

Людмила Г. Хрушкова
**Восточное Причерноморье в
византийскую эпоху**
История. Архитектура. Археология



Liudmila G. Khrushkova
The East Coast of the Black Sea
in the Byzantine era
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This book, by prof. L. G. Khrushkova from Lomonosov Moscow State University, is conceptualized as a continuation of a previous one, published in 2002 (by Nauka, under the title “*Раннехристианские памятники Восточного Причерноморья. IV-VII вв.*”). Since the first book is dedicated to the monuments of Late Antique period on the Eastern Black Sea coast – modern day Abkhazia, this one explores the same region in the medieval period or, as the title of the book says: the Byzantine period.

The book consists of eight chapters along with a preface and a conclusion. They

are followed by an extensive bibliography and a list of illustrations. The book is written in Russian language, but features a long enough abstract in English.

The author emphasizes the importance of historiography research in the field of archaeology, which in Russia, but also in Western Europe, is gaining momentum over the past decades. That is why Chapter 1 of this book gives an overview of previous research campaigns done in the Caucasus, mainly during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The first scholar who travelled to the area was the Swiss Frederic Dubois de Monpéroux in 1830s, followed by a number of foreign or domestic scholars who were individually conducting historical, archeological or epigraphical studies of this region, often making plans, drawings and photographs of monuments that are proving themselves very useful even today. Moscow Archeological Society, founded by Alexei S. Uvarov, has conducted first systematic excavation campaigns in the area. The Society has organized the 5th Archeological Congress in Tiflis and has published fundamental multi-volume series “Materials on the Archaeology of Caucasus”. The wife of Alexei Uvarov, Praskovya S. Uvarova – the first Russian professional female archeologist, has published most works on monuments of church architecture in the Caucasus, including the less accessible mountain areas of lower Abkhazia. Another distinguished scholar of this region was Nikodim P. Kondakov, who was, in his book on the matter, emphasizing the importance of local characteristics in the morphology of church architecture, not wanting to exaggerate the foreign influences. The author concludes the historiographical overview with the beginning of the Soviet era.

The second chapter is exploring the spread of Christianity in the region, based on the written sources and archaeological evidence. The most ancient and most important Christian centers in the Eastern Pontic region were Pityous (modern Pitsunda) and Sebastopolis on the coast, along with Archaeopolis in the hinterland. Up until the age of

Justinian, there are not many written sources about the spread of Christianity among the peoples of Colchis (Zichi, Abazgi, Sanigae, Apsilii and the Lazi). Procopius of Caesarea mentions the military importance of Lazica in the period of the Byzantine-Persian war. Although there is little doubt that the territory of the Eastern Black Sea coast was a part of the Greco-Roman world ever since the times of Homer, it was always peripheral, even during the times of Byzantine dominion. Centers of Christianity were closely tied to the Roman fortresses on the coast, from where it was spread in the hinterland. The spread of Christianity in this region is, according to the church tradition, attributed to the apostle Andrew and Simon the Zealot. Pityous was important, not only as one of the Christian centers, but also as the destination of exile (since the times of Strabo), as it was located on the border of the Roman civilization, surrounded by tribes regarded as particularly ferocious and savage. The official church documents about the Church organization in the area are scarce: it is known that Stratophilus, the bishop of Pityous, attended the First Council of Nicaea in 325. Outside of the walls of Roman *castellum* the archeological evidence of an early Christian church have been found, regarded as the cathedral of bishop Stratophilus. It is dated no earlier than 313 and existed until the end of the fourth century, when the new basilica was built on its foundations. The bishop of Phasis has attended the Second council of Constantinople in 553. Phasis was a metropolitan see of Lazica: with four bishops under its jurisdiction. Sebastopolis was the center of the autocephalous bishopric of Abazgiya. In the 11th century, the name of the metropolitan see transfers from Lazica to Trapesunt.

Church organization in Abkhazia during the Middle Ages, explored in the Chapter 3, is tied to political changes in the area, mainly the creation of the Abkhazian kingdom in 780. The kingdom lasted only for two centuries (until 980.) and it occupied the territory of all of Western Georgia and Abkhazia. Starting with the 10th century, Byzantine bishoprics, dependent on Constantinople, were gradually replaced with local ones, Phasis lost its significance and the bishoprics in Chqondidi, Mokva and Bediya were created. However, the archbishopric of Abazgiya, under the patriarch of Constantinople, continued to exist up until 13th centuries. In the early 10th century, the archbishopric of Soteriupolis was created, probably located in Pityous, which was instrumental in Christianization of Alania in the Northern Caucasus. Byzantine troops held control, in the 11th century, over Anakopia, the major fortress of Abazgiya, where a significant number of early Christian and medieval archeological remains had been found, as well as epigraphic documents in Greek. The title of the Patriarch (Catholikos) of Abkhazia was established in 13th century, whose ecclesiastical rule encompassed whole of Western Georgia, along with Abkhazia – its residence was first in Pitsunda (Bichvinta, ancient Pityous), later, from 17th century, in Gelati.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the study of church architecture in Abkhazia during the Middle Ages. Although short, period of the Abkhazian kingdom was a period of a great building activity, when churches of a type common during the Middle Byzantine period, the domed group of the “cross-in-square” type, were built. The majority of churches of this type are located in the area between the two bishoprics of the Constantinople patriarchy: Soteriupolis and Abazgiya. Common characteristics of those churches are elongated plan accented by a narthex at the western end; three apses on the east with three chambers situated in front of the apses; the facades almost devoid of decoration and porticoes on the three sides of the church. They are most commonly built in limestone. The

