



Ariel

"I come to answer thy best pleasure." The Tempest Act 1 Sc.ii

The Journal of the Newport-Kutaisi Twinning Association Issue No 4 April 2002



Bodbe Convent at Ninotsminda in the Kakheti region

- Georgian Studies Day.
- Travels through Georgia.
- The Wonder Cyclist.
- Win a Lonely Planet Guide.
- Much, much more!

*Celebrating the cultural links between
Kutaisi and Newport.*

ARIEL

"I come to answer thy best pleasure." The Tempest Act 1 Sc.ii

It may seem to you that you have only just received the last copy of **Ariel** before getting this, the latest issue. We promised then a more prompt production and so here it is!

In this we have Pat Wright's most interesting account of a visit she made last summer to a convent in the Kakheti region. We could not ignore the visit paid to Newport by Jumba Lezhava, the Georgian who is circling the world on a bike. We have, too, the account of the Georgian Studies Day which we found of enormous interest and have the hope that one day we may host such an occasion here in Newport.

Once again our thanks and appreciation to those who have contributed. A plea, yet again, to our Georgian friends to write for us, like Irakli Chikashua who has produced an article for all our football fans!

As part of our promotion of the 'Lonely Planet's *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan Ed.I.* guide we have a competition for our Newport and Kutaisi readers to win one. Have a go – it could be your lucky day!

Catherine Philpott.

Mike Singleton.



NEWS FLASH!!

As we were going to print, the news came that Newport had been granted City status. Queen Elizabeth II, as part of her Golden Jubilee celebrations, is visiting Newport in June. Invitations have been sent to Kutaisi by Newport's Mayor and Council to join us in celebrating both events. We are looking forward very much to seeing as many of our KNTA friends joining us then. We extend the warmest of welcomes!!.

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Illustrations: Top – Silver medallion from Gelati
Below – Wall painting David the Builder

CHAIRMAN BERNARD TYSON'S ADDRESS TO THE GEORGIAN STUDIES DAY



The Association, which was founded in 1989, is dedicated to promoting international friendship between Newport and Kutaisi and encouraging exchanges between individuals and groups with a variety of interests in our two communities. I have to say that with the increasing availability of email and the internet, communication is much simpler than it was in the early days.

I would like to acknowledge one special project which has been successfully completed this year. For many years there has been a close collaboration between the Twinning Association, the University of Wales College Newport and Kutaisi State University. The project was initiated in March 1999. Eindhoven Technical University in Holland was also a partner. The general aim was to promote and support the modernisation and in internationalisation of KSU. Perhaps the most prominent KSU graduate, President Eduard Shevardnadze, agreed to become a member. The project has now come to completion. The final conference was held in Kutaisi in March 2001 and a full account can be obtained from UWCN. A report has also been posted on a new KSU website (<http://KSU.gateway.ge/>).

UWCN has provided training opportunities for students from Kutaisi over the last ten years and four students have benefited from this generosity. We are still in touch with them and receive updates of their activities.

Currently David Mindiashvili is studying on the MBA course. As before, the University is waiving its tuition fees of £7,000.

Next year a young architect, Maka Melkadze, will be attending the MSc course in IT and Media.

Finally, I would like to mention the proactive approach the Association has in promoting Georgia in Newport. We have recently played host to the cyclist Jumbor Lezhava from Tbilisi who has spent the last eight years visiting all the countries of the world, 194 to date.

Looking to the future, Newport Council has invited the Mayor of Kutaisi and the Governor of Imereti to visit in order to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the signing of the twinning agreement.

The great Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli wrote many years ago: *"He is his own foe who seeks not a friend"*. In these troubled times the Newport Kutaisi Twinning Association would like to feel that we have heeded his words and made many, many friends.

BT

Day at the Guildhall

We arrived in London early in order not to miss any of the Georgian Studies Day programme that had been organised at the Guildhall in the City of London. For most of us it was the first time we had had the opportunity to see inside this famous building and the library room where we were to meet. Our congratulations to the organisers of this annual event in securing such a prestigious venue.

