



ARMAZI

ARMAZI (or ARMAZ-TSIKHE), an important royal city of Georgia (Iberia) situated close to the modern township of Mtskheta. The ancient Armazi was far more extensive than the modern Mtskheta; its strategic situation was dictated by its ready access to the Daryal Pass or Gate of the Alans, the main road over the Caucasus, through which the Scythians and Cimmerians invaded the ancient Near East. Armazi is situated at the confluence of the Mtkvari (Kura) with the Aragvi river and controls important trade routes; it is about twenty miles upstream from the modern Tbilisi/Tiflis. The name Armazi is usually taken to derive from that of the deity Ahura Mazdā, who as Armazi was the chief god of the pagan Iberian pantheon; “Armaz-tsikhe” means “citadel of Armazi” and is reflected in the Greco-Roman name Armastika or Harmozika.

Armazi had two great citadels. One was on the modern Mount Bagineti, south of the Kura river; the other, at Sevsamora, modern Tsitsamuri, was north of the river and controlled the road towards Mount Kazbek. Bagineti Citadel dates from Achaemenid times (Armazi I) and is referred to in classical sources as the Iberian Acropolis. Massive stone blocks formed an impregnable base but were finished off by less durable mud brick, as in the hilltop citadels of Urartu (ancient Armenia). Armazi I incorporates a kind of *apadāna*, a great hall of six columns with a tiled roof. Armazi II belongs to the Seleucid and early Parthian period and has a temple with an apse. Armazi III dates from the great days of the Iberian monarchy (ca. 50 to 300 A. D.) when Iberian kings, such as Farsman (Farasmanes), were allies of the Roman empire. The edifices



of Armazi III are constructed of elegantly cut stone blocks, joined together with lime mortar and metal clamps. Armazi III was captured by Pompey in 65 B.C. after a series of furious combats against the Iberian king Artag or Artokes. A ruined structure called “Pompey’s bridge” still stands, spanning part of the river Kura close to the main Tiflis-Gori railway line. As in Urartu, the city of Armazi included a lower town with quarters for foreign merchants. In the beginning of the Christian era Iberia or eastern Georgia had numerous cities and farmsteads. Houses, market places, and public buildings were constructed with architectural skill; Iberian kings employed their own court architects and engineers sent from Rome.

Over the past forty years, the Georgian Academy of Sciences in Tiflis has carried out extensive excavations in Armazi and its vicinity. These have revealed that a high standard of comfort and amenity was attained in the royal palace. Wooden furniture was sheathed with silver and bronze. Ladies wore magnificent jewelry. There was an elaborate Roman-style bath at Armazis-Khevi, complete with dressing room, heating chamber, hot bath, warm bath, and cold bath. Second in the official hierarchy at the Armazi court after the king stood the hereditary *pitiaxš* or *bdeaxš*, whose rank approximated to that of viceroy or satrap. The hereditary necropolis of this princely dynasty at Mtskheta-Armazi, excavated by the Georgian Academy, yielded engraved gems bearing portraits of two of these viceroys, Asparukh and Zevakh. Other officers of whom we have record include the royal architect and the epitropos or lord chamberlain. Official nomenclature indicates a synthesis of Hellenistic and Iranian titles.

Armazi played a central role in ancient Georgian cultural life and in the evolution of Iranian epigraphy in Georgia, prior to the invention of the Georgian national script in the 4th century A.D. Among a number of important inscriptions found at Armazi, the most important is the bilingual Greek and Middle Iranian tombstone inscription commemorating the short-lived Serapita and her noble lineage. The script used for the Middle Iranian portion of the text is an unusual form of Aramaic, hence known as the Armazi script.

Religious remains from Armazi are not abundant. A small group of silver bowls have been recovered from Armazi and other contemporary Iberian centers, depicting a horse standing before a Mithraic fire-altar. The best examples of these date from the 2nd century A.D., some bearing inscriptions in Middle Iranian. The medieval *Life of St. Nino* (St. Nino brought Christianity to Armazi-Mtskheta about A.D. 330) describes a whole series of pagan idols



worshipped there in earlier days. The chief god was Armazi himself, whose idol was in the form of a man of copper, clothed in golden armor, having shoulder pieces and eyes made from emeralds and beryl stones, and holding in his hand a sword which revolved in his grasp.

The great days of Armazi-Mtskheta ceased with the removal of the Iberian capital of Tiflis by King Vakhtang Gorgaslan (the Wolf-Lion) late in the 5th century. King Kosrow I (531-79) abolished the Iberian monarchy, and installed a *marzbān* in Tiflis. Armazi-Mtskheta was governed by a castle commandant, a post held in A.D. 545 by a certain Wistam (see [Arvand](#) (Gušnasp)). Armazi was finally destroyed and razed to the ground in A.D. 736 by the Arab general called in Georgian Murvan Qru.

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