

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery
<i>Location</i>	Tkibuli District
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Georgia
<i>Date</i>	28 October 1993

**Justification by State Party**

The external appearance of Bagrati Cathedral is monumental, varied, and dynamic. The perfect proportions, artistic mouldings, ornamentation, arches, and light construction amaze and fascinate the viewer. The cathedral demonstrates the rapid development of architectural decoration in Georgia in less than half-a-century. The high artistic value of Bagrati Cathedral extends far beyond merely local significance: it is one of the outstanding monuments of Christian medieval architecture.

Gelati Monastery is a well preserved historical ensemble. It is of special importance for its architecture, its mosaics, its wall paintings, and its enamel and metal work. Gelati was not simply a monastery: it was a centre of science and education, and the academy established in the Monastery was one of the most important centres of culture in ancient Georgia. By virtue of its high architectural quality and the outstanding examples of art that it houses, Gelati Monastery is a unique Georgian cultural treasury, and a rare case in the history of world culture.

**History and Description***History*

The earliest historical record of Kutaisi dates back to the 6th century AD, when the Byzantine Empire and Persia fought for possession of Georgia. At that time it was a typical early medieval town, with a fortress on a hill overlooking the walled town, built where a bridge crossed the river Rioni. The first half of the 8th century was one of large-scale expansion during the reign of King Archil. It was selected as the royal residence in the mid 8th century when eastern Georgia was occupied by the Arabs and reached the zenith of its development in the 10th-11th centuries.

Construction of Bagrati Cathedral, on the orders of Bagrat III, first king of united Georgia, began in the last quarter of the 10th century and was completed in the early years of the 11th century. The new stage in the architectural evolution of the town symbolized the end of the fight to unify the country. It was consecrated with great ceremony in the presence of representatives of all the regions of Georgia.

Gelati Monastery belongs to the "Golden Age" of medieval Georgia, a period of political strength and economic growth between the reigns of King David IV (the Builder) and Queen Tamar. It was David who began building the Monastery in 1106; it was completed in 1130 in the reign of his son and successor Demetré. One of its functions was to be the burying place of the Georgian royal house, and so it became a royal domain. It also housed the Academy, a project dear to the scholar king; among the projects carried out there were the translation into Georgian of ecclesiastical and secular literature and teaching in many subjects.

Buildings were added to the Monastery throughout the 13th and early 14th centuries, but there ensued a period of foreign invasion and internal feuds which resulted in much damage being incurred, culminating in the destruction by fire of the church in 1510 by Turkish invaders. Restoration work began in the early 16th

century when it became the residence of the *katholikos* of western Georgia, and continued throughout the 17th and 18th centuries.

In 1691 the Turks blew up the Cathedral during their invasion, and the dome and roofs collapsed. The south and west porches were still intact in the later 19th century, but now they, too, are in ruins. Gelati Monastery escaped this fate, but it lost its episcopal role in the early 19th century, when Georgia was annexed by Russia.

### *Description*

*Bagrati Cathedral* is located in the centre of Kutaisi, on a hill on the left bank of the Rioni, overlooking the Old Town. It is reached by a long, winding stairway.

The building has been in ruins since 1691. Richly ornamented capitals and fragments of piers and vaulting are scattered throughout the interior. It is cruciform in plan; three of the cross arms (east, south, and north) terminate in semicircular apses whilst the west arm is squared off. The central dome was supported by four free-standing pillars and the original roof was barrel-vaulted. The west end was extended beyond the main walls to align with the north and south transepts, creating a large two-storeyed structure and emphasizing the cruciform domed plan when viewed from the exterior. Different approaches can be seen in the decorative treatment of the facades, the capitals, and the bases, resulting from the preferences of successive master-builders.

Not long after the main building was completed a three-storey tower was constructed on its north-west corner. Each floor consists of a single room with fireplace and niches. It is believed that this was the residence of the Bishop of Kutaisi. Large monumental porches were next added to the south and west, in a new stylistic form, with animal, bird, and plant motifs.

