

GEORGIA

Bagrati Cathedral Reconstructed

Bagrati Cathedral, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1994 together with Gelati Monastery, was constructed at the end of the 10th century during the reign of King Bagrat III in Kutaisi and completed in 1003 (see inscription on the northern façade). During a Turkish invasion in 1691 (blowing-up of the dome) and in 1770 during the shelling of Kutaisi Fortress (upper parts of the church) it was badly damaged. The repair of the ruin, a national symbol of Georgia's revival, already started in the 1950s and in 2009 the Georgian Ministry of Culture approved the Bagrati Cathedral Rehabilitation Plan envisaging a reinforcement of the existing structure with the aim of complete reconstruction – a project a group of Georgian experts and ICOMOS Georgia protested against in vain (see also the report in *Heritage at Risk 2008–2010*, pp. 59–61, including a series of pictures of the reconstruction works). At its 34th session in Brasilia in 2010 the UNESCO World Heritage Committee placed Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery on the World Heritage in Danger List in view of *irreversible interventions carried out on the site as part of a major reconstruction project* and after further decisions in 2011 and 2012 to postpone final solutions the Committee at its 37th session in Phnom Penh in 2013 came to the conclusion that *due to the inappropriate rehabilitation the authenticity of Bagrati Cathedral has been irreversibly compromised and that it no longer contributes to the justification for the criterion for which the property was inscribed. Following the recommendation by the World Heritage Committee the State Party has submitted the major boundary modification for the property to allow Gelati Monastery to justify the criterion on its own.*

The reconstruction, claimed for years by the Georgian Patriarch, supported by President Saakashvili (*Bagrati was built for people to pray there and now it must be restored for modern Georgians to pray there as well*) and defended by Niki Vacheishvili, Director General of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia (*Bagrati is a national symbol of unity and it would be incorrect to preserve it in the form of ruins*) is now being looked after by the experienced Italian architect Andrea Bruno, who is in charge of the restoration of Bagrati: *My creative plan, which I started to develop in January 2011 along with restoration interventions, involves the identification and study of values of the construction and that part which lies within the adjacent entire archaeological area. I think that this is a necessary condition in order to fully meet the requirement of bodies in charge of preservation of cultural heritage, to increase the interest toward the monuments on the Cultural Heritage List and possibilities of determining their values. The work on these issues will start after the completion of the reconstruction process* (all quotations taken from the extensive article “Bagrati Cathedral – Copy or Original?” by Irina Bagauri in *Tabula Magazine*, June 25, 2012, <http://en.tabula.ge/print-6673.html>). To what extent the



Bagrati Cathedral before the intervention (photo: www.monument.ge)

Bagrati Cathedral after the reconstruction (photo: National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation)



interior design by Andrea Bruno, for instance “reconstruction of a gallery which will house a museum” in the left wing, has actually been carried out is currently unknown.

Michael Petzet

Appeal to Protect the Monuments in Abkhazia

Georgia is one of the ancient Christian states rich in unique historical and cultural monuments of global importance, museum artifacts and other values. After gaining independence and especially after the Rose Revolution of 2003, the protection of the historical and cultural heritage of Georgia became part of a com-

mon system guided and implemented by governmental and legal entities as well as by individuals within the framework of their authority. The steps made by the government towards protecting and popularizing the historical/cultural heritage envisage a close cooperation with international organizations. With their help, the implementation of numerous significant projects has become possible.

The long period of occupation of the Georgian territories has resulted in damages to the cultural and historical monuments of Georgia. Unique monuments of great aesthetic and historic value – Christian churches and buildings for public worship, feudal architectural complexes, beautiful ancient frescoes and inscriptions have been destroyed and this process is still going on. Even today, unique monuments of aesthetic, historic and cultural value and museum artifacts are exposed to danger.

Thus, the issue of protecting and maintaining historical and cultural monuments located on the occupied territories of Tskhinvali and Abkhazia has become more important.

After the 1990s, due to objective reasons the relevant authorities of the Georgian government were unable to carry out the necessary actions towards protecting cultural and historical monuments of global value located in this area. Before the eyes of the whole civilized world a deliberate counterfeiting of Georgian spiritual and cultural heritage and a falsification of its real historical origin are going on. For this purpose everything Georgian is being destroyed – ancient texts and inscriptions, frescoes, archaeological and museum artifacts, etc. By such actions, occupational and separatist forces are trying to prove that historical monuments located on that territory have nothing to do with Georgian history and culture. With such pseudo-scientific propaganda and actions they are trying to lead the public astray, to finally annex the above-mentioned territories, legalize ethnic cleansing and war crimes, the full responsibility of which rests with the Russian party.

