

THE MYSTERY OF THE GREAT ASHOT

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Abstract. The study provides a detailed discussion of the identity of Ashot the Great, also known as Ashot I Kuropalates, as well as issues related to the investigation of the location of his burial site. Ashot the Great, considered the founder of the Georgian Bagratid Dynasty, came under the protection of Byzantium against Muslim Arab expansion in the historical lands of Tao-Klarjeti and was awarded the title of Kuropalat. „He has been canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church, as he was a defender of the preservation and strengthening of the Christian faith, as well as a protector and supporter of the Church. It is known that Ashot the Great took possession of the fortress of Artanugi (Ardanutsik/Gevhernik), located in the present-day Artanuji district of Artvin Province, along with the surrounding territory, and made it an administrative center. At the beginning of the 9th century, in order to save central Iberia (Inner Kartli) from the Muslim Arabs, he had to relocate and settle in what is now the Artvin region, where the natural conditions offered greater defensive advantages. He tried to maintain his kingdom from here by repairing the Ardanuç Castle, which was built by the Iberian King Vakhtang Gorgasali in the 5th century, and establishing the area at its foot (Adakale) as a city. During the reign of Ashot the Great, under the leadership of Grigol Handzeli (759-861), great importance was given to the preservation of Georgian culture by building various monasteries in the region in line with Orthodox Christianity. However, one day, when Great Ashot went to the Nigala Valley (Seyitler Village) within the borders of the central district of Artvin to obtain military support from the local notables, he was probably assassinated in the Sveti Church (826/830). It is stated in historical sources that his body was taken by his soldiers and buried in the church building in Ardanuç Castle. Within the scope of this declaration, the archaeological findings regarding the tomb of Ashot the Great obtained during the 2025 excavation season of the „Ardanuç-Gevhernik Castle Excavation“, which is being carried out by us on behalf of Van Yüzüncü Yıl University with the permission and support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, are being shared with the scientific community.

Keywords: Ardanuç Castle, Ashot Kuropalat, Sveti Church, Peter and Paul Church, Crypt

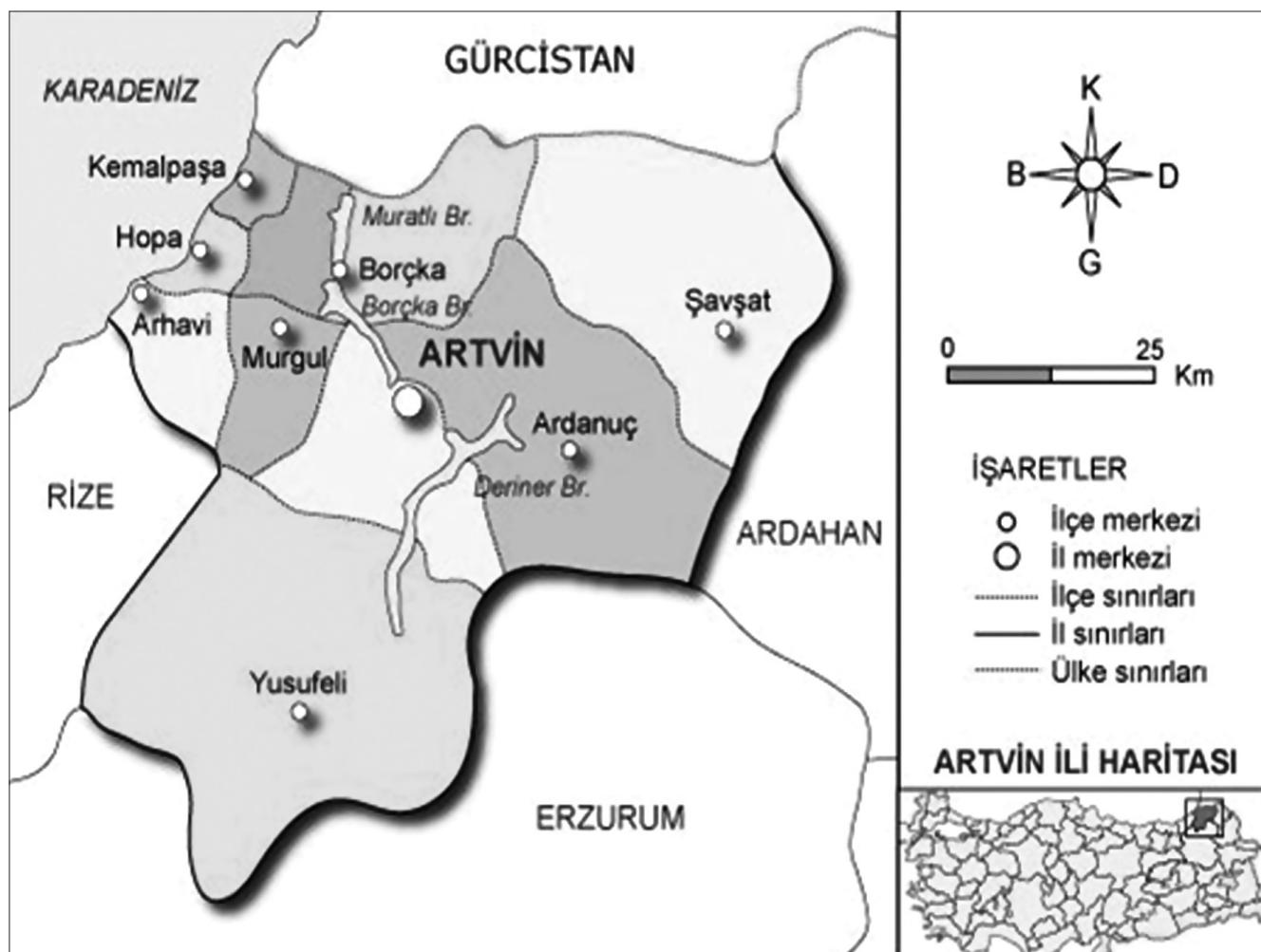
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Introduction. The „Tao-Klarjeti Region“, which has appeared in scientific publications since the second half of the 19th century; includes the districts in the north-eastern part of Erzurum province, which is located in the north-eastern part of today's Republic of Turkey, a significant part of Artvin province, Ardahan province and the districts in the north of Kars province (Ocak-Tanyeli, 2024). The term Tao-Klarjeti; covers two administratively important regions in the medieval world. Of these, Tao includes Erzurum and its surroundings, and Klarjeti includes Artvin and its surroundings. In some sources, it is emphasized that this term also means „Zemo Kartli (Upper Kartli) / Samstshe Saatabago“ and also includes the definition of „Upper Iberia“. At the same time, this region is generally known as „Mesheti“ in terms of geography and its people as „Meshis“ (Brossat, 2003; Hoştaria, 2005; Elyigit-Korkut, 2023).

