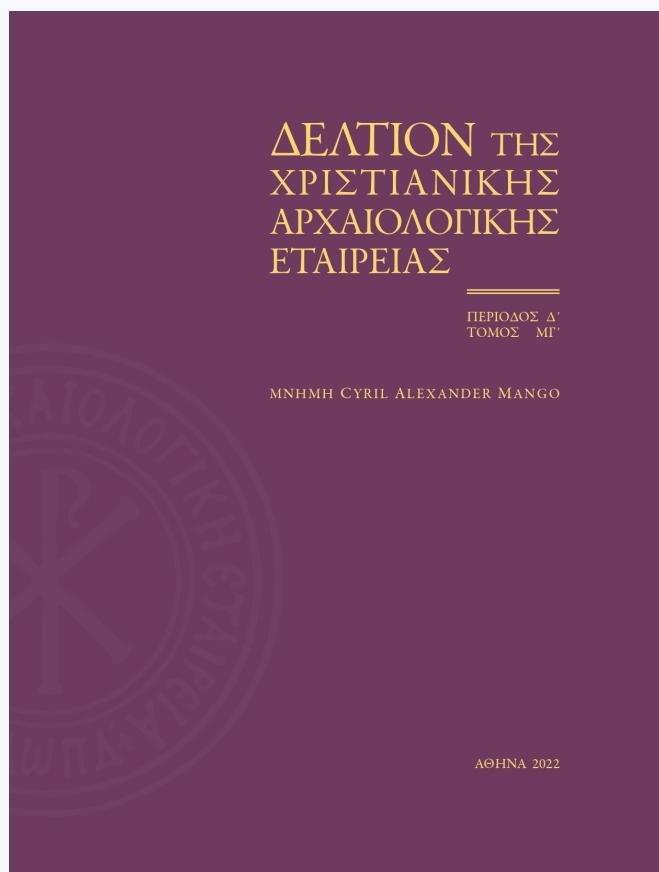


Deltion of the Christian Archaeological Society

Vol 43 (2022)

Deltion ChAE 43 (2022), Series 4



Pityous, the ancient Christian center of the Caucasus

Liudmila G. KHRUSHKOVA

doi: [10.12681/dchae.34366](https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.34366)

To cite this article:

KHRUSHKOVA, L. . G. (2023). Pityous, the ancient Christian center of the Caucasus. *Deltion of the Christian Archaeological Society*, 43, 45–56. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.34366>

Liudmila G. Khrushkova

PITYOUS, THE ANCIENT CHRISTIAN CENTER OF THE CAUCASUS

Η Πιτυούς (σημ. Πιτσούντα) είναι ένα από τα παλαιότερα επισκοπικά κέντρα του Καυκάσου. Ο πρώτος ναός κτίστηκε εκτός των τειχών του ρωμαϊκού castellum. Στις αρχές του 10ου αιώνα κτίστηκε ένας τρουλαίος ναός ως έδρα των αρχιεπισκόπου Σωτηριούπολεως. Κατά την ανασκαφική περίοδο 2006-2007 αποκαλύφθηκε οικιστικό συγκρότημα δίπλα στον βόρειο τοίχο του τρουλαίου ναού, το οποίο χρονολογείται στην Ύστερη Αρχαιότητα. Ο διπλός ναός ήταν η τρίτη εκκλησία της πόλης.

Pityous (modern Pitsunda) is one of the oldest Episcopal centers in the Caucasus. The first church was built outside the walls of the Roman castellum. At the beginning of the 10th century a domed church was erected as the cathedral of the archbishop of Soteriopolis. During the 2006-2007 excavation sessions, a residential complex was discovered next to the north wall of the domed church; this complex dates to Late Antiquity. A double church became the third Christian center of Pityous.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

Παλαιοχριστιανική περίοδος, μεσαιωνική περίοδος, ναοί, περιοχή του Πόντου, Καύκασος, Αμπχαζία, Πιτυούς.

Keywords

Early Christian period; Medieval period; churches; Pontic Area; Caucasus; Abkhazia; Pityous.

The name of the city “Pityous the Great” (Πιτυούς ὁ μέγας) dates back to Strabo. In modern studies, the city is often referred to as Pityunt, Pityunta, Pityonta; this name comes from the form of the oblique cases of the Greek toponym Pityous. The Abkhazian name of Pityous is Mzahar (or Mzahra), the Georgian name is Bičvinta. The current toponym Pitsunda derives from the name Pezonda of Italian nautical charts of the Late Middle Ages.

There were three Christian architectural complexes in Pityous. The oldest one, dating back to the early Christian period, is located within the walls of the ancient city. Another complex, the largest one, is located outside the walls, in the cemetery area. It includes several churches built during the 5th-10th centuries, as well as a residential complex dated to Late Antiquity. The third religious center of Pityous was the double church dated

to the 6th century, which is also located in the cemetery area. This article outlines the most important results of the Pityous study, including the results of our own excavations, most of which have not yet been published.

Brief history of the exploration of the city

The city of Pityous has been studied better than other historical centers of the eastern Black Sea coast (Figs 1, 2). The first author to leave us with a whole collection of iconographic documents was a missionary priest and a member of the Theatines order, Don Cristoforo de Castelli (1600-1659). He spent decades in Colchis; Castelli's reports (*Relazione*) on his journey to Colchis are accompanied by many drawings. The drawing of the

