



WARRIOR SAINTS IN MEDIEVAL GEORGIAN ART

Edited by Nikoloz Aleksidze and Ekaterine Gedevanishvili

Giorgi Chubinashvili National
Research Centre for Georgian Art
History and Heritage Preservation

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Nikoloz Aleksidze and Ekaterine Gedevanishvili

Tbilisi
2025

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Cover image: St. George slaying Diocletian, Labečina Icon, eleventh century. © Georgian National Museum.

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Dedicated to the guardians of Svaneti's churches
and their families, who, indeed like warrior saints,
protect the treasures of Svaneti's valleys and, in doing
so, safeguard all of Georgia.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLATION, TRANSLITERATION, AND EDITORIAL CHOICES

Transliteration of historic Georgian places and personal names adheres to the Library of Congress Romanization system. However, widely recognized names, particularly modern ones, are not transliterated. For instance, common place names such as Tbilisi, Svaneti, Kutaisi, Batumi, Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti, and Apkhazeti, as well as the names of contemporary towns, municipalities, institutions, and regional centers like Tsalenjikha, are presented in their modern spelling. Institutional names are also rendered in their official spelling even if elsewhere individual names are transliterated. E.g. Ushguli Ethnographic Museum, but Ušguli when referred to as a toponym. Similarly, the names and surnames of modern authors and individuals are rendered in contemporary form. In contrast, all other place names and the names of medieval authors and figures are transliterated, as seen in examples like Hadiši, Mac‘xvariši, and P‘avnisi.

In the main body of the text, original Georgian quotations are included alongside their English translations when possible. Endnotes follow an author-date citation style, which may appear unconventional; however, given the text’s complexity, this approach was considered the most prudent. In the bibliography, only the names and titles are translated, while all other elements, such as journal names and editors, remain in their original languages.

In the index, major warrior saints – George, Theodores, Demetrios, and Eustathios, who have their designated chapters – are not listed.

IMAGE CREDITS

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LIST OF MAJOR ABBREVIATIONS

CSLA – Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity Database.

Ivir. georg. – Georgian Manuscripts of the Holy Monastery of Iviron.

NCM – Georgian Manuscripts of the National Center of Manuscripts of Georgia.

Kutaisi – Manuscripts of the Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum.

Jer. georg. – Georgian Manuscripts of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

O/Sin. georg. – Georgian Manuscripts of the Old Collection of St. Catherine’s Monastery of Mt. Sinai.

Oxford, georg. – Georgian manuscripts of the Wardrop Collection of the Bodleian Libraries of Oxford.

INTRODUCTION

IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS OF THE CULT OF WARRIOR SAINTS

Nikoloz Aleksidze

The conception and evolution of the cult of saints, particularly that of soldier saints, are profoundly intertwined with the political, economic, and cultural transformations of the late antique Mediterranean. By the fourth century, the remains of martyrs, holy men and women, their burial sites, and objects associated with them began to display miraculous properties. They healed diseases, protected travelers from bandits, averted evil eye, and brought about success in various ventures. These material relics became highly sought-after objects. Emperors, local rulers, and bishops sought out the relics of saints from distant lands, bringing them to their own regions and establishing churches, monasteries, and secular institutions to enhance their personal or dynastic authority. Consequently, the cult of saints and their relics became interwoven with political narratives and the rhetoric of power. From the Near East to the Latin West, saints exhibited regional variations and local characteristics; they also remained in a state of constant movement, with imports and exports shaping the practice of their veneration. Some cults remained strictly local, primarily celebrating the lives of the saints, while others gained broader, more “international” appeal.

The cult of soldier saints emerged within this social, political, and ideological framework, but not primarily among the elite and imperial circles of the capital. Some of the earliest cults of warrior saints arose in the imperial peripheries, reflecting the anxieties associated with life in precarious, less-defended, and frequently shifting border zones. These cults proved particularly successful in militarized provinces or cities, such as Melitene, home to the renowned twelfth legion of the Roman Empire—the *Fulminata*. It was in this militarized context that, for example, the cult of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia, one of the most widespread in Late Antiquity, took root. Several other distinguished military saints, including Polyeuktos, Hieron, and other Meliteneian martyrs, also originated from this province. In Syria, for instance, military transit camps, the *metata*, were in several cases named after soldier saints, as evidenced by multiple inscriptions from the fifth and sixth centuries.¹ Another example of a powerful and long-lasting cult that developed in the imperial periphery addressing local anxieties was that of St. Menas. Like a few other martyrs who had been warriors in life, Menas became a specialized miracle worker after death, reputed for performing miracles such as liberating hostages, returning stolen goods,

and punishing bandits and potential rapists.² These miracles of the great soldier saint reflected fears and anxieties of living in a Nile valley and protected travelers from crocodile attacks or punished the theft of sheep and pigs. Nevertheless, the fascination with this particular warrior and his miracles far transcended the Egyptian context, extending all the way to Rus. It is indeed the nature of the cult of soldier saints to evolve from local miracle workers to great protectors of the empire and the emperors. As will be explored in subsequent chapters of this volume, the unmatched popularity of warrior saints in the peripheral militarized provinces of medieval Georgia, particularly in the mountainous border area of Svaneti, which served as a vital transit route from the North Caucasian steppes to the Black Sea ports, can be explained by their role as protectors of travelers, less defended peripheries, as well as border and transit zones. The dynamics of relationships between central and peripheral powers were often expressed in the conceptualization of soldier saints, as we shall see in subsequent chapters.

In Late Antiquity, however, the posthumous cultic function of warrior saints was not universal, and often the military identity of soldier martyrs did not persist after their deaths. In many early martyrdom accounts, the virtue of the martyred soldiers was not derived from their military careers but from their renunciation of military office and soldierly identity. Thus, they appeared as martyr saints not because of their military careers but in spite of them. This aspect of early soldier saints also manifests in medieval iconography, where the soldier saint is sometimes shown removing and relinquishing his belt as a symbol of his abandonment of privilege, often returning it to the ruler. The New Testament soldier Longinus (the Centurion) is said to have abandoned his military career following his conversion, choosing instead to embrace an ascetic life before ultimately becoming a martyr.³ By the fifth century, Longinus had already taken his place among other warrior saints and is mentioned alongside figures like Sergius, George, and Theodore. One encomium suggests that Longinus' military career continued posthumously, where he was depicted as actively recruiting souls of converts to Christianity for the heavenly army. Nevertheless, St. Longinus' iconography has not evolved into a fully autonomous figure; he appears only as a participant in the Crucifixion, gesturing to acknowledge Christ's divinity.

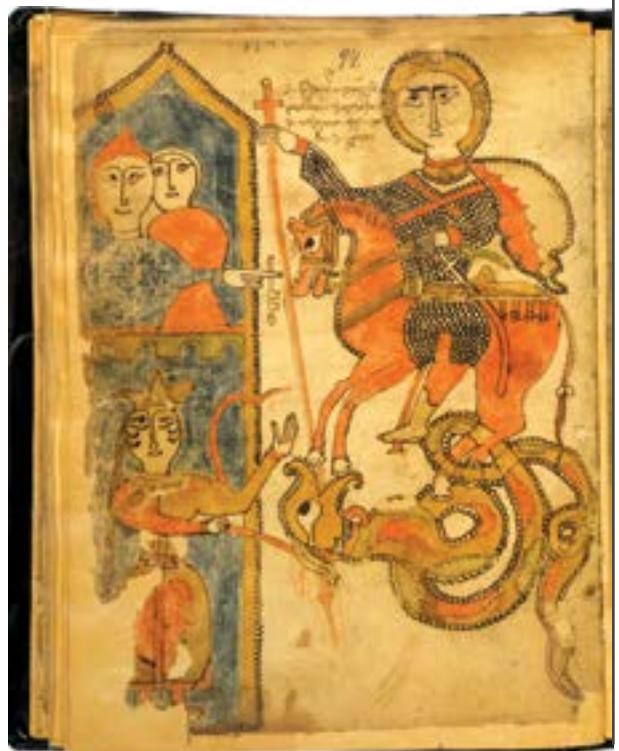
In some instances, figures who were not originally of military background became soldier saints in later traditions. For example, if the theory of the transformation of the holy monk Demetrios of Sirmium into the great soldier saint Demetrios of Thessalonike is accurate, it serves as one such example.⁴ Another, and arguably a better documented example is that of St. Prokopios.⁵ Due to these ambiguous identities, warrior saints may be depicted in visual art as soldiers, martyrs, or both, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters. In some cases, the soldierly identity of a particular martyr may be entirely overshadowed by their martyrdom imagery (as seen in the iconography of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, among others). The evolution of St. George serves as another prominent example; in his earliest martyrdom account, George is depicted as a soldier under the fictional Emperor Dadianos, his fame stemming more from his remarkable miracles than from his military status. In later traditions, however, his military identity becomes increasingly prominent, solidifying his role as the quintessential soldier saint, ultimately overshadowing even other significant warrior saints like Theodore.

In the Eastern Roman Empire, the cults of warrior saints, as we know them today, started to shape somewhat later in Late Antiquity, and were formed during the militaristic Macedonian dynasty. During this era, older warrior saints were rediscovered in a new light and acquired new functions. The most notable transformation was that of Theodore the Recruit (*Tēron*), who became known as Theodore the General (*Stratēlates*), yet his cult continued to develop independently from the original Theodore. Many other soldier saints experienced a similar evolution. This transition was linked to the intensification of military and expansionist rhetoric within Byzantium, along with the external and internal military challenges faced by the empire, the establishment of imperial and royal courts, and the reinforcement of feudal structures among the empire's peripheries. In this context, the cultic functions of the warrior saints expanded significantly—from acts such as returning stolen goods to their rightful owners to securing victories for emperors, defending cities and provinces, legitimizing dynastic or personal rule, and creating visual, symbolic, and rhetorical connections between emperors and warrior saints. These dynamics facilitated the legitimacy of political authority and played a crucial role in the rise of militaristic sentiments within society.

In both Byzantium and Georgia, the growing interest in warrior saints and their narratives coincided with the emergence and evolution of epic literature. This is evident in the tales of Digenis Akritas in Byzantium and the numerous Persianate epics in Georgia, such as the *Shahnameh*, the stories of Vis and Ramin, the epic account of Amiran and his companions, and later, Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther's Skin*. These epic prose and poetic works encapsulated the prevailing feudal values and reflected the political anxieties of their time. Literary motifs emphasizing camaraderie and friendship among epic heroes were mirrored in iconographies and often hagiographies of warrior saints. Scholars of medieval Georgian literature have often pointed to significant overlaps between hagiographies and epics (see, e.g., similarities between the *Martyrdom of Eustathios Plakidas* and the *Rusudaniani*, a late medieval Georgian epic poem). Meanwhile, soldier saints like George and Theodore were reimagined as brothers in arms and were often depicted side by side. The allure of courtly romance and epic adventures is vividly illustrated in one of the most popular motifs in medieval Georgian art: St. George defeating the dragon and rescuing the Princess of Lassia (Fig. 0.1) or the late fourteenth-early fifteenth century facade decoration of the church of Lašdžveri, where along the scenes of the Deesis, Eustathios' vision, we see a narrative depiction of Amiran and his brothers, with an emphasis on Amiran slaying the Dev, and him emerging from a whale's belly (Fig. 0.2), the former alluding to Theodore slaying the dragon and the latter conveying obvious biblical allusions.

There is often a significant disparity between the literary representation of a saint or the popularity of their hagiographical narratives, on the one hand, and the actual presence of their living cults, on the other. Frequently, the accounts of a saint's martyrdom may be widely circulated, while the active practice

0.1 *Miracle of the Liberation of the Princess.*
Dat'una K'variani
Life of St. George in Verse, 1446/373. 47v,
(seventeenth century).
Courtesy of the National Archives of Georgia,
Central Historical Archive.





0.2 “Amirandarejaniani,” facade painting (fourteenth–fifteenth century). Church of the Archangels of Lašgveri. Courtesy of Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut. Photo by Dror Maayan.

of their cult remains comparatively underdeveloped. Moreover, a saint’s name and feast day may appear multiple times in liturgical documents such as lectionaries, calendars, or synaxaria; however, these references do not always align with the preserved information in hagiography, nor do they accurately reflect actual practices. Such discrepancies are particularly notable among warrior saints, whose cults have undergone considerable transformations from their inception to their peak development. The cultic role or biographical details associated with these saints often surpass or diverge from literary traditions, manifesting in various forms across visual art, folklore, or narratives outside the realm of hagiography, depending on the prevailing societal needs. This discrepancy is also evident in Georgian contexts, where an abundance of a saint’s hagiographical dossier does not necessarily translate into a flourishing cult or corresponding visual representations.

Another striking characteristic of the cult of warrior saints, and perhaps of saints in general, is the often inexplicable absence of a particular saint’s cult contrasted with the disproportionate presence of another. For instance, as will be discussed in detail below, the imagery and miracle collections associated with significant saints like Menas or Sergios are almost entirely missing from medieval Georgia, while they are remarkably prominent in neighboring Armenia. In some cases, however, absences of cults may be telling. In the cases of Sts. Menas and Sergios, for example, their prominent presence in Armenia and lack in Georgia, just across the border, may indeed be a reflection of religious antagonism between the two nations—while in others, the relative popularity of a saint may simply be a matter of chance.