Efforts of the Georgian government, of academic circles and the non-governmental sector together with the international community to stop the deliberate change of appearance of Georgian architectural monuments and the falsification of its spiritual and cultural heritage have failed to yield results. Unfortunately, our serious concerns that the number of such activities could gradually increase have come true. In 2009, at the St. George Ilori Church – a monument of Georgian cultural heritage located on the occupied territory of Abkhazia – an act of vandalism was committed under the cloak of restoration works (breach of paragraph 5 of the Venice Charter and of international principles on the protection of cultural heritage), leading to a complete loss of authenticity of the monument.

Soon after this act of vandalism “restoration works” started on another monument in Abkhazia, the monastery complex of Bedia (10th century). So far we have no information about:

- Whether a qualified and complete preliminary study of the monument by international experts has been prepared;
- Whether a corresponding conclusion about the condition of the monument before the restoration exists;
- Whether the monument’s reconstruction and restoration plan has been presented;
- How qualified the group of specialists working on this monument actually is;
- To what extent the works being carried out on the monument meet the requirements of paragraphs 5 and 6 of the Venice Charter.

Conclusion based on the aforesaid

We, the participants of the scientific conference *Georgian Cultural Heritage in the Occupied Territories – Abkhazia* recognize that Georgian cultural heritage represents an integral part of the cultural heritage of mankind;

and as we are guided by the internationally recognized conventions and charters: the Venice Charter of 1964, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention of 1972, the UNESCO Hague Convention of 1954, etc.;

and as we believe that Georgia, as well as the international community, should do its best to preserve the cultural values of the occupied territories of Georgia for the next generations;

and as in the occupied territories it is especially difficult to take care, restore and maintain the monuments of cultural heritage; we consider that for the maintenance and protection of the monuments situated in the occupied territory of Georgia, Abkhazia, it would be reasonable to take the following steps:

1. Avoid carrying out any unplanned and amateur works on monuments of cultural heritage, in order to avoid losing cultural values, as happened during the willful “restoration” of St. George Ilori Church.
2. Intensify the cooperation with international organizations, such as the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the Georgian National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).
3. With the participation of international organizations (UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICOM) negotiations on creating a Georgian-Abkhazian working group(s) for studying the condition of cultural heritage sites and working out a plan of activities for their protection. To achieve this goal the most should be made of the Geneva Talks.
4. In order to implement the 2nd Protocol Provisions of the Hague Convention Georgia undertakes to:
 - Actively cooperate with the Hague Convention Committee;
 - Work out the necessary documentation for receiving a special protection status (under the 2nd Protocol Provisions) for a number of monuments in Abkhazia;
 - Appeal for technical and financial aid through the Hague Convention Committee.

Address issued by the participants of the scientific conference “Georgian Cultural Heritage in the Occupied Territories – Abkhazia”, Sokhumi State University, December 21, 2011

Sakdrisi – the Oldest Gold Mine in the World

Deep man-made holes in the rock; narrow galleries showing nothing attractive at first glance. What is the significance of this place? The importance of an archaeological site can only be evaluated through the systematic recovery and analysis of material remains and objects as physical evidence of human actions in the past. This is especially the case with ancient mining sites where

people of past societies engaged in the extraction and processing of precious metals. Assessing the cultural values of such sites requires a broad approach, including identifying the minerals that were mined, investigating the ancient mining methods and most of all trying to uncover the impact these materials had obtained on ancient societies. In the contemporary world the quest for mineral wealth continues, in many cases at places of historic mining activities, with the aim to exploit and consequently destroy these places for the very same purpose of extracting monetary profit.

The archaeological site of Sakdrisi-Kachagiani is located in the South-Eastern Caucasus, around 80 km from Tbilisi in the Bolnisi district of the Kvemo Kartli region. According to international and national archaeologists it is the world's oldest gold mine now threatened by commercial mining activities. The site is characterised by caverns into the ground of a small rocky hill called *Kachagiani* between the villages of Kazreti and Maschavera and along the Maschavera river.

From 2004 to 2012 the ancient adits and galleries inside the hill were partially excavated in a joint Georgian-German capacity building cooperation project in the field of archaeology that was conducted by the National Centre for Archaeology, the state institution giving scientific advice to the archaeological sector in Georgia, and the Deutsches Bergbau Museum Bochum (Germany). Due to the exceptional findings the site was listed in 2006 as Monument of National Significance, the highest protection status under Georgian law. The excavation team analysed many samples of organic material, such as charcoal remains from ancient fire exploration techniques with scientific C14 screening methods, in order to determine the age of the site.