* Lomonosov State University, Moscow, KhrushkovaL@list.ru

** The paper was translated from the Russian by Innokenty Gelbuk.

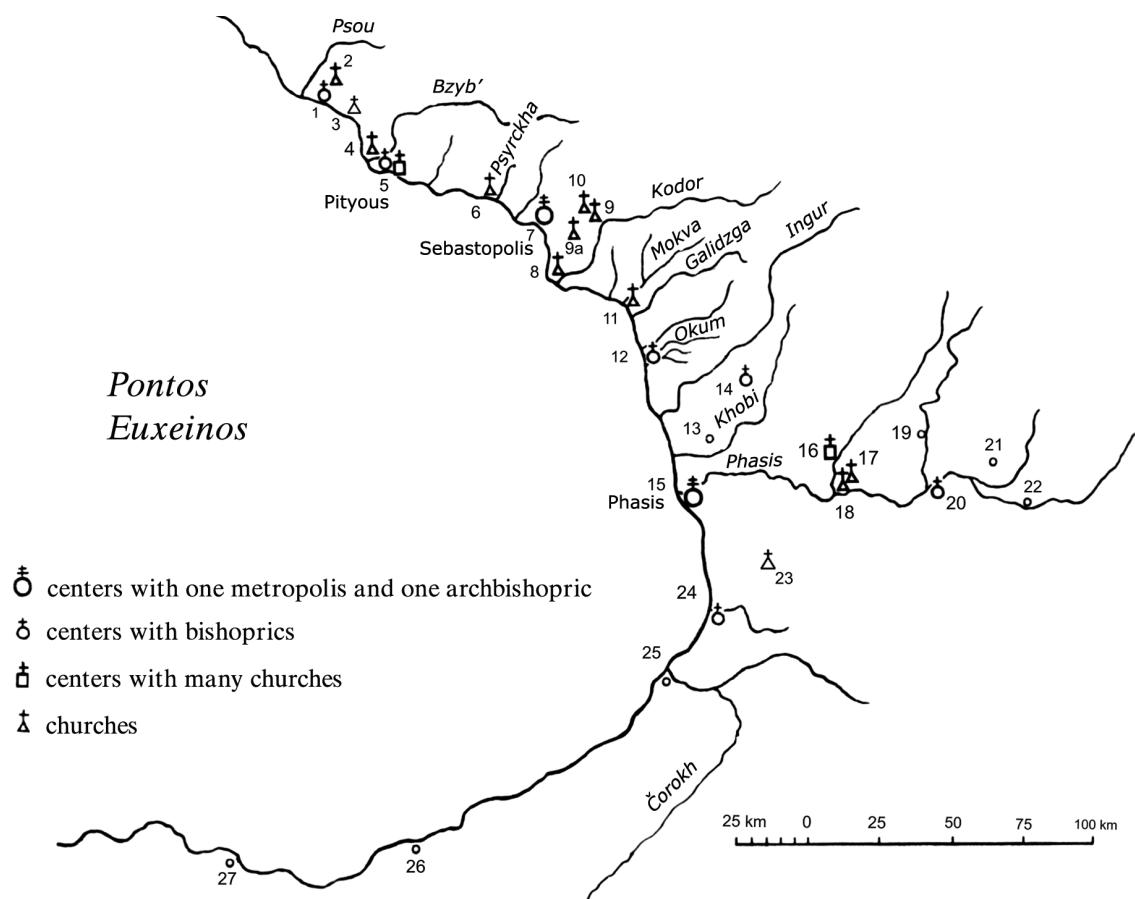


Fig. 1. The Black Sea east coast in the Byzantine era. Map of the region with indications of churches and bishoprics.

Pitsunda Church (i.e. the domed church) occupies a whole sheet¹ (Fig. 3). In front of the southern entrance is a porch; a similar porch existed on the northern side. Its foundations were discovered by our excavations in 2009. This picture reflects the existence in Pitsunda of the cult of the Cross and the cult of the Pillar.

The next important iconographic document about the Pitsunda Church appeared almost two hundred years later. It is a depiction of the church by Frédéric Dubois de Montpéraux (1798-1850), a Swiss scholar, who made his trip to the Western Caucasus and the Crimea in 1833.

¹ Don Christoforo de Castelli, *Fra Mōdizzaro al re di georgiani*, Album 3 Qq E 92, fol. s/p (Copy of the Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo). L. G. Khrushkova, *Восточное Причерноморье в византийскую эпоху. История. Архитектура. Археология (= The Eastern Black Sea Region in the Byzantine era. Architecture. Archaeology)*, Kaliningrad – Moscow 2018, fig. 79.

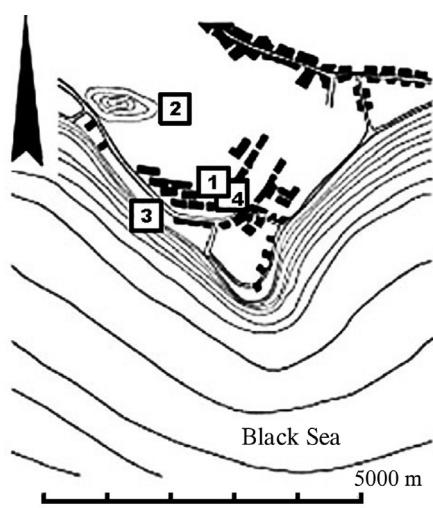


Fig. 2. Pityous during the 4th-10th centuries, schematic plan: (1) Religious complex intra muros, 4th-6th centuries; (2) Tower, 6th century; (3) Double church, 6th century; (4) Architectural complex, 5th-10th centuries.



Fig. 3. Pityous, the domed church, drawing by Don Cristoforo de Castelli (1600-1659) (Copy of the Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo).

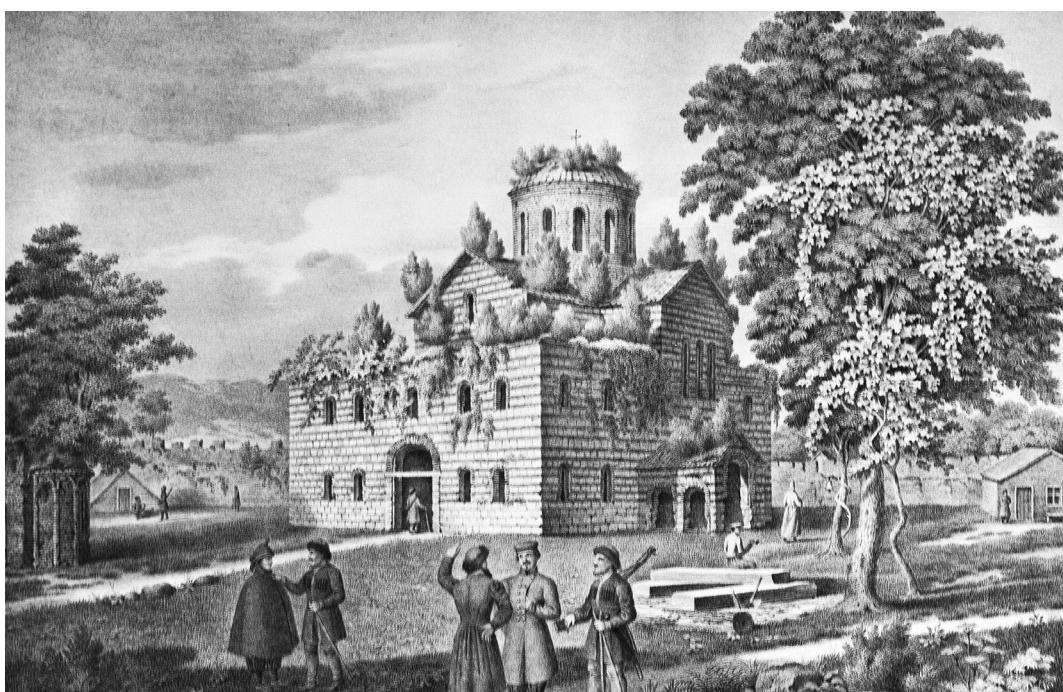


Fig. 4. Pityous, the domed church, drawing by F. Dubois de Montpereux (1839).

