

Pilgrimage in Georgia

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Abstract Pilgrimage is one of the most ancient practices of humankind and is associated with a great variety of religious and spiritual traditions. Making of pilgrimages is common in many religions all over the world. A lot of pilgrims' destinations were founded in inaccessible places but became centers of pilgrimage, attracting countless people.

Today, in these difficult times, when people are suffering from economic hardship, employment problems, quick spreading different diseases etc. People who have been struggling to find meaning in their lives can walk away with ray of hope, with a new vision of life and moreover, having stronger sense of responsibility and conscientiousness towards cultural heritage, caring about its preservation and improving ways how to attract people through common or virtual tours.

Since Georgia is a country with ancient and rich original culture which goes back as far as millennia and its knowledge and recognition has crossed national borders and entered the international level to become the cultural legacy of the mankind, our paper aims to deliver the main examples of pilgrimage places in this country. Historical buildings of Orthodox Churches, mosque, synagogue, Catholic and Protestant churches decorate the center of its capital Tbilisi. Georgian foreigners as well as Georgians have a unique opportunity to find refuge from daily routine and to get closer to eternal matters during the regular visits to Orthodox Monasteries and Churches around Georgia.

Keywords Pilgrimage • Belief • Heritage • Monasteries • Churches

1 Introduction

Pilgrimage is one of the most ancient practices of humankind and is associated with a great variety of religious and spiritual traditions. Making of pilgrimages is common in many religions all over the world. A lot of pilgrims' destinations

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where founded in inaccessible places but became centers of pilgrimage, attracting countless people.

Today, in these difficult times, when people are suffering from economic hardship, employment problems, quick spreading different diseases etc. pilgrimage is a sacred journey to a shrine or other location of importance to a person's beliefs and faith, although sometimes a symbolic journey into someone's own beliefs can give hope to those who have lost all hope. Monasteries become centers of spiritual healing and empowerment. People who have been struggling to find meaning in their lives can walk away with ray of hope, with a new vision of life and moreover, having stronger sense of responsibility and conscientiousness towards cultural heritage, caring about its preservation and improving ways how to attract people through common or virtual tours.

Since Georgia is a country with ancient and rich original culture which goes back as far as millennia and its knowledge and recognition has crossed national borders and entered the international level to become the cultural legacy of the mankind, our paper aims to deliver the main examples of pilgrimage places in this country. Historical buildings of Orthodox Churches, mosque, synagogue, Catholic and Protestant churches decorate the center of its capital Tbilisi. Georgian foreigners as well as Georgians have a unique opportunity to find refuge from daily routine and to get closer to eternal matters during the regular visits to Orthodox Monasteries and Churches around Georgia. Besides, we also emphasize the importance of collaboration of Religious Tourism with religious leaders of any country in order to get exhaustive knowledge about the pilgrimage places that will help one to understand the role and contribution of Orthodox Christianity to the whole World (UNWTO, 2011).

2 Main Aspects of Georgian Religious Heritage and Christian Art

Georgia is located in the Caucasus region, between the Black and Caspian Seas. The history of its statehood counts almost 3,500 years, and that of Christianity, 2,000 years. The Mother of God is considered the major protector of Georgia since the country was first allocated to her to preach in. Though later, on the will of God, she gave her icon to the Holy Apostle St. Andrew (later the First Called) and dispatched him to preach Gospel in Georgia. St. Andrew went to the land keeping the Mantle of the Prophet Elijah, brought to Mtskheta by the Jews persecuted by Nabuchodonosor in the sixth century, and the seamless Robe of Christ [in some sources it is called Chiton—Greek **Chitōn**, garment worn by Greek men and women from the Archaic period (c. 750–c. 500 B.C.) through the Hellenistic period (323–30 B.C.)], greatest holy relic of the entire Christendom, also brought here by the Mtskheta Jews after crucifixion of Christ.

At that time there were two kingdoms on the territory of Georgia—Kartli (Iberia, Hiberia) Kingdom to the east, and Egrisi (Colchida, Colchis, Lazica) Kingdom to the west. St. Andrew preached in different parts of Georgia. After preaching and

baptizing people there, he left the Holy Mother of God's icon in Atskveri Village (Kartli Kingdom). The icon used to be kept at Atskveri (Atskuri) Cathedral Church for many centuries.