It should not be forgotten that the first Christian institutions in the Tao-Klarjeti Region developed with the support or permission of Byzantium. Meanwhile, although the Armenians and Georgians in the

region adopted Christianity as the state religion in the first half of the 4th century, it is accepted that the Episcopal centre was established in Tao as of the 4th century. Christianity in the region developed in accordance with the Dyophysite creed, and in the 7th century the churches of Bani and Ishkhani were built under Byzantine rule. Alongside the Georgians, Narse III (641–661), the Dyophysite Catholicos of the Orthodox Armenians, was active here. It is assumed that the Bana Church may have been built before this date. These churches are known to have been destroyed and subsequently rebuilt over time. Previously, Ajara, Samtskhe and Klarjeti were the areas where St. Andria Pirveltsodebuli carried out his religious activity. Later, Saint Nino of Cappadocia entered Georgia from Javakheti. The first church in Klarjeti was built by King Mirian's grandson Mirdat inside the Tukharisi Castle, the location of which has not yet been determined. It is accepted that three separate bishopric centers, namely Akhiza (Klarjeti), Eruşeti (Artaani) and Tsunda (Javakheti), were established in the Tao-Klarjeti Region in the 5th century, during the time of Vakhtang Gorgaslan. The Opiza Monastery in Klarjeti, whose first establishment dates back to the time of Vakhtang Gorgaslan, is famous for having educated individuals such as the famous cleric Serapion Zarzmeli. In addition to the Opiza Monastery, the churches of Mere, Shindoba and Akhiza were also built. The outstanding works are 'The Martyrdom of the Kolai Infants' and 'The Martyrdom of David and Tirichan', which depict the harsh life of the first Christians living in the region (Kadıroğlu-İşler, 2010; Bayram, 2005; Korkut, 2018; Silogava-Şengelia, 2006; Kılıç, 2005; Giviashvili-Hizanishvili, 2021).

Geographic Location. Located at the easternmost tip of the Eastern Black Sea Region of the Republic of Turkey, Artvin Province consists of 9 districts, 3 of which are on the Black Sea coast (Map 1). The Sarp Land Border Gate in the Kemalpaşa district of the province, which borders Erzurum, Rize and



Map 1: Artvin Province and Surroundings, R. Sayılı'dan-2020



Map 2: Political Map of Georgia

Ardahan provinces and Georgia, has been providing passage to Georgia since November 19, 1990. Thanks to this gate, it forms the most important highway network connecting the Central Asian countries, especially the Caucasian countries (Map 2). After the collapse of the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991, Turkey developed close neighbourly relations with the Republic of Georgia and continues mutual cultural cooperation, especially in trade (Tarkan, 1973). Artvin and its districts were governed together with the Ajara Region on the one hand and the Ahiska Region on the other. Therefore, in addition to the ancient cultures of Anatolia, it has different cultural and ethnic structures.

Historicalness of the Region. Present-day Georgia has been inhabited since the Paleolithic period. The remains of a humanoid, named *Homo Georgicus*, unearthed in Dmanisi in Georgia, date back 1.8 million years. The Iberian Kingdom, established in the east of the country in the classical period, and the Colchis Kingdom, established in the west, are considered to be the beginning of the cultural development and state-building tradition of Georgians (Map 1). According to written sources, Proto-Georgians emerged on the historical stage in the 12th century BC. Archaeological finds indicate that the first Georgian political structure was formed in the 7th century BC (Celebi, 2025).

It is understood that the Kingdom of Colchis, founded by the Laz and Megrelians in the 7th-3rd centuries BC, emerged as a part of the Georgians. Ajara, which continued its existence as a part of the Iberian Kingdom (Saeristavo), founded by the Georgians between 302 BC and 580 AD, came to the fore under Roman rule after the Greek (Hellenic) colonization, especially in the 2nd century AD, Batum (Bathus) and Apsaros (Gonio) came to the fore. The region was under the protection of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine) at the end of the 4th century, and the Byzantine-Sassanid War, which took place between 542-562 AD, ended in favor of Byzantium. In the 9th century AD, the Kingdom of Iberia was divided into two. One of them is Tao-Klarjeti and the other is Egrisi Aphaz Kingdom. When united Georgia was established again in the early 11th century, this time the region was under the administration of the Principality of Samsthe. The region, which was subjected to attacks by the Seljuk Turks in the 11th century and the Mongols in the 13th century, was subject to the Principality of Guria