IDEOLOGICAL AND LITERARY SOURCES OF THE CULT OF WARRIOR SAINTS

Following the establishment of Christianity in Rome and its peripheries, this new religious and ideological system led to the emergence of many seemingly contradictory phenomena. The established ethical, ideological, and aesthetic ideals often clashed with the principles of the new faith. Much of early Christian literature sought to reconcile these incompatible elements, one of which was the issue of warfare and the declared stance of Christians toward militarism.

Early Church Fathers generally expressed open hostility toward warfare. For example, Origen deemed the militarism of the Hebrews unacceptable, perceiving Christians as a people who had exchanged the “old swords” of the Hebrews for “new plows.” The fathers of the early Church viewed military service and the associated Christian rhetoric as problematic for another reason: before the emperor’s conversion to Christianity, Christian participation in military service implied loyalty to a pagan emperor. Tertullian praised those who resolutely refused to serve the pagan emperor as heroes and saints. However, this attitude was not universal; typically, the defense of the empire—even a pagan one—was regarded as a paramount obligation. For Christian apologetes, defending this point was crucial, as many accusations from pagans against Christians centered on charges of treason and a lack of patriotism.

The situation shifted following Constantine’s conversion and the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire under Theodosius I; however, even during this period, the attitudes of the Church Fathers varied. Basil the Great, for example, espoused a moderate form of pacifism, while Athanasios of Alexandria openly praised those who took up arms against enemies.⁶ In his thirteenth canon, Basil asserts that killing in wartime should not be equated with murder, yet he advises those who have killed in battle to abstain from Holy Communion for three years.⁷ Conversely, the Synod of Arles, convened just a year after Constantine’s baptism, explicitly condemned those who “lay down their weapons during peacetime,” seemingly aimed at curbing potentially dangerous pacifistic sentiments among Christian

soldiers.⁸ Despite these nonunivocal yet authoritative positions, it is evident that Christianity spread rapidly among soldiers, especially under Theodosius I, creating a pressing need to reconcile militarism with the Christian faith.

To legitimize the inherent militarism of the cult of warrior saints, Christians drew examples primarily from the Old Testament. Despite the pacifistic prescriptions of the Ten Commandments, the commandment against killing did not appear to extend to enemies, a notion backed by the tumultuous history of the Hebrews. The sacred objective of the Hebrews involved seizing and defending the promised land by any means necessary, including the killing of enemies, which later underpinned the justification for Christian “holy wars.” As Christopher Walter notes, the aggressive actions of the Byzantines against neighboring adversaries such as the Arabs, Bulgarians, and Persians were rooted more in the Old Testament’s principles of total war than in the pacifistic teachings of Christ.⁹ The militaristic figures of the Hebrew Bible served as sources for legitimizing the roles of Christian soldier saints and military endeavors in general. Prominently among them were Joshua, son of Nun and King David, the latter ultimately becoming an emblem of military might and royal authority for Byzantine emperors.¹⁰ However, in Late Antiquity, both Joshua’s and David’s cult had yet to embody this political-military function, and their cult sites typically remained confined to the Holy Land.¹¹

Another significant source of emulation in the Hebrew Bible is the story of the Maccabean brothers and their revolt. This model was particularly adopted in fifth-century Armenia during the anti-Iranian liberation wars. The first and second books of Maccabees recount the rebellion against the Seleucids in Judea between 167 and 160 BC. Despite the death of Judas Maccabee, the Maccabean family ultimately succeeded in capturing Jerusalem, driving out the Seleucid forces and safeguarding Jewish culture from both imperial aggression and Hellenization. These biblical narratives served as a framework for the Armenian struggle for freedom from the Sasanians in the fifth century and for the preservation of cultural and religious identity, as chronicled by Armenian historians of the fifth and sixth centuries, Lazar P‘arpec‘i and Elišē Vardapet, and later echoed in medieval Armenian literature.¹² In essence, the Armenian cults of their own “national” warrior saints, those fallen in the crucial battle of Avarayr

(451) but also others, were rooted in the Maccabean model rather than any precedent from Roman history.

Beyond patriotic rhetoric, early Christians reinterpreted Old Testament themes as symbolizing an eternal struggle between good and evil. It became the duty of Christians to lead this battle. The New Testament is not devoid of military imagery, although it employs a more metaphorical approach rather than a straightforward call for military engagement. Notably, in the Gospel of Matthew, Christ speaks of coming with a sword rather than peace, a statement that contributed to a blend of expansive militarism and Christian ideals in the minds of Christian rulers. The metaphors Paul used in his epistles were often military in nature, invoking imagery of arms and armor: “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place;” “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:14, 17). Therefore, in New Testament rhetoric, a warrior’s armor was perceived not only as a soldier’s but also as a metaphor for a Christian’s spiritual fortitude.¹³

Common expressions such as “heavenly army” are already present in the New Testament (e.g., John 18:16; the Apocalypse of John 14:3). While initially referring to the army of angels, over time, martyr saints also filled these ranks. The term “soldier of Christ” eventually became a general designation for a martyr, cementing its place in the Georgian language as well. In Late Antiquity, the heavenly host of angels was conjured in the imaginations of the faithful as reminiscent of an imperial court—the angels were envisioned armed with swords and lances, guarding the gates of heaven like the emperor’s personal army.

Out of multiple examples in late antique and early medieval writing, John Sinaites most explicitly presents a Christian person as an iconographic illustration of a soldier saint:

But let us not fail, if you agree, to describe clearly in our treatise the weapons of these brave warriors: how they hold the shield of faith in God and their trainer, and with it they ward off, so to speak, every thought of unbelief and vacillation; how they constantly raise the drawn sword of the Spirit and slay every wish of their own that approaches them; how, clad in the iron armor of meekness and patience, they avert every insult, injury and missile.

And for a helmet of salvation, they have their superior's protection through prayer. And they do not stand with their feet together, for one is stretched out in service and the other is immovable in prayer.¹⁴

Beyond the Old and New Testaments, the visual and textual depictions of warrior saints were often drawn from pre-Christian, pagan, or, in the case of Caucasia, Iranian imagery. It is tempting to seek pre-Christian origins for Christian cults, and much has been written on the potential transformation of pre- or non-Christian deities into Christian cults, particularly those of warrior saints. In the context of Georgia, numerous studies have explored the "genetic evolution" of the cult of St. George from solar or lunar deities, or some other astral cults. The presence of the cult of St. George in vernacular Caucasian religions seemingly supports this argument, although it is also common for St. George to assimilate local cults in many other regions of Christendom. Nonetheless, it remains to be determined whether these cults represent vernacular adaptations of existing Christian traditions or organic continuations of pre-Christian religious practices.

While many such associations remain speculative, there are instances—particularly in visual art—where transformations of non-Christian imagery into Christian iconography can be clearly observed. One particularly enduring motif is that of the equestrian warrior slaying a dragon. Late antique magical amulets often depict a rider clad in military attire on a saddled horse, trampling a mythical creature, typically a dragon or demon. In many cases, the demon is female, identified as either Gello or Alabaster.¹⁵ These amulets may be distinctly pagan, semi-Christian, or syncretic. A notable example of this syncretism is a bronze amulet found in Cyprus, which features a horseman under a star, piercing a female demon with a cross-tipped spear. Next to the demon is an evil eye, surrounded by daggers. The identity of the rider remains ambiguous; he may represent Theodore, George, Demetrios, Sergios, Sisinnios, Solomon, or simply an unidentified knight.¹⁶ Similar images of dragon-slayers are widely attested on the so-called four-sided stelae in late antique Caucasia, as will be illustrated in subsequent chapters.

The existing motifs, pagan or pre-Christian, have without doubt affected the representations of warrior saints. In the case of Georgia, the strongest non-Christian substratum was sourced

from the Iranian commonwealth. Iranian models of chivalry, horsemanship, hunt and other attributes of a valiant warrior and charismatic kingship were internalized by Georgian culture early on. A typical example of such an Iranian warrior king turned soldier saint is the image of King Vaxtang the Wolf-Head as conveyed in the *Life of Vakhtang*, presumably an eighth-century composition. A typical epic account of the life and deeds of an Iranian king was transformed into a semi-hagiographical account of a holy king. Stephen Rapp has analyzed this terminology related to valiance in combat, especially the term *bumberazi* (roughly translated as “giant”) and pointed out that:

Although the pronounced *bumberazi* imagery of *The Life of the Kings* is temporally concentrated during the sway of the Parthian Arsacids, it has been projected through Sasanian and post-Sasanian filters. Together, *gmiri*, *goliat'i* and *bumberazi* are the K'art'velian analogues of the terminology associated with élite Sasanian warriors, the *aswārān*. The *aswār* (cf. OPers. *asbāra*) was a specialist in single combat (*mard-u-mard*) and an expert horseman. He accumulated honorifics bearing witness to his expertise and virility, including *hizārmard* (i.e., possessing the strength of “a thousand men”), *pahlawān* (“hero”), *jahān pahlawān* (“hero of the world”), *mumbāriz* (cf. Geo. *bumberazi*) and *zih sawār* (“exceptional rider”). Portrayals of pre-Bagratid K'art'velian hero-kings and their *bumberazis* are remarkably consistent with those of the late Sasanian *aswārān*.¹⁷

Arguably, the endurance of the Iranian tropes of *Farrah*, conveyed through the successful royal hunt, determined the popularity of certain cults as opposed to others. The disproportional popularity of the cult of Eustathios Plakidas and specifically of the episode of his vision during a hunt, found most commonly as decoration of Georgian church facades, echoes similar Iranian hunting scenes, a typically Iranian expression of fortune but especially royal fortune.¹⁸ As we shall see below, in a few surviving instances, in Georgia, it is not readily obvious whether the composition of a hunter and game on church facades conveys Eustathios' hunt or a motif of a royal hunt as a sign of good fortune.

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS OF WARRIOR SAINTS

The cult of warrior saints and their function experienced the most dramatic evolution from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. As pointed out earlier, the original function of warrior saints was the protection of goods, villages, shrines, military bases, etc. Over time, however, the cultic function of warrior saints increased as they were involved in greater regional political dramas and religious controversies. Soldier saints emerged as punishers of unrighteous rulers and as defenders of Orthodoxy. In subsequent chapters, it will be often pointed out that in medieval Georgian art, St. George was most commonly rendered as the slayer of an imperial figure, usually identified as Diocletian. The possible immediate historic contexts for the proliferation of this imagery will be discussed below; however, the tyrannical instrumentalization of warrior saints was a fairly well-established tradition, especially in late antique Caucasia.

One of the earliest such accounts is preserved in the fifth-century Armenian *Epic Histories*, traditionally known as Faustus Bi-wzandac'i's *History of Armenia*: The emperor Valens was determined to defeat the Christians and sent one of the sophists to argue with them. On his way, the sophist stopped and fell asleep at the martyrium of St. Thekla. The same night he saw how St. Thekla gathered a host of warrior saints and held a council. Thekla appealed to the warriors that the emperor had planned a decisive battle against Christians and needed to be taken out. The saints selected two soldiers, St. Sergios and St. Theodore, and instructed them to kill Valence.¹⁹ A little later, the same sophist saw the return of these two saints, who brought the news of the death of Valens. The Arian emperor Valens, who was killed in the Battle of Adrianople in 378, is obviously identified anachronistically in this episode. Nevertheless, it is a reference to the famous confrontation between Basil of Caesarea and Valens. It is significant that this episode almost exactly repeats Sozomen's account related to the killing of the emperor Julian the Apostate, although the death of the emperor was entrusted to unnamed saints. According to John Malalas, this mission was carried out by the soldier saint Merkourios, a fictional event that was also been established in St. Merkourios' early iconography.²⁰

Warrior saints were punishers not only of tyrannical emperors but also of infidels or representatives of other Christian denominations. Such stories were spread in South Caucasia in the context of the post-Chalcedonian controversies and political antagonisms in the wider region. In this, perhaps the most striking example of a soldier saint as a guardian of faith is that of St. Sergios, (Sargis/Sark‘is in Armenian), whom the Armenian anti-Chalcedonian tradition embraced as a figure who punished Chalcedonian Greeks and Georgians, a tradition still widely reported in South Caucasian folklore. A part of the Chalcedonian tradition perceived someone called Sargis as an “Armenian” saint to such an extent that according to some Chalcedonian traditions, this very Sargis becomes the main reason for the “apostasy” of Armenians from Constantinopolitan Orthodoxy. This outstanding popularity of St. Sergios in the Armenian tradition and his association with the non-Chalcedonian Christology and its defense may be one of the reasons for the much weaker prominence of the same saint in the neighboring Georgian literary and visual tradition. The feast of *Surp‘ Sark‘is* is celebrated in Armenian communities of Caucasia, still commemorates this warrior saint who flies over the rooftops of people’s houses, making sure that he is being respected appropriately. In some versions, he is particularly antagonistic toward Greeks and Georgians (e.g. Chalcedonians) and slays one or two of them if they accidentally come across him on the road.²¹

WARRIOR SAINTS IN THE GEORGIAN TRADITION

Despite the early interest in the political role of the cult of saints, the politicization of warrior saints and their incorporation into military or political rhetoric is a relatively late development. While the practice of venerating soldier saints as protectors or supporters of the army—such as Sergios and Demetrios—was already established in the militarized frontier provinces of the late antique Roman Empire, the centralization of this practice within the imperial capital emerged later.