*Gelati Monastery* is located 12 km from Kutaisi. The monastery precinct is enclosed by a stone wall, now entered from the east but originally through the south porch, which houses the tomb of its founder, David the Builder. The main church is in the centre of the enclosure, flanked by the Church of S George to the west and the two-storeyed Church of S Nicholas and the academy building behind it. A stream flows to the north-west with a bell-tower alongside it.

The main Church of the Virgin is domed and cruciform in plan. The original intention was to surround it with an ambulatory on three sides, but this was changed in the reign of Demetré to an annex with a porch to the south and the so-called narthex to the west, and other annexes were added on the north side during the 13th century. However, care was taken to ensure that the essential integrity of the building was preserved.

The exterior mass of the church is relieved by the decorative arcading on all its facades, which emphasize the upward thrust of its forms. The interior, surmounted by the large dome, combines space and solemnity, with light streaming in from many windows. The main entrance, of three doors, is from the west; the eye is immediately caught by the famous 12th century mosaic in the conch of the apse, depicting the Virgin and Child with two archangels in colour against a gold background. The frescoes covering the walls are later: they depict Biblical scenes and historical personages, including David IV the Builder. An inscription records that the wall-paintings were renewed in the first half of the 16th century, but it is known that renovation work was carried out on them on more than one occasion subsequently.

The annexes also conserve decorative features, such as remains of the early 12th century wall paintings in the west annex, depicting the seven Ecumenical Councils, the 13th century royal portraits in the south annex, and 15th-17th century paintings showing a royal coronation in the north annex.

The Church of St George is a tall domed structure of the 13th century with three projecting apses. The dome is supported by two massive stone columns and the apse angles. It is well lit by many windows and there are fragments of the original wall paintings preserved in the west porch; those in the main church are from the 16th century.

The late 13th century Church of St Nicholas is an unusual structure. It is two-storeyed, and the ground floor is open on all sides through arches. The small domed church proper is on the upper floor, approached

by a stone stairway (added later - access was originally by wooden ladder). It is polyhedral in form and surmounts the massive lower section.

A stone vaulted canopy on four columns was built in the 12th century over the spring to the north of the main church. In the 13th century a room and open, arched bell-tower were added to this structure.

The academy building dates from the reign of David the Builder. It is a large structure lit by wide arched windows. A richly decorated porch was added in the 14th century to the centre of the three original entrances. It was also accessible from the south through a passage above a large arch. The walls were originally painted, and stone seats are arranged along the walls. When it ceased to operate as an academy in the later Middle Ages it was converted into a refectory.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery are protected under the provisions of the Law on the Protection of the Monuments of the Republic of Georgia.

Both are public property, but are administered by the Patriarchate of Georgia.

### *Management*

Formal administration of the two properties is the responsibility of the Patriarchate of Georgia. However, in practice this is shared with the Kutaisi-Gelati Museum Reserve and the Main Board for the Protection of Monuments of the Republic of Georgia. The latter body is responsible for restoration and conservation work.

The urban agglomeration of Kutaisi and its immediate surroundings are protected by a series of cumulative designated zones. The two properties proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List are located in "strict protection zones". The historic town is protected as a "culture-historical and natural landscape complex". Finally, the scenic area to the east of the town is a "historical-anthropogenic landscape restoration, protection, and suburban cultural-recreative zone" of the old town. This includes an area of karst landscape and caves and a natural forest park.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

A systematic programme of restoration and conservation began at Bagrati Cathedral in 1951. At the present time a fundamental scientific study of the monument is in progress. The piers supporting the dome and the walls have been partially restored, and other projects are planned. The work is being carried out by the Main Board for the Protection of Monuments of the Republic of Georgia.

A major restoration campaign has now been completed at Gelati Monastery. Its condition is now good and no further major work is planned.