The numerous samples revealed that ore mining took place as early as in the 4th – 3rd millenniums BC at the Sakdrisi-Kachagiani site and the team could successfully extract gold sands of high quality from different subterranean layers inside the historic mine. In a nearby valley (Dzedzvebi) remains of ancient settlements with metallurgical workshops could be found, identified by object finds and burial graves as remains of the so-called Kura-Araxes culture of the 4th - 3rd millenniums BC, thus showing evidence of ore beneficiation near the historic mine. By means of sophisticated archaeometric electron probe micro analysis undertaken at the Institute of Archaeological Studies at the University of Bochum (Germany) element analysis of ore probes from Sakdrisi-Kachagiani could be compared with gold objects at the Azerbaijan Academy of Science dating from the same period and identified as Kura-Araxes culture objects. The results give evidence that the material objects of this cultural period were produced with metal derived from the Sakdrisi-Kachagiani mine. A similar analysis is in preparation to examine the material provenance of gold objects from the Tbilisi National Museum. Based on results from the research the Sakdrisi-Kachagiani ancient gold mine and the related Kura-Araxes culture settlements provide important and unique material evidence of the metallurgical capacities of the societies of the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze eras in the territories of the Southern Caucasus, which have not been found anywhere else in Georgia.

The entire region of Bolnisi is well known for its variety of gold and copper resources and for several decades, not far from the ancient site the Madneuli open pit mining plant has been exploiting copper in large quantities and it processes gold from auriferous “quartzite” ore that was stockpiled there in the past with toxic cyanide leaching techniques. A conflict arose in 2013, because the newly elected government of Georgia denies the existence of evidence of historic mining activities in the area of



Together with Georgian workers the mining excavations were exposed (photo: K. Stange/AVttention)

Sakdrisi-Kachagiani hill and has repealed the protection status of the archaeological site. Furthermore, in early 2014 the government of Georgia granted permission for the commercial exploitation of gold deposits located in the mentioned area.

The Madneuli plant was taken over by the Georgian state-owned company Quartzite Ltd in 2006 which until that time had been exploiting the site in a joint venture together with the Australian mining company Bolnisi Gold NL. According to its own mission statement at that time the Bolnisi/Quartzite joint venture was designed to demonstrate to the international investment community that Georgia is a safe country for investment, that the company has striven to achieve highest international standards and that responsible mining can be of socio-economic benefit for the entire country. As such Quartzite Ltd had officially signed the UN Global Compact policy to promote the practices inspired by this UN initiative and had repeatedly reported on its measures implemented to fulfil highest environmental and social standards according to the World Bank and International Finance Cooperation (IFC) Performance Standards.

The dynamics of the case evolved on May 28, 2013 when the Agency for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (advisory body to the Ministry of Culture) announced to re-examine the protection status of the Sakdrisi-Kachagiani site in response to an initiative of the new owner of the Madneuli plant, the Russian-owned private company RMG Gold which acquired the corresponding licence in late 2012.

The highest level of protection can only be revoked if the status of the site is considered to be severely changed, a conclusion that has to be stated by the Archaeological Division of the Cultural Heritage Protection Board, a group of scientists and experts stipulated by the Georgian law to advise the Agency for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in its decisions. However, the mentioned board was never asked. Instead, an ad-hoc commission formed by the Ministry of Culture discussed the future of the site and concluded that the protection status is not considered justified. Based on this recommendation the Ministry of Culture revoked the highest level of protection and the office of the Prime Minister confirmed this action in July 2013.

As a result professionals from the cultural heritage sector as well as citizens, various organisations of the civil society sector in Georgia and many people living in the area affected by the extension of the future mining activities have joined in a broad societal campaign against this mining project. Besides the cultural aspects the mining project and the new company leadership are under



The documentations inside the complex mine are time-consuming. Here a 3D scanner by Arctron is used (photo: K. Stange/AVtention).

pressure due to accusations of having violated labour rights and environmental standards. Based on a legal initiative of the local organisations the Tbilisi court annulled the revocation of the protection status on behalf by the Ministry of Culture by June 2014.

In a statement issued by the Georgian National Committee of ICOMOS on the recent development in the heritage sector the concern was raised that the general aim to attract more investment for the country's economic development is intended to be achieved by disposing of entire historic ensembles for large-scale development projects. Furthermore, the potential of heritage assets contributing to the social and economic development of the country is not even envisioned in the newly published "Strategy for the Socio-Economic Development of Georgia (2014–2020)" presented by the government of Georgia in early 2014. The actions of the government of Georgia as exemplified by the Sakdrisi case and its current position with regard to the overall value of cultural heritage for socio-economic development are in opposition and in fact a violation of international agreements and treaties for the protection of cultural heritage to which the State of Georgia has acceded to with the promise to ensure the provision and implementation of these principles.

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