In the ninth century, significant transformations began within the traditions of the cult of Warrior saints, primarily driven

by members of the ruling Macedonian dynasty. During the ninth and tenth centuries, Basil I (867–86), Leo VI (886–912), and especially Basil II (976–1025) expanded the empire’s territory in nearly every direction—east, south, and northwest—successfully annexing vast regions of Bulgaria and Armenia. By the early 1000s, the Byzantine Empire had restored much of its former strength lost during the Arab expansions of the seventh century.

Concurrently, from the latter half of the ninth century, powerful and militaristic provincial elites began to emerge in the Byzantine border regions. These elites displayed a keen interest in appropriating, utilizing, and revitalizing ancient local cults dedicated to warrior saints. As the chivalric ethos of these provincial elites took shape, the function of these ancient cults evolved to support and legitimize new ideals. Additionally, the provinces required patron saints to safeguard their cities and territories against continual threats from the Seljuks, Slavs, Ottomans, and other adversaries.

By the tenth century, the three prominent warrior saints—Demetrios, George, and Theodore (both *Tēron* and *Stratēlates*)—became closely intertwined in narrative and encomiastic texts, as well as visual representations. Their martyrdoms were notably reinterpreted to align with the new social, administrative, and ideological contexts. This period saw the cult of warrior saints actively shaped by the emperors themselves. Even saints who had originally disavowed military roles in their martyrdom accounts were reimagined not merely as soldiers but as high-ranking officers in this revised interpretation. These warrior saints emerged as principal supporters and visible allies to the emperors in critical battles. Perhaps most famously, Leo the Deacon recounts how Theodore appeared to Emperor John Tzimiskes (969–76) and how this saint helped the emperor repel a crucial attack of the Kievan forces.²² John Skylitzes also makes sure to associate important victories with the feast of St. George and St. Theodore.²³ After the victory, the captured city of Dorystolon was named Theodoropolis.²⁴ Other miracles are also associated with John Tzimiskes. It is likely that John needed this rhetoric and the propaganda of special assistance from the saints for legitimizing his rights following the murder of his predecessor, Nikephoros Phokas. Thus, the manipulation of the cult of saints, specifically the warrior saints, played a significant role not only in foreign affairs but also in the internal disputes between dynasties.

In South Caucasia, including Armenia and Kartli, the tradition of warrior saints drew from multiple sources: on the one hand, it was influenced by the West, while on the other hand, it emerged from local foundations. At the same time, Georgia, as part of the Anatolian and Eurasian cultural landscape, had absorbed syncretic traditions of holy warriors. Typically, the cult of martyred warriors arose during particularly intense periods of war or foreign occupation, as was in the case of Armenia, during the wars with the Sasanian Persians in the fifth century.

Like that of Armenia, Georgia's political geography was a contributing factor to the outstanding centrality of warrior saints in Georgian culture. Located on a virtual border zone of larger empires as well as on a geopolitical faultline, the Georgian kingdoms were traditionally caught between antagonistic great empires—the Persian and Byzantine, and later the Arab Caliphate—and were thus doomed to a constant struggle for physical survival. Naturally, being located at a geographical and political crossroads and thus having strategic centrality in the broader region, the cult of the warrior saints became a central aspect of devotion as well as royal ideology. Perhaps this is precisely the reason why, since its inception, the visual representation of warrior saints in Georgia has been particularly focused on their military attributes, whereas in the Byzantine world, warrior saints initially appeared mainly as martyrs. Georgian culture has internalized the cult of the warrior saints to such an extent that, over time, it has significantly determined the representation of its monarchs. A number of Georgian kings were over time canonized and perceived as soldier saints, such as Vaxtang Gorgasali, Archil I, David Kouropalates, David IV the Builder, Demetre I, Demetre II, Luarsab II, and others. Some of these kings, such as Archil I, Demetre II, and Luarsab II were remembered as both martyrs and soldiers, with their lives and deaths described in a manner remiscing old martyrdom accounts of soldier saints.

In Georgia, influenced by Byzantine traditions on the one hand and the continual resistance against the Arabs on the other, a local tradition of soldier saints began to take root by the ninth century: The *Martyrdom of Gobron*, the *Martyrdom of Konstanti of Kakheti*, and the *Martyrdom of David and Constantine* appeared within this context. In these narratives, both in their original forms and later metaphorastic versions, the self-sacrifice of Georgian warriors is typically presented as a desire to em-

ulate the great warrior saints: „მაშინ წამა ადარნასე მეფემან ჭეშმარიფი მარტვლობად მისი (გობრონის), ვითარცა გიორგისი და თეოდორესი”.²⁵ (Then King Adarnase believed in [Gobron's] true martyrdom, as that of George and Theodore). Furthermore, Konstanti's martyrdom was commemorated on the same day as that of St. George:

„და ვითარცა-იგი დღენდელსა ამას დღესა შინა ადიდე ღირსი შენი მოწამც წმიდადა გიორგი და შეიწირენ შრომანი მისნი და დათხევად უბიწოდსა სისხლისა მისისა, შეიწირენ უნდო[ნი]ცა ესე სისხლი ჩემნი, და მომეც მე ნაწილი მის თანა, რამთა წილ-მხუდეს რჩეულთა შენთა თანა, რამეთუ სამკდრებელი შენი მტკიცე არს ჩემდა”.²⁶

And just as on this day, let us honor your holy martyr, Saint George, and let the work of his hands and the shedding of his pure blood be honored, that my blood may be poured out too, and grant me my portion along with him, that I may be among the chosen ones of Yours, for your steadfastness is my strength.

From the late tenth century, Euthymios Hagiorites and other Athonite fathers sought to establish the Byzantine tradition of soldier saints in Georgian liturgical practice and hagiographic writing. Martyrdom accounts of practically all major and lesser warrior saints were translated and disseminated in Georgian. This focus of the Athonites on warrior saints was motivated by the formation of a strong monarchy in Georgia and the necessity of developing a chivalric and military ethos among the Georgian people. While this was indeed the case, it was equally important for the learned Hagiorite scholars to adapt the ongoing literary, rhetorical, and cultic trends from Byzantium into the Georgian context. This process pertained to both saintly warriors and other saints. As a result of their effort, by the eleventh century, nearly all significant hagiographical works related to both major and minor saintly warriors had been translated and were circulating in the Georgian cultural milieu both in Georgia and abroad.

Alongside the consolidation of the Bagrationi dynasty and royal court, there was a rethinking of the political function of the cult of saints in Georgia. A robust and militaristic central and feudal system emerged. Thus, akin to the process seen in the Macedonian dynasty, a kind of “masculinization” of the cult of

saints began, with an emphasis on warrior saints being progressively strengthened.²⁷

Among the soldier saints, Sts. George, Demetrios, and Theodore enjoyed particular prominence, as evidenced not only by the frequency of their depictions but also by the folk cults surrounding them and numerous epigraphic references. Accounts of saintly warriors requesting assistance appear sporadically in epigraphic monuments, particularly from the tenth century onward, with St. George's mentions being notably prevalent in lapidary inscriptions, especially in western Georgia. One could assert that in western Georgian lapidary inscriptions from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, St. George was the most frequently mentioned and was invoked for assistance by both high feudal lords and craftsmen. Following George, Theodore is mentioned with less frequency, while Demetrios is virtually absent from these inscriptions (with the exception of the Dodork‘a chapel discussed in the relevant chapter), indicating that his cult was likely an elite one artificially imported and established from Byzantium.

Of the three great warrior saints, the cult of St. George was by far the most pronounced in Georgia. In her recent book, Heather Badamo identifies St. George as the connector of the empires, as a certain cosmopolitan saint, but also as the paradigmatic face of the Georgian kingdom and the power of the Georgian Bagratids.²⁸ This “imperial” scale of these connections is illustrated by the era of David the Builder (1089–1125) and Queen Tamar (1186–1213).²⁹ Badamo identifies Byzantium as the immediate source of royal patronage by warrior saints. However, she also points out that the spread and establishment of the cult of George in Georgia have their own historical reasons.³⁰ Indeed, visual and paleographical material testifies to the existence of the cult of St. Georgia in Georgia, at least from the fifth–sixth centuries (see chapter of St. George). He appears as a patron saint early on. The ninth-century *Life of Grigol Xanc‘t‘eli* recounts the building of the church of St. George, initiated by a vision. The *Life of Grigol* also points to the fast of St. George in November, which over time has become a national feast day in Georgia.³¹ Thus, it is natural that in Georgia, St. George appears in the context of royal symbolism from a very early age. It can be claimed that Georgia was one of the earliest kingdoms to have adopted this aspect of St. George’s cult.

Evidently, the cult of St. George was “nationalized” at an

early date, as suggested by the multiple feasts of St. George in Georgia. Next to the traditional feast of St. George, Georgians celebrated the feast of 10 November, George's martyrdom on the wheel. In his *Great Synaxarion*, George Hagiorites points out:

ამას დღესა დაღაცათუ ბერძენი წმიდისა გიორგისთვის
არა დიად დღესასწაულობენ, არარავ არს ყენებავ, რაოთა
წუენ ვდღესასწაულობდეთ, რამეთუ წუენ პილრველითგან
ესრეთ გუაქვს წუეულება).³²

Although Greeks do not celebrate [on November 10] the feast of St. George, this does not mean that we should not celebrate it, since this has been our tradition from the beginning.

As suggested by material and literary evidence, the cult of St. George proliferated as a royal cult among Georgian rulers well before Georgia's unification under a single dynasty in the eleventh century. The royal house is first connected to St. George through the hymn of Ioane Minč'xi, preserved at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai, in which Ioane addresses St. George: “წმიდავო გეორგი შეეწიე გეორგის მეფესა წინაშე მეუფეთა
მეუფისა და ადიდე”.³³ (St. George, help the king George before the Lord of Lords and glorify him).

According to a slightly later colophon, this hymn was written in honor of King Giorgi. The king whose assistance Minč'xi seeks from St. George is likely King Giorgi II of Apkhazeti (922–57). During George II's reign, the Kingdom of Apkhazeti reached the pinnacle of its power, and he also managed to annex a large part of Kartli. Thus, by the first half of the tenth century, Giorgi II was the most powerful monarch among the Georgian royal dynasties. He is also credited with renewing the cathedral of Martvili and transforming it into an episcopal center, one of the principal shrines of western Georgia. Ioane Minč'xi spent a significant portion of his life in Martvili, which likely explains the particular reverence he cherished for Giorgi II.

Presumably, the cult of George spread in Georgia from the western regions and he was originally the patron saint of the royal house of the kings of Apkhazeti, as evidenced by the prevalence of this name among the Apkhaz nobility and its near absence among the Bagrationi dynasty. The earliest translations of St. George's martyrdom into Georgian are preserved in two

tenth-century manuscripts, one of which is Athonite (MS *Ivir. georg. 8*) and the other is Sinaitic (MS *O/Sin. georg. 62*). It is conceivable that these translations were commissioned by King Giorgi of Apkhazeti. Other texts associated with George, such as homilies, are also preserved in tenth-century manuscripts. In the late tenth century, Euthymios Hagiorites translated the homily of George. This evidence supports the idea that St. George became the dynastic saint of the kings of Apkhazeti shortly after King Giorgi I (861–8) ascended the throne. The special veneration of St. George among the kings of Apkhazeti is also indicated by King Constantine III's (893–922) visit to the Cathedral of Alaverdi in Kakheti to honor St. George and adorn his icon with gold. At the same time, St. George is mentioned in the 914 inscription of the church in Eredvi, dating the construction of the church to Constantine's campaign in Kartli and Kakheti.

After Ioane Minč'xi, the greatest attention to St. George was devoted by Abuserisže Tbeli in the thirteenth century. Tbeli's account is significant in that it appears to be founded on oral traditions about St. George formed in Achara, indicating the rapid folklorization of St. George's cult.³⁴

To the east, the cult of St. George was particularly prominent in the eastern Georgian kingdom of Kakheti-Hereti. This significance is exemplified by the rebuilding of the Cathedral of St. George in Alaverdi by King Kvirike the Great (1014–37) and the coins minted by the same king, which featured the image of St. George slaying an imperial figure on the reverse—a motif not found in Byzantine iconography (Fig. 0.3).³⁵ On a coin with an Arabic inscription, St. George is identified with an inscription in *Asomt'avruli*.³⁶ These coins, according to today's knowledge, show the earliest numismatic depictions of St. George. By contrast, the neighboring kingdoms of the King of Kakheti-Hereti, e.g., the Kingdom of Apkhazeti or the kings of the Armenian kingdom of Tašir-Joraget, minted coins with Christ and the Mother of God.

The cult of St. George established in various Georgian kingdoms was a herald of sorts for Georgia's subsequent unification. On the tympanum of Nikorcminda Cathedral (1010) (Fig. 0.4), St. George appears as the patron of the son of Bagrat, the king of united Georgia, prince Giorgi, which essentially implies the idea of Georgia's patronage par excellence.³⁷ With the unification of Georgia, the cult of St. George became entrenched in the po-



0.3 St. George slaying a man, coin minted by King Kvirike (1014–37).
Private collection.

0.4 St. George and St. Theodore with Christ (1010–4). Church of St. Nicholas of Nikorcminda.



litical rhetoric of the monarchs of the newly unified kingdom. The Bagrationis inherited the cult of George from the kings of Abkhazia. A notable example of the merging of the royal cults of the Bagrationis and the Apkhaz kings is illustrated in the relief on the altar screen of Urt‘xva, where a mounted warrior identified by a (perhaps later) inscription as St. George is depicted holding the head of a defeated enemy on his lance. As discussed by Ekaterine Gedevanishvili in the chapter on St. George, this imagery represents a hybrid iconography of St. George and the Biblical king David, which the Bagrationis had already appropriated as part of their mythological lineage.