The programme set out for us had a range of speakers that covered business, cultural and diplomatic aspects that concerned Georgia today and its relationship to the wider world, especially with the UK.

Music and wine were not forgotten. We listened to Michael Bloom's recordings of Georgian folk music. He leads a choir based in London, which specialises in the singing of Georgian songs. He was a great enthusiast and finally we heard from Risto Talas on *Tsinandali v Charonnay: Why we should be drinking Georgian Wine*. We became completely convinced!!!

I found the day to be of enormous interest, learning much of the current situation in Georgia. I admired the openness and honesty of the speakers telling us of how it is and not pulling punches. We appreciated this.



Bernard Tyson, Catherine Philpott and Pat Wright talking with HE Tamar Mamsheshvili.

Finally my grateful thanks to the very helpful Georgian student I met whose advice I followed in tracking down the London Georgian restaurant in Bethnal Green – I would never have found it on my own (see Ariel 3).

These occasions give us a great opportunity, not often found in Newport, to meet with Georgians living and working in Britain.

One last comment from David was that much as he likes his forays into the capital city he is very happy to return 'home' to Newport.

We were welcomed warmly by H.E. Teimerar Mamatsashvili, Ambassador of Georgia, who always makes a point of remembering Newport and sending his very good wishes. We hope soon that he will have the time to visit us here in South Wales.

We heard Deputy Head of Mission in Georgia, Stuart McLaren, who was representing Mrs Barnes, British Ambassador in Tbilisi. I thought that he and speakers following him spoke brave words as to how the present position is, both within the Georgian capital and beyond (see report).

Mrs Mamatsashvili, the Ambassador's wife, outlined her charity interests concerning children and hospitals. We hope that there will be some link with the Soroptimists in Newport who have offered their help.



Bernard moving on from tea to a more interesting beverage!

Catherine Philpott

Travelling Through Georgia

NKTA member **Pat Wright** visited Kutaisi for a month in 2001 staying with her long-time friend **Madlen Makhviliadze** Senior Lecturer in the English Department of Kutaisi State University.

It was the second day of my visit to Georgia late last August. I was staying with Madlen's aunt and uncle, Nina and Levan, who have an apartment in Tbilisi. They were hosting us with great generosity before we were to travel on to Kutaisi.

that climbed gradually upwards into the foothills of the great Caucasus range.

As we approached the hills the scenery became greener, some houses appeared and the road became progressively more uneven.



Above: The convent buildings shrouded by cypresses.
R. Madlen making her way down the path.

On this Sunday we set off on a trip to the Kakheti region, about sixty miles to the east of Tbilisi, to visit their daughter, Abbess Theodora, the Mother Superior of Bodbe Convent at Ninotsminda, near the town of Signaghi. It was a rare event for Nina and Levan. Madlen had never been to see her cousin there so I felt pleased to have been the excuse for this journey.

We travelled through gentle hills and plains, on past the yellowing fields where there were many vineyards which lay on the edge of the main wine growing area to the south of Telavi and Tsinandali. Wine buffs will recognise the name of one of the best dry white wines of Georgia. Levan had strong views on the changes taking place in modern wine production and had a distrust of bottles!

The road was straight and largely clear of traffic. We forgave the few potholes we had to swerve around and soon the wooded hills in the distance drew near. At the sign for Signaghi and Bodbe we turned off onto a narrower and prettier road

Signaghi was a town of stone houses with verandas, wooden shutters, wrought iron balconies, drainpipes and the chimney pots that we visitors all admire so much. There were gardens with verandas with drooping vines and heavily laden fruit trees growing each side of the road. Pigs rooted on the verges or slept in the sun and the happiest chickens I have ever seen wandered wherever they wished. The guidebook told me that Signaghi was a walled city with twenty-eight towers built by Irakli II in the 18th century and full of cypress trees.

As we turned out of the town and around the side of the hill we caught the first view of Bodbe with its red roofs. The cypress trees concealed the pathways around the church and its tower from strangers' eyes. We stopped to take photos of the convent and to look back and down over the magnificent view of the Alazani Valley and were unable to resist picking green walnuts. Trying in my inexperience to smash them open on a stone left me brown-fingered and with a stained blouse in which to meet the nuns.

