

Caucasian Albania



An International Handbook

Edited by
Jost Gippert and Jasmine Dum-Tragut

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15A The Gate of Ganja

The earthquake that befell Ganja/Gandzak in 1139 (cf. Chapter 15 of this Handbook, 1.2 above) affected not only the buildings of the city but also the defence preparedness of its inhabitants and its rulers. As a result, the city was captured soon afterwards by the contemporary king of Georgia, Demetrius (r. 1125–54 and 1155–56), who took with him as a trophy the iron gate of the city.¹ This fact is clearly mentioned in the report of the local historiographer, Kirakos Gandzaketsi, who writes:²

In those days, there suddenly was mist and fog, and mountain and plain were covered allover, and there was a terrible earthquake, and the capital, Gandzak, was destroyed. And by the grace of God, the newly ordained Catholicos survived, but the great teacher Grigor died in the earthquake, along with many other men, women and children, of uncountable number, who were killed by buildings falling on them. And the king of the Georgians, Demetrius, came and pillaged everything, and he took the gate of the city to his country.

The iron gate that Demetrius removed to Georgia still exists today.³ It is attached to the inner wall of a small barbican that belongs to the monastery complex of Gelati near Kutaisi in Imereti (see Figures 1 and 2). That this is the gate of Ganja and not, as popular belief used to assume, a gate from Derbent brought to Gelati by Demetrius' father, king David the Builder (r. 1089–1125),⁴

1 For a preliminary account of these events cf. Gippert and Tandashvili (2002).

2 Kirakos, ch. 10 (Melik-Ohanjanyan 1961: 200, ll. 12–20): *Ընդ առկրան ընդ այնոսիկ եղև յանկարծակի մէկ և մառախուղ, և լցալ առհասարակ լեռուն և դաշտ, և եղև չարժ ահագին, և կործանեցալ մայրաքաղաքն Գանձակ: Եւ շնորհօքն աստուծոյ ապրեալ եղև նորրինծայ կաթողիկոսն, բայց մեռաւ ի չարժմանէն մեծ վարդապետն Գրիգոր՝ հանդերձ ալ բազմութեամբ արանց և կանանց և մանկոց, որոց ոչ գոյ թիւ, զոր սպանին յինասծքն՝ անկեալ ի վերայ: Եւ եկն թագաւորն Վրաց Դեմետրէ և աւար էառ զամենայն ինչսն, տարաւ և զդրունս քաղաքին յիւր աշխարհն*: The same event is first mentioned in the initial chapter of Kirakos' *History* under the year 588 (ՇՁԸ); here, Demetrius (I) is correctly styled the father of David (V) and George (III): *Դեմետրէ՝ հայրն Դավիթ և Գիորգեայ*: (Melik-Ohanjanyan 1961: 117, ll. 4–8). In the account of the earthquake in Mkhitar Gosh's *Chronicle* (Manandyan and Acharyan 2014b: 607; cf. Dowsett 1958: 481–483), the gate is not mentioned.

3 Or, at least, one of its two wings; for the question of the lost second wing cf. Frähn (1836: 534).

4 This belief is clearly expressed in the *Description of Egrisi, or Abkhazia, or Imereti* by Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi, part of his *Geographic Description of Georgia*, which was completed by 1750; he writes: “A wall gate hangs in its portal, of iron, brought by the Builder from Derbent” (Հայտնայն Ֆեդուկոս Կարի ծէլես միսկա, Դայնիսա, զձմաշնեղբելոս մոլծանիւ զարդանցիւմ: Qaukhchishvili 1973: 754, ll. 2–3). It spread further via – among others – the travel reports by Jean François Gamba (1826: 273–274), Bernard Rottiers (1829: 118), and Frédéric Dubois de Montpéreux (1839: 176–177),



Fig. 1: The barbican of Gelati Monastery.

is clearly proven by the Arabic inscription it bears, which states that it was commissioned by Emir Shawur b. al-Fadl⁵ in the year 455 AH (~ 1063 CE); it reads:⁶

who wrote: “David III, le réparateur par excellence, l’avait fait construire pour y placer, comme trophée de ses victoires, les fameuses portes de fer, dites de Derbend”.

⁵ On Emir Abu’l Aswar Shawur I b. Fadl (Duin/Dvin, 1022–49; Ganja, 1049–67) see Chapter 15 of this Handbook (Dorfmann-Lazarev), 2.2.