### *Authenticity*

Bagrati Cathedral is ruined and may be considered *ipso facto* to be completely authentic. Gelati Monastery has been in continuous use since construction began and so it inevitably has certain elements that were introduced at a period before the modern philosophy of conservation had been formulated. However, much of its authenticity lies in its use and in its group integrity, neither of which can be challenged.

## **Evaluation**

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS evaluation mission visited the two properties in May 1994. The mission had high praise for the quality of the restoration and conservation work being carried out on them. It made recommendations regarding the removal of non-significant buildings from the Bagrati Cathedral buffer zone and the provision of interpretation and other infrastructural features. It expressed grave doubts about the projects being discussed for the reconstruction of the Cathedral and its reconsecration as a church and for the re-roofing of the Academy building at Gelati. Detailed maps showing the areas proposed for inscription and the buffer zones, which had been omitted from the nomination dossier, were supplied to the mission.

### *Qualities*

The two properties proposed in this nomination represent the flowering of feudal monarchy in medieval Georgia. By virtue of the location of this country, it developed its own distinctive stylistic idiom. The two properties are the highest expressions of this idiom, in the context of the royal capital.

### *Comparative analysis*

The nature of political and cultural development of this region of south-eastern Europe in the medieval period, coupled with the special geographical factors, was such that cultural evolution developed on national idiosyncratic and diverging trajectories in each country. This was a region of relatively small and distinct cultural areas. In the view of ICOMOS it is therefore unreasonable to apply comparative regional analysis to these monuments.

## **Recommendation**

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion iv:

- **Criterion iv** Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery represent the highest flowering of the architecture of medieval Georgia.

ICOMOS, October 1994

**ძველი კუთაისი ადგილები: Conventional Signs:**

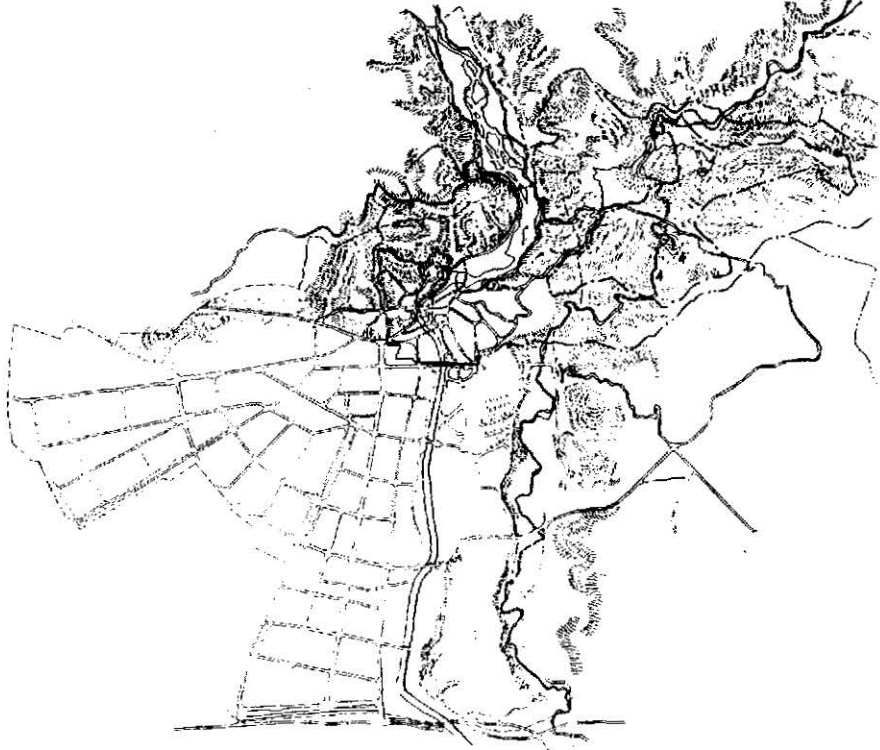
- - - - - ხეობის ცენტრი და ადგილის სხვადასხვა კონკრეტული მნიშვნელობის სიმბოლოები.
- - - - - The border of the strict protective zone of Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery -Complex;
- - - - - ქ. კუთაისის ვიდეოკონტაქტის, ბუნების დონების კომპლექსის გეგმის სიმბოლოები.
- - - - - The border of the protective zone of cultural-historical and natural-landscape-complex of Kutaisi;
- - - - - თანამედროვე კუთაისის ტერიტორიულ-გეგმობითი სივრცის.
- - - - - The territorial-administrative boundary of modern Kutaisi;
- - - - - ქვეყნის ტერიტორიის სტრატეგიული-გეგმობითი დონების რეგულაციის, დაცვის და ქვეყნის სტრატეგიული-გეგმობითი დონების სიმბოლოები.
- - - - - The border of the historical-anthropogenic landscape restoration, protection and suburban, cultural-recreative usage zone of the old Kutaisi surroundings. The zone of localisation of world import unique karst caves and a natural forest-park organization.