The hybridization of these representations may have been influenced by more direct circumstances. The creation of the altar screen coincided with the period of Bagrat III (1008–14), the grandson of George of Abkhazia and the foster son of David of Tao and his heir, King Giorgi I (1014–27). Bagrat became the holder of two thrones—declared “King of the Apkhazs and the Georgians,” laying political groundwork for such a synthetic relief image. Therefore, the relief of St. George is a visual symbol of the union between these two houses and their thrones.³⁸

The most narrative literary representation of the living cult of St. George in Georgia writing is found in the twelfth-century chronicle of David the Builder. During the battle at Didgori, St. George allegedly visibly led the Georgian armies into the vic-

tory. The 1121 war between David the Builder and a Seljuk coalition is identified in historical sources as a holy war of sorts, where the defeat of the Muslim coalition army by the Georgians is perceived as a cosmic war between Christianity and Islam.³⁹ Like the famous battle of Antioch in 1098, St. George of Didgori is perceived as the patron saint of the South Caucasian “empire” and as Christ’s protector in the oikumene.

Over the centuries, St. George became increasingly associated with Georgia, ultimately being conceptualized as its principal patron, possibly due to the clear connection in names. Numerous accounts, particularly from the Holy Land, as well as nearly all medieval, late medieval, and early modern geographers, travelers, and missionaries who chronicled their experiences in Georgia, highlight the exceptional devotion of Georgians to St. George. It also appears that St. George frequently adorned the banners of Georgian monarchs and feudal lords (Fig. 0.5).

As the perceived leader of the host of warrior saints, St. George played a crucial role in establishing the cults of other warrior saints in Georgia. In the narratives surrounding Georgian kings and martyrs, he serves as an exemplum. However, by the twelfth century, another imported cult, that of Demetrios of Thessalonike, emerged alongside St. George as a patron of the Georgian people.⁴⁰

As a result of imperial efforts, major warrior saint cults nested in provincial regions migrated to Constantinople. Basil I, for example, renovated the church of St. Demetrios in Constantinople in an attempt to transfer the center of his veneration from Thessalonike to the capital. Emperor Leo VI (886–912) particularly stood out in this regard for his military rhetoric. It is thanks to Leo that Demetrios of Thessalonike was transformed from a provincial cult into an imperial one and became the patron of the Byzantine army. Leo cultivated



0.5 St. George slaying the emperor, banner (eleventh – twelfth century).
Niko Berdzenishvili
Kutaisi State Historical
Museum.

an extremely personal association with Demetrios, which transpires most narratively in the *Life of Theophano*. When Leo was imprisoned by Basil I on charges of treason, “a youth, clothed in the garb of a soldier, holding in his right hand a spear and in his left a shield,” appeared to him in the cell. Although he was not explicitly identified, the saint reportedly said, “I have not come here of my own will, but you have made me come from Thessalonike.” Leo VI wished to establish such a close personal association with Demetrios that he became the only emperor to deliver homilies dedicated to this warrior saint. Leo dedicated several homilies to his beloved martyr, and by excessively emphasizing his military identity, he re-invigorated the original cult of the saint.⁴¹ The iconographic transformation of Demetrios from a healer and miracle worker to a soldier saint stems from this period.

The scale of the cult of Demetrios of Thessalonike began to increase significantly from the ninth century and particularly expanded in the eleventh century during the Komnenian dynasty, when a large part of the Balkans joined the empire. By then, Demetrios had transcended the boundaries of the province of Macedonia and became the patron saint of the empire *par excellence*. Emperor Manuel Komnenos (1143–80) played a particularly significant role in the centralization of Demetrios’ cult, as he ordered the transfer of the miraculous covering of Demetrios’ tomb from Thessalonike to Constantinople, which depicted Demetrios himself. Under the Komnenoi, Demetrios was already on par with other warrior saints such as George and Theodore Stratēlates in the imperial pantheon of warrior saints.

The kingdoms neighboring Byzantium, such as the Bulgars, Georgians, and non-Chalcedonian Armenians, also strove to adopt Byzantine cults and appropriate them as their own patrons in opposition to the Byzantines. The Bulgars made an effort to appropriate the cult of Demetrios. When the Second Bulgarian Empire was established and the Bulgars liberated themselves from Byzantine rule, they claimed that after the Norman capture of Thessalonike in 1185, Demetrios left Thessalonike and moved to Trnovo. From then on, Demetrios was depicted on coins of the Bulgarian kings. In response, a legend emerged in Byzantium, stating that in 1207, St. Demetrios slayed the Bulgarian king Kaloyan (1204–7).⁴² This motif later gained wide literary and pictorial dissemination and became associated with the tradition of other warrior saint saints favored by the emperors.

Similarly to the Bulgars, the Georgian aristocracy and the

Bagratid dynasty has also appropriated the cult of St. Demetrios as their patron saint. In fact, the Bagratids were the only dynasty to introduce the name Demetrios/Demetre into the royal names, as two Demetrioses ruled in Georgia between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. The martyrdom accounts and miracles of St. Demetrios have disseminated rapidly in Georgia, and so were his images, both painted and repoussé. In the *Synodikon* of the Iveron Monastery on Mt. Athos, Demetrios is explicitly named as the patron of *k'art'velt'a nat'esavisa*, (the Georgian nation).⁴³ Below, Ekaterine Gedevanishvili discusses some of the most striking examples of utilization of the cult of St. Demetrios in royal propaganda, particularly in the mountainous peripheral areas of the kingdom.

Apart from the great warrior saints, such as George, Demetrios, and two Theodoses, who feature prominently in Georgian art and writing, other warrior saints have also been imported for political reasons. The most notable example is Eugenios of Trebizond. The cult of Eugenios of Trebizond was originally closely tied to Trebizond and its surroundings. According to both the brief and extended accounts of his martyrdom, Eugenios' miraculous healings and assistance occur primarily for the people of Trebizond, and he is closely associated with the so-called Cave of Eugenios. Starting from the ninth century and during the Macedonian rule, the strategic advancement of Trebizond further enhanced the significance of Eugenios' cult. The military theme of Chaldea was founded in the ninth century and became the core of the Empire of Trebizond until it fell to the Ottomans in 1461. The Chaldia theme bordered Kartli to the east, Erzurum to the south, and extended to the middle of the Black Sea to the west. Its strategic location, the proximity to strong Georgian and Armenian states, and the abundance of trade routes significantly strengthened the military district of Chaldia.

Trebizond held great importance for Macedonian policies, which is why the Emperor Basil I elevated it to the status of an episcopal metropolis.⁴⁴ In the ninth century, a large monastery named after Eugenios was established in Trebizond and significantly renovated by the Komnenoi in the fourteenth century. The promotion of the cult of Eugenios and the establishment of his second feast on June 24 (marking his birth) are closely linked to this process, as is the proliferation of his miracle collections. The designation of the martyr's birthday is an unusual phenomenon. As Bernadette Martin-Hisard explains, the pragmatic function of establishing a second feast in June was to facilitate terrestrial and maritime communica-

tion, making it much easier, and this significant day contributed to the increase of Trebizond's economic and ecclesiastical importance. All of this, along with Emperor Basil II's particular reverence for Trebizond and Eugenios, underscores the saint's exceptional significance for the Macedonians.

From the beginning of the thirteenth century, Eugenios becomes the patron saint of the Komnenian dynasty, who even minted coins bearing his image and in 1224, Eugenios assisted in repelling the Seljuk siege of the city of Trebizond.⁴⁵ The foundation of the Empire of Trebizond and the marching of the Georgian armies of Queen Tamar to Chaldia contributed to the appropriation of the cult of this person also in Georgian tradition, as discussed below.

BOOK STRUCTURE

The present volume covers the cults and imagery of five warrior saints who enjoyed outstanding popularity in medieval Georgia. Separate chapters are dedicated to George, Demetrios, two Theodores (Tēron and Stratēlates) and Eustathios Plakidas. These saints have separate chapters due to the outstanding nature of their cults and the existence of hagiographic cycles in their depictions (with the exception of Theodore Tēron and Stratēlates). Along with visual material, to a certain extent, literary and historical contexts are also discussed.

Chapters that address individual saints are preceded by an introductory chapter by Ekaterine Gedevanishvili that discusses the topography of distribution of warrior saints in sacred space and highlights several features typical and sometimes unique to medieval Georgia. The introductory chapter also discusses some lesser warrior saints who feature, although less prominently, in medieval Georgian art.

In its totality, a broad and rich historical, literary, liturgical and artistic picture of the conception and development of the cult of warrior saints is drawn. However, the main focus is still on the visual history, which has essentially determined the structure of this interdisciplinary monograph. The second section, essentially an appendix, of the present volume provides an overview of the representation of the warrior saints, major as well as lesser, in medieval Georgian original and translated writing: translated martyrdom accounts, liturgical commemorations, hymns and other writing.

1 CSLA.E01834 (P. Nowakowski).

2 For the Greek miracles of Menas ascribed to Timothy of Alexandria, see
CSLA.E07440 (E. Rizos).

3 CSLA.E06102 (E. Rizos).

4 For a discussion, see CSLA.E01344 (E. Rizos).

5 CSLA.E07128 (N. Kälviäinen) and CSLA.E07129 (N. Kälviäinen).

6 Athanasius of Alexandria, 1894, 1358–1359.

7 Basil of Caesarea, 152.

8 Munier, 2001, 14–22.

9 Walter, 2003, 11; Rapp, 2010, 175–198.

10 See, e.g., Biliarsky, 2010, 255–279.

11 For the description of the tomb of David by the Piacenza pilgrim, see CSLA.
E00489 (R. Wiśniewski).

12 Thomson, 1975, 329–341.

13 Grotowski, 2010, 253.

14 John Climacus, 2019, 11.

15 On one of the amulets, probably of Syrian origin, the rider Sisinnios is re-
ported. Sisinnios and his brothers are usually associated with the slaying of
the female demon Gello. In addition to Sisinnios, Solomon is also frequent-
ly reported. As O. Pancaroğlu notes, „Through the use of the magical ring,
Solomon becomes an archetypal figure of the defeat of evil forces and over
time transforms into a quintessential symbol of folk Judeo-Christian syncret-
ic traditions. Saint Sisinnios appears to have been the first Christian saint
to grasp the magical dimension of Solomon as a demon slayer.” Pancaroğlu,
2004, 152–153.

