult, but the distance is shortened by more than half.

Merčule describes the site of the monastery in amazingly accurate terms (supra pp. 146, 147). We are told that upon his arrival in Klarjet'i, Grigol Hantz'eli established himself in the monastery of Opiza, undertook a search for a suitable place to build his own monastery, and shortly thereafter began with the construction. In the course of his lifetime he built a wooden (timber) church which was later replaced with a masonry one.

Some of the partly preserved structures built during Hantz'eli's life are: the circuit walls, the refectory, some cells for monks, and an oratory outside of the monastic enclosure. To the buildings added after Hantz'eli's death belong the circuit walls on the east and north side, the second masonry church dedicated to St. George, the bell tower, and some chapels outside the circuit walls. Below we offer a brief survey of these monuments.

28 G. Garitte, *Catalogue des manuscrits géorgiens littéraires du Mont Sinai*, CSCO 165, Subsidia 9 (1956), nr. 33, 85-97, which contains the testament of Makari (fols. 273^v-275^r).

The Circuit Walls of the Monastery

We are told by Merčule that the most difficult task in building the monastery in Hanzt'a was the levelling of the steep mountain slope (supra p.151). This included the construction of retaining circuit walls, still in existence in their original form on the east and south (fig. 2, pls. 1,2). They are 38.40 m. long on the east-west and 51,15 m. on the north-south axis. 20.00 m. of which must have been added later. The middle part of the east wall is supported by a 4.05 m. wide and 2.15 m. thick buttressing pier. The walls are best preserved on the east and south sides, where their height reaches up from six to eight meters. Built of roughly cut and not always squared large blocks and boulders with frequent fillings, the walls have a core of rubble between the exterior and interior shell that is less than one third of the wall's total thickness, which varies from 1.17 to 1.36 meters. Upon the rubble mortar was poured, but so sparingly that some of the rocks are not anchored to the facing stones.

These structural characteristics reflect precisely the numerous hardships and shortcomings which Hanzt'eli and his disciples encountered in their inhospitable surroundings, devastated by Muslim intrusions and by the plague which decimated the country.

The Refectory

The lowest-lying area of the monastery is its southeast corner. It is occupied by a 17.55 m. long and 12.14 m. wide hall, evenly divided into two halves by four evenly spaced piers (cruciform in plan) in its east-west axis. The piers and arches are now gone, but all profiled brackets originally carrying the transverse arches are preserved. The hall is provided with two parallel-sided 1.30 m. wide windows on the east (fig. 2, pl. 3) and three embrasured windows on the west (ext. w. 0.50 m., int. w. from 1.20 to 1.30 m.). No pilasters or wall piers were employed, and the transverse arches thrown from the crossarms, evidently carried by profiled brackets, are still *in situ*. Preserved also are the springings of the barrel vaults and part of both gables on the east side (pl. 3). All architectural elements are characteristic for this region from the end of the eighth to the middle of the tenth century.

This hall is bonded with the circuit wall and displays the same structural characteristic. It is accessible only from the north by two arched doors, respectively 1.06 m. and 1.70 m. wide. The second door, which is not shown on our plan (pl. 3), is pierced at a distance of 2.45 m. from the northeast corner. The first door leads to the court of the monastery while the second connects to the monks' cells.