St. Andrew preached Gospel together with St. Simon of Canaan (the same Andrew the First-Called) in western Georgia. The last was buried in Komani Village, Georgia. Another Apostle St. Matthias was also buried in Georgia. He preached in south-western part of the country and was buried in Gonio, nearby Batumi. According to the oldest scripts holy Apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus also visited East Georgia and preached Gospel there.

Though the first apostles partially failed to convert whole Georgia into Christianity but they succeed in that issue with essential group of population.

The Georgian Church has been founded by the Holy Apostles. Their journeys and preaches are scripted in the Georgian Chronicles, also by Greek and Latin authors, for instance Origenes (Origenes) (II–III cc), Bishop Dorotheus of Tire (IV c), Bishop Epiphanius of Cyprus (IV c), Nikita of Paphlagon (IX c), Ecumen (X c), etc.

Holy Apostles preaches left a significant path. Existence of Christian communities and churches are proved by archaeological materials dated back to I–III cc. St. Ireneus of Lyon mentions Iberians, i.e. Georgians, among Christians in second century (Georgia, 2007).

During the reign of Georgian King Mirian and Queen Nana (fourth century), Christianity was proclaimed state religion in East Georgia thanks to the enlightening activity of St. Illuminator Nino, Equal-to-the-Apostles. That was a turning point and absolutely new stage in the history of the country. Clever decision taken by Georgian King and queen as well as the population became a reason for close negotiations between Georgian and Byzantine churches. St. Nino baptized the royal family after Greek priests, bishops and deacons were sent to Georgia by Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena. That dates back to the IV c. A.D.

The fact that St. Nino of Cappadocia was a close relative of St. George is also interesting. According to the advice of St. Nino the foundation of the first church of the Twelve Apostles, Svetitskhoveli, where the Mantle of the Prophet Elijah and the Robe of Christ were buried, was laid there. Svetitskhoveli Patriarchate Cathedral is the spiritual center of Georgia. The Cathedral displays immortality of our nation and culture.

After adoption of Christianity as an official religion, Emperor Constantine and Queen Elena sent a piece of the Holy Cross, and the board onto which the Savior stood while crucifixion, and two nails, and the Savior's icon.

Preaching Christianity and establishing the Church in early fourth century as well as the crucial importance of Georgia for Christian World is confirmed the presence of Stratophilous, Bishop of Bichvinta (Abkhazia), at the First World Ecclesiastic Council in Nicaea in 325 A.D. Since then Georgia and the Georgian Orthodox Church have always firmly and devoutly kept Orthodox canons. As sixth century Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea writes, "Iberians are Christians keeping the rules better than any other nations".

Despite tragic history of Georgia, the Georgian Orthodox Church has always conducted great educational and revival activities since announcing the state religion. The whole territory of Georgia is covered with churches and monasteries. You can find hundreds of St. George's churches all over Georgia. St. George has always been especially honored and respected as a protector of Georgia.

The most important is that monasteries and churches are not only the houses of God, where one can only pray and attend the divine service, they have been turned into cultural and educational centers from the very beginning of their existence. In early twelfth century, the glorious King David the Builder, who united the Kingdom of Georgia, established Gelati Monastery and Academy near Kutaisi. Gelati Academy was recognized as a great center of theology and education and science among the orthodox world at that time. Another famous educational center existed simultaneously in Ikalto.

In XI–XII cc. it was widespread in Georgia to send talented young men to Greek schools. Among those students were Ephrem Mtsire (Ephraim the Small), Ekvtime Atoneli (Euthymius the Athonite), Giorgi Atoneli (George the Hagiorite), Arsen Ikaltoeli (Arsen of Iqalto), Ioane Petritsi and others. It is also noteworthy that Georgian students who studied abroad also established theological schools there and subsequently implemented their school traditions in their homeland. This practice of Georgian students was especially strong during the reign of David the Builder. He gave close attention to the education of his people. The king selected children who were sent to the Byzantine Empire “so that they be taught languages and bring home translations made by them there”. Many of them became well-known scholars. Later some of them founded churches and monasteries abroad, in Palestine, Syria, Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, etc. One should especially note Holy Cross Monastery in Jerusalem (currently being under jurisdiction of Greek Orthodox Church), St Jacob's Monastery in Jerusalem (currently being under jurisdiction of Jerusalem Armenian Church), Iviron Monastery on Holy Mount Athos (famous for Iviron Holy Mother Virgin's miraculous icon), Petritsoni Monastery (currently Bachkovo, Bulgaria).