Pat's Album



Above: Church interior

Below: Building of visitor's centre



L. Abbess Theodora showing us the building of the new wing.



Above: Church interior

L. Nina & Levan on their balcony at home.

Below: Steps down to the spring



Joyful and emotional greetings from the sisters took place at the top of the drive that led to the main convent buildings. The sun was shining and we could see the well-maintained garden that the nuns had obviously been planting up. The convent house had been built to a very high standard with warm yellow stone and the bands of narrow bricks in the style of the houses I had noticed in the town that we had just passed through.

I recognised Theodora from when I had met her on my last visit to Kutaisi in 1996. Then I was attending, with other members of the NKTA, the 1000 years celebrations of Bagrati. She was only in her early twenties having just finished her degree course at the University when Ilia II, the Grand Patriarch, undertook the restoration of the Georgian Orthodox Church. He needed to recruit intelligent and dedicated young people into the church. Monasteries, convents and church buildings were crumbling and neglected having been used for other purposes such as storage or, as in the case of Bodbe, a hospital. Theodora, against her parent's wishes became a nun and was made Mother Superior in 1991.

It had last been a convent in 1924. The nuns, at the time, were forced to either leave or to remain as nurses, unable to follow their calling and not allowed to pray in the church where the remains of St. Nino are buried. A couple of nuns stayed under these conditions and on the pretext of cleaning the church, which served as an operating theatre, managed to pray, out of sight, under the upturned icon of the Virgin. It had become an operating table.

Now back in place on the wall, the face of the Virgin still bears the marks of the scalpel. The red-roofed buildings at present house the thirty sisters and are in need of some renovation, though one wing has been magnificently restored and furnished to house the Patriarch and his priest when they visit Bodbe.

We were taken on tour of what will be the nuns' cells, also being beautifully built but considerably smaller. They have had to live in poor conditions since they came here. Two cattle byres were also nearly completed, one for winter and one for summer use. The storage rooms incor-

porate some of the much older buildings on the site. This is a working farm that has to sustain the community. No money ever changes hands here. The things they need that cannot be grown or made are exchanged with the local community with their produce.

After a fine meal

we set out on a walk downhill into the valley to see St. Nino's Holy Spring. We slipped and slithered down a steep and sometimes muddy path and came across a group of architects from the University of Tbilisi. They were working on buildings for the sisters to use as a visitors' centre.

Then, on the opposite side of the narrow valley we saw water pouring from a pipe in a wall. Nearby stood a beautiful little bathhouse with a dip pool. We were encouraged to bathe in it and indeed to immerse ourselves three times but I was not brave enough. It is said to be a cure for arthritis and as my knees were aching after that walk, I had a paddle! We drank from the pipe pure, deliciously fresh, spring water. Madlen filled a bottle to take back to her sister in Kutaisi.



The marks of the scalpel can still be seen.



Nuns of Bodbe Convent
Mother Superior Theodora stands centre with hands folded.

We made our return uphill back to the convent by 4wheel drive, a useful way to travel the route with its hairpin bends back along the

side of the hill. It was more exciting than a Barry Island ride – it stopped all conversation!

The sound of polyphonic singing came from the church as we drew near. As Nina and Levan made their farewells I slipped back in through the door of the church. There, taking advantage of the wonderful acoustics was a small choir singing a haunting song. Most of the choir members were Americans working in Tbilisi who loved this ancient Georgian music and regularly practised there. It was hard to tear oneself away. Once more the sisters were gathered outside. With hugs and kisses they waved us off as we drove out of the gates for our return to Tbilisi.

Pat Wright

ARCHIL KOSTAVA

Rector of Kutaisi Muskhelishvili State Technical University 1989-2002

News of the death in February of Archil Kostava, Principal of Kutaisi Technical University and enthusiastic champion of the Newport Kutaisi twinning since the earliest days, comes as almost as great a blow to his friends in Newport as it does to his family, friends, colleagues, students and fellow townspeople of Kutaisi.

A man of great wisdom, experience, culture and social conscience, Archil Kostava will be greatly missed not only in Kutaisi but throughout his beloved Georgia.