largest churches are in Pitsunda and Mokva, the one in Pitsunda has a narthex decorated with 16th century frescoes. The church in Lykhny has Paleologue age frescoes of the Constantinople school. The church in Mokva has four aisles, although the outmost aisles actually consist of small chapels. Other notable examples of churches of this type are in Alakhadzy, Bzyb, Anakopia, Mysghua and in Veseloe and Loo in Krasnodar region of Russia. A special case is the royal palace of Lykhny, dated to the 10th century, with evidences of different cultural traditions: Byzantine (with traces of Classical tradition), Islamic and local. Another common type in medieval Abkhazia was the single nave type, with more than 10 examples from 9th to 14th centuries analyzed. They are usually small, built from the local materials, with notable examples in Tsebelda, Elyr and Ambara. The latter is an example of a sub-type found only in eastern Georgia and Abkhazia, with two isolated symmetrical annexes on both sides of the nave. N. Chubinashvili calls this type “the three church basilica” and the functions of those symmetrical annexes remain unclear.

A separate chapter is dedicated to the Early Christian architectural complex in Sebastopolis. There, an octagonal church has been excavated. It had a dome, supported by an octagonal stylobate. Four structures have been added to the central octagon, forming a cross plan. This church, according to the author, belongs to the large group of octagonal structures in the Christian East. In its center, the church had an oriented exedra. This church, dated to the early 5th century, has been destroyed in a fire, which is attested in Procopius’ description of the destruction of Sebastopolis in 542. The church was not rebuilt; instead, a smaller in scale basilica has been erected to the southeast of it.

The sixth chapter represents a catalogue of glazed pottery from the excavations of Sebastopolis, published here for the first time. It includes 178 objects (bowls, plates, pitchers, lamps), from which the most valuable are Zeuxippus Ware bowls with a yellow glaze, dated to the 14th century. The seventh chapter deals with a group of objects of the Byzantine era (from 6th to 14th century) from Abkhazia: made out of metal, stone and ceramics. Most of them are today located in The Abkhazian State Museum. The first group consists of bronze censers of the Palestinian type and bronze crosses, second group of the elements of architectural decoration and the third of painted ceramics.

The eighth, final, chapter deals with Christian monuments of the Krasnodar territory in present-day Russia. This territory was, however, politically and religiously tied to the territory of Abkhazia, which is why its monuments bear enough similarities with the Abkhazian ones. Historically, it was the land of the Zichi people, who were known of their savagery and were difficult to accept Christianity. In the Middle Ages the territory was divided by three archbishoprics under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople, the archbishopric of Abazgiya, archbishopric of Zihiya and archbishopric of Alania. Morphologically, church monuments are tied to the Abkhazian ones, with two of the “inscribed cross” type of the 10th and 11th century (Loo and Veseloe), two three-aisle, three-apse basilicas from 7th century (Lesnoe-1 and Lesnoe-2), and five single-nave churches dated to 10-11th century (Sakhanraya Golovka, Akhun, Galitsino, Agua). The Krion Neron church is unique in its typology, having a cruciform plan, and is dated to 10th century. Special emphasis is put on the analysis of churches Lesnoe-1 and Lesnoe-2, as their typology is interesting in examining the problem of liturgical functions of the tripartite sanctuary of an Early Christian basilica in the Christian East. Lastly, the group of objects from The Historical Museum of Sochi is examined, especially its Proconnesian marble remains of architectural decoration from the age of Justinian and the Palestinian bronze

censer from 9th-10th century. They illustrate how the Eastern Pontic area, especially its urban centers on the Black Sea coast were certainly not culturally isolated during the periods of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, but, due to their positions along the trade routes with Byzantium and the Islamic world, they were receptive of external influences. That is especially the case with easily transferable smaller objects, such as chalices, censers etc., but also with elements of different styles that are visible on the architectural monuments – church buildings and residential architecture.

This book was certainly a very interesting read, due to its intriguing subject of medieval architecture in the geographical area, which was, up until this point, not well known to worldwide audience. It is well-structured and written using succinct and comprehensible language. It is exceptionally well equipped with various illustrations: photographs, many of them taken by the author herself, plans, drawings and geographical maps. It can definitely serve as a reference literature to anyone interested in medieval architecture of this, archeologically still under-researched, area. We will hope for its translation to English language, so it can reach a wider audience.

Palmira Krleža, University of Zagreb (Croatia)¹

¹ Рецензия опубликована: Hortus Artium Medievalium. Journal of the International Research Center for Late Antiquity and Middle Ages. Vol. 25/1. Zagreb-Motovun, 2019. P. 215-216.