In the west wall, now overgrown with lush vegetation, there must have been a

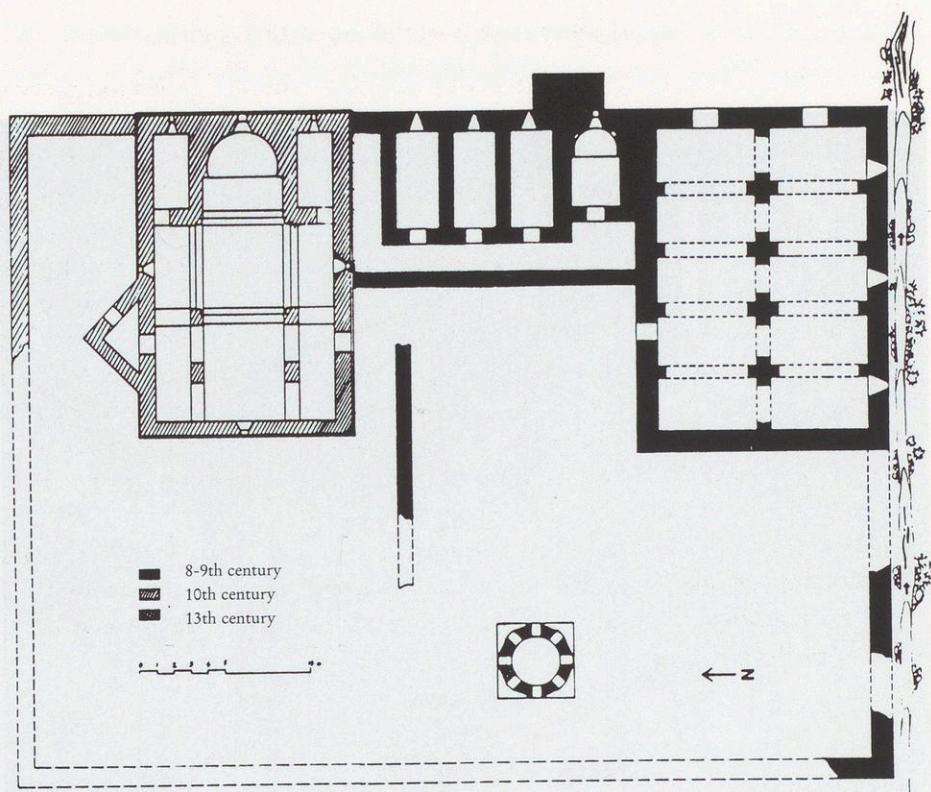
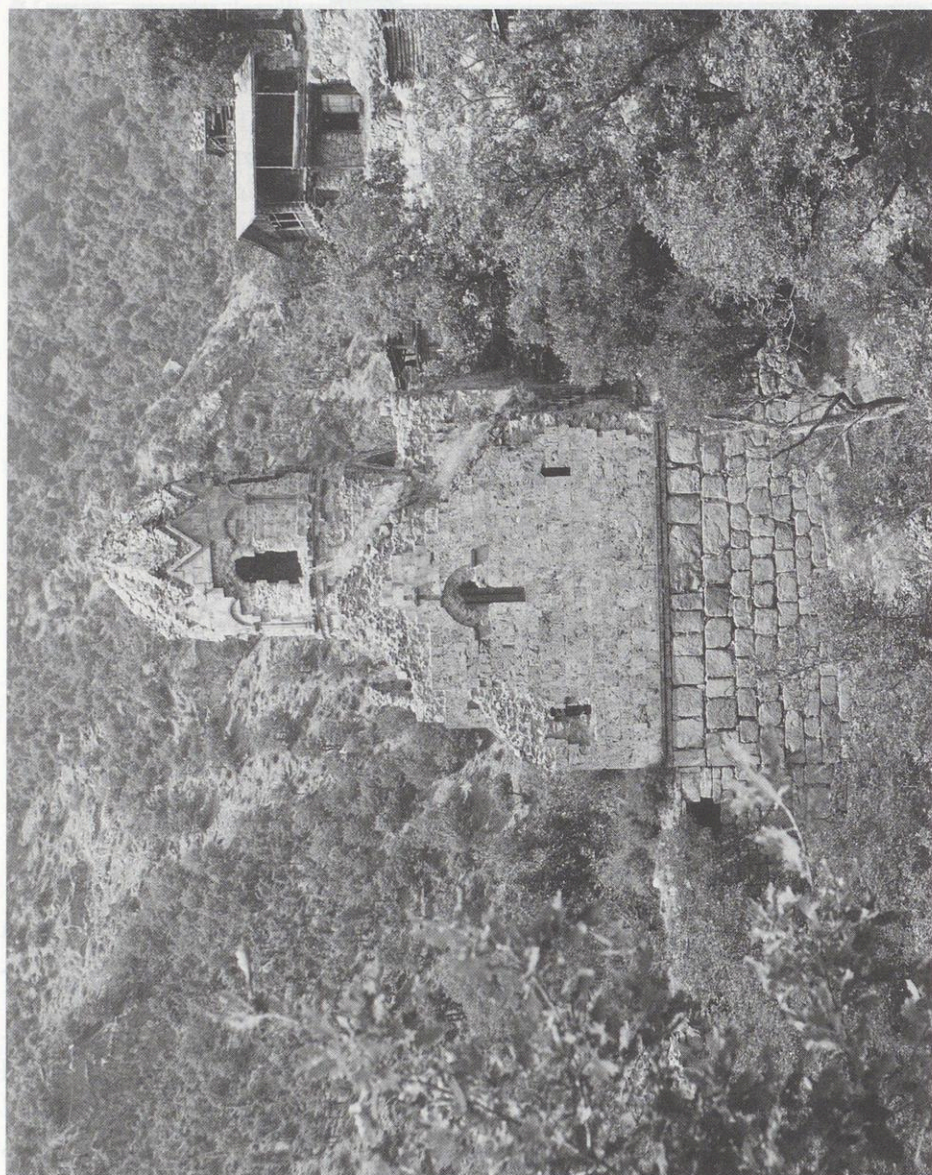


fig 2. General Plan of Hanzt'a Monastery.

doorway connecting the refectory to the kitchen, whose location has never been recorded. One would suspect that it was west of the refectory near the creek flowing along the south retaining wall.

It should be mentioned that in the southwest corner of the hall a sizable barrel-vaulted cellar is seen below its flagstone pavement. It could have been used for storage or for a similar purpose. This subterranean cellar, parts of which I traced along the east retaining wall, indicates that the levelling of the slope, which according to Merčule²⁹ was accomplished with great toil, apparently was not carried throughout, since the south and east declivity had not been completely filled with earth. Instead, rudimentary barrel-vaulted rooms had been constructed along the retaining walls, not only facilitating the levelling of the

29 *Life*, 257₁₋₇, 260₂₉, 277₅₋₆.



pl 2. General View of the Monastery. Looking West.



pl. 3 Refectory, Interior, Looking Northeast.

site, but also diminishing the outward thrust of the retaining walls, while simultaneously serving as storage rooms for the monastic community.