Despite his impressive intellectual abilities Archil had a quiet, modest manner and a great sense of fun. As Rosemary and I recollect, although in my case the memory is somewhat dimmed as a result of excessive 'sharvi gvino', Archil could throw a great party and was, an outstanding 'tamada'.

I still smile when I remember escorting Archil around the British Museum and quickly discovering that he knew far more about the Greek and Egyptian civilisations than me. I also remember his generosity. During our visit to Kutaisi in the early 1990s Archil, characteristically, took off his wrist watch and asked Rosemary to accept it as a present. Naturally she tried to dissuade him but he insisted. Happily it doesn't fit naturally with Rosemary's wardrobe and over the years I have surreptitiously appropriated it and now wear it most days, a treasured souvenir of a kind act and a very fine man.

Derek Butler
Newport
2nd March 2002

Archil Kostava was born on the 12th December 1937 and graduated from Kutaisi's Secondary School #2 in 1955. In 1960 he entered the Georgian Technical University, choosing to major in Engineering as a metallurgist. Afterwards he joined the Kutaisi Automobile Factory as a technologist and designer.

In 1962-1985 Archil continued his education in Moscow as a postgraduate student, gaining a doctorate of Technical Sciences and finally a professorship.

In 1986-1989 he was instated as a professor at the Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi.

Since 1989 Archil Kostava had been Rector of Kutaisi State Technical University.

In 1991 he became a member of the Gelati Ecclesiastical Academy. He received the first laureate of the Council of Ministers and of the G. Nikoladze of Academy of Sciences. Finally he was awarded the Order of Honour.

In this year he became a Prefect of the City of Kutaisi.

At different periods of his life he was involved in a variety of projects as a researcher and lecturer at institutions and colleges of higher education in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Great Britain, USA, Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

Archil Kostava's interests were wide and varied, being the author of more than 150 books, 80 inventions and many academic papers covering subjects such as:

Creative Theory of the Creation of Universe.
Theory and Practice of Design and Construction
Physics and Mechanics of Heavy Pressure.

He leaves a wife and three children.

December 1937- February 2002

CP

The third in the series of articles by **Mike Singleton** giving a brief outline of the history of Georgia.

Part III: To the Present Day

In January 1801 Czar Paul 1 annexed East Georgia in violation of the 1783 treaty. This annexation put an end to the independent existence of the Georgian kingdoms and principalities and Georgia lost her age-old statehood. Under Russian rule the Georgian church lost its self government and was turned into a part of the Russian synod. The second half of the 19th century shows the abolition of serfdom (1864) and an ever-increasing Russification policy that touched every aspect of Georgian society.



Ilia Chavchavadze became the recognised leader and spiritual father of the nation. One can hardly recall any project or event in the social and cultural life of Georgia in this period that was not either initiated or led by him or in which he did not participate. Georgians actively participated in the revolutionary events of 1905- 1907.



On October 25 (November 7) 1917 the Bolshevik party staged a coup and established Soviet power. On May 26, 1918 the National Council of Georgia declared Georgia's independence. Georgian statehood, lost 117 years ago, was restored. Soviet Russia and Georgia signed a treaty on May 7 1920, whereby Russia recognised the independence and sovereignty of the Georgian Democratic Republic.



After the so-called sovietisation of Azerbaijan and Armenia in February of 1921 the Soviet forces invaded.

Despite the fact that Stalin and Beria, his chief of secret police, were both Georgians the Georgian people were given no reprieve under their repressive regime. Georgia had to pass through the ordeal of industrialisation and collectivisation, suffering severely during the depressions of the

1930's. 300,000 Georgian soldiers fell during the Second World War. In 1990 multi-party elections were held and, on the 9th of April, Parliament declared the independence of Georgia. The well-known dissident of the Brezhnev era, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was elected President.



In the winter of 1991- 1992 a military rebellion forced Gamsakhurdia to leave the country. In July 1992 Georgia became the 179th member of the United Nations. Eduard Shevardnadze obtained an overwhelming majority in the elections that followed in the October of 1992, and was confirmed as the chairman of the Parliament of the Republic of Georgia. On August 24 1995 a new constitution was adopted. On November 5 1995 presidential elections were held. On November 26 Eduard Shevardnadze was installed as President of Georgia.



