

## INTRODUCTION

Kartli / Iberia (a historical region in central-to-eastern Georgia) was christianized from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and thereafter the Holy Land and Jerusalem, the city of God, occupied an extraordinarily important role in the spiritual and intellectual life of the Georgian people. This phenomenon had a precondition. According to Georgian historical chronicles, St Nino Equal to the Apostles and the Enlightener of Georgia came to Kartli from Jerusalem. The same sources report and the archaeological material confirms that Christians already existed in 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries Kartli among the Jewish community exiled from Palestine.<sup>1</sup> In the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries Mtskheta, the capital of Kartli was transformed into second Jerusalem with its holy sites. The place names: Holy of Holies (Great Zion), Golgotha, Gethsemane, Bethlehem, Bethany were given to the places of Mtskheta and in its environs.<sup>2</sup> From the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century the liturgy in Georgia was conducted according to the Jerusalemite tradition.

As for the historical Palestine itself, one of the most desirable goals for the Georgian people was to be present in the Holy Land, and to establish churches and monasteries that would conduct services there in Georgian. Ordinary Georgian pilgrims, clergy, members of the royal family and aristocracy travelled to the Holy Land in order to venerate Biblical sites and to pray at Christian holy places.

The Holy Land became the significant centre for Georgian religious scholarship; here, in its monasteries literary works and precious manuscripts were created that represented a significant part of the intellectual treasure of the Georgian people in the medieval period.

The Georgian colony in Jerusalem had the longest uninterrupted history of existence among Georgian monastic centres abroad; a histo-

<sup>1</sup> MGALOBlishvili - GAGOSHIDZE, *The Jewish Diaspora*, pp. 46-58; TCHekhanovets, *The Caucasian Archaeology*, pp. 245-246.

<sup>2</sup> MGALOBlishvili, *New Jerusalem*, p. 37; Id., *How Mtskheta*, pp. 59-66.

ry that lasted over fourteen centuries, having begun in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and continued until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Georgian monastic colony and in general, the Georgian presence in the Holy Land, are attested by a variety of sources: epigraphic material, as well as the remains of the historical churches and monasteries, wall paintings, minor portable objects (icons, embroidery), Georgian and foreign written sources: the *Lives* of saints, pilgrims' accounts, whether Georgian or otherwise,<sup>3</sup> the colophons of manuscripts, etc.

### *Greek Written Sources*

Information about Georgian monks in the Holy Land in the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries is preserved in early Greek written sources, where Georgians are referred to as *Iberians*, *Lazs* or *Bessoi*.<sup>4</sup>

The most significant source concerning the early monastic life of Georgians in the Holy Land is the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, an eminent Palestinian church authority of Georgian provenance, written in Greek by his disciple John Rufus in the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The Greek text of this work has not survived, but the *Life* has been preserved to our day in a Syriac translation, the earliest manuscript of which is dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> The work also survives in a Georgian translation, which in its present form is not older than the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

Peter the Iberian, in his civil life Murvan (Maruan, alternatively Nabarnugios) was the son of the Iberian king Bosmarios (Buzmir). He was educated at Constantinople, where he had been sent as a hostage at the Byzantine court. When he grew up, he escaped to the Holy Land together with his compatriot, Mithridates. They became monks in Jerusalem and received new names after their place of origin: Murvan became Peter the Iberian, and Mithridates became Iovane the Laz. In the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century Peter the Iberian founded a monastery

<sup>3</sup> PERADZE, *An Account*, pp. 181–246.

<sup>4</sup> KEKELIDZE, *Who are the Bessoi?* pp. 84–98. According to early Greek sources, the *Bessoi* also appear on Mt Sinai. Their identification with the Georgians had been acknowledged by European scholars, see PATRICH, *Sabas*, pp. 251, 338, n. 15; MILIK, *La Topographie*, pp. 127–189; TCHÉKHANOVETS, *The Caucasian Archaeology*, p. 2. Another version suggests that the *Bessoi* were people of Thracian origin. According to Thomson, it is unclear whether the *Bessoi* were of Caucasian or Thracian origin, THOMSON, *The Georgian*, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> For the Syriac translation of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, see: HORN – PHENIX (eds.), *John Rufus*.