Our survey of the hall did not reveal, nor was it expected to reveal, any architectural sculpture.

The similarity of our hall to other refectories in Tao-Klarjet'i's monasteries, particularly to that of Ot'ht'a Eklesia, which also is divided into two compartments, as well as its large size and its location along the creek³⁰, suggests its function as a refectory or seminary. If this were the case, one would expect a kitchen on its west side.

I suggested (p. 156) that the refectory was built at the same time as the retaining walls, at an early stage of Grigol Hantz'eli's building activity, namely toward the very end of the eighth century.

On August 15 in 1904 when N. Marr visited the site he found to the west of the monastery the remains of a 2.65×1.14 m. winepress with its accessories.³¹ During my visits I could not even find a trace of such a press, which must have existed, inasmuch as – according to Merčule – the monks of Hantz'a planted orchards and vineyards³², which are still being cultivated by the villagers of today.

The Monks' Cells

North of the refectory along the east retaining wall are the remains of three small cells of similar dimensions (5.80×2.50 m., 2.60 m. high). My investigation suggests that these cells were the topmost floor of three-storied dormitories mostly buried under the debris. The cells are uniform in every respect, each having a 1.06 m. wide door on the west and a single embrasured window on the east. The cells below do not have windows on the east side, perhaps for security reasons. On the west, however, they had a 1.67 m wide passage or balcony of which very little remains.

The floor of the cells is on the same level as the springing line of the refectory's barrel vault owing to the declining terrain toward the southeast; consequently the height of the refectory is almost twice that of the cells.

Each of the cells, occupied by a single monk, was extremely plain, lacking a fireplace or other comfort, and so reflecting the ascetic life that was endured by the monastic community.³³ Additional cells and one for Grigol Hantz'eli may

30 In Hantz'a as well as in Ot'ht'a Eklesia the creek flows along the side of the refectory and not the kitchen.

31 Marr, *Dnevnik*, 153.

32 This observation is confirmed by Merčule, *Life*, 269²², 23.

33 W. Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historic Tao, Klarjet'i, and Šavšet'i* (Stuttgart, 1992), 27.

have been located on the west side of the monastery, an area which is completely covered with gravel, and some shacks, or overgrown with vegetation.

The Oratory

On the east side, located between the refectory and the monks' cells, is a tiny, relatively well preserved oratory. Its interior dimensions are 4.50×2.85 m., including a 1.50 m. deep, semicircular apse containing a single embrasured window. It is flanked by two square niches (fig. 2, pl. 1), a traditional element for the chapels of this region. The apse is elevated from the floor by a single step. The chapel's total height is 2.60 m.; it is accessible from the west by a 1.00 m. wide door. Sometime after it had been constructed, it was evidently embellished with wall paintings of which small fragments remain at floor level. This chapel is bonded to the adjacent buildings and is contemporary with them, displaying the same architectural features.

The Chapel Extramuros

Some fifty meters southwest of the monastic enclosure just above a spring is a small barrel-vaulted, apsed chapel. Its interior dimensions are 3.90×2.50 (fig. 3, pls. 4, 5). Its eastern wall is aligned flush with the arcuated niche (w. 2.88 m., h. 1.54 m.) over a recessed spring (see pl. 4) that flows abundantly even on hot summer days, and must have provided the monastery with more than sufficient water for all purposes.

The chapel is built with roughly squared or sometimes uneven blocks laid in irregular courses, varying considerably in size. One should also call attention to the thickness of the wall, which varies from 0.97 to 1.05 m., while the core of the rubble between the facing stones is very narrow, not exceeding 0.17 m. The chapel has on its east side a very narrow, arcuated window. Its west wall is now gone, but even if it was originally pierced by a similar opening, its interior would have been very dimly lit. The only entrance is through the narrow (0.72 m. wide) doorway on the south.

On the basis of its structural method and its similarity to early medieval chapels, such as the private chapel of Ašot I Kuropalates, and the monastery structures describes above, it could be placed at the very end of the eighth century. At the same time one wonders why so keen an observer of Hanzt'a as Merčule does not even fleetingly mention this lonely chapel.