*"I respect everyone, love everyone,
but hate more than Georgia."*

MS

MS



THE AMAZING GEORGIAN CYCLIST

**"Gisurveb jumrtelobus da bednier
mogzaurobas."**

Jumba Lezhava was born in Tbilisi. His father was from Samtredia and his mother was born in Guria, the birthplace of Eduard Shevardnadze. He attended Moscow Technical University where he studied Heavy Mechanical Engineering and Electronics. He returned to the Mathematics Institute in Tbilisi and achieved prominence there. He married and had two daughters.

At the age of 46 he damaged his intestines and so he began doing press-ups, becoming so good that he started to enter competitions. By the age of 50 he had become world champion, achieving every possible world record, all 11 of them! He holds the records for the number of press-ups for 1 hour, 12 hours and 24 hours. He has done them continuously for 100 days doing 17,300 each day and even for one year - 12,000 every day.

At the age of 53 he found a new challenge for his now amazingly strong body, a result of a suggestion from a friend's son, who had thought of something to test his mind and body to the extreme - to cycle around the world. Sadly, the boy, Rati Kikacheisvili, died a few years later in Abkhazia, never to see this challenge realised.

At the age of 56 Lezhava started his world tour from Turkey, aiming to visit every country.

He planned that the project would take him eight years. Lezhava is devoted to his family and to Georgia so the obvious question arises as to how he could plan to be away so long. The first part of the answer is that sadly his wife had died. The situation in Georgia had become very bad with drugs and guns and he felt he wanted to do something about it. He wanted to present a good example to younger people, to show that this old man did not believe in fighting and that he would put his life to a good purpose.

His children were not happy with his decision but they understood his ideas so they reluctantly let him go. He says he has good sons-in-law and keeps in regular contact by phone and fax - people often let him phone free of charge.

So far Lezhava has visited 194 countries and only five countries have refused him entry, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, (this in spite of the personal intervention of the Georgian Ambassador in Egypt). The worst of these, in his opinion, is Saudi Arabia because of its borders with so many countries. He has applied seven times and each time has been turned down. North Korea has said they may be able to admit him in due course so he hasn't given up! Ironically South Korea is his favourite country; he found the people very friendly, hard working and intelligent, although every country to him appears beautiful and interesting. He enjoyed all the Caribbean countries but found Haiti the most difficult with no government he felt it was really dangerous. Somalia was 'a country with no country,' as he put it, since it too has no government and no Georgian consulate. In Vietnam he found little welcome and felt that the police were everywhere. In Burma he spent six hours daily suffering police interrogation. He has even visited Antarctica, the improbable route inked on his map of the world along with all the others.

On the day we met him he had just been to Cardiff. He thought the city was very nice, liked specially the academic and historical parts. Went to the university and met the Chemistry professor and was impressed with the students. He was given a guided tour of the Millennium Stadium for which, sadly, he had to pay. He was met by what he considered to be "educated" policemen. He said the centre was pleasingly clean with nice bars - but he doesn't drink.

Whilst there he looked in vain for a national hat - apparently Georgia has around 250 hats (as an aside, testimony to his enormous experience, he told us that Tanzania has 360 languages). Wales, seemed to him not to have a national hat. He liked the castle but was surprised that it was not old. He was amazed at the cost of hotels (don't we know it!) On



Being interviewed by the local press

Hawaii he could stay in 4 and 5 star hotels for \$5. Our country is a sore trial of his budget that amounts to \$37 for 4 days.

The next day he was on his way to Stratford-on-Avon. He aims to ride 150 km. each day, never riding in the dark. His next target is the Isle of Man, thence to Ireland and on to Norway, Sweden and Finland, that is, in the Scandinavian winter and on a bike!

I was deeply impressed by this man, swept away by his enormous experience and dazzling achievement worn so lightly. He remains humble and open to all that he meets. He is a credit to himself, a testimony to the Georgian nation but



Jumbar Lezhava before setting off on the next stage of his marathon trip around the world.