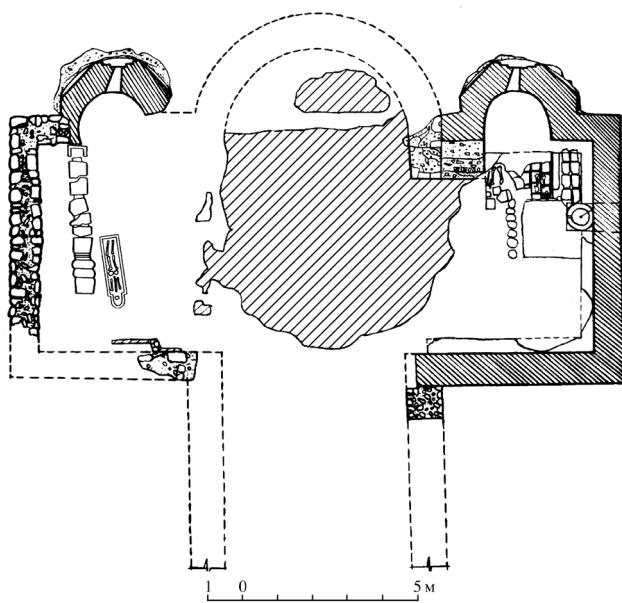


Fig. 5. Pityous, cemetery. Plan of the architectural complex extra muros. First phase: a martyrium and a chapel with a semicircular apse, second half of the 5th century; Second phase: cruciform church with three apses, second half of the 6th century.

Dubois depicts the Pitsunda Church from the southwest² (Fig. 4). These iconographic documents of the 17th and 19th centuries indicate that the Pitsunda Church was in a reasonably good condition³. In the second half of the 19th century, art historians also became interested in Abkhazia. In 1873, the best-known Russian Byzantinist Nikodim P. Kondakov (1844-1925)⁴, drew attention to the large domed church in Pitsunda. Thus, the large domed church of Pitsunda was well known to travelers, architectural historians, and archaeologists.

The Pitsunda Archaeological Expedition began work in 1952, under the direction of Andria M. Apakidze. The excavations continued until 1992⁵. The first Christian

² F. Dubois de Monpereux, *Voyage autour du Caucase chez les Tcherkesses et les Abkhazes en Colchide, en Géorgie, en Arménie et en Crimée*, 1, Paris 1839, 223-232. *Atlas*, Neuchatel 1843, 3e série, pl. 1.

³ F. Dubois de Monpereux, *Voyage autour du Caucase*, op.cit. (n. 2), 232.

⁴ L. G. Khrushkova, "Nikodim P. Kondakov", *Personenlexikon zur christlichen Archäologie*, 2, Regensburg 2012, 751-755.

⁵ A. M. Apakidze (ed.), *Великий Питиунт* (= Great Pityount), I-III, Tbilisi 1975-1978.

church, the cathedral of Stratophilus, was built outside the walls of the Roman castle. Later it was rebuilt twice and surrounded by the wall of a larger fortress. The fourth church on this site was a single-nave church, which was built in the second half of the 6th century⁶. In an area to the south-east of the *castellum*, in the cemetery of Pityous, one more religious complex was found. Initially two buildings appeared here: a small *martyrium* which included an anthropoid sarcophagus and two tombs, as well as a chapel with a semicircular apse. This complex can be dated to the second half of the 5th century. In the second half of the 6th century a cruciform church with three apses was built on its remains⁷ (Fig. 5). The large domed church of the 10th century was built near the cruciform church on account of the special significance of the site. To sum up, the area contains constructions of different eras. In the other cemetery of Pityous, Teymuraz M. Mikéladzé discovered the double church of the early Christian period⁸.

In 2006-2009 we continued the excavations of the two monuments in Pityous. The double church in the cemetery has been completely excavated. It was not possible to excavate the territory adjacent to it, because the church is surrounded from all sides by trees. A pine is growing in the southern apse, so it may be suggested that the grove appeared at a later time. We have also excavated the residential complex located near the large domed church. A large number of findings dated to Late Antiquity, discovered during the excavations of this complex, have been prepared for publication.

⁶ I. Tsitsishvili, "Bičvintis sakulto nagebobata kompleksi", A. M. Apakidze (ed.), *Великий Питиунт* (= Great Pityount), II, Tbilisi 1977, 83-119.

⁷ G. A. Lordkipanidze – Z. B. Agrba, "Раскопки на территории комплекса Пицундского храма. Археологические открытия 1980 года в Абхазии" (= "Excavations on the territory of the Pitsunda church complex. Archaeological discoveries of 1980 in Abkhazia"), Tbilisi 1982, 26-31. L. G. Khrushkova, *Les monuments chrétiens de la côte orientale de la mer Noire. Abkhazie, IVe-XIVE siècle*, Turnhout 2006, 34-36. L. G. Khrushkova, *Раннхристианские памятники Восточного Причерноморья, IV-VII века* (= *Early Christian Monuments of the Eastern Black Sea Region, IV-VII Centuries*), Moscow 2002, 97-110.

⁸ T. M. Mikéladzé, "Oriapsidiani eklesia bičvintaši", *Материалы по археологии Грузии и Каеказа* (= *Materials on the Archeology of Georgia and the Caucasus*), 2, 1963, 125-131.