Besides, King David the Builder initiated summon of the Great Ecclesiastic Council in Ruis-Urbnisi Diocese in 1103. The Ruis-Urbnisi Ecclesiastic Council revised vital issues of ecclesiastic as well as civil society.

Georgian Christian art is of special note as well. Great many Georgian ecclesiastic and civil architectural monuments have been recognized as unique masterpieces in the world. Monumental art, frescos, and mosaics have been developed along with architecture. Original Georgian frescos played notable role in evolution of Byzantine art and vice versa.

Relations with Holy Land of Jerusalem have always been of special importance for Georgia as well as all Christian world. Lots of landmarks and names linked to Jerusalem are found all over Georgia, especially in its ancient and former capital city Mtskheta. Georgian kings and princes built churches and monasteries, and greatly donated to Jerusalem since early Christian centuries.

Mtskheta is also called a holy city, a place where Christian pilgrims and tourists come from around the world. Due to its great architectural and historical values

century Mtskheta and its surroundings entered UNESCO's world heritage list in 1994. The city's numerous holy sites have won it the name of Second Jerusalem.

Greece, as the cradle of Orthodox Christianity, also made tremendous contributions to Christianity especially during the millennium of the Byzantine Empire. This was the period of the Great Greek Fathers, of huge missionary initiatives, of Christian thought, poetry, and literature. It was the period of local and ecumenical synods, which formed and defined the values of Christian faith basic to all Christian churches and denominations today. It was also an era of great social anxiety and cultural movement in the Church.

Many sources say that most major heresies originated in the Greek East. But all of them were defeated on the same ground by the intellect, the logic, the mystical intuition, and the biblical scholarship of the Greek Fathers, or their Hellenized allies of the Near East.

As T. R. Glover has put it: "The chief contribution of the Greek was his demand for this very thing—that Christianity must be universal. . .the Greek really secured the triumph of Jesus. . . . Even the faults of the Greek have indirectly served the church."

Greece has contributed significantly to the ecumenical movement and under the support of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Greek Orthodox theology will continue to work for the restoration of the Christian world and the unity of the Church.

Due to such great efforts of Orthodox Churches we, as one of the devoted Orthodox nations in the World, have inherited rich heritage and we are proud to own numerous caves, monasteries, churches etc., pilgrimage centers that have become centers of spiritual healing and empowerment.

The list given below is a part of the huge treasure of Orthodox Church and Georgian people are proud to have sacred places in Georgia where pilgrims can see the signs of the Biblical stories, adore various sacred things directly connected with the life or death of Prophets, Saints, Holy Fathers and so on.

We would like to present several distinguished ones such as:

1. Svetitskhoveli Church in Mtskheta;
2. Jvari Monastery in Mtskheta;
3. Mantle of St. Elijah in Mtskheta;
4. Tomb of St. Monk Gabriel in Mtskheta;
5. Holy Cross in Mtskheta;
6. Grapevine Cross in Tbilisi;
7. Mokvi Gospel in Tbilisi;
8. Khakhuli Tryptich Icon of Virgin Mary in Tbilisi;
9. Ancha Icon of the Savior in Tbilisi;
10. Tomb of St. Basilisko in Comana;
11. Sarcophagus of St. John Chrysostom in Comana;
12. Head of John the Baptist in Comana;
13. Tomb of St. Nino in Bodbe, Kakheti Region;
14. Holy Spring of St. Nino in Bodbe, Kakheti Region;
15. Tomb of Joseph of Alaverdi in Alaverdi, Kakheti Region;

16. Tomb of St. Neophytos of Urbnisi in Inner Kartli, Kareli Municipality;
17. Tomb of St. Father Piros in Inner Kartli, Kareli Municipality;
18. Tomb of St. Anton of Martkopi in Norio, Gardabani Municipality;
19. Tomb of St. Mathias in Batumi, Achara;
20. Tunic of the Virgin Mary in Zugdidi, Samegrelo Region; (www.orthodoxy.ge, n.d.)