⁶ The first reliable account of the inscription was provided, together with the correct identification of the Emir (“Emir von Towin”), in 1835 by Christian Martin Frähn (1836: 538–543) who relied upon a historiographer named Shahri Zade (متن التاريخ لابن عبد العليم محمد سعيد الشهير). Accordingly, Frähn was also the first to call the provenance from Derbent (شهري زاده).

In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate! This gate was ordered to be produced by our lord, the commander (and) most splendid master Šawur b. al-Faḍl – may God prolong his suzerainty – by the hand of the administrator Abi al-Farāğ Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh – may God grant him longlasting fortune. It was manufactured by Ibrāhīm b. ‘Uṭmān b. Mal-lākūn, the blacksmith, in the year 455.

The floor of the same barbican is partly covered by a large stone slab with a much worn inscription in Old Georgian (*asomtavruli*) characters (see Fig. 3); it reads:⁷

Christ! This is my resting place for eternity. It pleases me; here I shall dwell.

The content of the inscription, which is a rendering of Psalm 131.14 [132.14],⁸ clearly suggests that this is the epitaph of a person that was buried underneath. According to popular belief again, this was King David the Builder himself, during whose reign the monastery was founded.⁹ This belief, too, was already widespread in the 19th century.¹⁰ The most detailed information available on the association of the slab with king David is Mikhail Sabinin’s note of 1882 according to which the relics of the king were removed from beneath the slab, being “unearthed with

into question, thus correcting a previous treatment of his own (Frähn 1828: 20–23); instead, he proposed hesitatingly, “sollte man vielleicht an Berdaa, die alte Hauptstadt von Arran und Karabagh, zu denken haben...? Sie war im Besitze unseres Emirs gewesen und wurde hundert Jahre hernach von König David erobert” (1836: 545). Hesitatingly as well, Dubois de Montpéreux proposed Ani as the place of origin: “Ces portes de fer ne seraient-elles point celles d’Ani, dont David I^{er} fit la conquête en 1124?” (1839: 181). – Cf. <https://armazi.uni-frankfurt.de/gelati/dmsas/dmarabz.htm#dmarab6> for a visualisation of the three sections of the inscription.

7 Cf. <https://armazi.uni-frankfurt.de/gelati/dmsas/dmsas.htm#dmsas> for a visualisation of the inscription. A large image of the inscription can be found in Derlemenko and Gigilashvili (1982: pl. 21), a scholarly edition in Silogava (1980: 130–140, no. 162 with pl. 130).

8 The biblical content was correctly identified by Dubois de Montpéreux (1839: 182: “tirée de la Sainte-Ecriture”), who translated: “C’est ici le lieu de mon repos; il me plaît; j’y demeurerai”.

9 The foundation is dealt with at large in the king’s Vita as contained in the Georgian chronicle *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (Qaukhchishvili 1955: 329–331; cf. also Shanidze 1992: 174–176 and Metreveli 2008: 312–314). Interestingly enough, the name of the monastery is mentioned in only one of the manuscripts of the Vita (ms. “C”, i.e. the so-called Chalashvili manuscript of the 16th century, today ms. Q 207 of the K. Kekelidze National Centre for Manuscripts, Tbilisi). As the variants *g(a)enati* and *g(a)enatli* occurring in other contexts show, *gelati* reflects Greek γενέθλιος ‘belonging to the birth’, in reference to the Nativity of the Virgin to which the Cathedral in Gelati is devoted.

10 It is expressed in, among other sources, the accounts of Rottiers (“le tombeau de David Ier (Bagration), enterré à côté de la porte de fer de Derbent”; 1828: 118) and Marie Félicité Brosset (“celle qui passe pour renfermer les restes de David-le-Réparateur, est couverte d’une pierre de grande dimension, où est tracée en grandes lettres cette phrase...”; 1851: 39).



Fig. 2: The Gate of Ganja in the barbican.

great respect and deposited under the table of the convent church of Gaenati when the holy church had canonised king David and had appointed 26 January as his holy day”.¹¹ Sabinin’s information remains doubtful, however, if we consider

¹¹ იქვეს წმიდა ეკკლესიამ შერიცხა ღვით მეფე წმიდათა შორის და დააწესა ღვთისწაული კვ. იანვარსა, ღიდის მოწიწებით იქმნა აღმოსუცნებულ წმიდა ნაწილნი მისნი და დაკრძალულ გაენათის საკრებო ეკკლესიის ტრაპეზსა ქუცზე (Sabinin 1882: 512 n. 1).