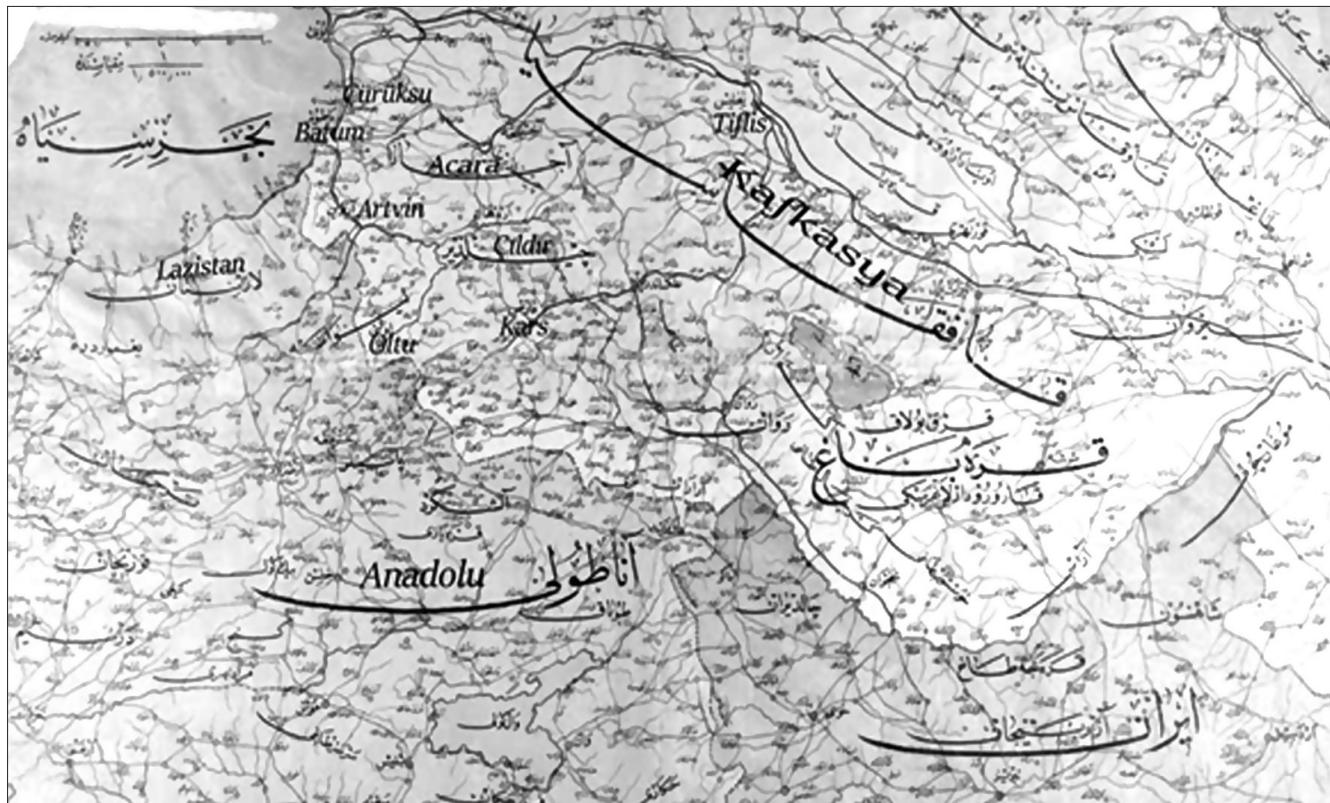
in 1535. Meanwhile, it is known that the Genoese, who were present on the Eastern Black Sea coast between 1261 and 1475, used Gonio Castle (Köse-Subaşı, 2021; Subaşı, 2013).

Ottoman rule in the region, which began in 1535, was governed by the Erzurum Beylerbeylik from 1568 to 1574, and by the Çıldır Beylerbeylik (eyalet) from 1580 (Aydın, 1998). After falling out of Ottoman hands for a while, it was taken back in 1586 and this time the Ajara Beylerbeylik was established in 1591. As a result of the Ottoman-Russian War in 1828, Ahıskı (Ahaltsikhe) was lost and some of the Muslims there had to migrate to Turkish lands. The region, which was taken over by the Çıldır Beylerbeylik in 1603, remained under Ottoman rule uninterruptedly until the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, as part of the Lazistan Sanjak, the center of which was Batumi. The region, which was given in to the Russians with the Treaty of San Stefano signed on March 3, 1878, was returned to the Ottomans with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, with three sanjaks (Kars, Ardahan and Batum). The Ottoman army entered Batumi on April 14, 1918. However, in accordance with the Armistice of Mudors of October 30, 1918, the region remained under British and Georgian administration for a while. Bolshevik Russia attacked Georgia, and the Moscow-Kars Treaty (16 March 1921 – 13 October 1921) was signed between the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the Russian Government, definitively establishing the borders of present-day Turkey with Georgia and Armenia. In accordance with the Treaty of Moscow, the Turkish Army had to evacuate Batumi on March 28, 1921. Ajara entered the composition of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic as an autonomous entity and came under the framework of the Soviet Union, and this situation continued until 1991. Thus, Batumi and Artvin, which had been governed under the same administration for many years, came under the administration of separate countries as a result of the Moscow-Kars Treaties. Especially after the 93 War in 1878, a significant number of Muslim Georgians had to migrate to various provinces of Turkey (Kırzioğlu, 1976; Özdemir, 2002; Demirel, 2009). The



Map 3: Map of Colchis and Iberia

political history of the region can be summarized as follows; Iberian Princes: 588-888; Tao-Klarjeti Kings: 888-1008; United Georgian Kings: 1008-1259; Georgian and Imereti Kings: 1259-1510; Kartli, Kakheti and Imereti Kings: 1490-1762. In addition, the region we are talking about, namely Ajara and Artvin, was dependent on the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, and on Tsarist Russia in 1878, but in 1921 it was within the political borders of two separate states.



Map 4: Map of Anatolia and the Caucasus Showing the Ottoman-Russian Border After the Berlin Treaty (Ottoman Archives, M. Kasap'tan)

Capital of the Tao-Klarjeti Kingdom: Ardanuç (Ardanuci). Ardanuç Castle and City, built by the Iberian King Gorgaslan in the 5th century and repaired and made suitable for life by Ashot the Great in the early 9th century, is today located in the Adakale district of the Ardanuç district of Artvin province (Samuşia, 2008).

The castle consists of the inner castle (Stadel) and the city part (Adakale), and today it is called Gevhernik Castle. Ardanuç Castle and City, which was the most important political, cultural and commercial center of the region for many years; After 1952, with the relocation of the Ardanuç District Center to the present area, it lost its former importance and today the urban part has become a neighborhood. The inner castle (Stadel) has been abandoned since the Ottoman period (Aytekin, 1999; Aytekin, 2024; M. Zeki, 1999; Mari, 2012).

- Ardanuç Castle was first registered by the Ankara-based Immovable Cultural and Natural Heritage Supreme Board in accordance with the decision numbered 3058 and dated 20.03.1987.
- Afterwards, Ardanuç-Gevhernik Castle was registered as a 1st Degree Urban Archaeological Site and a 3rd Degree Natural Site by the Trabzon K.T.V.K.B.K. with the decisions numbered 26.07.2002/4493 and 14.11.2003/4870.
- Most recently, Ardanuç-Central Adakale Neighborhood: Urban and Archaeological Site, Ardanuç-Gevhernik Castle: First Degree Archaeological Site, were registered by Trabzon K.T.V.K.B.K. with the decision dated 28.06.2012 and numbered 624. It is understood that the name Gevhernik was given to the Inner Castle (Stadel) with this decision.
- In March 2023, the „Conservation Development Plan“ was accepted and approved by the Erzurum Conservation Regional Board.