<sup>6</sup> For an edition of the Georgian version see: ABULADZE (ed.), *Monuments*, II, pp. 213–263; MARR, *The Life of Peter the Iberian*; For an adapted English translation see: LANG, *Lives*, pp. 81–93.

for Georgian monks on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, near the Tower of David:

He had completed the building of the holy church and the monastery, and collected a large amount of the brethren, many graceful figures, and gave them the legislation and appointed the abbot, the God-abiding and holy man. And it is called the monastery of the Georgians.<sup>7</sup>

Peter the Iberian and Iovane the Laz also founded a guest house for Georgian and Greek monks. According to the Georgian version of Peter's *Life*, Peter and Iovane were also involved in the foundation of a monastery near Jerusalem, at the river Jordan, in the desert. Later Peter the Iberian took abode in Gaza, where he became bishop of Maiuma. He is considered to have been an anti-Chalcedonian.<sup>8</sup> By a group of scholars Peter the Iberian is thought to have been the author of the famous early Christian philosophic treatise the *Corpus Areopagiticum*.<sup>9</sup>

Apparently, the *Life of Peter the Iberian* was employed by the prominent 6<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea who mentions monasteries belonging to the Iberians and the Lazs, among the monasteries that had been restored by Justinian in the area of Jerusalem (*De Aedificiis*, V. 9).<sup>10</sup>

Information about the Georgian monks in the St Sabas Lavra is provided by a "founder's *Typikon*" of this monastery, composed in late antiquity. According to this source, the non-Greek speaking monks in the Lavra, the Georgians among them, had been strictly forbidden:

... to celebrate a complete liturgy in their churches. Let them instead gather over there, and sing the canonical hours and selected verses from the *Psalms* in their own language, and read the *Apostle* and the *Gospel* as well, and then go to the Great Church and take part in the divine, undefiled, and life-giving sacraments together with the whole brotherhood.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> სრულყო შენებაჲ წმიდისა მის ეკლესიისა და მონასტრისა და შეკრიბნა მას შინა მმანი მრავალნი, ყოველნივე მოღუაწენი, და განუჩინა მათ წესი და კანონი და დაუდგინა მათ წინამძღურად კაცი ღმერთშემოსილი და წმიდაჲ. და ჰრქჳან მონასტერსა მას ქართველთა მონასტერი, ABULADZE (ed.), *Monuments*, II, p. 231.

<sup>8</sup> HORN, *Asceticism*; BITTON-ASHKELONY – KOFSKY (eds.), *Christian Gaza*; ID., *The Monastic School*; PERRONE, *Monasticism*, p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> HONIGMANN, *Pierre l'Ibérien*; NUTSUBUDZE, *Peter the Iberian*; ENUKASHVILI (ed.), *Corpus Areopagiticum*; VAN ESBROECK, *Peter the Iberian*, pp. 217–227; ID., *La triple preface*, pp. 167–186; LOURIE, *Peter the Iberian*, pp. 143–212.

<sup>10</sup> DEVING (trans.), *Procopius*; TCHEKHANOVETS, *The Caucasian Archaeology*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> ... λειτουργίαν τελείαν ποιεῖν ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις αὐτῶν, ἀλλὰ συναθροισομένους ἐν αὐταῖς ψάλλειν τὰς ὥρας καὶ τὰ τυπικά, ἀναγινώσκειν δὲ τὸν Ἀπόστολον καὶ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἰσερχεσθαι εἰς τὴν μεγάλην ἐκκλησίαν καὶ μεταλαμβάνειν μετὰ