Written sources

Pityous was mentioned by Arrian about 132 (or 136) A.D.⁹. It has long been known as one of the oldest Episcopal centers in the Caucasus. Its bishop Stratophilus was the only representative of the Caucasus at the first Council of Nicaea in 325 and signed all documents of the council¹⁰. A *Notitia Dignitatum* from the turn of the 5th century A.D., mentions Pityous as the location of Roman troops¹¹. According to Procopius of Caesarea, Pityous and Sebastopolis had been named in the 28 *Novella* of Justinian as the fortresses of the province *Pontus Polemoniacus*¹².

Pityous retained its significance over many centuries. The picture of the development of this Christian city and its environs in the 4th-6th centuries is restored in accordance with the archaeological data. In the era of the wars of Justinian against Persia, Pityous is not mentioned in Byzantine sources. Constantine Porphyrogenitus writes in his treatise *De Administrando Imperio* (42, 14): “The coast from the borders of Zikhia, that is, from the Nikopsis River, constitutes the country of Abasgia, right up to the fortress of Soteriopolis (χάστρον Σωτηριούπολις)”¹³. Soteriopolis was the center of the archbishopric, which was subordinate to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Information about the province of Soteriopolis first appears in the seventh *Notitia Episcopatum*, during the first patriarchate of Nikolaos Mystikos (901-907)¹⁴. Nikolaos carried out the “Alan program”, which included the organization of a mission

to the Alans, the creation of an archbishopric, and the construction of an Episcopal church. Discussions about this have been going on for several decades. Some historians, starting with Julian A. Kulakovskiy (1855-1919), believe that Soteriopolis was in Pityous/ Pitsunda and this opinion is the most probable. The location of Soteriopolis in Pitsunda agrees with the facts about the repeated mergers and divisions of the provinces of Soteriopolis, Alania and Zikhia. Pityous had convenient communication with Constantinople by sea and with Alania through the gorge of the river Bzyb, which flows into the Black Sea near Pityous. Thus, in Late Antiquity, Pityous became the first Episcopal center in the eastern Black Sea region, and more than a thousand years later, it became the last location vacated by the Byzantines. And, finally, this domed church of Pitsunda became the first to be restored and used by the Society for the Reestablishment of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus, in the 1869’s.

The domed church

The huge domed church in Pitsunda is the largest on the east coast of the Black Sea and was erected as the cathedral of the Archbishop of Soteriopolis, in the beginning of the 10th century¹⁵ (Fig. 6). The church was also a missionary and pilgrimage center. Byzantine missionaries were sent to the northeast side, to Alania and Zikhia. In addition, Pitsunda for centuries remained the center of the cult of the Apostle Andrew, who, according to tradition, was the illuminator of this territory. When the Turks had established themselves in the eastern Black Sea region, the Catholicos returned from Pitsunda to Gelati, along with archives, books and icons. The sources do not give an exact date for this move. Some historians believe that this event occurred under Eudemon I Čkhetidze, around the middle of the 16th century, while others place it in the middle of the 17th century¹⁶. The church continued to be venerated also under the Turks, as attested by various 17th century sources.

⁹ Arrien 18, 1-2: G. Marenghi (ed.), *Arriano, Periplo del Ponto Eusino*, Naples 1958, 92-93.

¹⁰ E. Honigmann, “La liste originale des Pères de Nicée, à propos de l’Évêché de ‘Sodoma’ en Arabie”, *Byzantion* 14/1 (1939), 46. Idem, “The Original Lists of the Members of the Council of Nicaea, the Robber-Synod and the Council of the Chalcedon”, *Byzantion* 16/1 (1944), 20.

¹¹ O. Seck (ed.), *Notitia Dignitatum Orientis*, Berolini 1876, 83-85 (reprint: Frankfurt, 1962).

¹² Procope, *De Aed. III, 7, 5*: H. B. Dewing (ed.), *Buildings, Prokopii Caesariensis, De Aedificiis (Peri Ktismatōn)*, London 1971, 212-213.

¹³ Gy. Moravčík (ed.), *Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio*, Engl. transl. by R. J. H. Jenkins, Budapest 1949, 183-185. Khroushkova, *Les monuments chrétiens*, op.cit. (n. 7), 93-95.

¹⁴ J. Darruzès (ed.), *Notitiae episcopatum ecclesiae Constantino-politanae*, Paris 1981, 273 (Notice 7, N 87).

¹⁵ Khroushkova, *Les monuments chrétiens*, op.cit. (n. 7), 100-107. Eadem, *Восточное Причерноморье*, op.cit. (n. 1), 118-194.

¹⁶ Khroushkova, *Les monuments chrétiens*, op.cit. (n. 7), 17-28, 89-97. Eadem, *Восточное Причерноморье*, op.cit. (n. 1), 28-77.



Fig. 6. Pityous, the domed church, beginning of the 10th century, after restoration.

The church is located outside the walls of the ancient city of Pityous, one kilometer from the coast. The church is very large; its length is 43.3m. The plan represents the inscribed cross type (Fig. 7). A series of domed churches of Abkhazia of the same type are notable for their great similarity. These are, in addition to Pitsunda, the well-preserved churches in Lykhny, Anakopia (modern New Athos), and Mokva. Three more churches are preserved in ruins; these are located, respectively, in the gorge of the river Bzyb, in the village of Alakhadzy on the Pitsunda cape, and in the town of Msygkhua, in the vicinity of Anakopia. All these monuments are located in the northern part of the Abkhazian Kingdom¹⁷. The dates of construction indicated in the annals are known only for the Bishop's church in Mokva (between 957 and 967)¹⁸.

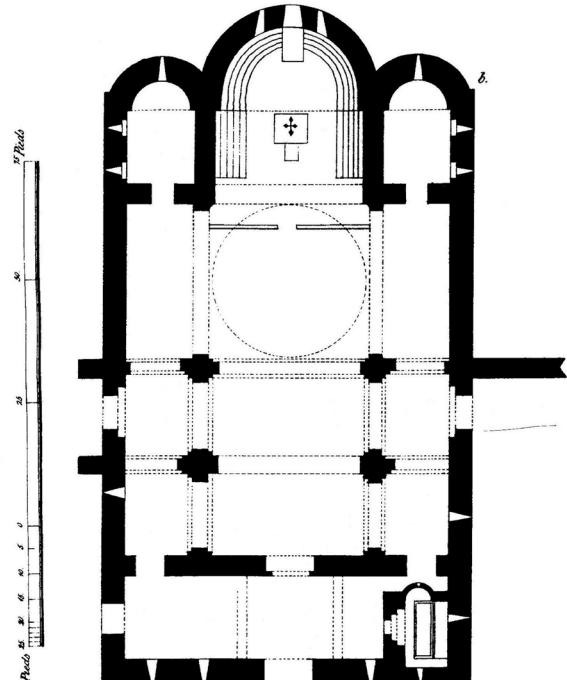


Fig. 7. Pityous, the domed church, plan by F. Dubois de Montpéreux (1839).