Inner Castle (Stadel). The Inner Castle, which is located on a high bedrock on the upper side of the Adakale settlement that forms the city section, is accessed by a portable two-stage metal staircase placed in the northwest corner, following a rough path. It is estimated that the original staircase, which has not survived to the present day, was also in this section. As mentioned before, the Inner Castle, built on a very high bedrock, consists of a rock mass extending in the northwest-southeast direction, and has an area of approximately 8,000 m², with a length of approximately 200 m and a width of 40 m. It appears to have been completely surrounded by city walls. Today, some remains of the city walls remain on the side facing the city and in the south-eastern section. The Inner Castle, which was understood to have been abandoned after the Middle-Ages, contains the ruins of walls, a ruined double church, a cistern and various buildings. The underground tunnel, which is thought to have been opened to supply water from the Inner Castle to the Ardanuç stream, has now been filled with block stones and has been abandoned (Edwards, 1986, Aytekin, 1999).

City Section (Adakale). The castle, which consists of a sloping land, only has some of its suitable for settlement. Since the area towards the Inner Castle is quite sloped, no construction has been done here. The main entrance of the castle, which was found to be surrounded by walls, during the Ottoman period was provided by a gate located in the south, where the inscription is located, and which is also protected by a bastion, parts of which have survived to the present day. In the Middle Ages, based on the existing ruins, it is understood that it was provided from the south-eastern part of Adakale, which constitutes the lower part. Although Adakale is a settlement established in the Middle Ages, there are no intact architectural works from that period, apart from the ruins of city walls and foundations of buildings here and there, and the ruins of a church. Perhaps this is due to the attacks the castle suffered at different times and the fact that it was used as a residential area for many years (Aytekin, 2024).

During the Ottoman period, various civil, commercial and religious architectural structures were built in the Adakale settlement, ensuring the development of the city. Undoubtedly, the most important of these works are the İskender Pasha Mosque-Tomb Complex, Arasta, Konak, Fountains, Shadirvan, Madrasa and Kale Hammam (Aytekin, 2021; Şafakçı 2017; Demirci 2018). In addition to these, as stated in the Iskender Pasha Foundation Charter dated 973 AH (1565 AD), a radical restoration of the old

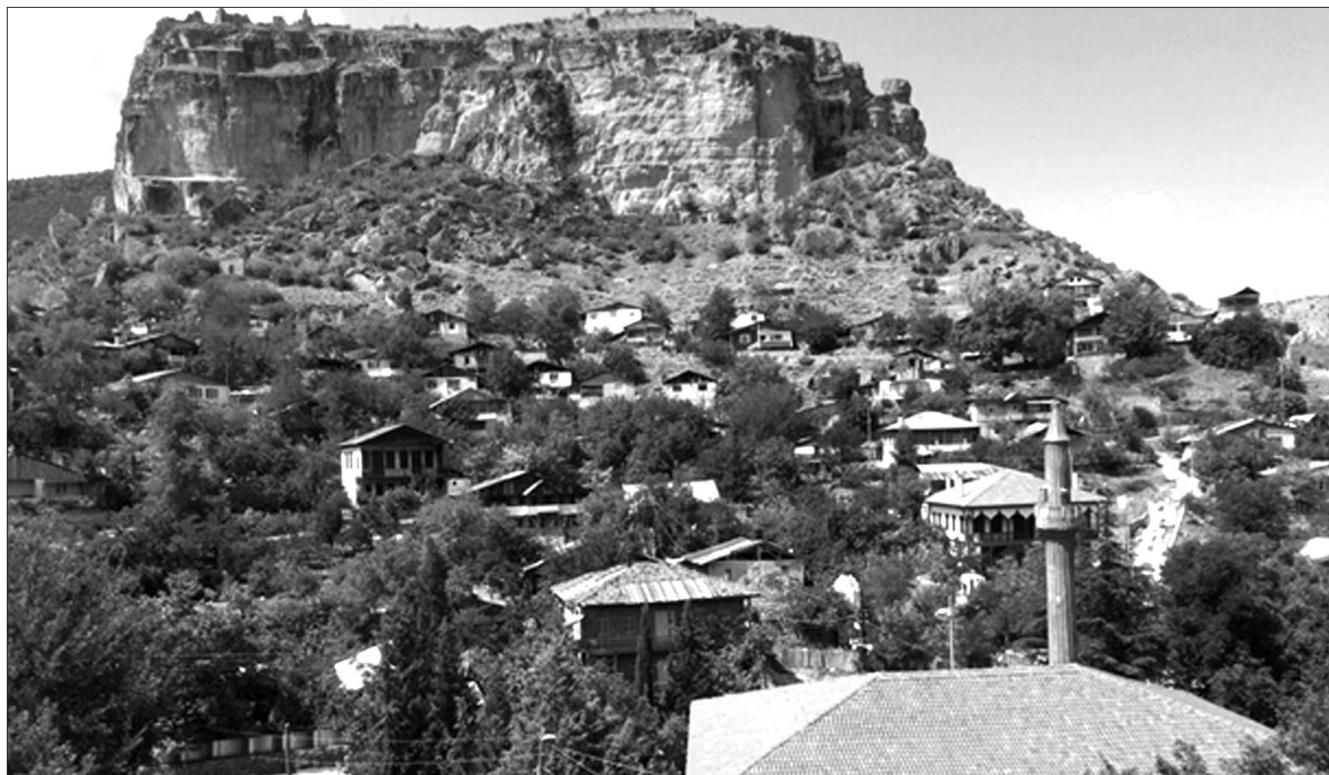


Photo 1: Old Ardanuç, City (Adakale)-Stadel (Gevhernik), 2024

mosque was carried out, a dye house and shops (Arasta) were built and donated to the mosque officials (Oflaz, 2009, ;İskenderoğlu 1989; Bayram, 2005). A part of this arasta (shops) located on the street that continues from the entrance gate to the mosque has survived to the present day (Aytekin, 2024).

According to the census dated 1835, it is understood that 118 households lived in Ardanuç Castle (near Ardanuç Castle) (Taşkın ve Kaya, 2019). Ardanuç Castle, which was one of the important administrative centres of the region in the past, continues to have 110 households and approximately 500 people living there today. The Adakale settlement is divided into two neighbourhoods: a lower and an upper neighbourhood. Ottoman-era construction is concentrated in the lower neighbourhood. In the upper neighbourhood, small, single-story, undemanding houses are noteworthy. Besides the main entrance, there is a separate entrance to the upper neighbourhood, also from the South (Aytekin, 2023). The Adakale campus, which is approximately 65,000 m² in size, is partly surrounded by walls and a significant portion of it is privately owned (Photo 1).