He plans to be back home in Tbilisi in December 2002, very conscious of the fact that he hasn't kept to his time-table. We weren't inclined to comment on this fact since it has been a monumental achievement, planned so long ago and literally encompassing the whole world, a circumnavigation which would have most people applauding tumultuously.

He is proud of his achievement both for himself and for his country. He thinks the world will, in his words "pick up". His optimism is based on his observation that the people of Africa are now literate and can read newspapers for themselves. In Arabia families send their children all over the world including Oxford and Cambridge - he was particularly taken with that. In 25 years, he is convinced, there will be world peace and one religion. Wherever he goes he shows people a very simple thing that can be done by everyone, his press-ups; not only simple - its free.

On his return home he is looking forward to many things - his house, (which is a famous scientists' house run by the university, shared with other academics), his daughters, his friends, khachapuri and sweet tea.

more than that he is witness to the enormous potential within every one of us, both physically and psychologically. He is the embodiment of his dream. I wished him *"Gisurveb jumtelobas da bednier mogzaurobas"* - a safe onward journey - until he returns back to the country he loves so much. He takes the world with him.

He is the embodiment of his dreams.



Mike Singleton

Mike Singleton visited the TORPEDO KUTAISI website from where he contacted Irakli Chikashua. Currently living in the USA Irakli avidly follows Torpedo and the national team and designed the site. Here is his e-mailed article and reply:

INTERNATIONAL SOCCER: Georgia beats Hungary 3 – 1 **by** **Irakli Chikashua**

Alexander Chivadze made a perfect start to his reign as Georgia national coach as his side gained revenge for their defeat in Budapest in June by registering a comprehensive victory over Hungary in Tbilisi.

More than 15,000 fans stayed behind at the Lokomotiv Stadium after the final whistle to celebrate a welcome return to form for the Georgians. Hungary's pre-match boast that they would easily defeat Georgia was made to sound hollow from the third minute as Mikheil Kavelashvili found space in the box but somehow headed wide. Shota Arveladze missed two more-than-presentable opportunities before Freiburg midfielder Levan Tskitishvili eluded two Hungarian defenders and laid it off for the Rangers man to open the scoring.

Hungary responded well and it took Lanush Matyus just five minutes to level the scores as he capitalised on a dreadful error in the Georgian back-line. Bela Ilish could even have given Hungary the lead before half-time, but he was denied by keeper David Gvaramadze.

The home side regrouped at half-time, and the second-half began with a Georgian storm. Gocha Jamarauli broke clear to restore the Georgians' lead on 49 minutes.

Their third came on 64 minutes as Georgi Demetradze robbed Tamas Peto and slipped Alexander Lashvili through. They made no mistake. Alexander Rekhviashvili was dismissed for a second yellow card shortly after, but the home side remained in control and Lashvili and Demetradze could have made the win even more convincing.

Hello dear Mike,

Yes! I was so happy when I was following the match results on www.livescore.com. Frankly, I was not expecting our guys coming out so strong. From Torpedo Kutaisi players there was only David Gvaramadze who played in this match unfortunately. He is the best goalkeeper Georgia has to offer today. He really played well and had nice saves from goal couple of times. While Torpedo's Head Coach Revaz Dzodzuashvili was coaching Georgian International team, (before he was sacked) you could see more Torpedo Players there but things change. Georgian team consisted mostly of International players that arrived home shortly before the match and had little time for training. Here is the list of Georgian players that appeared in the match against Hungary: Gvaramadze, Kobiashvili, Khizanishvili, Rekhviashvili, Kadeladze, Tskitishvili (Sajaia 78), Nemsadze, Kavelashvili (Lashvili 46), Jamarauli, Kinkladze, S. Arveladze (Demetradze 62).

By the way, Hungarian Coach Bertalan Bicskei was fired right after this game. They had no doubts they could win this game.

Sorry for not writing back for long time. I'm working on a couple of web design projects here and will be extremely busy until the 20th of this month. However I do remember about my promise to provide you with an article about Torpedo and all information I can gather. I will work on it after I'm done with these projects.