The hagiographical work *Vita Theodosii* written by Theodore of Petra in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, mentions Georgians in the following context: in the monastery established by Theodosius the Cenobiarch (423–529), in each of Armenians' and Bessoi's churches the daily liturgy, including the Scripture reading and the recitation of *Psalms* and prayers, was held in their own languages, but for the *proskomedía* all gathered in the main church for a common ceremony with the Greek speakers.<sup>12</sup>

The Bessoi monks are mentioned in the *Life of St Sabas* by Cyril of Scythopolis (525–559). According to the *Life*, the Bessoi took an active part in the street clashes provoked in Jerusalem by the edict of Justinian in the year 543. They fought on the side of the Orthodox, together with the Sabaite monks.<sup>13</sup>

### *Georgian Written Sources*

Georgian written sources occur from a later period and contain important information concerning the Georgian pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

According to the *Life of David Garejeli*, David, an ascetic monk of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and the founder of a monastic centre in eastern Georgia, the Gareja Lavra, went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land with a group of his disciples. He did not enter Jerusalem considering himself unworthy to visit the Holy City. David took three small stones – “*the whole grace of Jerusalem*” and turned back to Gareja. Later two stones were taken back to Jerusalem, and the third one remained in the Gareja monastery.<sup>14</sup>

Georgian contact to the monastery of St Sabas is attested in the *Life* of Grigol Khandzteli (ca. 759–861) a prominent Georgian ecclesiastic and founder of numerous monastic communities in Tao-Klarjeti. As mentioned in the *Life*, Grigol asked a man travelling to Jerusa-

πάσης τῆς ἀδελφότητος τῶν θείων καὶ ἀχράντων καὶ ζωοποιῶν μυστηρίων, *Sinai gr.* 1096 (12<sup>th</sup> c.), fol. 145–147; English translation: THOMAS – CONSTANTINIDES HERO (eds.), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation*, p. 1316. Some scholars suggest that the information about Georgians was added later; initially the Armenians were mentioned instead of the Georgians, TCHEKHANOVETS, *The Caucasian Archaeology*, p. 12. The younger liturgical Typikon of St Sabas Lavra survives only in late manuscripts dated to the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. This *Typicon* is translated into Georgian, for the edition see: KOCHLAMAZASHVILI – GIUNASHVILI (eds.), *Typicon*, reviewed by CHRONZ, *Typicon des Šio-Mgvimeklosters*, pp. 296–300.

<sup>12</sup> USENER (ed.), *Der heilige Theodosios*; TCHEKHANOVETS, *The Caucasian Archaeology*, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> SCHWARTZ (ed.), *Kyrillos*; TCHEKHANOVETS, *The Caucasian Archaeology*, p. 32.

<sup>14</sup> The *Life of St David Garejeli* was composed by the Catholicos of Georgia, Arsen II in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. For the edition of the Georgian text see: ABULADZE (ed.), *Monuments*, I, pp. 229–240; for the adapted English translation: LANG, *Lives*, pp. 81–93; see also MARTIN-HISARD, *Les Treize saints*.

lem to bring him the *Ordo* of St Sabas and he made use of it alongside the *Ordines* of other significant monasteries while laying down the regulations for his own church and monastery.<sup>15</sup>

As reported in the *Life* of Hilarion the Iberian († 822), a Georgian monk from the Kakheti region,<sup>16</sup> he went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with his companions. They visited Mount Tabor, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, the Jordan River and the Lavra of St Sabas.

Georgian sources also contain important information concerning building activities conducted by the Georgians in the Holy Land. These are: the *Life of Prokhore*, the founder of the Holy Cross monastery in Jerusalem, the *Life of George the Hagiorite*, and the colophons of manuscripts copied in the Holy Land.<sup>17</sup>