3 Mtskheta: A Former Capital of Georgia

Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta (The Most Distinguished Ancient Cities in Georgia and the Former Capital)

Why is Mtskheta such a big deal? Let's count the ways: Firstly, it's one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world. There have been people living there since before 1000 B.C.; Secondly, it was the capital of the Georgian kingdom of Iberia from the third century B.C. to the fifth century A.D.; Thirdly, it's where Christianity was proclaimed as the official state religion of Kartli (another early Georgian kingdom) in 337 A.D., making Georgia the second country to have done so; it's believed to be the place where Jesus's robe was buried (inside the famous Svetitskhoveli Cathedral); it's where most of the kings of Georgia up through the nineteenth century are buried; it's where the Georgian Orthodox church has its headquarters today; Its historical buildings have been proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site (www.pravmir.com, 2007).

Construction of Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (firstly as a small church) started from fourth century, later it was restored many times during the Middle Ages. Cathedral is stunning both from the outside (especially in the mid-morning sunlight) and the inside. It's free to enter, better for ladies to have a headscarf) and wander around the many old tombs inside and just continuously look up at the big internal dome (www.tripadvisor.ie, 2014).

Georgian churches have a unique style and this Cathedral is not an exception. Pilgrims should not miss two things. First, the icon of Saint Elias, a Georgian Jew who brought Jesus robe into Georgia and the tomb of his sister Sidonia. Georgian man won the robe of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion and brought it back to Georgia. His sister died when she touched the robe and put it in her arms, according to the story, nobody was able to take out the robe from her arm and she was buried with the robe.

The distinguishing feature is the massive image of Christ that stares straight at you when you walk in through the doors. It seems that his eyes look inside your soul. When you go into an orthodox church, you usually see a wide variety of paintings, frescos, and icons. These depict Mary, Jesus, the apostles, and other noteworthy individuals.

Down the street from Svetitskhoveli Cathedral is the small and relatively modest **Antioch Church**. It dates back to the seventh century, and there is a small nunnery located right next to the church these days.

A five-minute walk north from Svetitskhoveli Cathedral brings you to **Samtavro Church**, which is another example of a building that is in remarkably good shape for its age. It was built in the twelfth century, and the small church also on the grounds in the same yard was built dates back to the fourth century.

a. *One more thing to see near Mtskheta is Jvari (Cross) Monastery (VI c.).*

Jvari Monastery is situated spectacularly on top of a mountain above the city of Mtskheta. It was built in sixth century. This isn't one of those buildings that was first built forever ago and has rebuilt several times over the centuries. That incredible church has stood and survived on top of this mountain since the 500s. Its name has been derived from its architectural style and shape of Cross.

According to historical sources, on the same location in the early fourth century Saint Nino, Evangelist and Illuminator of Georgia credited with converting King Mirian III of Kartli to Christianity, erected a large wooden cross on the site of a pagan temple. The cross was reportedly able to work miracles and therefore drew pilgrims from all over the Caucasus.

b. *Mantle of St. Elijah.*

Elijah was a prophet and a wonder-worker in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Ahab (ninth century B.C.), according to the Biblical Books of Kings.

In Christianity the New Testament describes how both Jesus and John the Baptist are compared with Elijah and Elijah appears with Moses during the Transfiguration of Jesus. There also exists Georgian story about Jesus, St. George and Prophet Elijah.

He is venerated as a saint he denounced the power for apostasy and corruption, enlightened the Pagans while the Jews lived in heresy, miraculously created vast supplies of food from less sources, and raised the dead from the tomb.