Photo 2: Ardanuç/Gevhernik Castle Stadel, 2025

Archaeological Excavations at Ardanuç Castle. The excavation was started on behalf of the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism and Van Yüzüncü Yıl University in the „Gevhernik Castle, Ardanuç District, Artvin Province (Project Number: CK010802 -2021)“ with the permission based on the Presidential Decree dated 03.06.2021 and numbered 2021/4065 for archaeological drilling and excavation in 2021, and continued uninterruptedly between 2021 and 2025 with a scientific team of 25 people under the leadership of Dr. Lecturer Osman AYTEKİN. It is planned to continue the excavation work in our excavation area, which is within the scope of the „Heritage to the Future Project“ implemented by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey between 2024 and 2028, in the coming years by providing long-term work opportunities.

Who is the Great Ashot? Ashot I Kuropalat, Ashot the Great (Georgian: აშოთ I დიდი, Ashot' I didi) (d. 826/830 AD) was the ruling prince of Iberia (present-day Georgia), and is considered to be the first member of the Bagratid Dynasty to hold this position (813) (Photo. 3). From his lands in Tao-Klarjeti, he fought to expand the Bagratid Dynasty's sovereignty until his assassination in 826/830 and came under the protection of the Eastern Roman Empire against Muslim Arab attacks. Ashot I is also known

as Ashot I Kurapalati, as he received the title Kurapalati (Greek: κουροπαλάτης) from Byzantium. As a patron of Christian culture and a friend of the church, he was canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church (Toumanof, 1956).



Photo 3: Relief of Banu (B. Ashot) from the Opiza Church, Georgian National State Museum

Ashot the Great was the son of the Iberian nobleman Adarnase, who founded the Bagratid principality in Tao-Klarjeti (present-day north-eastern Türkiye) and his father bequeathed to his son the vast lands he had seized after the line of his cousins, Garami and Khosrovi, ended. Since Ashot the Great could not establish authority in Central Iberia (Shida Kartli) as a result of the Arab domination in Tbilisi, he renovated the Artanuci Castle, known to have been built by King Vakhtang Gorgasali in the 5th century, and was recognized by Byzantium as the Kuropalatis and ruling prince of Iberia. In order to revive his country, which was devastated by Muslim Arabs and the cholera epidemic, he took the local monastic communities founded by Grigol Handzeli under his protection and encouraged the settlement of Georgians in the Tao-Klarjeti Region. As a result, the political and religious centre of Iberia relocated from Central Iberia to the southeast, that is, Tao-Klarjeti in Turkey (Djobadze, 1992).

He fought to save the Georgian homeland from the Muslim Arab occupation from his lands in Tao-Klarjeti, and although not always successful, he captured most of the lands connected from Tao in the southwest to Shida Kartli in the northeast, including Kola, Artaani, Javakheti, Samtskhe. Of the former Khosrovi lands, only Kakheti was not under his control. With the Arab emirs in the Caucasus acting more and more autonomously, the Caliph recognized Ashot the Great as prince of Iberia to oppose the rebellious emir of Tiflis, Ismail ibn Shu'ayb (818). The emir received support from the Kakheti prince Grigol, the enemy of Ashot the Great, and the Georgian mountain tribes of the Mtviuletids and Tsanaretids. Ashot I, who received the support of Theodosius II, the Byzantine vassal king of Abkhazia, fought with the Emir of Tiflis in Xani and was victorious, succeeding in expelling the Kakheti from the lands of Central Iberia (Subaşı, 2023).

The Bagratid family's fortunes were reversed in 827/8 when Khalid ibn Yazid, the Caliph's viceroy of Arminia, took steps to strengthen Arab rule in the Caucasus. Ashot I must have been alive at that time, and the information provided by the 11th-century chronologist Sumbat, who argued that Ashot was killed in 826, is controversial. It is more likely that his assassination took place four years later, on

January 29, 830. After being expelled from Central Iberia by the Arabs, Ashot the Great retreated to the Nigali Valley and was killed by traitors in the apse of a church there (Photos 4-5). After the death of Ashot the Great, his inheritance was divided among his three sons, Bagrat I, Adarnese II, and Guaram. His daughter was married to Theodosius II, King of Abkhazia (Rapp, 2003).

The Assassination of Ashot the Great. According to the book *Kartlis Tskhovroba*; „He discovered a rock in the Klarjeti forests where Vakht'ang Gorgasali built the Art'anuji fortress and where Baghdad's Sag destroyed it. Ashot restored and rebuilt this castle and founded a city beneath it. Ashot built the Church of the Apostles Peter and Paul inside the castle, prepared his own tomb, and settled in this castle. Soon after, Ashot conquered the lands as far as the gate of the city of Bardav (?). God granted Ashot victory and great glory in battle many times“ . „Meanwhile, Ashot set out to gather an army to fight the Saracens(?). He arrived at a certain place and sent his men to gather his army. While his army was still not completed, the Saracens suddenly attacked, forcing him to flee. Thereupon, he went to the Nigali (Artvin Center) region and began to gather his forces and expand his army. And those whom he had commanded came to kill him, but Ashot was unaware of their intention before they came to his palace. When they arrived at Ashot's palace, Ashot realized their plan, but his army was not with him except for a small force. He couldn't resist them, so he took refuge in the church. Ashot was stabbed with a sword in the apse. The apse was stained with his blood, for he was slaughtered like a lamb on the apse steps. The traces of his blood are still there“ .



Photo 4: Sveti Church and Tower in Nigala/Seyitler Village, Pavlinov'dan, 1888

“And when the army of Doliskana heard that their ruler Ashot had been killed by the descendants of Oroz-Moroz (?), they set out from Doliskana and pursued the murderers. They caught them at Chorokhi (Choruh River) and killed them mercilessly until not a single person was left alive. Ashot died in the year 6830 after Creation. This occurred in the 46th year of Koronikon, in the 13th cycle, on January 29. He left behind three sons: the eldest, Adarnase, and then Bagrat. These two sons, Shavsheti and Klarjeti, also came with him. His youngest son, Guaram, was born after his arrival in Ardanuci. After the death of their father Ashot, all the surrounding lands of Ashot's sons were captured by the Saracens, because the sons were not yet of age (major)“ (Abashidze, 2014).