### *Inscriptions*

The Holy Land has yielded up to 100 Georgian inscriptions dating to the period between the 5<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The majority of the inscriptions are preserved in various churches and monasteries of Jerusalem: in the Holy Cross monastery, in the church of the Resurrection, the churches of St Nicholas, and St Thekla in the Katamon district of Jerusalem. Some Georgian inscriptions are to be found in Bethlehem, on the columns of the Holy Nativity Church, in Nazareth, and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Most of the epigraphic inscriptions are in the form of graffiti written by pilgrims, some of them containing important information of an historical character. The earliest inscriptions dating to the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, are now kept in the Franciscan church of the Annunciation in Nazareth.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from the pilgrims' graffiti, some building and official ecclesiastical inscriptions have been preserved, notably four mosaic inscriptions from the church of St Theodore excavated in B'ir el-Qutt, in the vicinity of Bethlehem near Shepherds Field.<sup>20</sup> Two Georgian inscriptions mention Maruan (Peter the Iberian) and his family members: his

<sup>15</sup> ABULADZE (ed.), *Monuments*, I, p. 264; GALADZA, *Liturgy*, p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> For the edition of the text see: ABULADZE (ed.), *Monuments*, II, pp. 9–37; see also, PEETERS, *St Hilarion*; MARTIN-HISARD, *La pérégrination*; KLDIASHVILI, *Gareja*; TCHEKHANOVETS, *The Caucasian Archaeology*, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> On this topic see below, pp. 29–32.

<sup>18</sup> GAGOSHIDZE, *Georgian Inscriptions*, p. 71; TCHEKHANOVETS – PATARIDZE, *Revisiting the Georgian Inscriptions*, pp. 395–422; TCHEKHANOVETS, *Caucasian Archaeology*, pp. 136–200.

<sup>19</sup> ALEKSIDZE, *Louvre*, pp. 13–25; TCHEKHANOVETS, *Caucasian Archaeology*, pp. 193–195.

<sup>20</sup> Excavations at B'ir al-Qutt had been conducted by the Italian archaeologist Virgilio Corbo in the 1950s; see: CORBO, *Gli scavi*, pp. 279–284; TARKHNISHVILI, *A Newly Discovered*, pp. 12–17; KEKELIDZE, *Ancient Georgian Monastery*, pp. 72–80; TCHEKHANOVETS, *Caucasian Archaeology*, pp. 137–149.

father and grandfather. They have been attributed to the 430s.<sup>21</sup> The third inscription that mentions Anton Abba and Iosia, presumably belonged to the benefactors of the mosaic pavement and can be dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the period of the restoration of the monastery.<sup>22</sup> The fourth mosaic inscription cannot be read, for only a few Greek or Latin letters have been preserved.

A notable Georgian inscription<sup>23</sup> was found in the village Umm Leisun near Jerusalem; the *mtavruli* inscription on the gravestone of Iovane Kartveli (the *Georgian*), bishop of Purtavi, presumably dates to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> or the early 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup>

The Holy Land also preserves Georgian inscriptions on the wall paintings of the Holy Cross monastery in Jerusalem. The wall paintings of various chronological periods are significant due to their highly artistic value, as well as for the depiction of the history of the Georgian colonies in the monasteries of Jerusalem; the frescos represent legends of the Wood of the Holy Cross and the foundation of the Holy Cross monastery, and also Georgian historical figures: members of royal and noble families, famous clergymen with Georgian and Georgian-Greek explanatory inscriptions.<sup>25</sup> They contain important information about the history of the monastery. A Georgian-Greek building inscription dated to 1642 is preserved above the entrance gate and contains information about the restoration work and its benefactors: Nikiphore Cholokashvili, the abbot of the Holy Cross monastery in Jerusalem and Levan Dadiani, the governor of Megrelia who had financed the renovations.

Georgian inscriptions on embroidery also contain significant facts about contacts maintained by Georgian historical figures with the Holy Land. They mention Georgian royals and dukes, their family members, high priests and other clergymen who had commissioned these embroidered textiles. An embroidered scene of the Descent

<sup>21</sup> CORBO – TARKHNIHVILI, *Inscrizioni Georgiane*, pp. 181–188; TSERETELI, *Ancient Georgian Inscriptions*; KHURTSILAVA, *The Inscriptions*, pp. 10–26.

