

## Shrine Forest Research (Arkhoti Valley Example)

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### Abstract

Indigenous religious beliefs are the closest connection between human, cultural systems and natural systems. Julian Steward, the founder of the theory of the Cultural Ecology, also considers proto-religions (non Abrahamic religions) to be part of the cultural core.

As for the sacred-ritual rules of hunting, land use, pastoralism or forest use, this is the point where the cultural system and nature are most closely interconnected. Religious beliefs regulating forest use are widespread in many parts of the world, but their preservation in an authentic form has occurred in small areas.

The purpose of our research is to study the phenomenon of the “Shire Forest” (ხატობს ტყე [khatis tke]) spread in the Pshav-Khevsureti region using the example of Arkhoti valley. We believe that “Shrine Forest” represent a medieval, indigenous form of protected areas, and their study is one of the key components of the cultural landscape research methodology.