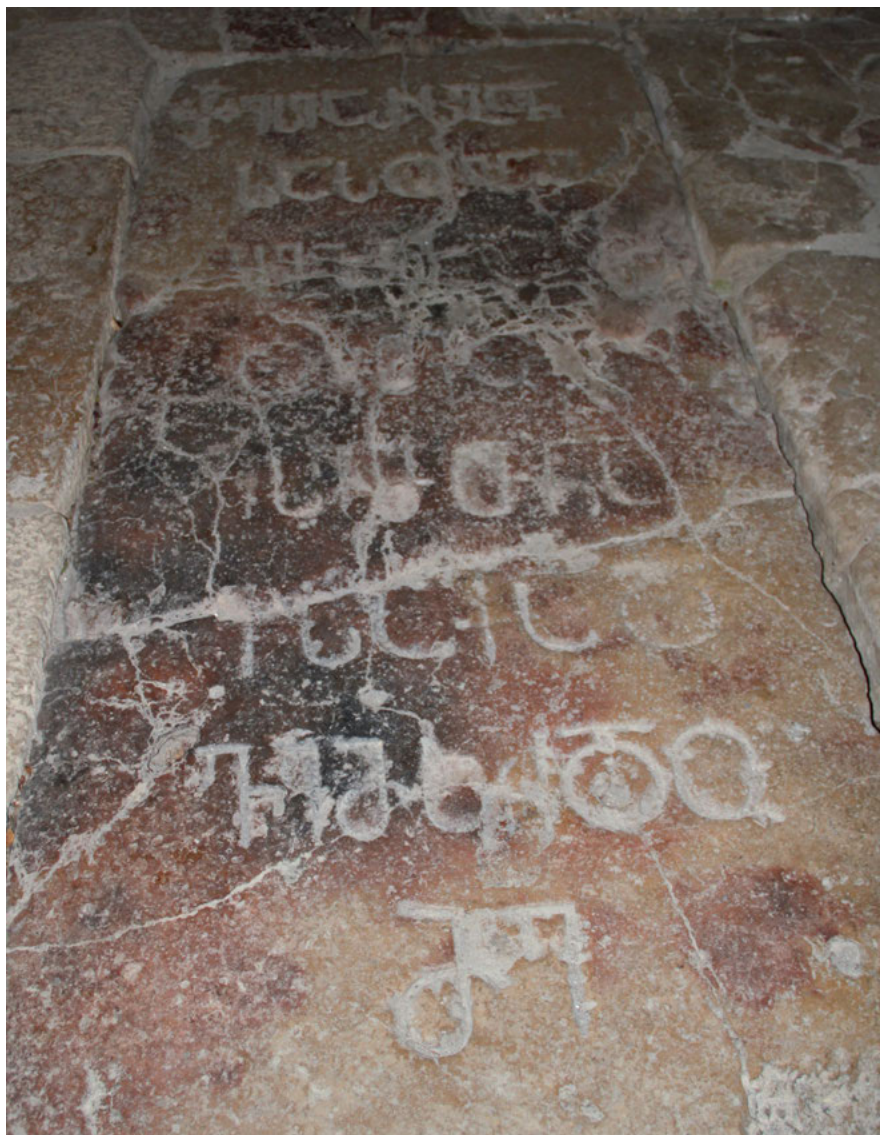


Fig. 3: The Georgian epitaph in the barbican.

the quaint “reading” of the inscription he provides, restoring it as a “quatrain in khutsuri letters which has been erased by people walking over it without care”.¹²

We must further note that according to the Georgian tradition, there were also other royals buried in Gelati. This is indicated, among others, by Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi who in his *Description of Egrisi, or Abkhazia, or Imereti* of 1750 lists, besides the Builder, his grandson King George (III, r. 1156–1184), Queen Tamar (r. 1184–1213), King Lasha (Giorgi IV, r. 1213–1223), Queen Rusudan (1223–1245), King David (VI Narin, r. 1245–1293), and his eponymous cousin (King David VII Ulu, r. 1247–1270).¹³ Given that there is no indication whatsoever in David the Builder’s *Vita* or any other reliable source relating to him which might be taken as a proof that he was buried in Gelati and that the present epitaph is his,¹⁴ including the so-called “Testament” of the king which is unlikely to be authentic,¹⁵ the case of an independent “oral tradition” on David being buried under the slab that would have persisted since the 12th century is rather weak.