<sup>22</sup> TSERETELI, *Ancient Georgian Inscriptions*. Tchekhanovets presumes that the monastery was built in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by the bishop Anton mentioned in the third mosaic inscription; she suggests that all inscriptions were executed at the same time, during the construction of the monastery in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. In her opinion, the inscriptions mentioning Peter the Iberian and his family members were dedicated to them *in memoriam*, TCHEKHANOVETS, *Caucasian Archaeology*, pp. 147–149.

<sup>23</sup> The monastery at Umm Leisun was excavated in 2002 by Israeli archaeologists; see: SELIGMAN, *Excavations*, pp. 129–146; M GALOBLISHVILI, *An Unknown Georgian Monastery*, pp. 111–122.

<sup>24</sup> The toponym “Purtavi” has been interpreted differently by scholars; see: GAGOSHIDZE, *The Georgian Inscription*, pp. 123–127; M GALOBLISHVILI, *An Unknown Georgian Monastery*, pp. 111–122; TCHEKHANOVETS, *Caucasian Archaeology*, pp. 150–156.

<sup>25</sup> VIRSALADZE, *A Painting*; DIBEULIDZE – JANJALIA, *Wall Paintings*, pp. 50–51.

from the Cross dated to 1743, mentions Prince Mamuka the son of George VI, king of Imereti, his wife Darejan Dadiani and their offspring.<sup>26</sup>

The Greek inscriptions in the Holy Land mentioning Georgians are also noteworthy. Greek epigraphic monuments mentioned Georgians as Iberians, Lazs or Bessoi.<sup>27</sup> There are two epitaphs found in Jerusalem: an epitaph of Thekla the Bessian, the hegumeness of a monastery, and an epitaph of the deacons of the church of the Resurrection, who are mentioned as Iberians.<sup>28</sup>

### *Churches and Monasteries*

Georgian clergy lived and worked in the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic environment of the monastic centres of the Holy Land, such as the St Sabas monastery, the St Chariton Lavra (Palavra / Palaia Lavra). Georgian presence was attested in the most important churches of Jerusalem: at Golgotha and the Church of the Resurrection. Believers of every Christian country strived to secure their place in these religious centres and to establish themselves so as to pursue their spiritual activities. Many Georgian manuscripts were copied and presented to these monasteries, bearing witness to the active involvement of the Georgian community into the religious life of the Holy Land. According to Georgian and foreign sources, during the reign of king George V the Illustrious in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Georgians had the privilege of holding the keys to the Edicule of the Church of the Resurrection. This privilege lasted until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. A Georgian presence can be traced in Gethsemane from the 9<sup>th</sup> century at the Basilica of the Dormition of the Mother of God, where the Georgians apparently had their own altar and enjoyed certain advantages. Several manuscripts are known to have been copied there.<sup>29</sup>

There are up to twenty attested monasteries that probably belonged to Georgians:<sup>30</sup> the monastery of St Theodore at B'ir el-Qutt near Bethlehem and the monastery at Umm Leisun near Jerusalem where the earliest Georgian inscriptions had been preserved; the monasteries in the old part of Jerusalem – St Thekla, St George, St Nicholas, St Theodore and others presumably remained in the possession of the Georgian community during the 13<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The most

<sup>26</sup> TSERADZE, *A Georgian Embroidery*, pp. 97–103.

<sup>27</sup> TCHEKHANOVETS, *Caucasian Archaeology*, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 186–189.

<sup>29</sup> About this issue see below, pp. 40, 55, etc.

<sup>30</sup> For a list of the monasteries connected with Georgian activities in the Holy Land see: MGALOBlishvili (ed.), *Georgians in the Holy Land*, pp. 170–172. JAPARIDZE, *Georgian Monasteries*, pp. 83–121; In this work the list is mostly based on Arabic sources.

outstanding place among them undoubtedly belonged to the Holy Cross monastery in Jerusalem. It was built by a Georgian ecclesiastic George-Phokhore in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and was in the possession of the Georgians during eight centuries. Today, the monastery is under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Some of the remains of the Georgian churches were discovered by means of archaeological excavations, others mentioned in written sources have not been located.