P. Ingorokva's identification of this chapel with the first masonry ("old") church is obviously incorrect for a number of reasons: first, it is built on relatively even ground, not requiring the hard labor of levelling the site for con-

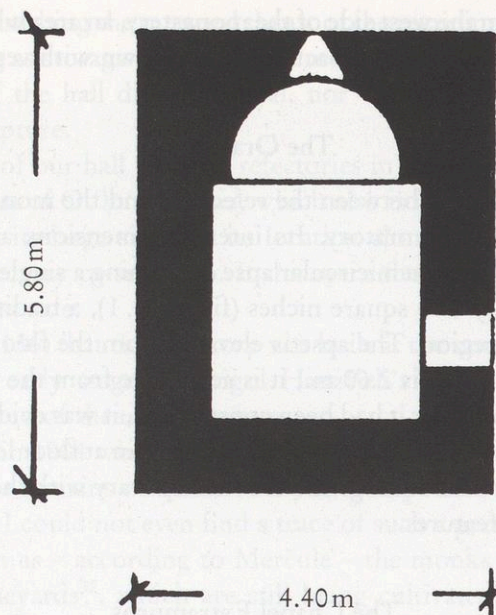


fig. 3 Chapel, Extra Muros, Above Spring, Plan.

struction as described by Merčule;³⁴ second, it is located outside the monastic enclosure; third, it is not a church but only a tiny oratory unfit for church service; and fourth, in describing the building process of the church, Merčule would not have omitted the fact that it had been built over a spring.

Some of the chapels built at different times after the eighth century on the outskirts of the monastery I have described on a previous occasion.³⁵

The Building Activities after the Death of Grigor Ȧantz'eli

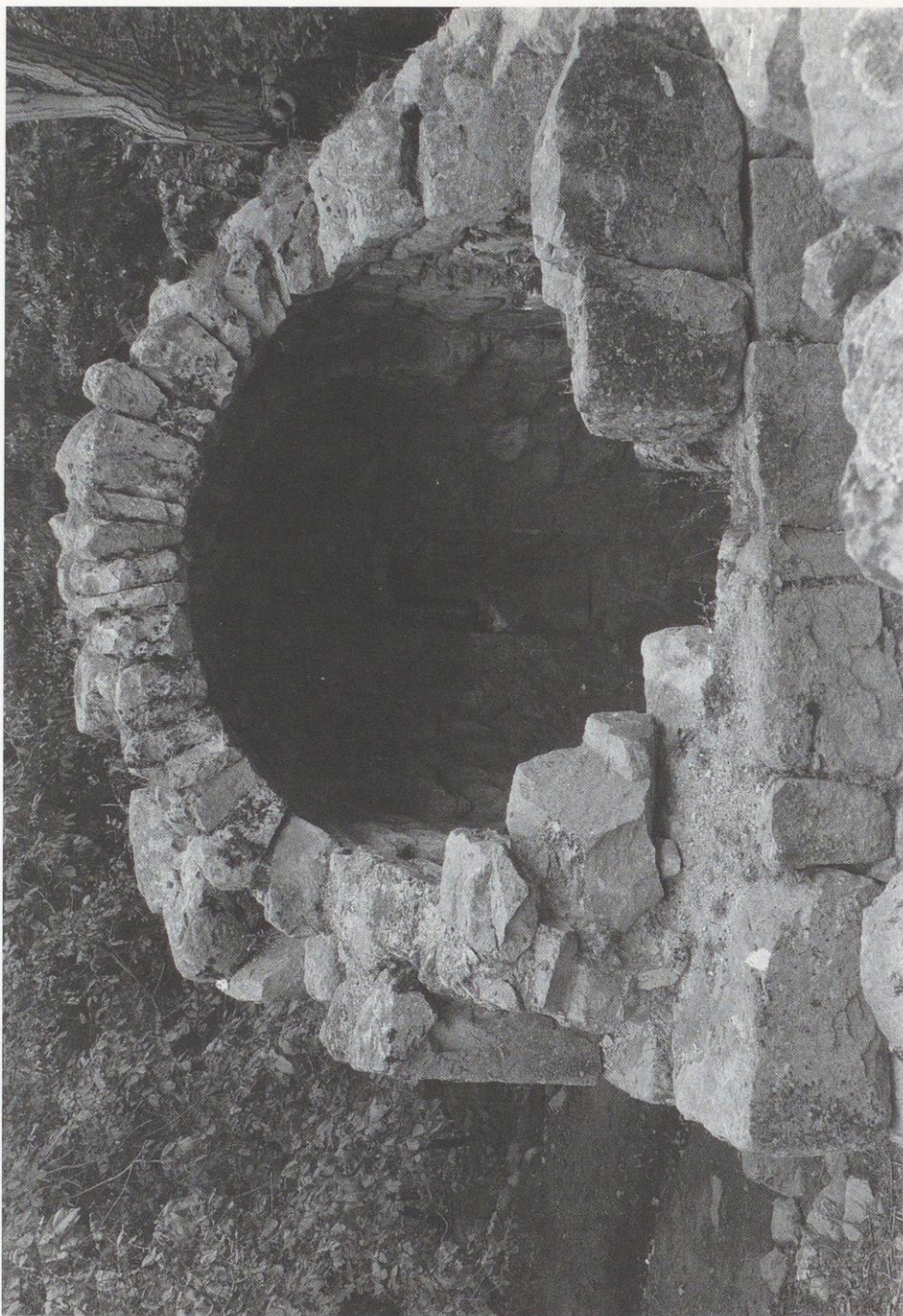
Despite occasional setbacks the economic conditions for the monasteries in Tao-Klarjet'i, including those for the monastery of Ȧantz'a, continued to improve and the monastic community proceeded to expand. Consequently, after the death of Ȧantz'eli the building activity within the monastic enclosure and its surroundings advanced as well. Some of these structures can be identified:

³⁴ *Life*, 260₂₄₋₃₇; and for the second masonry church: 277₄₋₇.