¹⁷ Khroushkova, *Восточное Причерноморье*, op.cit. (n. 1), c. 78-164.

¹⁸ M.-F. Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'au XIXe siècle*. 1e Partie: *Histoire ancienne jusqu'en 1469 de J.C.*, Saint-Petersbourg 1849, 290. T. Qaukhchišvili (ed.), *Kartlis Ckhovreba*,



Fig. 8. Pityous, the residential complex in the north side of the domed church, during the excavations.

In 2007, during our excavations, the foundations of the north porch of the domed church were discovered. Side porches, are depicted on both the north and south sides in old plans and drawings. However, today the south porch no longer exists. Only the foundations of the east and west walls of the north porch remain. The east wall of the porch is better preserved, it measures 6×1.2m; the west wall is in a much worse condition. These foundations are laid in rubble. A drain of later origin (19th century) abuts the east wall of the porch. It is 3 m long and laid in thick bricks.

The residential complex

The residential structure is situated almost parallel to the domed church; however their lengthwise axes do not

coincide. Architectural remains are represented only by the wall foundations (Fig. 8). In 2006, during the repair works next to the north wall of the domed church, remains of ancient structures were discovered, which became the catalyst for the beginning of the excavations. The trench, at a distance of 15m from the north wall of the church, was 2m wide and 46m long (23 squares of 2m by 2m) and allowed to appreciate the dynamics of the cultural accumulations and the presence of building remains on this site.

The stratigraphy looked as follows: The west end of the trench had a layer of gray soil (a depth of up to 55cm) under the turf. Squares 13-20 had a layer of dry yellow clay, up to 28-30cm deep under the turf. The clay layer contained practically no archaeological finds. The clay served to level the surface of the site during the late phase of the existence of the monument, possibly during the construction works of the second half of the 19th century, when a monastery was established here. Below it was a layer of dark-gray soil, saturated with

Tbilisi 1955, 270. M. D. Lordkipanidze (ed.), *Matiane Kartlisa*, Tbilisi 1976, 36. G. Pätsch, *Das Leben Kartlis*, Leipzig 1985, 343.

cultural remains, and especially with numerous fragments of flat tiles. As usual, massive concentrations of tiles were observed near the walls, forming in places a layer up to 45-50cm deep. These remains indicated the destruction of the roof of the structure. There was other evidence of the destruction of the walls in this layer –multiple fragments of mortar, stones, charcoal. It is highly likely that the destruction was caused by a fire. Fragments of ceramic vessels of different eras, from Late Antiquity (amphorae) to the Late Middle Ages, pointed to the dislocation of the layers due to various later interferences.

Architectural remains are represented only by the wall foundations. It is likely that they were completely demolished. The foundations are partly destroyed by tree roots. In 2007 we determined the location of the corners and walls of the premises in the north part of the complex, which allowed us to establish the dimensions of the construction on the south-north axis, 21.56m. In 2008, the central and east parts of the complex, comprising eight rooms, were excavated. The length of the excavated part exceeds 16.3m in the east-west direction. The construction continued westward; its overall length has not been established yet. The relative location of this construction and the domed church is arranged in such a way, that the east wall of Room 4 is 1.9m away from the south doorway, in other words the room in question did not block the entry to the church. The secular structure is situated almost parallel to the church; however their lengthwise axes do not coincide. The distance between the two buildings varies from 3.20m to 4.10m. The church is oriented to the east, where the axis of the secular building diverges somewhat to the south-east. This suggests that the two structures were not built as a single ensemble, but that they functioned simultaneously over a period of time.

The foundations are laid in cobble-stone with mortar, in places hewn limestone and fragile porous conglomerate stone are used. The latter is very common in the antique and medieval constructions in Pityous and its vicinity, because of its easy availability in the area. The technique used in the laying of the foundations indicates that Rooms 1 and 2 comprised a single structure –17.5m by 9.25m in size– divided by the wall into two unequal parts. Its location was unrelated to the location of the church.

A distinguishing feature of the foundations of this building: the presence of a row of bricks which levels the masonry along the width of the wall at its most crucial part, at the transition from the foundation to the wall proper. The width of the walls is mostly 0.95 m-0.98 m (nearly three Byzantine feet); the bricks jutted out slightly beyond the surface of the wall on both sides, the width of the brickwork is 1.05m. The bricks are square (or almost square) and rather standardized in size: 33×29cm, 32×30cm, 30.5×30cm, 30×29cm, 29×29 cm, 28.5×28cm, with a width of 3 to 4 cm; some bricks feature hatching. Bricks of this type are common in the monuments of Abkhazia of Late Antiquity. In the masonry of the north wall of Room 1 there are almost no bricks. That wall is 0.73m thick. It is in a poorer state of preservation than the others. In the east part of Room 1, at a depth of 0.44-0.50 m below the current surface, fragments of the floor survive. The pavement, which is 0.09-0.11m thick, consists of two layers. The lower layer comprises pebbles laid on the edge, at an angle; the upper layer is lime concrete with crushed ceramics, which gives it its characteristic pink colour. These two rooms were, in all likelihood, residential. The north wall of the north room continues to the west, where excavations are to continue. Room 3 was added to Rooms 1 and 2 from the south. Room 4 adjoins Room 3. The complex developed northward; these are Rooms 5-8. This was the limit of the east part of the complex. It was built when the earlier premises still functioned. This follows from the fact that the foundations of the later parts adjoin the ancient foundations but never cover them. Besides, the north walls of both parts are on the same line, they formed a common façade. Rooms 3 and 4 were most likely residential. The very small structures 5 and 6 had an ancillary function, while the narrow Rooms 6 and 7 may have served as a gallery open to the east.