First case, when we hear about Elijah's mantle is when he, cared for by angels in the wilderness, walked to Mount Horeb. This was the location where Moses had received the Ten Commandments seven centuries earlier. Similar to Moses, Ilia was addressed by God in a cave and while Ilia was expressing his disappointment about the sinfulness and apostasy of the Jews, God suddenly revealed himself to Ilia through fire, wind and earthquake on the mountain, and commanded Ilia to prophecy the death of King Ahab and anoint his successor. When Elijah saw the God, he covered his face with his mantle;

Second case when the Mantle of the Prophet is mentioned concerns the period, when knowing that his work was done, Elijah proceeded to the River Jordan with his disciple Elisha and parted the waters of the Jordan. They crossed the river, and then a fiery chariot took Elijah up into the heavens, with his mantle falling to the ground and Elisha taking possession of it while taking on Elijah's role as prophet and spiritual father of the Kingdom of Israel. The English phrase "taking up the mantle" derives from this biblical passage. (Nova Science Publishers, 2004–2014)

c. *Tomb of St. Monk Gabriel*

Gabriel born Goderdzi Urgebadze (1929–1995) was a Georgian Orthodox monk venerated for his dedicated monastic life and faithfulness. With many miracles credited to him, Gabriel's grave at Mtskheta has attracted an increasing number of pilgrims because of its miraculous power. The Georgian Orthodox Church officially canonized him as Holy Father St. Gabriel, Confessor and Fool for Christ on 20 December 2012.

d. *Holy Cross*

We would like to mention about the Cross, which was made by the St. Illuminator Nino from the wonder-worker tree and erected on the mountain which is located on the confluence of two rivers—Mtkvari and Araksi, the place decorated today by abovementioned Jvari Monastery. Holy Cross has been healing different diseases and making miracles. Besides, Holy Chrism used to flow from the Cross. After many attempts made by various enemies the Holy Cross has been robbed and miraculously survived and placed in the fabulous Svetitskhoveli Cathedral.

4 Tbilisi

- *The Grapevine Cross*

Also known as the **Georgian cross** or **Saint Nino's Cross**, is a major symbol of the Georgian Orthodox Church and dates from the fourth century A.D., when Christianity became the official religion in the kingdom of Iberia (Kartli).

It is recognizable by the slight drooping of its horizontal arms. Traditional accounts credit Saint Nino, woman from Cappadocia who preached Christianity in Iberia (corresponding to modern eastern Georgia) early in the fourth century, with this unusual shape of cross. The legend has it that she received the grapevine cross from the Virgin Mary and secured it weaved it by with her own hair. Nino came with this cross on her mission to Georgia. However, the familiar representation of the cross, with its irregular drooping arms, did not appear until the early modern era. Nowadays the Grapevine Cross is kept in Sioni Cathedral of Tbilisi. (Linderman, 2007)

- *Mokvi Gospel (13-14th cen.)*

MG preserved at the National Centre of Manuscripts, is an outstanding specimen of Georgian calligraphic art and miniature painted of the turn of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. Its especial artistic peculiarity lies in the miniatures done on sheet gold; The artistic appearance of the Mokvi Four Gospels, as a monument belonging to the Byzantine area, follows the iconographic models preserved in Georgian and Byzantine tradition.

The Gospel has come down to us in a rather damaged form; the leaves disintegrated from moisture clearly show the heavy plight of the painting.

- *The Khakhuli Icon (8–12th cen.)*

In the feudal epoch Georgian goldsmith art reached the peak of artistic mastery. This ancient art traversed a complicated path of evolution, every stage of which,

whether coinciding with a period of florescence, or one decline, set itself its own artistic tasks.

Having emerged in Georgian goldsmith's work during the Middle ages, the decorative trend mentioned above was powerfully manifested at the peak of feudal times, during the reigns of King David the Builder and his son Demetre I, when Georgia strove for the unification of the Transcaucasia.

It was the period when the repousse triptych of the Khakhuli Virgin was created.

The triptych, kept since 1952 in the treasury of the Georgian State Museum of Fine Art, derives its name from Khakhuli Monastery in Tao, one of Georgia's ancient provinces, where it was originally kept. In the twelfth century David the Builder (1089–1125) had the already famous Khakhuli icon, believed to be miracle-working, conveyed to the Monastery at Gelati, where a new repousse case was made for it. The lateral panels of the triptych encased in repousse silverwork were left in their original form as remarkable specimens of the tenth century toreutics, while the rest of the icon was adorned anew with gold, silver, cloisonné enamels and precious stones.