16 CSLA.E01326 (P. Nowakowski).

17 Rapp, 2017, 237.

18 Saltykov, 1985, 5–15.

19 CSLA.E00243 (N. Alekṣidze); Garsoian, 1989, 130–132, 421.

20 CSLA.E02775 (E. Rizos). For a comparison of the two stories, see Peeters,
1921, 65–88.

21 For a detailed discussion, see Alekṣidze, 2018.

22 Leo the Deacon, 2015, 197–198.

23 John Skylitzes, 2010, 286;

24 Ibid., 292–293.

25 See Abuladze, 1963, 182.

26 See Abuladze, 1963a, 170.

27 On the masculinization of the Georgian saintly pantheon, see Alekṣidze,
2024, 139–165.

28 Walter, 2003, 120, 128–129, 136–137, 142; Kuehn, 2011, 102–105;
Grotowski, 2003, 39–42; Badamo, 2023, 64–77, 82–90.

29 Badamo, 2023, 66–77.

30 Ibid., 63.

31 Abuladze, 1963, 261, 266.

32 Dolakidze, Chitunashvili, 2017, 64:

33 Khachidze, 1987, 25.

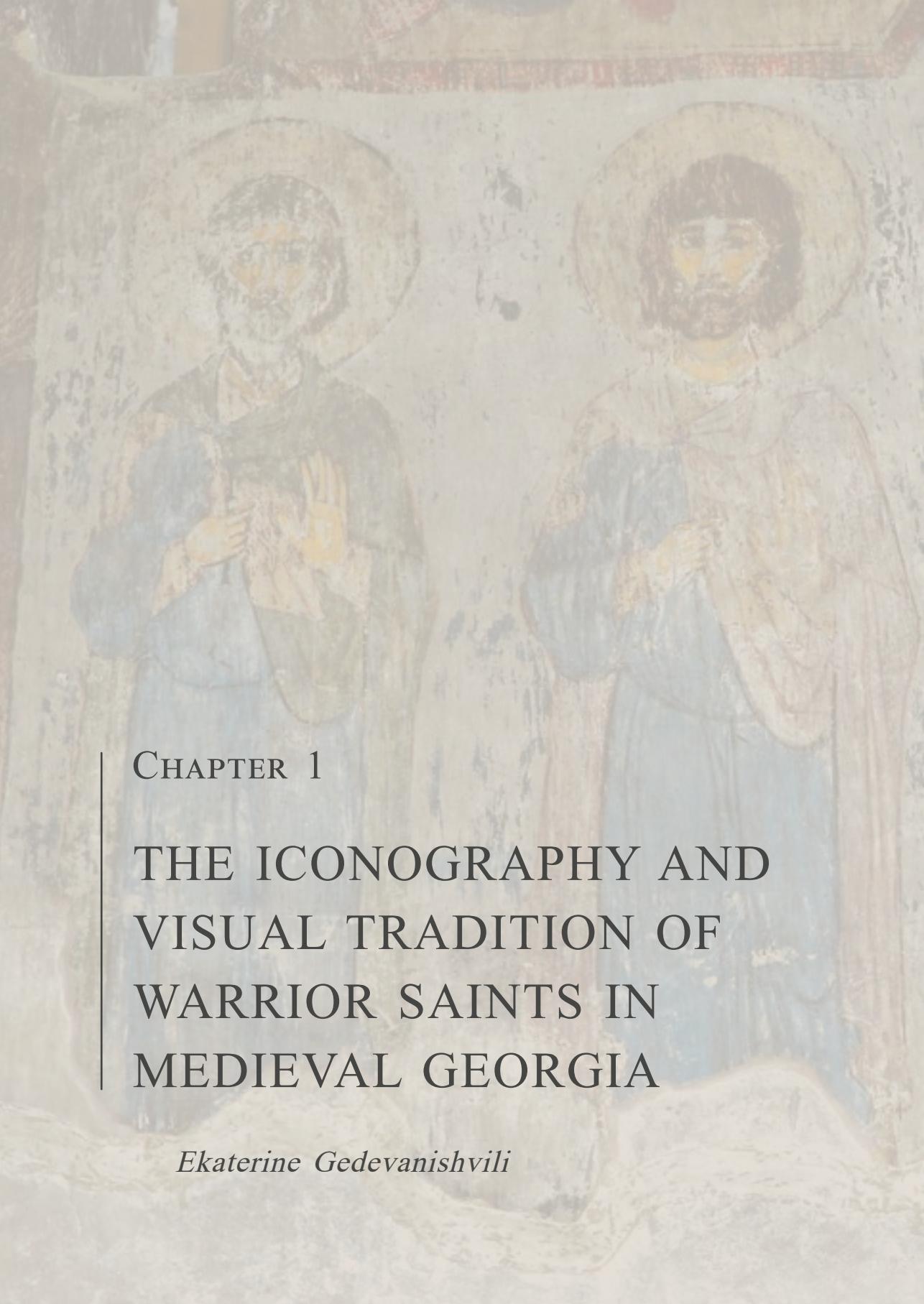
34 See Abuserisze Tbeli, *sascaulni cm. giorgisni*, ed. Gabidzashvili, 1991,
255–268.

35 I would like to thank N. Javakhishvili for providing the relevant image.

36 Akopyan, Vardanyan, 2013, 43–44; Paghava, 2024, 13–14; Paghava, 2016,
261, 262.

37 Aladashvili, 1957, 27–29; Aladashvili, 1977, 146–193.

- 38 For a more detailed discussion, see Alekisdze, 2024, 131–165.
- 39 Badamo, 2023, 67–68. For non-Georgian references, see Tvaradze, 2004, 137–138.
- 40 Jojua, 2023, 102–103.
- 41 For a study of some homilies in the context of medieval Georgian representations of Demetrios, see Ekaterine Gedevanishvili's corresponding chapter.
- 42 Russell, 2010, 14–15.
- 43 Jojua, 2023, 103.
- 44 Martin-Hisard, 1980, 338.
- 45 Rosenquist, 1996, 309–335.



CHAPTER 1

THE ICONOGRAPHY AND VISUAL TRADITION OF WARRIOR SAINTS IN MEDIEVAL GEORGIA

Ekaterine Gedevanishvili

In Georgia, the earliest representations of warrior saints can be found in the decoration of the sixth-century high crosses.¹ This artistic medium, characteristic of the South Caucasus, showcases some of the earliest imagery of warrior saints depicted as vanquishers of evil. These early representations exhibit significant iconographic variations: alongside the relatively rare depictions of mounted saints slaying dragons (*Fig. 1.1*),² there are also images of warrior saints portrayed standing as we have in the case of the Xandisi stele (*Fig. 1.2*).³ One decorative program of a high cross even incorporates a scene from the life of a soldier saint: The

1.1 Brdažori large stele (sixth–seventh century).

Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut. Photo by Dror Maayan.



1.2 Xandisi stele (sixth century). Georgian National Museum.

sixth- or seventh-century stone cross of Nat'lismc' emeli (John the Baptist) in the Davit'gareja desert monastery illustrates the conversion of St. Eustathios (Fig. 1.3). Additionally, some lesser-known warrior saints from this period can also be found on stone crosses; for instance, the stone cross at Gant'iadi features a warrior saint recently identified as St. Christopher.⁴

It is appropriate to begin the history of the visual imagery of the warrior saints with stelai depicting “victorious crosses.”⁵ These monumental sculptural media symbolize the triumph of the Cross of Golgotha, reflecting the ideals of warrior saints as champions of faith. Given the thematic diversity in the decoration of the stone crosses,⁶ the universal image of the warrior saint adopts a polymorphic symbolism, embodying victory over evil,⁷ apotropaic qualities, and eschatological themes (as discussed in the chapters on St. George and Theodore).

While the iconography of warrior saints predates Iconoclasm period, its crystallization predominantly occurred during the restoration of icon veneration, which led to the establishment of their canonical features.⁸ The primary methods of identifying specific warrior saints involve their attire and attributes.⁹ Additionally, their physical characteristics, such as hairstyle and the shape or absence of beards, provide further layers of identification. In Georgian art, the distinctive traits of warrior saints began to emerge relatively early. St. George is consistently portrayed as beardless, with curly hair; St. Theodore is depicted with a distinctive beard; while St. Demetrios typically appears with short hair and is usually beardless. However, as explored in subsequent chapters, deviations from these standard representations are also common in later artistic works.

In the earliest examples of Georgian art, the military iconographic attributes of warrior saints are already evident, with saints depicted wielding weapons. However, in some early works, traditional iconography has not yet fully developed. For instance, in the above-mentioned Xandisi Stele (sixth century), the saint identified as St. George is dressed in secular attire and his military identity is subtly signaled by the cross atop his spear (*Crux Hastata*),¹⁰ a feature that later became conventional in portrayals of warrior saints combating dragons or the Emperor Diocletian.¹¹



1.3 Vision of
St. Eustathios (sixth–
seventh century), schema.

Georgian National
Museum.

1.1. THE CULT OF THE MOTHER OF GOD AND WARRIOR SAINTS

During the militarization of the Byzantine Empire under the Macedonian dynasty, the Theotokos became a leader of sorts of warrior saints, a feature of Mary that transpires as early as the homilies of Andrew of Crete and the *Akathist* hymn, where the Mother of God is called the “shield of the rulers,” “the strategos,” and “the invincible warrior.”¹² For the Byzantines, the association of the Theotokos with victory carried significant political, historical, and theological implications. In hymnography, liturgical, and narrative texts, her virginal birth was seen as a triumph of Christianity, a victory over nature, and a symbol of humanity’s salvation,¹³ all of which contributed to the military imagery surrounding the Mother of God. This is particularly evident in the Macedonian icons and ivory triptychs where the Theotokos is depicted alongside warrior saints.

In medieval Georgian tradition, especially from the tenth century onward, following Georgia’s unification, the concept of the “Lot of the Mother of God” further amplified her military role.¹⁴ Georgian historiography provides numerous examples of the Theotokos’ visible assistance in key military engagements.¹⁵ A notable narrative illustrating the militarization of her cult is found in the iambic verses praising Mary that are said to have been inscribed on the banner of the Caliph by Queen Tamar, which she donated to the Gelat’i Monastery. The Theotokos is credited as the reason for Tamar’s victory over the Muslims.¹⁶ The now-lost banner of Čanjet’i featuring the Hodegitria was the embodiment of the political cult of the Theotokos in Georgia (*Fig. 1.4*).

The Brili Cross, dating to the tenth century and named after a small village in central Georgia where it was discovered, is attributed to David Kouropalates (983–1001) and symbolizes the devotion of Georgian monarchs to the Mother of God (*Fig. 1.5*). Bissara Pentcheva recognizes it as one of the earliest depictions of the military cult of the Theotokos, illustrating the convergence of two forms of victory: the Hodegitria, which represents the Virginal birth, and the Crucifixion, symbolizing triumph over death.¹⁷



1.4 *Panagia Hodegitria* (twelfth–thirteenth century),
Čanjet'i banner.



1.5 Processional cross of David Kouropalates (tenth century). Georgian National Museum.

Panagia Nikopoia, who carried military significance in Byzantium, also appears as a protector of Georgian kings. The imagery of Nikopoia can be traced in Georgia as early as the sixth century, appearing in a royal context during the eighth and ninth centuries. A significant example of this connection is the church of Kabeni of the Mother of God, also known as Gethsemane, built in the eighth to ninth century, where ceramic tiles depicting the Theotokos were discovered (Fig. 1.6). These tiles were subsequently integrated into the wall of the renovated church,¹⁸ materializing one of the major symbolic metaphors of the Virgin Mary as “the fortress and citadel and protective wall and refuge of all” (the Akathist hymn). The church’s inscription mentions a certain Latavri, identified as the sister of Ašot Kouropalates (786–813).¹⁹ Thus, the depiction of Nikopoia on the tenth-century stele of David Kouropalates signifies a continuation of this established tradition



1.6 Virgin Nikopoia, tile
(eighth–ninth century).
Kabeni Church of the
Mother of God.



1.7 Stele of David
Kuropalates (tenth
century). Erzurum
Museum.

(Fig. 1.7). Soon after, Nikopoia became a palladium of Georgia's Bagratid monarchs (Fig. 1.8).

As a result, warrior saints frequently appear as companions of the Theotokos on processional crosses and icons.²⁰ The now partially lost tenth-century triptych of Č'ukuli (Fig. 1.9) and Č'ixariši (Fig. 1.10) exemplify this association by featuring prominent images of warrior saints.

1.2. ARCHANGELS AND WARRIOR SAINTS

The cult of warrior saints is intimately connected with that of the Archangels, particularly Archangel Michael, who is described as "the leader of the heavenly host... the companion, aid, and protector of all."²¹ In Byzantine sources, Archangel Michael visibly assists emperors in battle alongside figures such as George, Demetrios, and Theodore. Previously the leader of the Hebrew nation, Archangel Michael now appears as the supporter of the Church and Christian nations. His military cult became particularly prominent during the reign of the Macedonian emperors and

1.8 Mother of God with the Archangels, mosaic (twelfth century). Gelati Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.



1.9 Mother of God and warrior saints (tenth century), Č'ukuli triptych. Niko Berdzenishvili
Kutaisi State Historical Museum.



1.10 Mother of God and warrior saints (tenth century), Č'ixarisi triptych.



1.11 St. George slaying Diocletian; the vision of Joshua (1096). Church of the Archangels of Ip'rari.

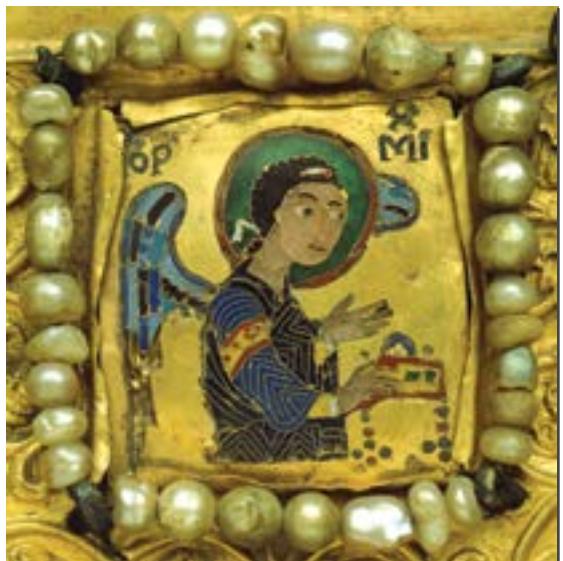
gradually evolved into a form of personal protection for the emperors themselves. By the tenth century, images of the archangels dressed in military attire and wielding weapons began to emerge.

The protection of Archangel Michael as the “general” of the heavenly army is frequently referenced in medieval Georgian sources. In the *Life of Vakhtang*, the king attributes his victory over T’arxan to the archangel’s assistance.²² Later, the *Life of David the Builder* narrates an incident where the image of the archangel saved the king, an episode that is likely reflected in the decoration of Ip’rari, emphasizing the theme of Archangel Michael’s protection akin to the vision of Joshua, son of Nun (Fig. 1.11).²³ This link is vividly depicted in the Xaxuli icon, where, in a symbolic representation of royal power, Christ receives a crown from both the Theotokos and Archangel Michael (Fig. 1.12).

The triumphant imagery of Archangel Michael is rooted in his defeat of the dragon in heaven, as recounted in Revelation 12:7–9. This narrative later served as the prototype for the symbolic depiction of the archangel conquering the dragon, serpent, or Satan, ultimately establishing him as a universal symbol of

victory over evil. However, the imagery of Archangel Michael vanquishing Satan did not gain prominence in medieval Georgia. Instead, his military function is evident solely in representations of the archangels in military garb.

Such images are typical of all eras; however, we will only mention a few examples, notable for their scale and monumentality, such as the decoration of the Church of the Archangels of Jumat'i (seventeenth century, Guria) (Fig. 1.13), the upper church of the Savior at Lagami (fourteenth century, Mestia, Upper Svaneti) (Fig. 1.14), and Kaiše (late fourteenth to early fifteenth century, P'ari Community, Upper Svaneti) (Fig. 1.15). In the latter, Archangels Gabriel and Michael are depicted



1.12 Archangel Michael with the crown, enamel (eleventh century), detail, Xaxuli triptych (twelfth century). Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.