Two small marble fragments, both with traces of fire, remain of the architectural decoration. There is also a small fragment of an architectural detail of limestone. A palmette can be discerned on it. Another, still smaller, limestone fragment contains a discernable vegetal motif. In the 5th-6th centuries, a significant amount of marble was imported into Pityous from Prokonnossos. The limestone elements of the decoration, dated to the 10th-11th centuries, had not been found here until now.



Fig. 9. Pityous, the residential complex. The twin burial.

The burials

Thirty-five burials were discovered on the site under investigation. Most of them appeared after the building was no longer functioning. Some skeletons were laid directly on the foundations, when the walls were no longer there. The depth of the burials varies, from 0.23m below the modern surface to a depth of 1.05m where the soil turns to subsoil sand. Most burials are inhumations according to the Christian rite: the skeleton is laid on the back, with the head to the west, slightly turned to the south. The placement of the arms varies: sometimes they are extended alongside the body, laid on the chest (both or just one), or in the pelvic area. Sometimes one of the arms is placed under the chin. The findings are either absent or very poor: iron rings, scissors, small knives (usually by the pelvis, on the left-hand side), a button. In two cases, whole ceramic vessels were found in the burials. Both burials were located near the north-west corner of the domed church. In one case the head of the deceased was covered with tiles.

In 2008, in the south-west part of the complex burials were discovered, which in some respects differ from the rest. Two of the burials had tomb constructions. In one case this was an arrangement of stones near the upper part of the skeleton. One skeleton was placed in a tomb, consisting of small slabs and stones, without mortar. Both were laid on the back, with the head to the west, there were no findings. A twin burial was discovered to the south of these, with an orientation to the

north-east (Fig. 9). Between the heads of the deceased, on a tile fragment, stood a jug *in situ*. The jug is 22cm high, of light-brown clay, with a massive handle; the jug is decorated with an ornament, imprinted with a stamp.

The ceramics

The most frequent finds are tiles of Late Antique shapes. Their concentration as a thick layer (up to 0.5m) near the walls bears testimony to the nature of the roof: during a fire, when the wooden beams catch fire, and during the subsequent destruction, the entire mass of tiles quickly falls from the roof. Another group of tiles relates to the Middle Ages, including three fragments with the sign of the cross in relief. Tiles with similar signs have been found in the lower layer of the palace of Lykhny, in the early 10th-century layer, and also in the excavations of the 10th-11th-century church in the village of Loo near Soči.

The ceramic vessels fall into two chronological groups: the 6th-century group (*amphorae, luteria, pithoi* etc.), and the medieval group (jugs, bowls). The second group is rich in large jugs with widening mouth (some with a diameter of up to 9cm), which can be dated to the 9th-10th centuries. The fragments of the pots sometimes carry common ornaments, the wave motif, incisions. Some jug handles are ornamented with crosses, the herring-bone and other motifs. This kind of ornament on ceramic vessels of local production began to spread in the 10th-11th centuries. Glazed cups, decorated with a yellow-brown vegetal ornament, date to the 14th century and belongs to the “Zeuxippus Ware”¹⁹. There are very few glazed vessels. Another noteworthy absence is *terra sigillata* ceramics. It is very common in Pityous, but inside the walls of the city with its significant population of Roman soldiers and merchants.

The double church

The double church became the third Christian center of Pityous. Unlike other church buildings, it is located on the seashore, in a pine grove. The excavations of Teymuraz M. Mikéladzé in 1956 were not completed.

¹⁹ Khroushkova, *Восточное Причерноморье*, op.cit. (n. 1), 248-311.

Our excavations opened the side vestibules of the church and a gallery from the west. In the interior of the church, we discovered a *synthronon* in the northern apse and a partition in the southern nave. The dimensions of the main space of the double church are 18.5m in length and 14.5m in width, without the apses; its plan is almost square (Fig. 10). The double church consisted of two naves; each nave is equipped with an apse, polygonal on the outside and horseshoe-shaped internally. The western part of the southern nave was separated by a partition wall. Two massive pillars mounted on the stylobate, located along the longitudinal axis of the building separated the naves. The church was equipped with six doorways. Two small vestibules adjoined the openings located in the eastern part of the longitudinal walls. The northern vestibule is better preserved. To the west of the church was a gallery. The main building material of the church is local stone of gray color; this is a loose porous stone, a gravel conglomerate. The quarries of this stone, located in the coastal zone of Pitsunda, continue to operate.

Excavations of the church yielded fragments of various types of ceramics and other sporadic finds. Tiles predominate. The tiles in the trenches were no different from those found in and around the church. The amphorae are the most important findings for dating the church. Among the amphorae, the most numerous are of the type often referred to as "Colchis". The characteristic features of this type are an elongated body with a pointed bottom and a narrow point in its body in the middle, a short and narrow neck, flat handles attached under the rim and bent at a right or an almost right angle. These amphorae are made of brown clay with a reddish or orange tint. This type of amphorae is well known in the eastern Black Sea region in the 6th century, including Pityous²⁰. In Abkhazia, the type of amphorae "with a narrow point in its body" is also present in the archaeological sites at



Fig. 10. Pityous, seashore. The double church, second half of the 6th century.

Sebastopolis²¹, Gyenos²², and Tsebelda²³. In some cases, such amphorae are directly associated with an architectural monument. So, in the Tsandripš basilica of the Justinianic era, the "waisted" amphorae were placed in the vault of the conch of the central apse²⁴.

The double church of Pitsunda was built in the second half of the 6th century, and very probably, after the Byzantine-Persian wars, after the peace Treaty concluded in 561/62 in Dara²⁵.

²¹ Khroushkova, *Восточное Причерноморье*, op.cit. (n. 1), 235-237, fig. 445-446.

²² Khroushkova, *Les monuments chrétiens*, op.cit. (n. 7), pl. 45d.

²³ J. N. Voronov – O. C. Bgazhba, *Материалы по археологии Цебельды. Итоги исследований Цибилиума в 1978-1982 гг* (= *Materials on the Archaeology of Tsebelda. Results of the Studies of Cibilium in 1978-1982*), Tbilisi 1985, 72, pls 29, 30.

²⁴ Khroushkova, *Раннехристианские памятники Восточного Причерноморья*, op.cit. (n. 7), 171-173, fig. 55, pl. XXXV. 1, 2. Eadem, *Les monuments chrétiens*, op.cit. (n. 7), 52, pl. 24b.

