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ON THE QUESTION OF EARLY CHRISTIAN EPARCHIES IN LAZETI
(ANCIENT CHANETI)

In the first century of our era Saint Andrew the First Called and Matatha preached Christianity in Lazeti, one of the historical provinces of Georgia.

According to history South-west Georgian territory from the mouth of the Chorokhi river to the modern Turkish town of Unie was a living space of Laz (Chans). The whole region can conditionally be divided into middle and east Chaneti. Assimilation of the west Laz to the Greek must have been taken place before the new era and of the middle Laz after A.D. 258 when the Romans restored the city of Trabzon burnt by the Goths. The east Chaneti that still has the Georgian population and the Laz, Kartvelian speech, maintained its identity owing to the relief that was hard to reach and the nearness to the rest of Georgia.

According to *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (The Life of Georgia) apostles come to Georgia during the reign of King Aderk, when the west Georgia is a part of the united "Kartlian" kingdom. The record says that Saint Andrew appointed bishops, priests and deans to the people he had converted to Christianity. In the east Chaneti their must be at least two bishops of Apsari and Htsisi, and the one - Trabzon bishop in the middle Chaneti. Greek and Roman sources most often mention Apsari and Htsisi.

There also exists the evidence that the Cathedral of Opi, the residence of the Laz bishops was founded by Saint Nino (P.Ingorokva). In the A.D. IV in the east Chaneti Bishopric Cathedrals and Christianity seem to have been eliminated as Saint Nino converts the population one more times and establishes cathedrals in the places where the bishops of Htsisi (of Surmene) must have their seat in the earlier times. The city of Opi is in three kilometers distance from Surmene.

According to the views dominated in the Georgian historiography at the time of gaining autocephaly of the Georgian Church King Vakhtang possessed Khupati (Khopa) castle. P.Ingorokva asserts that in the A.D. V century even the newly established Tamburi bishopric fell under the jurisdiction of Mtskheta Catholicos. Tamburi was situated at the place of modern town Artashen.