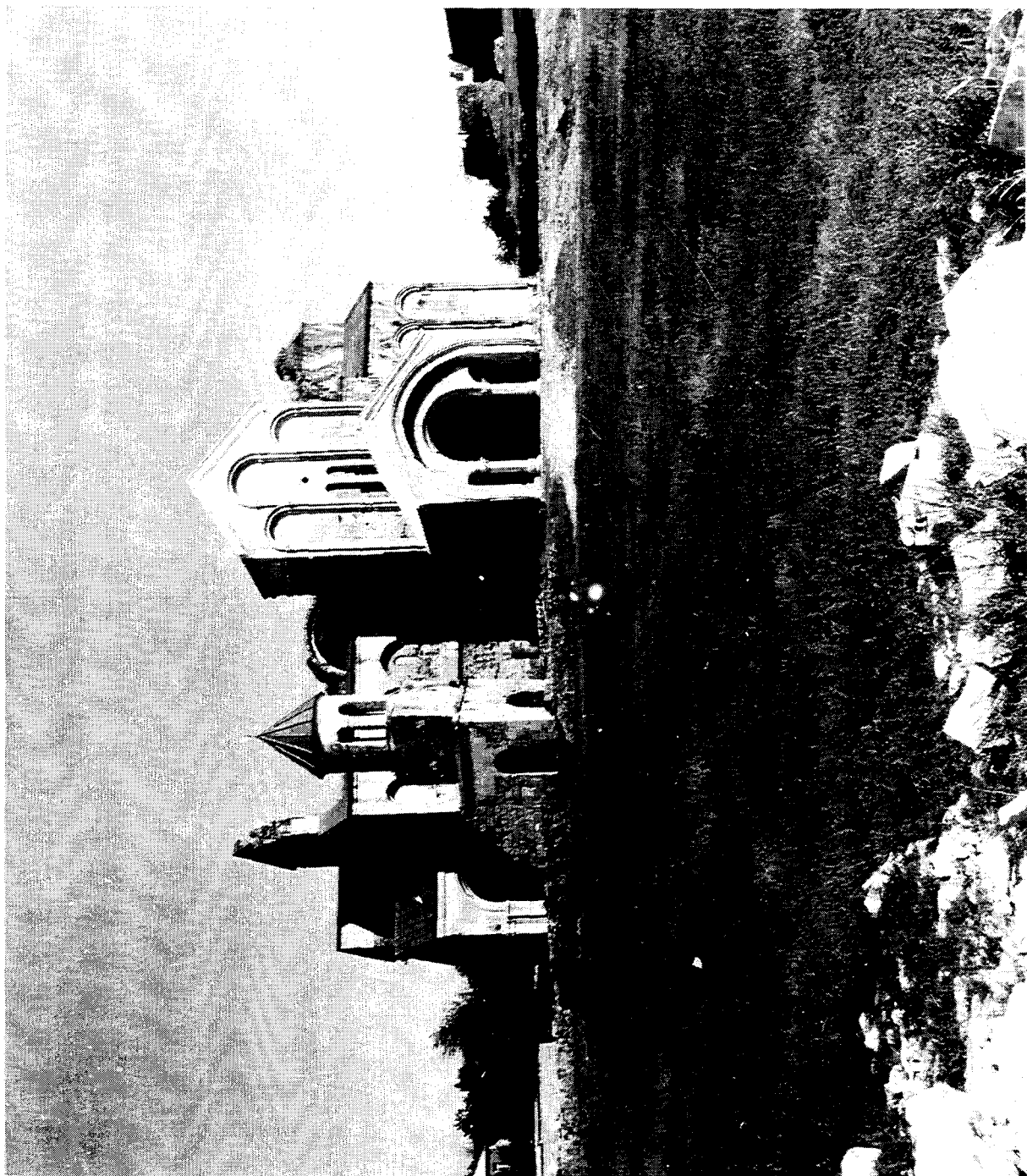
**საქართველო:**

1. კუთაისის საბაზილიკო კომპლექსი. 2. ბაგრატის ტაძარი. 3. შვედეთის ხის მუზეუმი. 4. ტყეში ნაპოვნი ძველი მონეტების კვანძი. 5. მ. მამიალის ხის სახლი. 6. სარდალოს მონეტის არქეოლოგიური გათხრების შედეგად გამოვლენილი IV-VI სსსს დროინდელი ფორტიფიკაციის ქსოვი. ქვეყნის ტერიტორიის შემოსაზღვრითი სარდალოს-საბაზილიკო კომპლექსის სიმბოლოები და სამოქალაქო დასახლებების ნაგებობების სიმბოლოები. 7. მისივე დროინდელი, პოტენციური არქეოლოგიური ტერიტორიის სარდალოს-გელათის კომპლექსის (ქ.ე. XIII-XI სსსს) სარდალოს-საბაზილიკოს რეკონსტრუქციის (ქ.ე.ე. 6, 295-215 66) მიერ მოხსენიებული კომპლექსის შედეგად აღმოჩენილი ქვეყნის "ქვეყნის დაცვის ქსოვი, მონეტების ქსოვი" - "სარდალოს რეკონსტრუქციის" და სარდალოს რეკონსტრუქციის სიმბოლოები.