The central part of the triptych, the representation of the Khakhuli Virgin, was originally an icon of precious metal; the face and hands of the Virgin were in cloisonné enamel. The background repousseis now lost, while the face and hands, brilliant examples of Georgian cloisonné enamel, are today fixed in the central part of the icon.

The Khakhuli triptych is a brilliant example of artistic metalwork in feudal Georgia, fully conforming to the epoch in which the idea of its creation was conceived and materialized.

- ***The Ancha Icon of the Savior***

The Icon known in Georgia as **Anchiskhati**, is a medieval Georgian encaustic icon, traditionally considered to be the *Keramidion*, a "holy tile" imprinted with the face of Jesus Christ miraculously transferred by contact with the Image of Edessa (*Mandylion*). Dated to the sixth-seventh century, it was covered with a chased silver riza and partly repainted in the following centuries. The icon derives its name from the Georgian monastery of Ancha in what is now Turkey, Ancha icon of the Savior (Anchiskhati) was brought to Georgia from the Holy Land; It traveled a lot, was brought to Anchiskhati Church in Tbilisi, in 1664 (till 1938), Nowadays the icon is now kept at the National Art Museum of Georgia in Tbilisi. The **Ancha Icon of the Savior** has a long Miraculous history.

5 Comana

Historical village in Abkhazia, about ten km from Sokhumi has been visited and adored by the great Saints; St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople and an important Early Church Father performed the last Divine Service in 407 A.D.

Today in the center of the village one can see the small temple with St. John Crysostom's sarcophagus in it;

Here was cruelly killed Holy Martyr Basiliskos in 308 A.D.; Besides, there was found the head of beheaded St. John the Baptist;

6 Kakheti Region

- ***St. Nino's Tomb in Bodbe Monastery in Kakheti***

After completing her great deeds (converting population of Kartli to Christianity), St. Nino decided to have a rest in the village of Bodbe, and there, in accordance with God's providence, she was buried.

King Mirian, desiring to honor the Enlightener of Georgia, intended to transfer the relics of the Saint to Mtskheta, to the Cathedral of Svetitskhoveli, where the tunic of Christ was buried. However, 200 people could not even move her tomb from its place. Soon the King St. Mirian built a church on the burial place of the Saint. So he decided to leave her tomb there and to construct monastery making St. Nino's name eternal.

The tomb of St. Nino was revered so much that even Tatar-Mongols who had devastated the entire country did not dare to desecrate it, although they did some harm to the church itself.

- ***Holy Spring of St. Nino***

Beginning of a long path down to the Holy Spring from the Bodbe Monastery, the road turns into a narrow path down the mountain.

The Holy Spring was originally situated at the site of the Monastery, but disappeared during Soviet times when the Monastery was converted to a maternity hospital. After Georgia regained its independence and the Monastery once more reverted to its original use, the spring reappeared at the bottom of the hill, 2 km. further down. Because of its renowned healing powers, pilgrims from all over Georgia come to both bathe in the spring and drink/take home water from the holy spring.

- ***St. Joseph of Alaverdi***

He was of the thirteen Assyrian Fathers who came from Antioch in VI, founded Alaverdi Monastery where he is buried. Many miracles are being performed on his grave.

7 Inner Kartli, Kareli Municipality

- ***St. Stephen Urbnisi Monastery***

Urbnisi is a village in Shida Kartli region, Kareli municipality.

Situated on the Mtkvari river, it was an important city in ancient and early medieval Georgia.

One can find the tomb of Holy Hieromartyr Neophite of Urnisi, who descended from a line of Persian fire-worshippers and was stoned to death by enemy for being firm protector and follower of Christianity; (Machitadze, 2007)

- ***St. Piros of Breti***

Village Breti is located 9 km south from Kareli center, on the left bank of the river Prone. Father Piros, one of the Assyrian fathers lived and worked here in the sixth century. The monastery found by Father Piros was a significant place of education, literacy and arts and culture for years. The Church of Father Piros is located in the center of the village along with the Church of St. George, and remaining of the ancient village. The belfry was later built at the south corner of the church. At the moment the complex is a monastery for nuns. (Agency, 2012)

- ***Tomb of Anton of Martkopi in Norio, Gardabani Municipality***

In a several dozen kilometers from Tbilisi, a monastery founded by father Anton of Martkopi, one of the Thirteen Assyrian Fathers, carries the name of Martkopi “Gvtaeba Monastery” (VI c.) and is situated on the most beautiful slope of Mount Ialno.