Colophons of Jerusalem manuscripts preserve information about establishment and history of the Georgian monasteries in the Holy Land; for example, the research conducted on the colophons and notes of three Jerusalem manuscripts: *Jer. georg.* 50 (11 c.),<sup>31</sup> *Jer. georg.* 42 (11 c.) and *Jer. georg.* 28 (12<sup>th</sup> c.) unfolded a remarkable picture of establishing the monastery of Shehani: the priest of the Holy Cross monastery Gabriel Tphileli, who was a contemporary of George-Phokhore, the builder of the Holy Cross monastery, left Jerusalem together with other monks and travelled to Jordan, where he established a monastery in the vicinity of Arnon, on Mt Shihan (Jebel Shihan) – “*desert of Shehani*” (შეჰანის უდაბნო), as mentioned in the colophons. The brethren became engaged in literary activities with the help of the clergy of the Holy Cross monastery, for their main concern was to enrich the newly founded monastery with manuscripts. Iovane, the scribe of the manuscript *Jer. georg.* 50, who copied it at the monastery of Shehani, wrote in his extensive colophon that he had dared to take on this task, because his monastery was “*newly built and in need of books*” (რომელი ახალშენი და გლობაკი იყო წიგნითა).<sup>32</sup> The monastery presumably existed until the early 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup>

The monastery of Devtubani (a place name of Georgian origin, which means “*Giants’ area*”) is mentioned in two manuscripts: *Jer. georg.* 62 (*Menaion*, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> cc.) and *Jer. georg.* 65 (*Parakletike*, 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> cc.). According to the colophons, a number of Georgian manuscripts were kept in this monastery. The colophons provide evidence that the manuscripts of this monastery were also in use in other monasteries of the Holy Land, namely, in the monastery of the Holy Cross and Golgotha. According to the 14<sup>th</sup> century *agape* of the *Great Synaxarion* (*Jer. georg.* 24+25), in which Marina of Devtubani is mentioned, it appears that the Devtubani monastery was a nunnery. Unfortunately,

<sup>31</sup> Cod. *Jer. georg.* 50 was mistakenly attributed by Blake to the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> cc., BLAKE, *Catalogue* (1924)<sup>34</sup>, p. 392. Metreveli’s complex study of the sources relating to the monastery of Shehani and its connection with the Holy Cross monastery confirm that the manuscript is significantly earlier.

<sup>32</sup> METREVELI, *Desert of Shehani*, p. 240.

<sup>33</sup> *Ib.*, p. 246.



the colophons do not provide information for precise location of the monastery.<sup>34</sup>

The Tkebnari monastery, mentioned in the colophon of *Jer. georg.* 132 (the *Menaion*, 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> cc.) has also not been located. The colophon reports that the scribe of the manuscript had donated the *Menaion* to the Tkebnari monastery (f. 343r-v). The Georgian origin of the place-name indicates that the monastery was Georgian.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Monastery of the Holy Cross*

As mentioned above, the Georgian monastery of the Holy Cross was certainly the most outstanding stronghold of the Georgian colony and the most significant among the Georgian churches and monasteries in the Holy Land. Legend has it, that it was built on the sacred site of the tree whose wood was used for the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified.

There are different versions of the foundation of the monastery and the identity of the founders. According to Greek sources, the Holy Cross monastery was built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by the mother of Emperor Constantine I, Empress Helena; another version implies that the monastery was built later, during the reign of Justinian I (527-565) in the 6<sup>th</sup> century or Emperor Heraclius (610-641) in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> Some Georgian sources narrate that the site for the monastery was obtained by the Georgian king Mirian (4<sup>th</sup> c.), who built the first church there. Other Georgian sources name king Vakhtang Gorgasali as the founder of the monastery in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> Hard information from Georgian sources consists of the renovation of the Holy Cross monastery by the Georgian monk Prokhore (985-1066) in the 1050s.<sup>38</sup>

According to the *Life of Prokhore*,<sup>39</sup> Prokhore's civil name was George Shavsheli after the region of Tao-Klarjeti. Around 1010-1015 Prokhore came to the Holy Land, where he had spent some years in the Lavra of St Sabas. Later he went to Jerusalem and established the

<sup>34</sup> TSERADZE, *Devtabani*, pp. 179-182.