1.13 Archangel Michael (seventeenth century). Church of the Archangels of Jumat'i.

1.14 Archangels Michael and Gabriel (fourteenth century), detail of the altar screen. "Upper" Church of the Savior of Lağami.

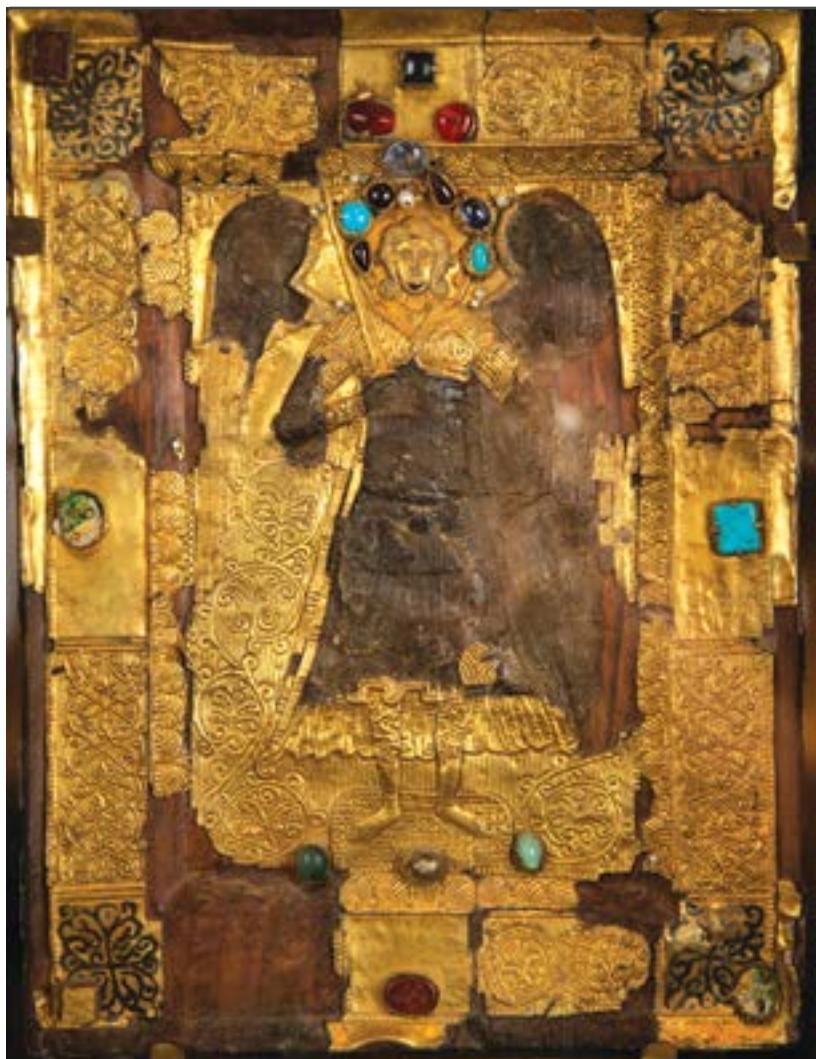


1.15 Archangels Michael and Gabriel (fourteenth–fifteenth century). Church of the Archangels of Kaiše.



in the bema, positioned just above the altar, as if guarding the holy sacraments during the liturgy.

Of particular significance is the thirteenth-century icon of Archangel Michael from M[u]xeri (Latali Community, Upper Svaneti), which reflects the political dimensions of the cult of the celestial beings (*Fig. 1.16*). In this depiction, the archangel is attired in military uniform, and the donor's inscription implores his protection over the Bagrationi family, the nobility, and "whole Georgia:" "Holy Archangel of Muxeri, not made by human hand, glorify the Bagrationi kings and the Dadiani and nobles and the whole Georgia and all the Svans and Latali Gorge and rise the one who rises you: the village of Latali and all who

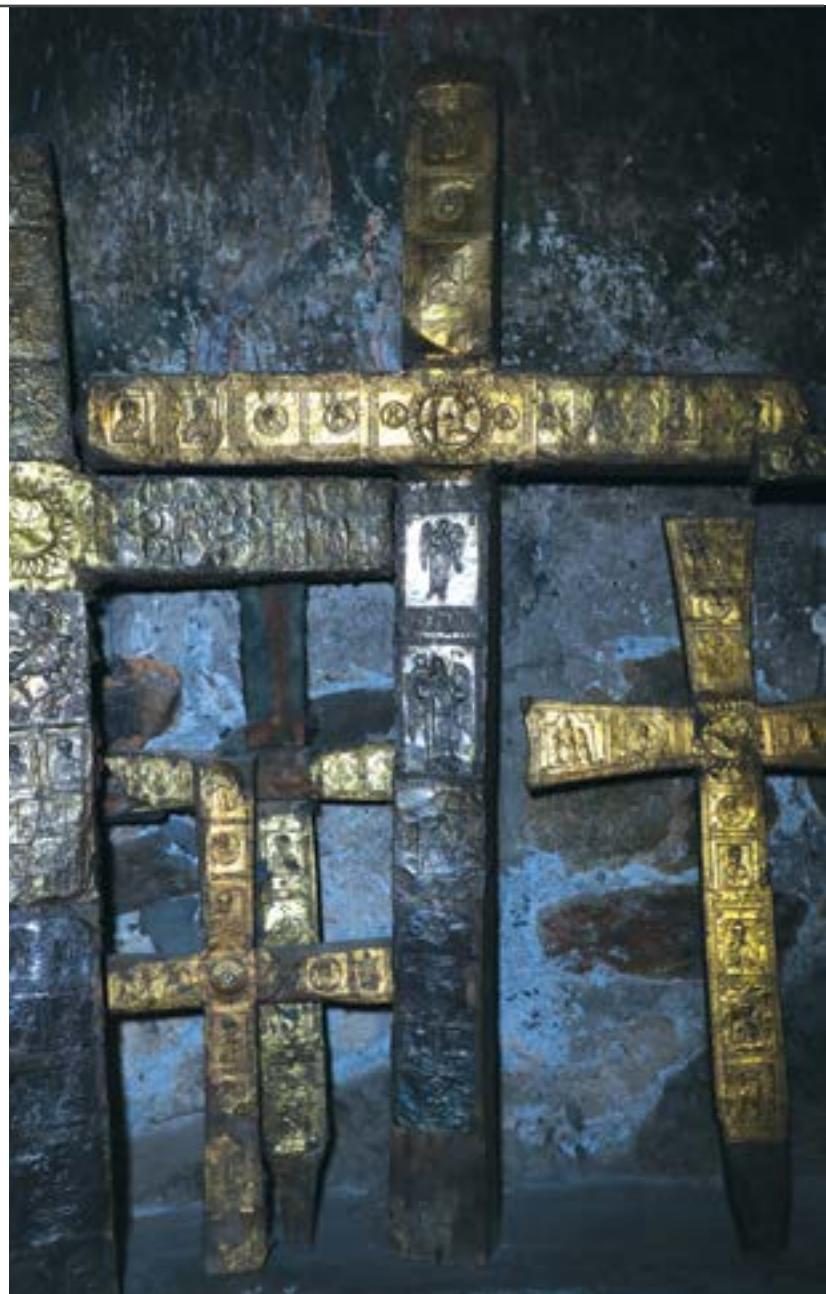


1.16 Archangel Michael of M'xeri (thirteenth century). Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography.

praise thee. Amen.”²⁴ With his arms raised, Archangel Michael seemingly safeguards this union.

Thus, it is logical that the archangels are often paired with the warrior saints. This pairing can be found in the decoration of pre-altar crosses, processional crosses, and various liturgical objects, as well as in church decoration programs.²⁵

1.17 Pre-altar crosses from the Church of the Savior of Cvirmi.



1.3. WARRIOR SAINTS ON LITURGICAL OBJECTS

Monumental pre-altar crosses are a distinctive medium of medieval Georgian art, characterized by the prominent depiction of warrior saints within their decoration (Fig. 1.17). Michele Bacci compares the compositional arrangement of saints on these crosses to the traditional embellishment of the cross with pearls and gems, such as in the Jerusalemite *Crux Gemmata*: “The images of the holy persons juxtaposed over the cross could be paralleled with the gems and pearls that dotted the Jerusalem *Crux Gemmata*, as inhabitants of the Heavenly Jerusalem, saints and their incorruptible corpses were viewed as made of precious metal being part of the mystical body of Christ.”²⁶ This symbolic context also applies to the decorative principles used in icon frames and triptychs/diptychs, where frames convey a sense of sacred infinity rather than merely serving as boundaries. Glenn Peers refers to the phenomenon of the frames as a bridge between the visible

1.18 *Resurrection of Lazarus, Entry into Jerusalem, female saints, a warrior saint (fourteenth century). Lagami “upper” Church of the Savior.*





1.19 *St. Barbara, Deesis and various saints* (eleventh century). Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography.

and invisible worlds, discussing the metaphoric and symbolic significance of materials like gold and silver.²⁷ This understanding of frames illuminates the prominence of warrior saints in medieval Georgian art, particularly in repoussé metalwork, where imagery of warrior saints is virtually ubiquitous.

Warrior saints frequently appear alongside other categories of saints, such as apostles, healers, martyrs, and church fathers. Notably, the depiction of warrior saints with holy women is especially common in Georgia, possibly reflecting the apostolic tradition of St. Nino. This pairing occurs both in monumental art and in icons, with its most frequent representation found in Svanetian art (Figs. 1.18; 1.19).²⁸

The distribution of saints on liturgical objects often reflects decorative principles that seek to balance and unify the gleaming surfaces of these items through the “dotted” images in the frames

of the icons or arms of the crosses. Typically, on the icon programs the thematic principle governs the decorative system; for instance, the upper sections commonly portray the Deesis, along with the Savior, the Mother of God, and angels, while the sides feature apostles, holy fathers, and, less frequently, holy anargyroi (*Fig. 1.19*). Warrior saints are generally found in the lower or lateral borders.

A unique feature of medieval Georgian art, distinguishing it from Byzantine art, is the dedication of entire pre-altar crosses to the cycle of St. George (see chapter on St. George).²⁹ While it is relatively common in the Eastern Christian tradition to dedicate crosses to individual saints, such explicit dedications are rarely reflected in Byzantine iconographic programs (*Fig. 1.20*). Moreover, it is unusual for Byzantine liturgical objects (except textile) to feature multiple identical images of warrior saints, a practice common on the pre-altar crosses of Svaneti. Here, the images of warrior saints, such as Theodore and George slaying the dragon



1.20 Treasury of
Mejvrisxevi, Dimitri
Ermakov's photo collection.



1.21 Crucifixion and warrior saints, detail of the decoration of the pre-altar cross. Church of the Savior of Cvirmi.



1.22 Warrior saints, detail of the decoration of the pre-altar cross, church of the Savior of Cvirmi.

and the emperor, are replicated multiple times (Figs. 1.21; 1.22). It is also common to show multiple half-figures of the warrior saints. This repetition appears to reflect a tradition of textile decoration where the recurrence of images enhances their apotropaic power, as explained by Henry Maguire. In the context of Georgian pre-altar crosses, the multiplicity of triumphant images of the warriors can be interpreted as evoking the cross's military role in Christianity.³⁰

Another notable peculiarity in the iconography of Svanetian pre-altar crosses is the representation of non-warrior saints as soldiers, e.g., St. Pantaleimon clad in armor alongside other warrior saints on the cross of Svip'i (Fig. 1.23). Similarly, the cross from the treasury of Ušguli depicts the infant martyr St. Kyrikos transformed into a warrior saint and presented in full military garb (Fig. 1.24). Interestingly, St. Kyrikos is often depicted on Svanetian icon frames alongside warrior saints, which may be explained by the exceptional prominence of St. Kyrikos' cult in Svaneti. This transformation indicates that any male saint, regardless of their original identity, could have been viewed as a "Soldier of Christ," protector of the earthly Church (see Nikoloz Aleksidze's chapter), further underscoring the popularity of soldier saints in medieval Georgian tradition.

The existence of the *vita* icons in Georgian art as early as the eleventh century (e.g., the Icon of Laklakidze), gave rise to the hagiographical icons of St. George.³¹ Georgian evidence signifi-

1.23 St. Panteleimon and St. Prokopios (thirteenth–fourteenth century). Svip'i pre-altar cross, Church of St. George of Svip'i.



1.24 Sts. Kyrikos and Ioulitta, detail of a pre-altar cross (twelfth–thirteenth century). Ushguli Ethnographic Museum.

1.25 St. George's vita icon (early thirteenth century).
St. Catherine's Monastery of Mt. Sinai. Permission of St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria expeditions to Mt. Sinai.



cantly enriches this relatively rare artistic genre. The cycle of the cross of Seti (c.1030, Mestia, Upper Svaneti) is one of the earliest variations on the extended biographic cycles of St. George, stimulating the creation of vita icons of this particularly revered saint in Georgia. Among the most outstanding examples of hagiographic icons of St. George are the icon St. George of Ubisa



1.26 St. Demetrios (thirteenth century). Church of St. George of Lahili. Dimitri Ermakov's photo.

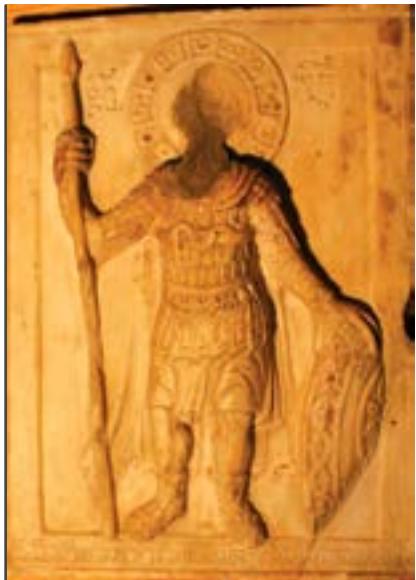


1.27 St. George slaying the dragon (fifteenth century (?)). The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo by Pavel Demidov.