He spent the last 15 years of his life there. The remains of an ancient foundation indicate that on the place of the contemporary cathedral there was an ancient cathedral of greater size, but for some reason in was destroyed. For a long time, a Divine-Made image brought by St. Anton of Martkopi from Edessa was stored at the monastery. But in 1395 it was lost during the Tamerlane invasion.

In the seventeenth century the ancient frescos were destroyed again and in 1848–1855 under the leadership of Ivane Arjevanidze, the monastery was restored.

The most sacred place of the monastery is the tomb of St. Anton of Martkopi, which has been preserved to this day and is considered miraculous. East of the monastery there is a tower where evidently resided the saint.

Famous dates of well-known people of Georgia are associated with the monastery. In this cathedral was married Alexander Chavchavadze, father of Ekaterine Dadiani—the last Queen of Samegrelo, and Nina Chavchavadze-Griboedova.

I. ***Tomb of St. Prophet Matata in Batumi, Achara***

Saint Matthias, the disciple who, according to the biblical Acts of the Apostles 1:21–26, was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot after Judas betrayed Jesus.

It is written that Matthias accompanied Jesus and the Apostles from the time of the Lord’s Baptism to his Ascension and that, when it became time to replace Judas, the Apostles cast lots between Matthias and another candidate, St. Joseph Barsabbas. St. Jerome and the early Christian writers Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea attest that Matthias was among the 72 disciples paired off and dispatched by Jesus. Soon after his election, Matthias received the Holy Spirit with the other Apostles (Acts 2:1–4). He is not mentioned again in the New Testament.

According to the general sources Matthias ministered in Judaea and then carried out missions to foreign places. Greek tradition states that he Christianized Cappadocia, a mountainous district now in central Turkey, later journeying to the region about the Caspian Sea, where he was martyred by crucifixion and, according to other legends, chopped apart. His symbol, related to his supposed martyrdom, is either a cross or a halberd. St. Helena, mother of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, reputedly transported Matthias' relics from Jerusalem to Rome.

II. *Tunic of the Virgin Mary in Zugdidi.*

One of the most precious relics of all Christian World is kept in the Historical Museum of Zugdidi—the Tunic of the Virgin Mary. After a long traveling from Palestine to Constantinople and further more. . . Finally miraculously discovered on Georgian land together with her wonder making Icon and her belt. The Holy Tunic has been performing various miracles, starting from 632 A.D. when it saved Constantinople from enemy's total destruction till this age, when in 2000 A.D. the Holy Savior appeared on its surface.

8 Conclusion

Religion, faith and spirituality are so intertwined that clear differentiations of all three aspects are necessary for a deeper understanding of the pilgrimage role as a part of religious tourism. One of the oldest forms of tourism is religious or as it is now known, faith-based tourism. The Bible speaks of ascending to Jerusalem at least three times a years for each of the Biblical harvest festivals. Likewise, the Islamic world is famous for the Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca. Religious tourism usually involves followers of particular faiths visiting locations that some people regard as holy sites.

Often tourism professionals have little or nothing to do with the faith-based community other than knowing their own religious leader(s). We consider that there is a lack in negotiation between the market and people demands. Tourism leaders should take time to meet with local religious leadership, ask them if they attract visitors for family events, religious retreats, or faith-based study. Often these people feel disconnected from the tourism community and have a great deal of both marketing knowledge and expertise to share. While working with these religious leaders, implementing some innovations already existed in digital world tourism, such as virtual or panorama tours etc. it will be easier to develop a joint business plan and be a focus for more tourists of different age categories. Besides, never forget to ask them how you as a travel or tourism professional can be of help to each one of them.

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