

ROLAND ISAKADZE

EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN KUTAISI

Historical sources have only two instances to mention the early Christian churches of Kutaisi and both are dated in relation of the events of the 30s of the 8th century. Considering this fact the present archaeological discoveries of the multitude of churches, belonging to the 4th-8th centuries, become a noteworthy issue. The more so, the number of churches is likely to increase parallel to the subsequent excavations.

Chronologically, the most ancient of the churches is the 4th century big three nave basilica discovered during the excavation of the Bagrati Cathedral. In about the 5th-and the early half of 6th centuries the edifice seems have been substantially rebuilt.

The two nave small church with protruded apses discovered in the "Inner City" territory revealing two construction layers and belonging to the Bath complex is of 5th-7th centuries. Dated the close of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th century is a three apse church discovered under the floor of the 13th century Citadel Church. The church has the well-definable traces of the later reconstruction of 7th-8th centuries. The 4th century big basilica was presumably destroyed during the Iran invasion in 5th century. In the 7th century we see the new basilica in the same place, which according to *Kartlis Tskhovteba* (The Georgian Chronicles) is called Kutaisi Saqdari (church). Leon II, the king of Egris-Apkhzeti, carried out reconstruction works at the end of the 8th century after it had been damaged during the invasion of the Arabs headed by Murvan the Deaf. The wall texture of the new basilica is organically included in the Bagrati Cathedral building and is easily discernable up to the storey and a half level. As for the elements of the interior they are erased on the floor level. It is the ruined layer of this basilica where archaeologists discovered inscribed antefix (G "B).

I think that Kozma and Damiane Church, up to the Red Bridge, mentioned in "the Life of David and Konstantine" must have been located at the fork of the present A.Kazbegi and David and Konstantine streets which is either covered by the present houses or was lost in the 60s of the 19th century during the Lechkhumi road construction when the historically inhabited slope was cut off by "making use of explosive materials" (N.Nikoladze)