(probably late thirteenth century) and the icon of Mt Sinai (early thirteenth century), whose Georgian donor (Monk Ioane) boasted to the multiethnic community of Mt Sinai the exclusive patronage of St. George of the Georgian people. (Fig. 1.25).³² In addition, Platon Ioseliani (1809–75) reports that the church of Ert‘acminda (Shida Kartli) housed an icon depicting the life of St. Eustathios, donated by King Demetre II (1270–89). Ioseliani notes the presence of a kneeling image of the king on the icon and dates it to 1279 according to the donor’s inscription.³³

Georgian art has preserved a unique type of composite imagery featuring warrior saints, exemplified by metalwork icons of St. Demetrios (thirteenth century) and St. George (fifteenth century (?)) (Figs. 1.26; 1.27). In these icons, antique spolia serve as substitutes for the saints’ faces (see the chapter on St. Demetrios), while the remainder of the figures are metalwork.

Georgian art has preserved a marble icon of St. George (43,5 × 60), which is rare for the region. Renée Schmerling dates



1.28 St. George,
eleventh century,
marble icon from Vani.

this piece to the eleventh century, suggesting that it closely follows other examples of Georgian repoussé icons of the epoch (Fig. 1.28).

Like in Byzantium, the most revered warrior saints in Georgia were Sts. George, Theodore, and Demetrios, who are regarded as quintessential warrior saints. Other warrior saints of the so-called état majeur and minor group, such as Prokopios, Merkurios, Nestor, Artemios, Christophoros, and others, also appear sporadically. However, these figures feature relatively rarely on liturgical objects and are more frequently represented on wall paintings. One notable exception is the decoration of the cross of Svip'i, as well as the decoration of some icon frames as well (Fig. 1.29).

St. Eustathios stands out as an exception, as Georgian art has preserved his entire life cycle alongside multiple images. St. Prokopios is also featured prominently in several monuments; e.g., he features prominently in the murals of Ateni Sioni (c.1070) where he is represented here not as a warrior but as a martyr, depicting a laconic scene of his conversion. Next to him is a red cross, which signifies Prokopios' conversion through the vision of the cross. He also appears in the Xaxuli triptych (twelfth century), where his enamel portrait is part of the Deesis above the central enamel icon of the Mother of God. In this context, he appears as a complementary figure to St. Demetrios, the patron saint of the donor of the Xaxuli icon – King Demetre I. Prokopios is similarly highlighted in the Church of the Dormition of Varžia (1184–6), where he is again portrayed alongside St. Demetrios, positioned opposite the royal Bagratid portraits.

Evidently, Prokopios' royal patronage in Georgia had a literary foundation and was rooted in the parallelism between the revelation of the Cross in the *Conversion of Kartli* and the story of the conversion of St. Prokopios. His conversion was also similar to the vision of the Emperor Constantine and his conversion.³⁴ Perhaps these associations determined St. Prokopios' royal patronage in Georgia, which transpires in the first redaction of the Georgian *Menaion* (MS *Jer. georg. 42*), where the hymn ends in the following words: „ძალი მცრისად დაამდაბლე სრულად ძლიერებითა ფუარისა შენისამთა ქრისტე ღმერთო და ვედრებითა წმიდისა პროკოპისითა მოჰმადლე ძლევად მეფესა



1.29 *Svip'i* pre-altar crosses, church of St. George of *Svip'i*.



1.30 *Warrior saint slaying the dragon* (1171). *Sat'xe* altar screen, fragment. Georgian National Museum.



1.31 *Warrior saint slaying the dragon* (tenth - eleventh century). *Sap'ara* altar screen, fragment. Georgian National Museum.

მუენსა და დირს მყვენ შეს ვლად სასუფეველსა.³⁵ (You trampled the might of the enemy with your cross, Christ God, and through the intercession of St. Prokopios grant victory to our king and make me worthy to enter heaven).

1.4. IMAGES OF WARRIOR SAINTS IN SACRED SPACE

1.4.1. CHANCELS AND ALTAR APSES

Along with features shared with the Byzantine tradition, there is a peculiarly Georgian tradition of distributing the warrior saints in church spaces. One such feature of local art is their depiction on chancels (*Figs. 1.30; 1.31*).³⁶ Apparently, this tradition has had a long history in the art of the Christian East, as attested by seventh-century sources, according to which on the templon of the church of John the Baptist of Constantinople, there was a depiction of St. Artemios. Christopher Walter suggests that figurative depictions on the templons of Constantinople must have existed as early as the sixth century.³⁷ However, if in Byzantium this tradition is known to us through written sources and some sporadically surviving evidence, in Georgia it had a systematic character and was consistently applied over the centuries. One such early sample of stone chancel is the chancel screen of Cebelda (late seventh or early eighth century)³⁸ (*Fig. 1.32*). On stone chancels, equestrian saints are mostly depicted in a heraldic manner. On painted ones, however, portrait-like depictions of warrior saints are prioritized (e.g., altar screen of Ip'rari (1096)). The inclusion of warrior saints in decorative programs of the



1.32 Cebelda altar screen (seventh–eighth century), fragment. Georgian National Museum.



1.33 St. Theodore Stratēlates (sixteenth century), sanctuary program. Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God of Gelat'i.



1.34 St. Theodore Tēron (sixteenth century), sanctuary program. Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God of Gelat'i.

separations of the “Holy of Holies” and the naos reflects their function as the guardians of the sacred space.³⁹

While it is less common in Georgian tradition to depict warrior saints within the sanctuary, notable exceptions exist. In this respect, one of the most outstanding examples is the decoration of the main church of the Gelat'i Monastery. In a sixteenth-century layer, inside the altar apse, we can observe half-figures of Theodore Tēron and Stratēlates inscribed into medallions (Figs. 1.33; 1.34). Irine Mamaiašvili points out how unusual this theme is for Byzantine art and highlights a parallel to fifteenth-century Romanian art in Densus.⁴⁰ The depiction at Gelat'i echoes an earlier example from the Uraveli wall painting (early eleventh century, Samtskhe), which presents various categories of saints

1.35 Heraldic image of the warrior saints (early eleventh century). Iqalt'o altar table, detail. Telavi Museum of History and Ethnography.



in the apse program. Evidently, Gelat'i's purported possession of Theodore's skull may have influenced this unique departure from the general program.⁴¹

Georgian art is also familiar with the tradition of depicting warrior saints on altar tables, as exemplified by the relief of Iqal't'o (early eleventh century) (Fig. 1.35). Nina Iamanidze notes the distinctive arrangement of the warrior saints here: they appear in the upper register of the decoration, next to the Crucifixion.⁴² Another peculiar example is the church of St. George of Svip'i (P'ari community, Upper Svaneti), where St. George is depicted on the postament of the pre-altar cross (Fig. 1.36). Antony Eastmond dates this image to the thirteenth century and links it to the liturgical organization of the church.⁴³ St. George, who appears on the pedestal of "Mt Golgotha," reflects the metaphor of the saints and the terrestrial church in general as the "living stone" as articulated by St. Peter (I Peter 2:5). The same function also transpires in the tradition of placing warrior saints near altar apses. One of the earliest examples of this topography is the tenth-century layer of the decoration of the Jvaripatiōsani of T'elovani, where the warrior saints appear on the north and south pilasters of the bema as well as on the pilasters supporting the dome. They act as the bearers of the Christian church and together with the cosmic cross of the dome, symbolize God's omnipotence and unshakable firmness.⁴⁴

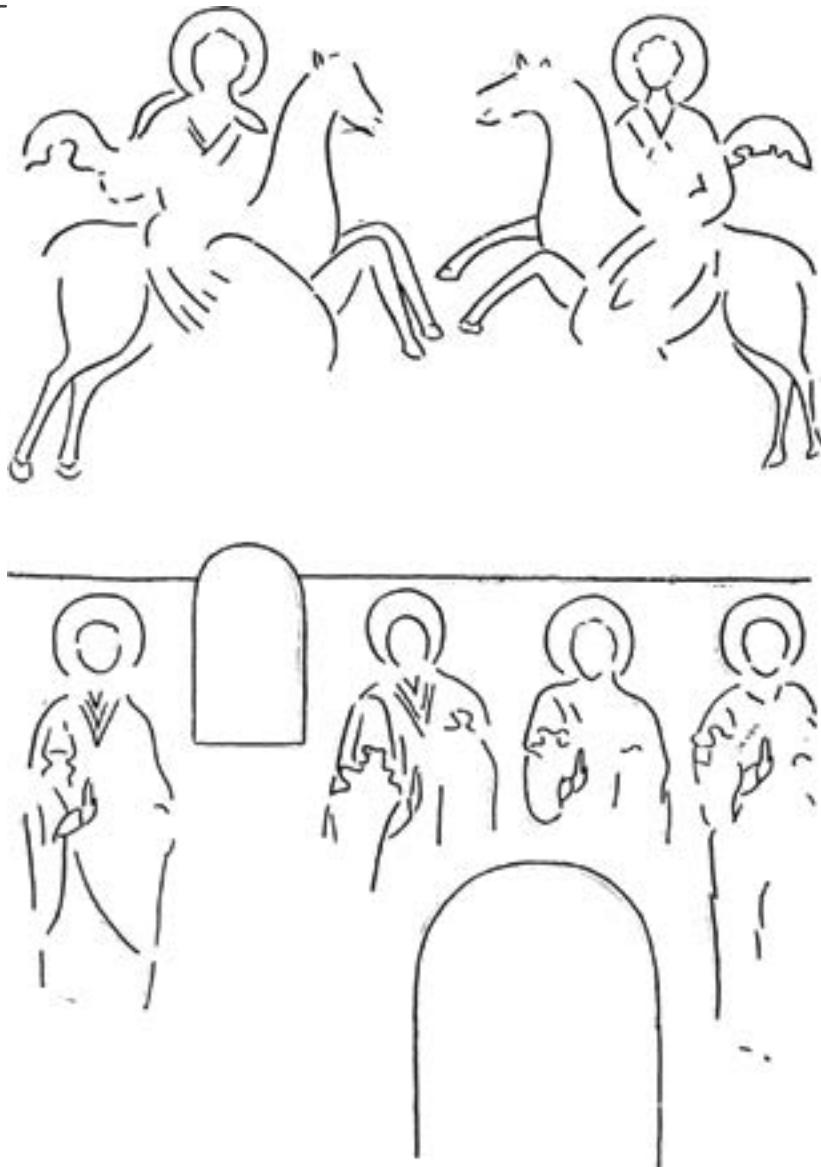


1.36 *St. George, base of a pre-altar cross (thirteenth century). Church of St. George of Svip'i.*

1.4.2. "THE TENTH RANK OF ANGELS"

At a certain point in history, Georgian iconography diverged from the traditional path of Byzantine iconography. One significant departure is the depiction of equestrian warriors on the vaults of the domeless churches.⁴⁵ This practice can be traced back to the so-called "VI church" of Sabereebi in Davit'gareja (ninth–tenth century), where, despite considerable damage, warrior saints can still be seen on the slope of the vault above the church's entrance.⁴⁶ This tradition continues in the decorative programs of Ac'i (early eleventh century, Ieli Community, Upper Svaneti) and Ip'xi churches (early eleventh century, Latali Community, Upper Svaneti) (Fig. 1.37), as well as in the first layer of the murals of Lamaria (tenth century, Ušguli). This choice is often explained by the early date of their creation, at a time when the artistic

1.37 Heraldic images of warrior saints and church fathers (early eleventh century), schema. Church of St. George of Ip'xi.



system of church decorations was not yet fully developed.⁴⁷ However, this tradition seems to persist into the later Middle Ages, as demonstrated by the church of Nuzal from the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries.⁴⁸

It can be reasonably argued that this choice reflects a desire to elevate the warrior saints into the “celestial zone,” equating them with angels and the celestial host—especially since the church of Ac'i is dedicated to the archangels. In addition to their topographical position, this association is reinforced by specif-

ic elements of the warriors' iconography, such as their flying capes, which resemble angelic wings. This symbolic connection is supported by the *labarum* of the Church of St. George in Geri. Sara Barnaveli analyzes the type of George's cape depicted on the Geri banner and suggests that it serves as a symbolic allusion to wings. A similar association is found in the representation of Sts. Sergios and Bakkhos in Vale (tenth century, Akhalsikhe Municipality, Samtskhe-Javakheti), where their ornamental capes evoke decorative wings (Fig. 1.38).⁴⁹ This feature clearly illustrates the iconographic unity of Christ's celestial and earthly warriors, a notion bolstered by literary references describing the saints as belonging to the "tenth rank of angels:" "Holy men who fill the tenth rank of angels."⁵⁰ Abuserisze Tbeli (c.1190–1240) begins his encomium of St. George with this comparison, which is echoed in many other sources.