³⁵ Djobadze, *Monasteries*, 26, fig. 5.



pl. 4 Chapel over the Spring, Exterior, Looking West.



pl. 5 Chapel over the Spring, Exterior, Looking East.

The Second ("New") Masonry Church

On the northeast section, on the highest point of the mandra, over a 6.00 m. high substructure, which is flush but not bonded to the eastern retaining wall, lies the new or second masonry church dedicated to St. George.³⁶ Despite the levelling of the steep declivity for the construction of the church, its floor level is at the same height as the springing line of the refectory's barrel vault. Thus, the church with its height of eighteen meters boldly dominates the monastery and its surroundings.

Owing to stone-pillaging and climatic-calamities, as well as its precarious situation, the church is in a lamentable state: its barrel vaults are almost completely gone, the facing stones of the drum have been removed, and the roof tiles have disappeared. After 1967 the eastern pier of the north aisle was completely demolished. Still, the church's appearance is rather impressive.

Typologically the church belongs to the cruciform domed buildings (fig. 4) in which the cross is inscribed within a square plan (cross-in-square). Its interior width equals 10.50 m., its length 16.86 m., including the apse (pl. 7) and its presbytery (4.70×2.40 m.). The rectangular side rooms (4.45×2.20 m.) flanking the apse do not open into it, but to the west by 0.96 m. wide openings. The westarm is 4.60 m., whereas the aisles barely reach a width of 2.00 m. The walls of the nave are supported by two pairs of piers (0.95×0.85 m.) which have an intercolumniation. The profiled brackets, originally carrying the arches of the barrel vault, are preserved (pls. 6, 7). The four slightly pointed ribbed arches of the central bay support the dome. The transition from the square base to the octagonal drum is achieved by squinches (pl. 8, fig. 5). Likewise, the transition from the octagonal drum to the dome's circular base is accomplished by shallow concave triangular monoliths.

The exterior of the dome's drum is dodecagonal and evenly pierced by four arcuated windows. The drum's surface is emphasized by twelve blind arches carried by paired colonnettes (pl. 9). The outstanding feature of the dome is its roofing which is also divided into twelve even segments of cusped and furrowed ribbings in the form of a half-open umbrella. These roof segments are arranged in such a fashion that they form gables with rectangular stepped cornices above blind arches. This innovative design of the dome, which shortly after appears also in Opiza and much later in Armenian churches (Ani, Bjni, Marmas'en), should be credited to the master mason of our church, Amona, who is highly praised by Merčule.³⁷ The masonry is the mortared rubble faced with well-cut,

36 Soon after the construction of this church the retaining wall of the monastery was extended by 7.35 m. to the north.

37 *Life*, 277₈.

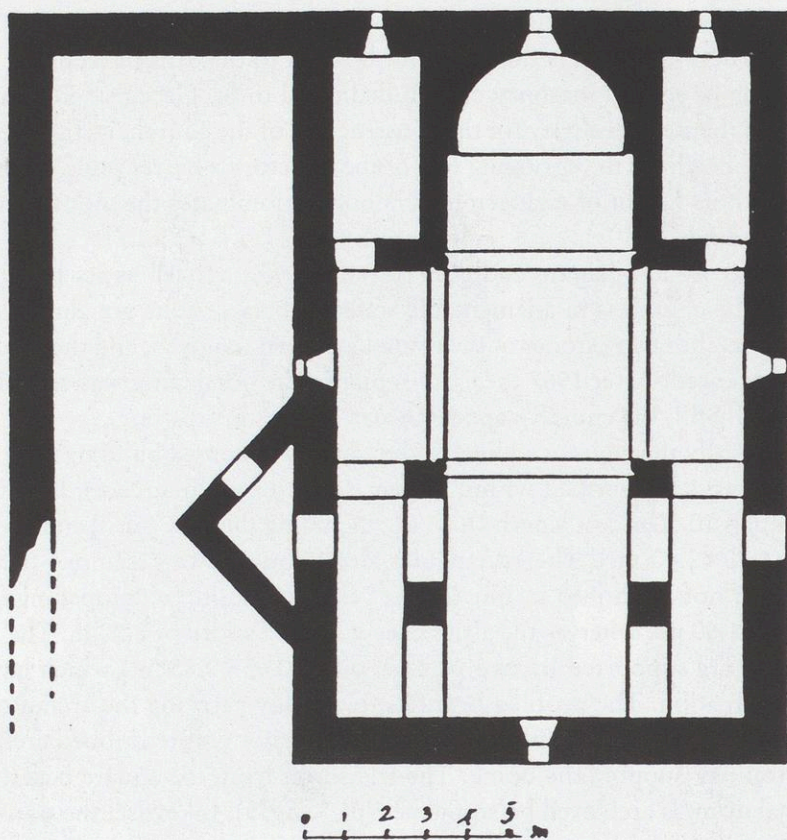


fig. 4 Church of St. George, Plan.

smoothly surfaced, and evenly coursed blocks, which are squared and joined with such accuracy that the mortar is invisible between the courses (pl. 10).