²⁵ L. G. Khroushkova, *Раннехристианская двойная церковь* (= *The Early Christian double church*), Москва - Сухум 2020.

²⁰ K. I. Berzenishvili – R. V. Puturidze, *Пицундские амфоры (каталог)* (= *Pitsunda amphoras (catalogue)*), A. M. Apakidze (ed.), *Великий Питиунт. Археологические раскопки в Пицунде* (= *Great Pitiunt. Archaeological excavations in Pitsunda*), 1, Tbilisi, 1975, 252-278. A. M. Apakidze (ed.), *Великий Питиунт. Археологические раскопки в Пицунде* (= *Great Pitiunt. Archaeological excavations in Pitsunda*), 3, Tbilisi, 1978, 92-94.

Conclusion

In the second half of the 6th century, after the end of the Byzantine-Persian wars, Pityous began to expand beyond the old city walls. Two buildings, namely the double church in the cemetery and the cruciform church in the other cemetery, date to that time. In terms of its architectural characteristics, the double church differs significantly from the earliest church buildings in the settlement (churches nos 1, 2, 3), which were timber roofed basilicas. The double church is distinguished by a complex plan and vaulting. It functioned until the 10th-11th centuries, a chronology confirmed by archaeological materials.

The main religious center of the city was the large architectural complex, which was formed during the 6th-10th centuries. It included the cruciform church of the 6th century, which remained in use when the large domed church, the cathedral of the diocese of Soteriopolis was built in the beginning of the 10th century.

The church was probably built on the remains of an early Christian basilica, which has not yet been discovered by excavations. Its existence is indicated by the position of the residential building within its topographic context. This building dated to Late Antiquity, was very likely adjacent to the church building; otherwise it is difficult to explain its position in the complex: it was located not to the east of the cruciform church, which would be its most logical position, but shifted significantly to the north. It can easily be explained by the fact that another building was situated to the east of the cruciform church.

Illustration credits

Figs 1, 5, 6: Drawings by Liudmila G. Khrushkova. Fig. 2. Apakidze, *Великий Питиунъ* 1975, op.cit. (n. 5), fig. 2. Fig. 3: De Castelli, *Fra Mōdizzaro al re di georgiani*, op.cit. (n. 1). Figs 4, 7: Dubois de Montpréreux, *Voyage autour du Caucase*, op.cit. (n. 2). Figs 8, 9: Photographs by Liudmila G. Khrushkova. Fig. 10: Photograph by G. Aleksandrov.

Liudmila G. Khrushkova

ΠΙΤΥΟΥΣ, Η ΠΑΛΑΙΑ ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΙΚΗ ΕΔΡΑ ΤΟΥ ΚΑΥΚΑΣΟΥ

H Πιτυούς (σημ. Πιτσούντα) είναι γνωστή ως μια από τις παλαιότερες επισκοπικές έδρες του Καυκάσου (Εικ. 1, 2). Ο επίσκοπος Στρατόφιλος υπήρξε ο μοναδικός εκπρόσωπος του Καυκάσου στην Α΄ Οικουμενική Σύνοδο της Νίκαιας, το 325. Οι παλαιότερες αναφορές στην Πιτυούντα, με πλούσια εικονογραφική τεκμηρίωση, οφείλονται στον Cristoforo de Castelli (1600-1659), ιεραπόστολο, μέλος του τάγματος των Θεατίνων, ο οποίος δημοσίευσε σε βιβλίο (*Relazione*) σειρά πολλών σχεδίων. Ένα από αυτά αφορά το σχέδιο του τρουλαίου ναού της Πιτυούντας (*Praegrandissima et Antiquissima haec Ecclesia*), σχέδιο ακριβές και λεπτομερές (Εικ. 3). Η επόμενη εικονογραφική απεικόνιση του τρουλαίου ναού της Πιτυούντας δημοσιεύεται από τον Frédéric Dubois de Montpréreux (1798-1850) (Εικ. 4). Συνεπώς, ο μεγάλος τρουλαίος ναός της Πιτυούντας

ήταν πολύ γνωστός στους ιστορικούς της αρχιτεκτονικής και τους αρχαιολόγους. Ωστόσο, πολύ λίγα στοιχεία ήταν γνωστά σχετικά με την αρχαία πόλη της Πιτυούντας και την αρχαιολογία της.

Ο πρώτος ναός, ο οποίος ταυτίζεται με τον καθεδρικό του Στρατόφιλου, κτίστηκε εκτός των τειχών του ρωμαϊκού κάστρου. Αργότερα, ξανακτίστηκε δύο φορές και εντάχθηκε στο πλαίσιο ενός μεγαλύτερου οχυρού. Η τέταρτη φάση αυτού του ναού ήταν ένας μονόχωρος ναός, ο οποίος κτίστηκε κατά το δεύτερο μισό του δου αιώνα. Σε μια περιοχή νοτιοανατολικά της αρχαίας πόλης της Πιτυούντας βρέθηκε ένα άλλο εκκλησιαστικό συγκρότημα. Αρχικά δύο κτήρια εμφανίστηκαν εδώ: ένα μικρό μαρτύριο ορθογώνιας κάτοψης και ένα παρεκκλήσι με ημικυλινδρική αψίδα. Αυτό το συγκρότημα μπορεί να χρονολογηθεί στο

δεύτερο μισό του 5ου αιώνα. Κατά το δεύτερο μισό του 6ου αιώνα ένας μεγάλος σταυρόσχημος ναός με τρεις αψίδες κτίστηκε στα ερείπια τους (Εικ. 5). Στις αρχές του 10ου αιώνα αυτό το συγκρότημα συμπληρώθηκε με έναν μεγάλο τρουλαίο ναό.

Η πόλη της Σωτηριούπολης (το κάστρον Σωτηριούπολης του Κωνσταντίνου Πορφυρογέννητου) υπήρξε έδρα αρχιεπισκοπής που υπαγόταν στο πατριαρχείο Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Η ταύτιση της Σωτηριούπολης με την Πιτυούντα φαίνεται πολύ πιθανή. Ο επιβλητικών διαστάσεων τρουλαίος ναός στην Πιτυούντα, ο μεγαλύτερος στην ανατολική ακτή της Μαύρης Θάλασσας, ανεγέρθηκε ως καθεδρικός ναός του αρχιεπισκόπου Σωτηριούπολεως. Η κάτοψη του ναού ακολουθεί τον τύπο του σταυροειδούς εγγεγραμμένου (Εικ. 6, 7).