In view of all this, it seems more likely that the stone slab covers the grave of Demetrius, the son of David the Builder and conqueror of Ganja. Several observations speak in favour of this assumption. First, the barbican contains, as we have seen, the iron gate of Ganja which Demetrius brought to Georgia.¹⁶ Second, it was Demetrius, not David, under whose reign the construction of the church was accomplished and the monastery was consecrated in 1130 CE; should David

¹² The quatrain reads: “When I hosted the seven kings in Načarmagevi, I routed Turks, Persians, Arabs out of the boundaries of my kingdom. I poured the fish over from the rivers of this side to the rivers of the other side (this means rulership extending between both seas). Having accomplished all this, I (now) cross my hands over my heart” (ოდეშჲ ნაჭარმაგევს შუდთა მეფეთა მასპინძელ ვექჲენ, თურქნი, სპარსნი, არაბნი საზღუართაგან სამეფოთა ჩემისაგან ვაოტე. გადავასხე თევზნი მდინარეთაგან ამერისათა, მდინარეთა იმერისათა (რომელიც ნიშნავს ორთა ზღვსა მფლობელიბასა). ყოველი ესე აღუასრულე გულ ზელ ვიკრიფე აღმსრულებელ; Sabinin 1882: 512 n. 1). Cf. Megreliḏzé (1967: 125–128) as to the provenance of this text.

¹³ ამას შინა დაფლულ არიან აღმაშენებელი, გიორგი, თამარ, ლაშა, რუსუდან, დავით, დავით და სხუანიცა (Qaukhchishvili 1973: 574, ll. 5–7). Accordingly, in his report of a visit to Gelati on 13 August 1772, Johann Anton Güldenstädt primarily mentions Queen Tamar as being buried there: “Hier soll die Zaarin Taman [sic!] und verschiedene Zaaren begraben liegen” (1787: 303). – The two cousins named David ruled simultaneously over West and East Georgia.

¹⁴ Cf. Gabidzashvili (1968: 271–284) for a survey of the hagiographical sources available on King David.

¹⁵ Cf. Enukidze, Silogava and Shoshiashvili (1984: 60–61) on this document which is only attested in a few 19th-century copies and probably a late forgery.

¹⁶ When M. F. Brosset visited the site in 1848, there were still remnants of a wall inscription in Georgian visible in the barbican, which he made out as “Le roi Dimitri a saccagé l’Aran et cette porte, en l’année 13^e de son règne, ..4. depuis le commencement du monde” (Brosset 1851: 254). The date after creation may have been indicated there in both the Byzantine (*annus mundi*) and the Georgian style, 1139 CE yielding 6647 and 6743, resp. The inscription is lost today.

the Builder ('1125) have been buried there before the consecration? Third, the chronicle of the time of King Lasha (George IV), part of the Georgian chronicle *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, preserves the information that Demetrius was transported to Gelati and buried there after having died at another place.¹⁷

King Demet're passed away in the stronghold of Belt'i¹⁸ and was brought to Gelati, to the new monastery he himself had consecrated. The chronicon was 374 (i.e. 1154 CE).

In this light, the fact that Vakhushti Bagrationi omits just Demetrius in his list of royals that were buried in Gelati is all the more noteworthy. If this was not by mere accident, it may point to Demetrius being regarded less important by the prince than the other rulers mentioned. The association of the epitaph with king David may lastly have been supported by the fact that the inscription it bears is modelled on a psalm, given that psalms are usually named *davitni* (quasi 'Davids') in Old Georgian.¹⁹

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¹⁷ დემეტრე მეფე ბელტის ციხეს მიიცვალა და გელათს წარიყვანეს მისგან-ვე კურთხეულს ახალსა მონასტერსა, ქრონიკონი იყო სამას სამოცდათოთხმეტი (Qaukhchishvili 1955: 367, ll. 5–6). The fact that the information regarding Demetrius is missing in one of the manuscripts containing the chronicle (the Chalashvili manuscript, see n. 9 above) cannot disprove its authenticity.

¹⁸ *Belt'i* *cixe*, usually identified with the ruined fortress *Bebris cixe* (41°51'19" N, 44°43'21" E), ca. 1.5 km north of Mtskheta.

¹⁹ Cf. Megrélidzé (1967: 127) for this suggestion.

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