For the interior shell of the church walls roughly picked blocks have been employed with frequent use of small fillings (pl. 6). Evidently the mason intended to cover the wall with wall paintings. I found small fragments of such painting on the floor level of the apse, but Marr saw many fragments, some of which bore Georgian *mrvglonani* inscriptions made with black pigment.³⁸

The building process of the church must have been accelerated by the use of newly standardized blocks, a *novum* observed by Merčule, an additional reason for him to praise the architect Amona.

The church of St. George, although devoid of sculptural ornamentation is,

38 Marr, *Dnevnik*, 146, 147.



pl. 6 Church, Interior, Looking Southwest.



pl. 7 Church, Interior, Looking East.

The church of St. George, although devoid of sculptural ornamentation is



pl. 8 Church, Interior, Dome, Looking North.

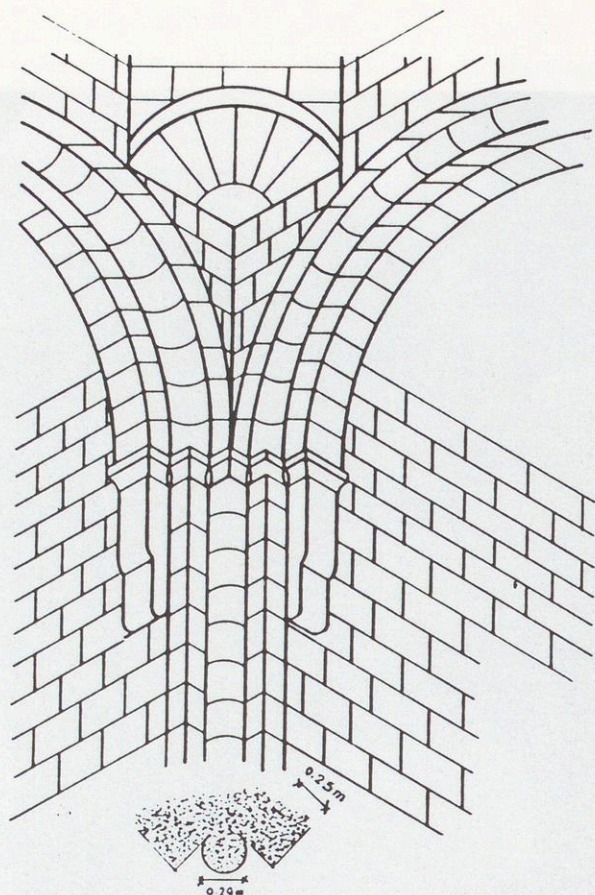


fig. 5 Church, Interior, Northeastern Squinch.

however, the earliest example in Tao-Klarjet'i where the mason introduced decorative elements, such as the "Faltendach" with a broken stepped cornice, the articulation of the drum's exterior surface by blind arcades, and the enlivening of the paired colonnettes, capitals, and bases with red pigment. Reddish fine-grained blocks facing the drum further enhance the warm, pictorial effect of the dome hovering above the entire monastery. With all that wealth the church should originally have made a lasting impact on admiring spectators. Small wonder that Merçule calls it the "new and beautiful church"³⁹ and lauds its innova-

39 *Life*, 277₄₋₅.



pl. 9- Church, Exterior, Dome, Looking Northeast.



pl. 10 Detail of Plate 9.

tive architect "as a builder with great wisdom".⁴⁰ Another decorative innovative accent is the placement of an omega-shaped window brow with an equal-armed salient red cross over the arcuated window (pl. 2) on the east facade, alluding to the second coming of Christ.⁴¹

We are well informed by Merčule about the date of the church. He mentions that construction began under Ašot Kuhi, Duke of Dukes, ruler of Klarjet'i (896-918), and that it was completed by his nephew, Gurgen (918-941). Thus, the church could have been under construction from 896 to 941. However, the architecture and the construction technique, such as the application of ashlar on the outer walls, the use of standardized blocks, and the introduction of those decorative elements enumerated above, narrow the chronological limits, and it would not be farfetched to suggest that the construction of the church must have begun toward the very end of Ašot's rule, and – after a hiatus of some fifteen years – was completed by Gurgen shortly before 941.