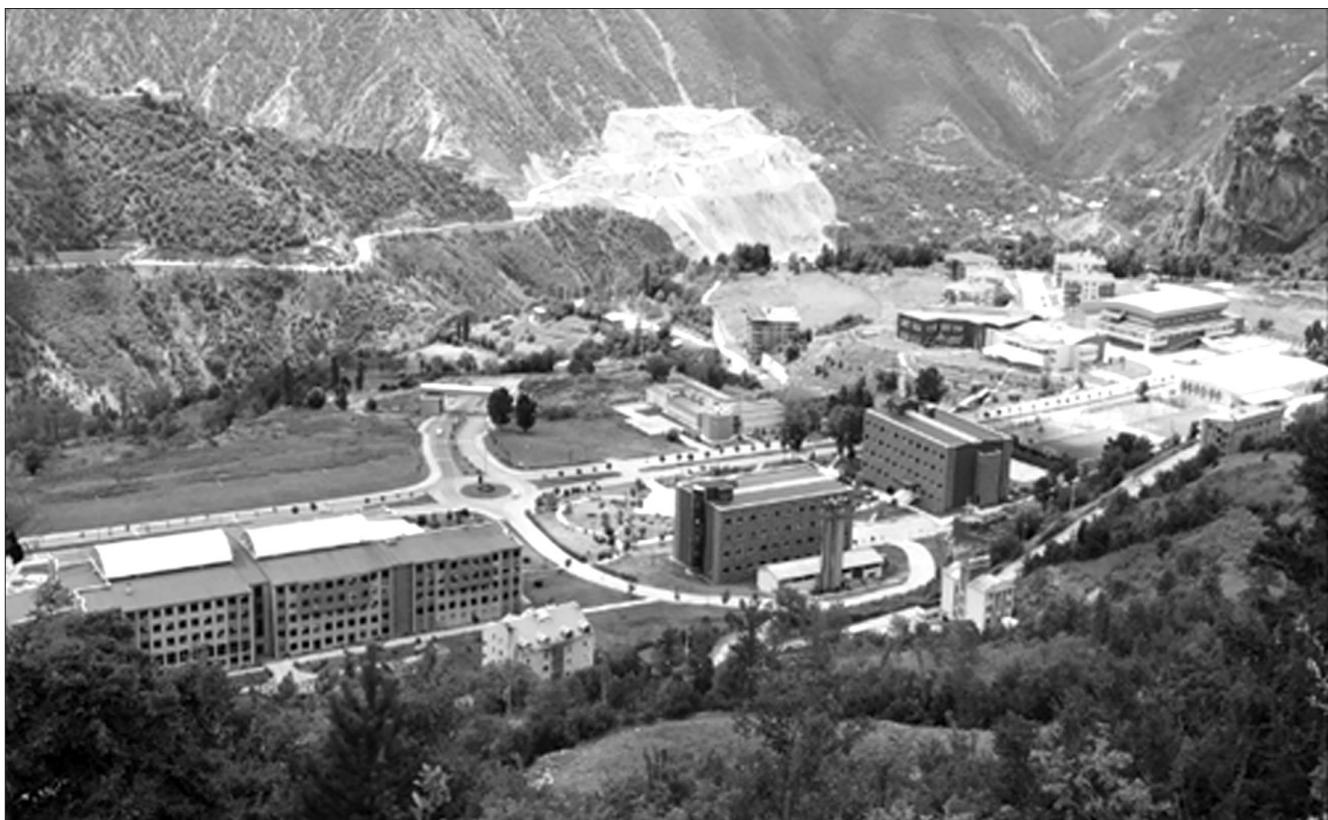


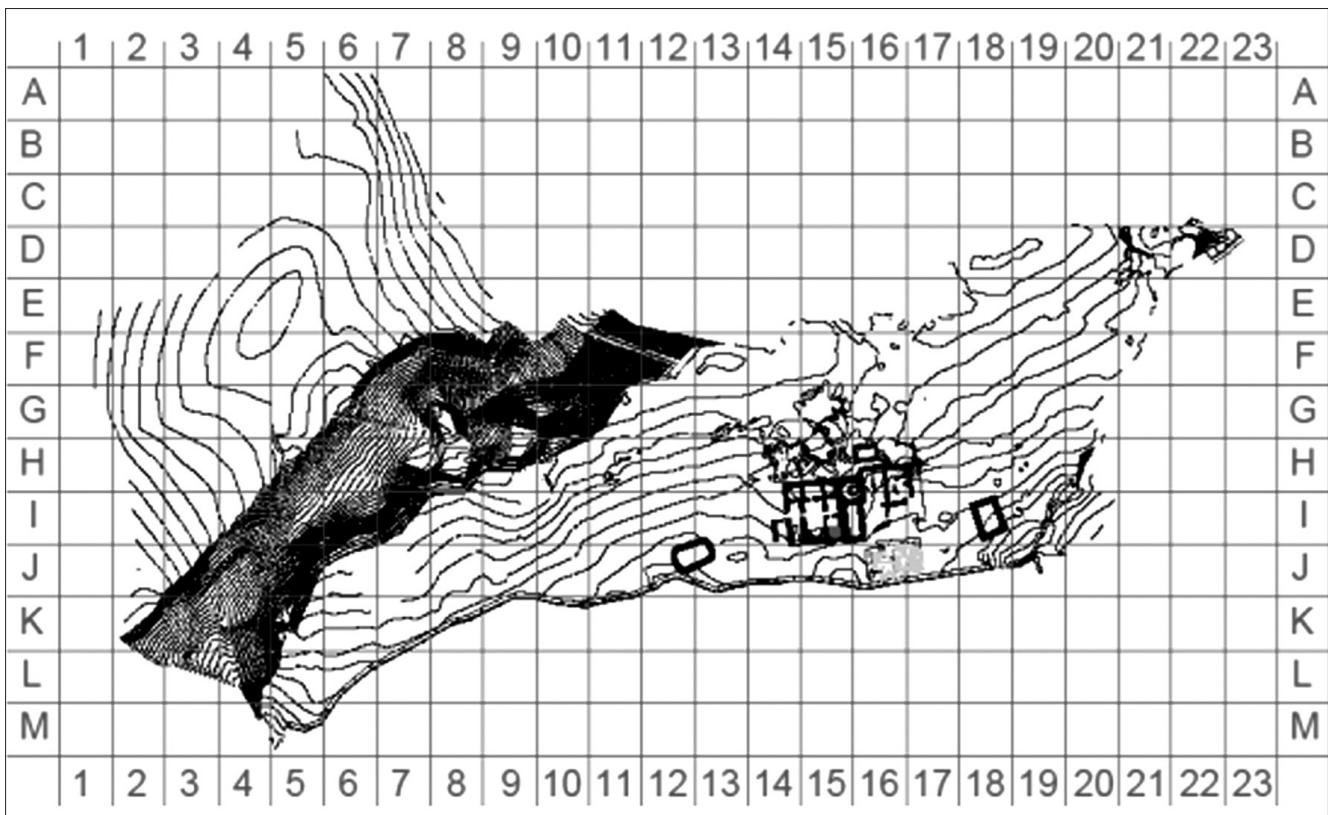
Photo 5: Nigala/Seyitler Village, Artvin Coruh University Campus, 2020

Evaluation. The Georgian Ashot the Great (813-826/830) and the Armenian Ashot I of the Bagratuni Dynasty are sometimes confused with each other. However, since it is known that the Armenian Ashot I reigned between 885 and 890, it is possible to separate them historically.