<sup>35</sup> Id., *The Georgian Toponym*, pp. 282-285.

<sup>36</sup> TZAFERIS, *The Monastery*, pp. 7, 8.

<sup>37</sup> On the legends of the foundation of the Holy Cross monastery preserved in Georgian and foreign sources see: MENABDE, *Seats*, II, pp. 70-71; MGALOBlishvili, *The Monastery*, p. 31; van Esbroeck, *Le couvent*, pp. 139-170.

<sup>38</sup> MGALOBlishvili, *The Monastery*, p. 32. The tradition of the identity of the site of the Holy Cross monastery with that of the tree that was used as wood for the True Cross, was reflected in 12<sup>th</sup> c. notes of Scandinavian and Russian pilgrims, as well as in Greek manuscripts and in later Georgian sources, see PERADZE, *An Account*, pp. 181-246; MGALOBlishvili, *The Monastery*, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> The *Life* was composed in Jerusalem at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in the circle of the monks of the monastery of the Holy Cross; for an edition see GABIDZASHVILI (ed.), *Monuments*, IV, pp. 345-346.

Holy Cross monastery. It was constructed in 1038–1056/7 over the remains of an earlier domed basilica from the 4th–5th centuries which was destroyed after the Arab conquests of Palestine.<sup>40</sup> He gathered together about eighty ascetic brothers, who had been inspired by Prokhore's virtues. He set out the rules and canons similar to those of St Sabas' monastery and built a hostel for pilgrims afterwards.

In the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century the famous Georgian scholar and translator George the Hagiorite arrived in Jerusalem in order to deliver donations offered by the Georgian king Bagrat IV (1027–1072) and his mother Mariam. George and his companion had visited many monasteries and brought the donations for the poor of Jerusalem. This was the starting point of the systematic support of the Georgian ecclesiastical institutions of the Palestine that became a priority for the kings of the Bagrationi royal family for centuries to come.

According to the Life of George the Hagiorite, during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem he met Prokhore who at the time was building the monastery of the Holy Cross commissioned by king Bagrat, and at the same time attempting to collect manuscripts for its library.

In the period after Prokhore, the conditions of the Georgians at the Holy Cross monastery, and in the Holy Land in general, became hazardous. Since the 1070/80s the Turk-Seljuks had been gaining power in the Middle East; they conquered the lands and subjugated significant Christian centres in Jerusalem, Antioch, Edessa. Entrenched circumstances in Palestine forced western European Christian countries to consolidate their military forces in order to send Crusaders to Asia Minor. After much fighting, the Crusaders managed to oust the Muslims from some of the most important centres of the Christian East, among them Jerusalem won back in 1099. The western Europeans created a Crusader stronghold in the Middle East in Jerusalem, where they established the Kingdom of Jerusalem; the churches and monasteries of the city and its environs came under Crusader control. The monastery of the Holy Cross stayed outside their rule. It stood half ruined by the Turk-Seljuks, but it had been restored in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, an act made possible as a result of the strengthening of the political power of the kingdom of Georgia and its influence worldwide.

The determined battles won by king David the Builder of Georgia made him an ally and a partner of the Crusaders. Georgian manuscripts created at that time testify the *agape*, witnessing good relationships between Georgians and Crusader.<sup>41</sup> After the 1180s, the retaliation against the Crusaders of the Muslim military and political leader

<sup>40</sup> DJAPARIDZE, *Georgian Monasteries*, p. 294.

<sup>41</sup> Concerning this issue see below, pp. 450–451.