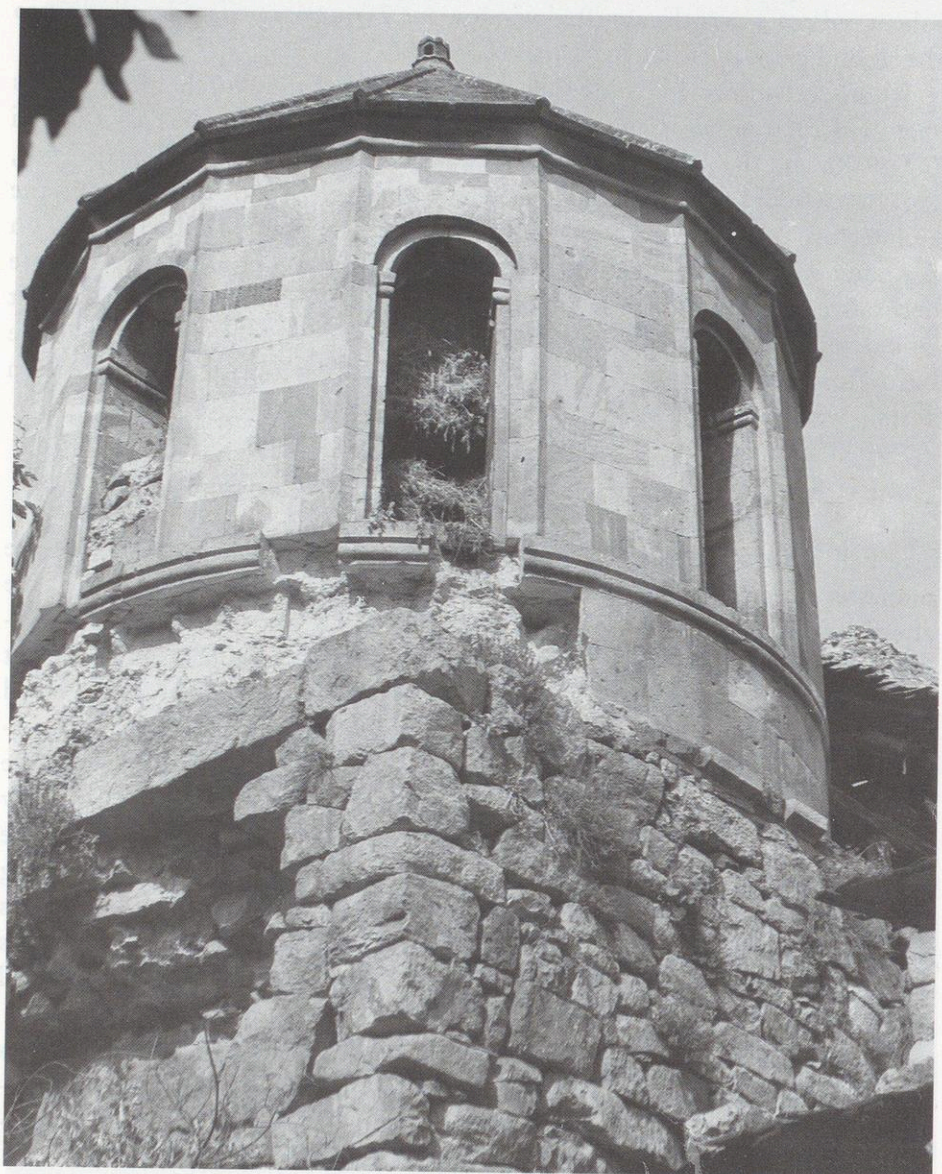
The Bell Tower

The bell tower, consisting of two stories, is located on the west side of the monastery (fig. 2, pl. 11). Its construction material is the same as that of the church itself. At present the tower is used to store winter fodder, and consequently it is well preserved. Its lower story, consisting of a square compartment (exterior dimensions 4.50 m²), is built of unevenly coursed, roughly picked blocks. The second story, the bell tower proper, constructed of smooth-surfaced ashlar, is a sixteen-sided drum set on a circular base. The edges of the drum's facets are emphasized by shallow, angular ribs. The drum is evenly pierced by eight arcuated, parallel-sided apertures (h. 1.95 m., w. 0.58 m.). The drum's upper cornice is accentuated by a billet molding consisting of alternating red and yellowish squared blocks. Its conical roof is formed by sixteen sections of ribbed interlocking stone pantiles ending in broken eaves, echoing the eaves of the church's dome. The roof is topped by a small boss resembling the bell tower itself.

The date of the bell tower can be determined by two mason's inscriptions carved on the upper portion of the drum's northeast surface. It contains numerous clumsy linguistic-orthographic mistakes and paleographic features suggest-

40 *Life*, 277₈.

41 On the theological meaning of such crosses as precursors of Christ, see Djobadze, *Monasteries*, 33. About two decades after the construction of the Hanzt'a church the architectural sculpture of the churches in Tao-Klarjet'i – instead of the plain geometric crosses – employs exclusively the "leaved" or "flourishing" crosses in which the cross of Christ and the paradisiacal tree of life are organically fused. On this account see *ibid.*, 154, fig. 50 and 200-202, fig. 71.



pl. 11 Belltower, Exterior, Looking Southeast.

ing that the bell tower could not have been built before the fourteenth century.⁴² Furthermore, if I am not mistaken, bell towers were unknown in Georgia before the thirteenth century.