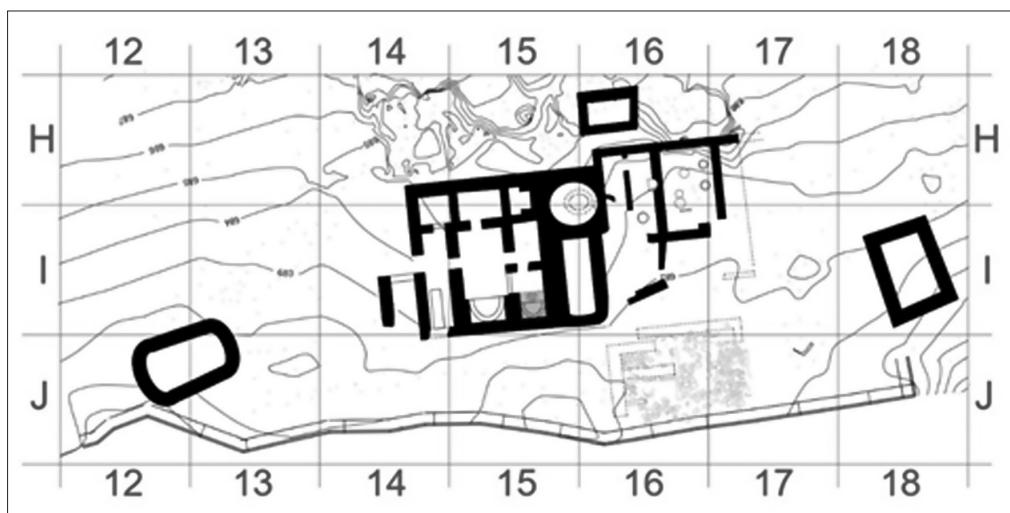
It is understood that the Great Ashot came from Inner Kartli, that is, from the lands of today's Georgia, to the Şavşat and Ardanuç (Şavşeti-Klarçeti) lands of Artvin, which they found more secure, at the beginning of the 9th century, under the pressure of the Muslim Arabs and due to his unity of religion and sect, he came under the protection of Byzantium and was awarded the title of Kuropalat (Favorite of the Palace).

Ashot the Great, who revitalized the Ardanuç Castle (Gevhernik Castle), which was built in the 5th century during the reign of Vakhtang V Gorgaslan, the Iberian King, to protect himself from the administrative and religious oppression of the Sassanids and later destroyed by Muslim Arabs in the 8th century, and who founded his city (Adakale) at the foot of the Ardanuç Castle, is understood to have been assassinated in the Sveti Church, now completely destroyed, in the Nigala Valley (Artvin Center, Seyitler Village) in 826 or 830 by persons whose identities cannot be fully determined. It is said that the body of Ashot the Great was taken from here by his soldiers and brought to Ardanuç Castle and buried in the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, which he had previously built.

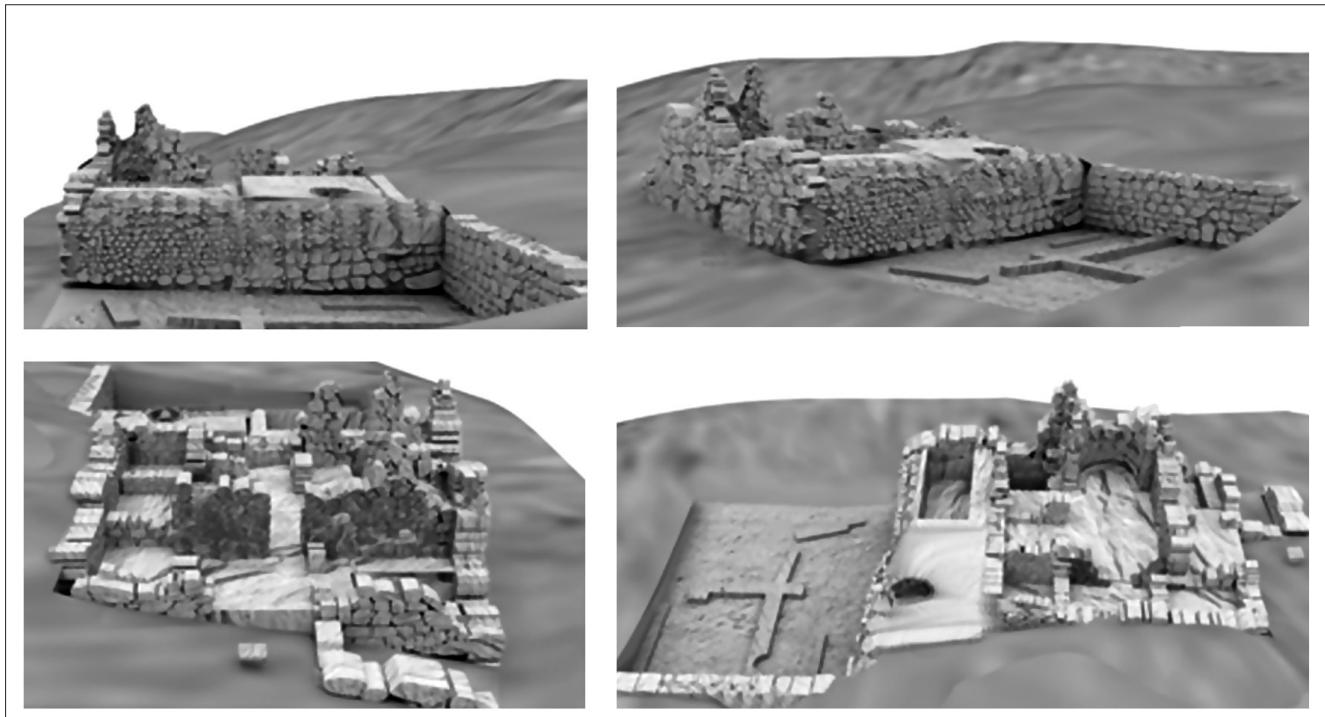
Findings. Within the scope of the Ardanuç-Gevhernik Castle archaeological excavations carried out by us in 2021, the excavations at the Church of Saints Paul and Peter and the surrounding area were completed, starting from 2024 and continuing in 2025. At this stage, the grave of Ashot the Great has been found, but his body has not been found (Drawings 1, 2, 3).