Meanwhile if you have any other questions that I can answer, you are more than welcome to ask me any time. If I have an answer I'll get back to you promptly.

Regards,
Irakli.

P.S. I'm including one article about this game.



About our sister city of Kutaisi for readers who have yet to travel to Georgia and experience the delights of that wonderful city and its people.

From the Lonely Planet Guide book.

Kutaisi

Pop 240,000

Bagrati



Kutaisi has been a city since at least the 6th century BC, and a settlement existed here long before that. It is first mentioned by Apollonius of Rhodes in the 3rd Century BC. In his poem about the Argents he calls it Kutaia and some scholars believe this was the city of King Aetes, father of Medea. Kutaisi was one of the main cities of Colchis and later of Egrisi.

It found itself in the thick of the 6th century war between the Byzantine and Persian empires, and changed hands several times. In the 730s the area was devastated by the Arabs. At the end of

that century Leon II, Duke of Abkhazia, renounced his status of vassal to Byzantium and declared himself King of Abkhazia which he united with Egrisi. He transferred his residence from Anakopia to Kutaisi and built a palace in the citadel on the right bank of the Rioni River.

In 978 Bagrat III became King of the newly united Abkhazia and Kartli-Iberia, with Kutaisi as its capital and in 1089 David the Builder was crowned here. Until 1122 when Tbilisi, liberated from Arab rule by David, took over this role, Kutaisi was the political economic and cultural centre of Georgia.

After the Mongol invasions Georgia was again divided and Kutaisi resumed its role as the political capital of the western region. Further fragmentation reduced Kutaisi to the capital of the Imeretian kingdom alone.



Interior Gelati

In 1510 the Ottomans burnt the city. There was a revival at the beginning of the next century when Giorgi III developed the left bank of the Rioni, but this was snuffed out by the 101-year Ottoman occupation starting in 1669, during which Bagrati Cathedral was blown up. In 1770 the city was recaptured by Georgian and Russian forces. Since then Kutaisi has enjoyed a period of relative peace.

In the second half of the 19th Century it played a significant role in the movement of national re-awakening and reform. Under the Soviet regime it became the second most important industrial centre in Georgia, and its population grew significantly.

It has managed to retain its elegant early 20th century character and the many gardens, the river and the views of the mountains around making it a very pleasant place to spend time in.



The three bridges over the Rioni River are notable landmarks with Chachvis Khidi the oldest. Originally a rope bridge, the chains were laid down in 1866. Tsiteli Khidi was partly made in Paris also in the 1860s. Tetri Khidi dates from 1872. Leaning over these bridges one can admire the wild torrents of the water that gush underneath and the tiered houses with their overhanging balconies that cling to the river's banks defying gravity. This is one of my favourite places in Kutaisi.

From here crossing the River Rioni by the Chain Bridge or Chachvis Khidi walk up cobbled streets lined with houses and gardens to the magnificent ruins of Bagrati built by King Bagrat III visible from the centre of Kutaisi. This was an 11th century cathedral, now a World Heritage Site, built on a promontory above the river, giving fine views along the Rioni as far as the eye can see to the monastery complex of Gelati.

There on a wooded hill stunningly situated 11 km north east of Kutaisi is the 12th century cathedral of Gelati founded by King David the Builder in 1106. When he died in 1125 he left instructions that he should be buried under the stone of the southern gatehouse, which was the main entrance to the complex, meaning that all who came here would step on his tomb.

Gelati had a very valuable treasury including a collection of manuscripts and the famous icon *Khakhulis Ghvtismshoblis Khati* - the Virgin Mary icon of Khakhuli which is now in the Georgian State Art Museum in Tbilisi.

South west from the city of Kutaisi lies Vani, possibly the city of King Aeeetes, possessor of the Greek legendary Golden Fleece. Then travelling even further on to the Black Sea coast you will



find the resort and port of Batumi famous for its wonderful botanical gardens with plants gathered from all corners of the earth.

Top L. Cable car over the River Rioni to the top of Gabashvili Hill.

Above: Kirov Street looking towards the Drama Theatre.

Below: Akaki Tsereteli Street.



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