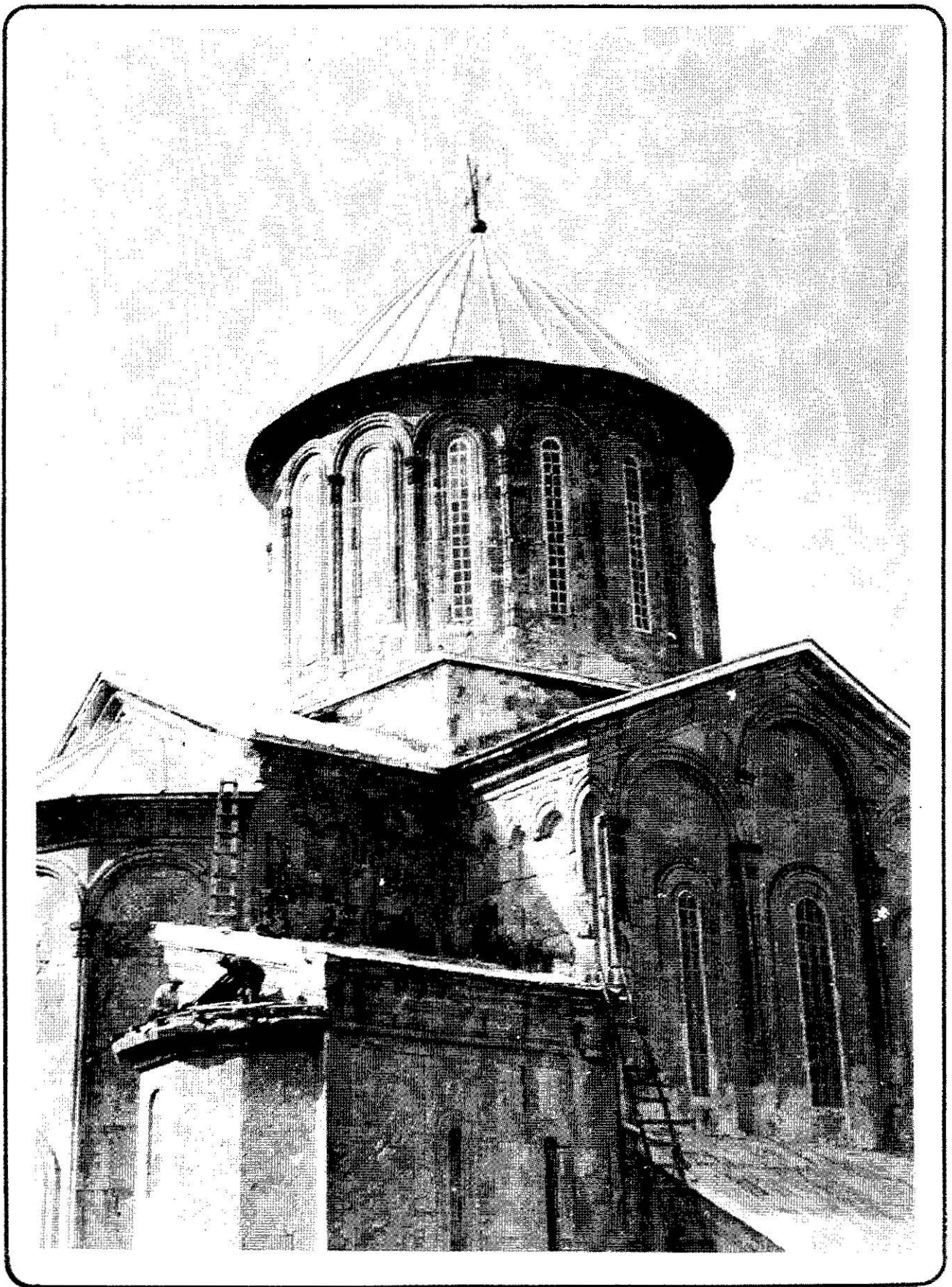
**EXPLANATION:**

1. Gelati Monastery Complex; 2. Bagrati Cathedral; 3. Mtskheta Mtskheta Complex; 4. The monuments of prehistoric period of the Takaltseta River; Cave dwellings of primitive Man. 5. Mtskheta Monastery Complex; 6. The feudal Kutaisi of the IV-VI cc. revealed by the current archaeological excavations. The remains of the fortification-protective wall system encircling the town territory and other municipal buildings; 7. The significant, potential archaeological territory. One of the hypothetical zones of the existence of the capital of Colchis, the town mentioned by Apollonios Rodaseli (Greek author, (295-215 B.C.) in his book about Argonauts campaign against the kingdom of Colchis (210-21 cc. B.C.), "The Royal Town of Aeaetes" - the King of Colchis; "Populous Town", "Sarbstan Town", "the Town where Hades came from" (Strabon, Greek author the boundary of B.C. and A.D.)