Identification of the Monastery

On August 14, 1904, when Marr arrived at the monastery of "Lower P'ort'a" (i.e. Hantz'a), he immediately exclaimed that he was in the Monastery of Šatberdi.⁴³ This mistaken identification of the monastery of Hantz'a (in Lower P'ort'a) as Šatberdi was accepted by most scholars, until it was corrected by Ingorokva⁴⁴, who identified the monastery in Lower P'ort'a as that of Hantz'a. Indeed, against Marr's identification of the monastery of Hantz'a as Šatberdi there are numerous irrefutable arguments:

1. In the *Life of Grigol Hantz'eli* Merčule gives an account of a journey undertaken during the thirties of the ninth century by the king of Klarjet'i, Bagrat I, in the company of his two brothers and Grigol Hantz'eli with his associated monks, in order to visit the monasteries of the region. The worldly dignitaries and the holy men began their journey in Art'anuji, the capital of Bagrat's kingdom. First they visited the newly established monastery of Šatberdi; then, passing the monasteries of Opiza, Hantz'a, Midznadzoroi, and C'karost'avi, they finally came to the monastery of Bert'a. Their itinerary logically proceeded from south to north and east (see our map fig. 1), following a continuous sequence of existing monasteries.⁴⁵

2. In the same source we are told that the monastery closest to Opiza was Hantz'a.⁴⁶

3. Merčule continues: "although Šatberdi is somewhat distant from these monasteries [i.e. Hantz'a, Bert'a, Opiza, C'karost'avi], it is through its teachings and all other benevolent deeds that it is inseparable from them."⁴⁷ Since the local rulers and the spiritual dignitaries began their journey in Art'anuji, and since the first church they inspected was Šatberdi, which was farthest from the other Klarjet'i monasteries, it is impossible to identify the monastery of Lower Port'a, namely Hantz'a, as Šatberdi. The monastery of Šatberdi must have been located in the vicinity of Art'anuji.

4. We are also told that since the monastery of Hantz'a did not have sufficient land to sustain itself, Grigol Hantz'eli requested and received from King Ašot I

42 On these inscriptions see Djobadze, *Monasteries*, 37-39.

43 Marr, *Dnevnik*, 139.

44 P. Ingorokva, *Georgi Merčule* (Tbilisi, 1954), 307-310.

45 *Life*, 274-276.

46 *Life*, 311³⁹⁻⁴¹; 313³⁰⁻³⁵.

47 *Life*, 313³⁴⁻³⁷.

fertile land in Šatberdi, where he eventually built a monastery as a dependency of Hanzt'a.⁴⁸ Indeed, the rocky terrain of Hanzt'a consists of poor, unyielding land, while Šatberdi has plentiful arable land and numerous fertile orchards.⁴⁹

5. In the second chapter of a document describing the bishoprics of the Georgian province Meshet'i we learn that between Opiza and Hanzt'a lies a place called "Dahatula".⁵⁰ Marr located this Dahatula between Opiza and Lower P'ort'a (Hanzt'a),⁵¹ which proves that the monastery in Lower P'ort'a is indeed Hanzt'a and not Šatberdi.

6. Finally, the colophon of a Georgian manuscript (no. 77, fol. 192b) preserved in St. Catherine's monastery at Sinai refers to the "blessed father Grigol" as "builder of Hanzt'a" and to Markoz as "builder of the bell tower of Hanzt'a".⁵² Since among the monasteries of Klarjet'i only the monastery in Lower P'ort'a (i.e., Hanzt'a) has a bell tower, there can be no doubt that this Markoz mentioned here and the Markoz mentioned on the bell tower's inscription in Hanzt'a are one and the same person.⁵³

Outside of the monastic enclosure are a few chapels, a hermitage, and other structural remains of historical significance discussed by Djobadze.⁵⁴

I hope that this brief survey of the Hanzt'a monastery will generate interest in a systematic, extensive study of the monasteries of Tao, Klarjet'i, and Šavšet'i, and stimulate the concern for their protection as well.

48 *Life*, 262₃₂₋₄₀.

49 I was not able to locate the monastery of Šatberdi; but it is tempting to identify it with the church at Yeni Rabat. See Djobadze, *Monasteries*, 45-48.

50 Jordania, *K'ronikebi*, vol. 2 (Tbilisi, 1897), 187.

51 Marr, *Dnevnik*, 141, 142; see also Ingorokva, *Georgi Merčule*, 311.

52 I. Djavahišvili, *Sinis mt'is K'art'ul helnac'ert'a aḡc'eriloba* (Description of the Georgian manuscripts at Mount Sinai) (Tbilisi, 1947), 241₁₇₋₂₂.

53 Recently the identification of Hanzt'a was discussed by L. Menabde, *Zveli K'art'uli Mc'erlobis Kerebi* (Ancient Georgian literary centers), vol. 1 (Tbilisi, 1962), 396-400, who, to my mind unconvincingly, attempts to defend Marr's opinion.

54 Djobadze, *Monasteries*, 26.