Drawing 1: Ardanuç/Gevhernik Castle Stadium, Topographic Map, 2025



Drawing 2: Survey Plan of the Ardanuç/Gevhernik Castle Stadium, Peter and Paul Church and its Surroundings, 2025



Drawing 3: Ardanuç/Gevhernik Castle Stadium, Peter and Paul Church and Surroundings, 3D Model Sheet, 2025



Photo 6: Peter and Paul Church and Surrounding Structures, 2025



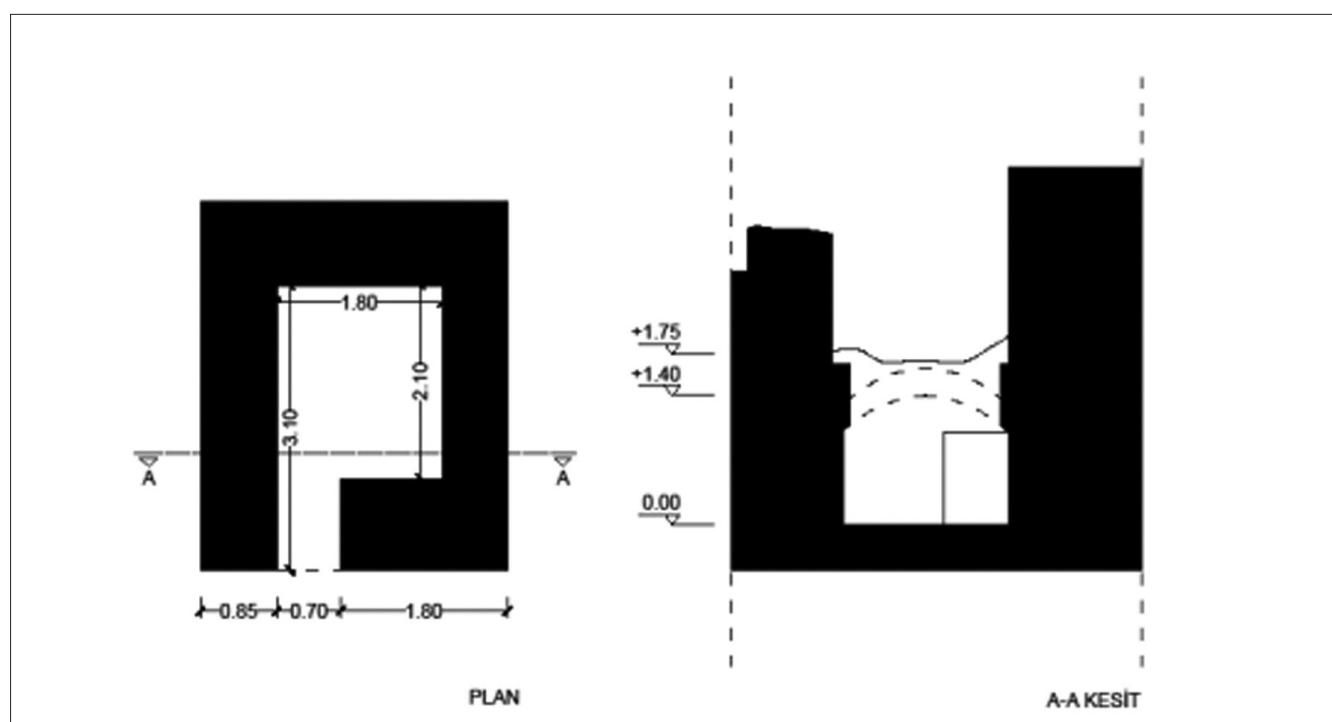
Photo 7: Peter and Paul Church, Before the Apse Was Opened, 2025



Photo 8: Burial Chamber Unearthed in the Apse of the Church of Peter and Paul, 2025



Photo 9: Burial Chamber Unearthed in the Church of Peter and Paul, 2025



Çizim 4: Petrus ve Pavlus Kilisesinde Ortaya Çıkarılan Mezar Odasının Rölöve Planı ve Kesiti, 2025

In particular, as a result of the archaeological excavations we carried out in August 2025, a burial chamber was unearthed in the crypt under the apse of the church on the north side of the Peter and Paul Church, just as stated in the „Georgian Book of Life“ (Photos 6, 7). It was observed that this burial chamber, which has a narrow entrance from the east side of the church, had a vaulted cover made of stone material and that the vault cover was completely destroyed at an unknown date in order to reach the tomb (Photos 8, 9). The burial chamber in question measures 1.80 x 2.10 m and is approximately 1.50 m deep, and is formed by a stone wall with a narrow entrance of 0.70 m width and 1.00 m length from the outside (Drawing 4). Apart from a small number of animal bone fragments, no other objects were found in the burial chamber in question.

Result. According to our observations, the burial chamber in question has not been robbed recently. So, who removed the body of Ashot the Great from the burial site and when?

It is possible that the body of the Great Ashot was taken by the elders of the Church of Peter and Paul, who knew of his existence here, at the beginning of the Ottoman rule in the 16th century, and buried in a monastery or church in Georgia, which they thought would be more safeguarded!?

The most important data supporting our view is that many manuscripts/bibles and sacred items belonging to churches were taken to Georgia from the Tao-Klarjeti lands in Turkey, especially starting from the 12th century, by different times and individuals. In addition, there are records that some foreign researchers who came to Artvin during the Tsarist Russian Administration after 1878 and took various works to Georgia and other foreign countries.

As a result, as a result of the archaeological excavations carried out by us in Ardanuç Castle, the body of Great Ashot Kuropalat could not be found in the crypt of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Ardanuç/Gevhernik Castle. To shed light on this situation, comprehensive and serious interdisciplinary studies need to be conducted.

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