Το οικιστικό συγκρότημα βρίσκεται σχεδόν παράλληλα με τον τρουλαίο ναό, αλλά οι άξονές τους δεν συμπίπτουν. Τα μοναδικά αρχιτεκτονικά λείψανα είναι τα θεμέλια των τοίχων (Εικ. 8). Είναι πιθανό να είχε κατεδαφιστεί ολοσχερώς. Σε κάποια σημεία τα θεμέλια έχουν καταστραφεί από ρέες δέντρων. Στις διαστάσεις της κατασκευής ο άξονας βιορρά-νότου ανέρχεται στα 21,56 μ. Το 2008 έγινε ανασκαφή στα κεντρικά και ανατολικά σημεία του συγκροτήματος. Τα δωμάτια 3 και 4 είχαν πιθανότατα οικιακή χρήση. Οι πολύ μικρές κατασκευές 5 και 6 είχαν βιοθητική λειτουργία, ενώ τα στενά δωμάτια 6 και 7 μπορεί να χρησιμοποιούνταν ως υπερώ ανοικτό προς τα ανατολικά. Δύο μικρά μαρμάρινα θραύσματα -και τα δύο με ίχνη φωτιάς- έχουν απομείνει από την αρχιτεκτονική διακόσμηση.

Ένα ξεχωριστό χαρακτηριστικό των θεμελίων αυτού του κτηρίου είναι η παρουσία σειράς από πλίνθους στο πιο κρίσιμο σημείο του τοίχου, δηλαδή στη μετάβαση από τα θεμέλια προς τον κυρίως τοίχο. Το πλάτος των τοίχων είναι κυρίως 0,95 μ. - 0,98 μ. (σχεδόν τρία βυζαντινά πόδια). Αυτό το συγκρότημα μπορεί να χρονολογηθεί στην Ύστερη Αρχαιότητα (5ος-6ος αιώνας), πριν από το 542, όταν οι Βυζαντινοί χρειάστηκε να εγκαταλείψουν προσωρινά την Πιτυούντα.

Τριάντα πέντε ταφές αποκαλύφθηκαν στον υπό εξέταση χώρο. Οι περισσότερες από αυτές πραγματοποιήθηκαν όταν το κτήριο δεν βρισκόταν πια σε χρήση. Οι περισσότερες ταφές ακολουθούν το χριστιανικό τυπικό. Σε δύο περιπτώσεις βρέθηκαν στις ταφές ολόκληρα κεραμικά αγγεία. Μια διπλή ταφή αποκαλύφθηκε στο

δωμάτιο 1, με ασυνήθιστο προσανατολισμό βιορριανατολικά (Εικ. 9). Ανάμεσα στα κεφάλια των νεκρών, πάνω σε θραύσμα κεραμιδιού, βρισκόταν μία κανάτα *in situ*.

Τα πιο συνηθισμένα ευρήματα είναι αγγεία σχημάτων της Ύστερης Αρχαιότητας. Τα κεραμικά αγγεία ανήκουν σε δύο χρονολογικές ομάδες: την ομάδα του 6ου αιώνα (αμφορείς, λουτήρια, πίθοι κ.λπ.) και τη μεσαιωνική ομάδα (κανάτες, κούπες), η οποία μπορεί να χρονολογηθεί στους 10ο-11ο αιώνες. Η διακόσμηση των κεραμικών εγχώριας παραγωγής άρχισε να εξαπλώνεται τον 10ο-11ο αιώνα. Ένα εφυαλωμένο κύπελλο, διακοσμημένο με κιτρινο-κάστανο φυτικό κόσμημα, χρονολογείται στον 14ο αιώνα και ανήκει στην «Κεραμική του Ζευξίππου».

Ο διπλός ναός αποτέλεσε το τρίτο εκκλησιαστικό κέντρο της Πιτυούντας. Σε αντίθεση με άλλα εκκλησιαστικά κτίσματα, βρίσκεται στην ακτή, μέσα σε ένα πευκοδάσος. Οι διαστάσεις του ναού ανέρχονται σε 18,5 μ. μήκος και 14,5 μ. πλάτος, χωρίς τις δύο αψίδες, ενώ η κάτοψη του διαγράφεται σχεδόν τετράγωνη (Εικ. 10). Ο διπλός ναός αποτελούνταν από δύο κυρίως χώρους/κλίτη, με τον καθένα να έχει τη δική του αψίδα, πολυγωνική εξωτερικά και πεταλόσχημη εσωτερικά. Δύο πεσσοί πάνω στον στυλοβάτη, τοποθετημένοι στον επιψήκη άξονα του κτηρίου, χώριζαν τον ναό σε δύο χώρους. Δύο μικροί προθάλαμοι ενώνονταν με τα ανοίγματα στο ανατολικό τμήμα των κατά μήκος τοίχων. Στα δυτικά του ναού βρισκόταν προστώο. Ο ναός είναι οικοδομημένος με τοπική πέτρα. Το δυτικό τμήμα του νότιου κλίτους χωρίζεται με διαχωριστικό τοίχο. Ο διπλός ναός της Πιτυούντας κτίστηκε κατά το δεύτερο μισό του 6ου αιώνα. Μετά το τέλος των βυζαντινοπερσικών πολέμων, η Πιτυούντα αρχισε να αναπτύσσεται πέρα από τα παλαιά τείχη της πόλης. Ως προς τα αρχιτεκτονικά χαρακτηριστικά τους, ο διπλός ναός διαφέρει σημαντικά από τα πρωτότερα εκκλησιαστικά κτίσματα του οικισμού (ναοί υπ' αριθ. 1, 2, 3), τα οποία ακολουθούσαν τον τύπο της ξυλόστεγης βασιλικής. Ο διπλός ναός, ο οποίος ξεχωρίζει για την περίπλοκη κάτοψη του και τη θολοδομή του, λειτουργησε μέχρι τον 10ο-11ο αιώνα, χρονολόγηση που επιβεβαιώνεται από τα αρχαιολογικά τεκμήρια.

*Lomonosow State University, Μόσχα
KhrushkovaL@list.ru*