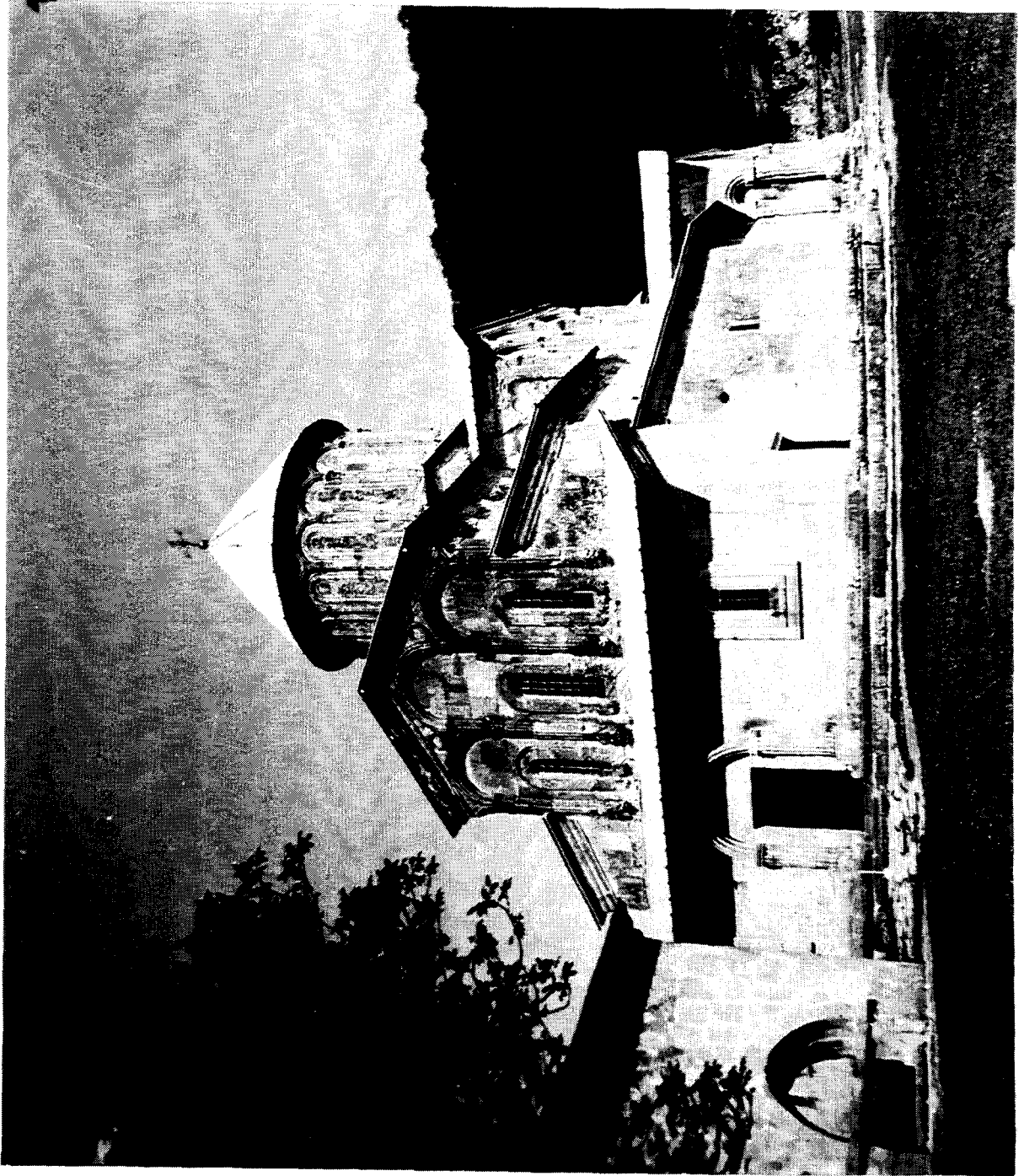




Bagrat : cathédrale, vue du sud-ouest /  
Bagrati : Cathedral, seen from the south-west

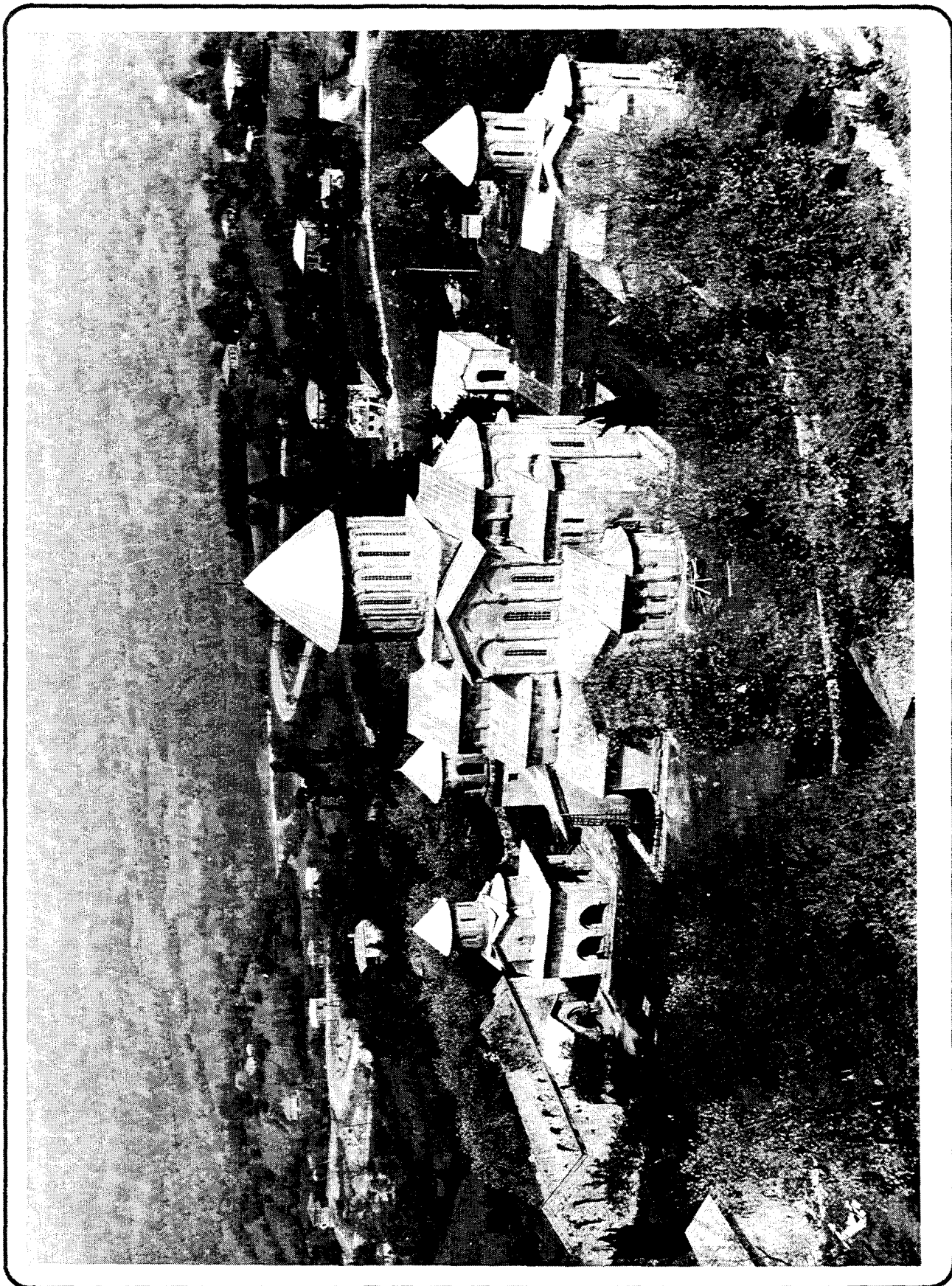


Ghélati : monastère, vu du nord-est /  
Gelati : Monastery, seen from the north-east



Ghélati : monastère, vu du sud-ouest /  
Gelati : Monastery, seen from the south-west





Ghélati : vue d'ensemble du monastère /  
Gelati : general view of the Monastery