1.38 St. Bakkhos (tenth century). Church of the Mother of God of Vale.

Consequently, the Georgian tradition of depicting warrior saints on church vaults can be regarded as a local variation of the Byzantine practice of placing saints in the "upper zone." Particularly noteworthy in this context is the depiction of mounted warrior saints in celestial realms, which enhances their prominence within the overall decorative program.

This tradition of placing warrior saints in upper registers also conveys their apocalyptic significance (Revelation 19:11–16). Christian art has traditionally featured celestial riders of the Apocalypse from an early age (Fig. 1.39).⁵¹ In Georgian art, the apocalyptic role of warrior saints manifests relatively early; for instance, in the decorative program of the church of Lič‘aniši (early eleventh century, Hadiši community, Upper Svaneti), Sts. George and Theodore are included in the program of the Last Judgment and are perceived as participants of eschatological events (see St. George’s chapter). The same applies to the window relief of Joisubani (tenth century, Oni Municipality, Racha) (Fig. 1.40), with many other examples present.



1.39 *Christ and apocalyptic warriors* (eleventh century). *Burgo de Osma Codex* (85 v.), Spain, source: Stierlin, 1978.



1.40 *Joisubani* (tenth century). Window decoration.

Notably, on the vaults of both Ac‘i and Ip‘xi, the background behind the warrior saints is adorned with star-like flowers inscribed in circles, symbolizing heaven and intensifying the apocalyptic message of the overall program (Fig. 1.41). These sym-

bolic associations may explain the inclusion of warrior saints in scenes of the Last Judgment.⁵² A common occurrence is the pairing of warrior saints with the Deesis, which serves as a concise representation of the Last Judgment and highlights the intercession of the warrior saints at Christ's Second Coming (*Fig. 1.42*). This concept has likely contributed to the popularity of warrior saint depictions on memorial monuments, particularly in churches built atop graves. A prime example is Dodork'a Monastery of Davit'gareja, where St. George is depicted as the guardian of the grave of St. Dodo of Gareja.⁵³



1.41 *Warrior saint (early eleventh century), schema. Church of St. George of Ip'xi.*



1.42 *Deesis and George slaying Diocletian, Ip'ari icon (eleventh century). Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography.*

1.4.3. WARRIOR SAINTS ON WINDOW OPENINGS

One of the most characteristic iconographic features of Georgian wall painting is the narrative decoration of window jambs.⁵⁴ The depiction of saints, including soldier saints, as well as of entire scenes on window openings is typical for the entire history of medieval Georgian art. An outstanding example is the late twelfth-century decoration of the church of the Dormition of Varžia (1184–6). Antony Eastmond points to the abundance

of warrior saints in Varžia and explains it through the military and strategic centrality of this cave complex during the reign of Queen Tamar.⁵⁵ Here we can see the scene of the crowning of the warrior saints. On the window jambs of the south wall, four warrior saints can be observed: two warriors, George and Theodore, are crowned by Christ Pantokrator, whereas the two others, Demetrios and Prokopios, are blessed by Christ Emmanuel (*Fig. 1.43*). In the wall between the windows, there is a massive

1.43 The coronation of the saints by Christ (1184–6). Church of the Dormition of Varžia.



figure of a standing warrior; however, his identificatory inscription has been erased. Above him is the Crucifixion, which visually unites the entire surface of the wall and makes the scene of the glorification of the saints a narrative part of the Crucifixion (Fig. 1.44). Therefore, the south-eastern section of the wall carries the meaning of the warrior saints' co-martyrdom with Christ. Evidently, the designer of Varžia was familiar with the depictions of saints on the windows of Išxani cathedral. By establishing a certain dialogue between physical light, architecture and visual narrative, the artist has achieved remarkable liveliness of the decoration. Christ's half-figure with open arms entering the opening of the window against a bright light into the murky space of the church creates an illusion of a vision. This scene, depicted opposite the royal panel, conveys the military patronage of the royal power.⁵⁶ Notably, next to the glorification of the warrior is a figure of St. Nino. At Varžia, the warrior saints also appear on the jambs of the south-west window; their images are included in the extended scene of the Harrowing of Hell (Fig. 1.45), thus emphasizing the triumphal context of the message.

There is another peculiar example of depicting a warrior saint on the window jamb in the case of Longinus the Centurion in

1.44 *The coronation of the saints by Christ and crucifixion, various saints, 1184–6. Church of the Dormition of Varžia.*





1.45 Anastasis, Mandylion, warrior saints (1184–6). Church of the Dormition of Varzia.



1.46 Crucifixion, St. Longinus, Deposition (c.1220). Church of the Dormition of Timot'esubani.

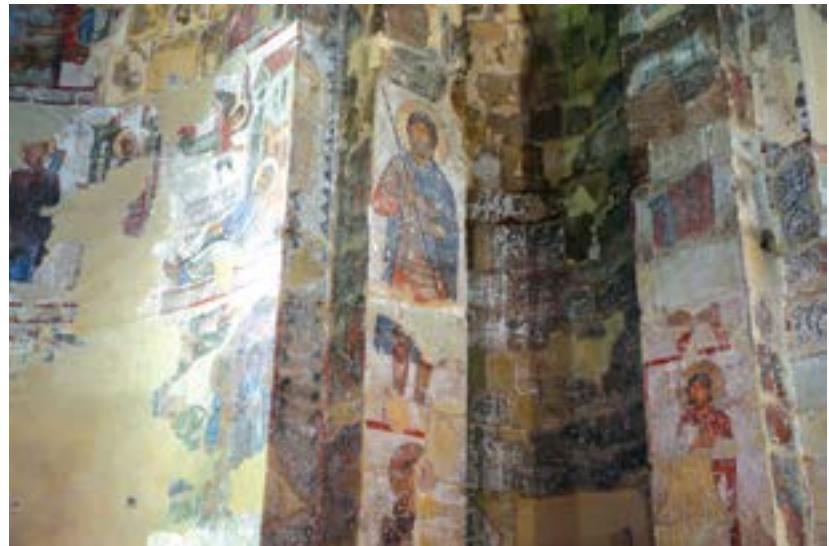
Timot‘esubani (c.1220).⁵⁷ As a rule, Longinus is never depicted alone or among other warrior saints and is always incorporated into the scene of the Crucifixion (see Nikoloz Aleksidze’s chapter). In Timot‘esubani too, Longinus is represented within the context of the Crucifixion (*Fig. 1.46*). However, while the Crucifixion is depicted on the east wall of the south transept, Longinus is transposed to the jamb of the south wall. Characteristically, he is facing Christ, his gesticulation conveying his acceptance of Christ’s divine and human natures. He is stepping forward, which gives his massive figure on the window slope additional dynamism. Due to the bright red color of the jamb, his figure is highlighted even more, giving him a certain compositional autonomy. Thus, the first warrior to confess Christianity appears here as a symbol of the defender of faith.

1.4.4. WARRIOR SAINTS IN PARISH SPACE

In the decorative programs of the churches, the number of warrior saints has increased significantly since the eleventh century.⁵⁸ This tradition originated somewhat earlier in Georgia. For instance, three warrior saints appear in the wall paintings of the Monastery of St. Dodo in the Davit‘gareja desert (ninth century). Another early example is the early eleventh-century decoration of the lower church of Lağami in Mestia (Upper Svaneti).⁵⁹ The central figures of the decoration inside this small church are George, Theodore, and Artemios (*Fig. 1.47*). The depiction of

1.47 Saints (early eleventh century).
Lağami “lower” church of the Savior.





1.48 *Church of the Dormition of Ateni (Sioni) (c.1070). General view of the interior.*

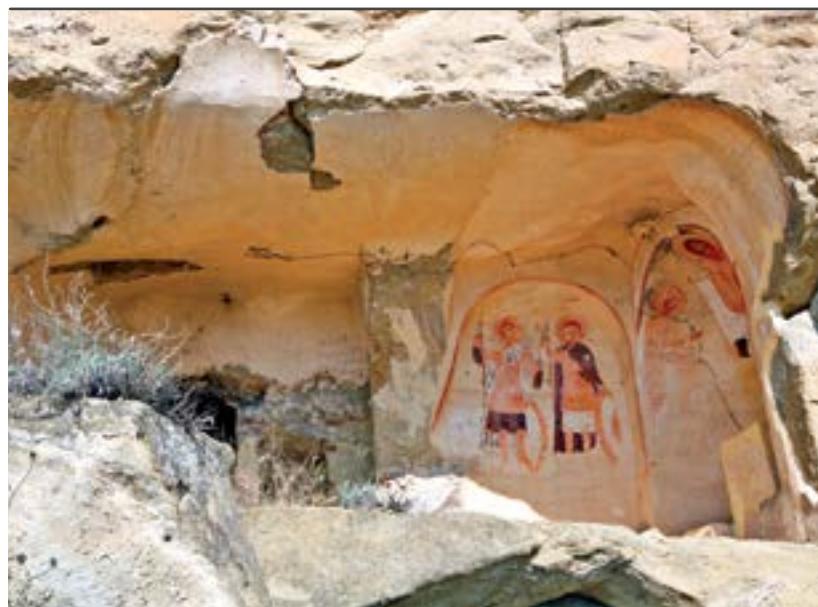


1.49 *Various saints (tenth–eleventh century). Fragment of the door of the Church of the Archangels of Č'ukuli. Georgian National Museum.*

St. Artemios as a warrior saint is rare for this period.⁶⁰ Marina Kenia suggests that more warrior saints can be identified in the painting. Curiously, the warrior saints are depicted together with female saints.

The Church of Ateni Sioni (c.1070) is particularly outstanding due to the number of warrior saints it houses.⁶¹ Together with their sheer number, their massive size is equally striking (*Fig. 1.48*). The massive figures of the warriors presented on the pilasters seemingly create a “carcass” of the entire program. Apart from the usual warrior saints, less common saints also appear. Specifically accentuated are Artemios and James the Persian.

The perception of warrior saints as protectors of sacred spaces has led to their placement near church entrances and tympanums. They frequently incorporated into the decoration of the doors (*Fig. 1.49*), which enhances their apotropaic function.⁶² There is also a longstanding tradition of depicting warrior saints in monasteries next to the entrances into the cells, as attested by numerous images in the monasteries of Davit[“]gareja (*Fig. 1.50*).⁶³ Together with apotropaic function, this tradition also points to the association of monks with warriors due to their own spiritual wars.⁶⁴ This idea is conveyed in the church of the Savior in Latali (1140), where the figure accentuated between Sts. Theodore and George is identified by Neli Chakvetadze as St. Makarios the Great, one of the founders of desert asceticism (*Fig. 1.51*).



1.50 Chapel of St. George (twelfth–thirteenth century). Udabno Monastery of Davit[“]gareja. Courtesy of Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut. Photo by Dror Maayan.

1.51 St. George,
St. Theodore, and
St. Makarios the Great
(1140). Church of
the Savior of Latali,
“Mač’xvariši.”



1.52 Warrior Saints
(c.1150). Church of
St. George of Ikvi.



1.53 Warrior Saints
(c.1205). Church of
St. Nicholas of Quncvisi.



The number of warrior saints in the decoration of the churches increased dramatically in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This can certainly be explained by the Byzantine influence; however, as correctly argued by Ekaterina Privalova, this was also caused by the unification, centralization, and general militarization of the Georgian monarchy in this period.⁶⁵ The prevalence of the warrior saints triumphantly marked the political zenith of the Georgian kingdom.

In the monuments of this period, the depictions of standing or half-figures of warrior saints appear as concentrated panels or cover the entire space (*Fig. 1.52*). In wall paintings, the depictions of warrior saints inscribed in circular medallions are relatively rare in Georgia and appear mostly from the twelfth century onwards (e.g., Varžia (1184–6), Ači (end of the thirteenth century) or Vač'ežori (second half of the thirteenth century)).⁶⁶

Classical examples of representative images of soldiers can be found in Timot'esubani (c.1220) and Qincvisi (c.1205)⁶⁷ (*Figs. 1.53; 1.54*), where both the number and scale of warrior saints increase dramatically. The size of the standing warrior saints is so imposing in Qincvisi that they seemingly step outside, into the church's space. This effect is also enhanced by their placement in the lower register of the decoration. The warriors appear most prominently on the pillars and arches of Timot'esubani, conveying a sense of fortitude as pillars of Christian faith.⁶⁸

In this vast host of warrior saints, some figures are particularly outstanding. In our case, this is St. Eugenios of Trebizond. Eugenios appears for the first time in the decorative program of Varžia (1184–6) among the royal portraits of King Giorgi III (1156–84) and Queen Tamar (1184–1213) (*Fig. 1.55*).⁶⁹ Nino Chikhladze suggests that Eugenios' appearance in Varžia must reflect the strategic aims of the Georgian kingdom—the foundation of the Empire of Trebizond, which is usually ascribed to Queen Tamar.⁷⁰ Indeed, otherwise, the inclusion of this very local saint in the royal portraits is inexplicable, especially since the image in Varžia precedes the rise of the cult of this saint in Byzantium (see Nikoloz Aleksidze's chapter). The rise of the cult of Eugenios is usually associated with the foundation of the Empire of Trebizond, when Eugenios became the patron saint of the newly founded state and its rulers.⁷¹ Since then, Eugenios has appeared on seals, coats of arms, and coins of the Komnenoi. Whereas, earlier, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, he appeared only



1.54 *Last Judgment*, general view of the west transept (c.1220). Church of the Dormition of Timot'esubani.



1.55 Royal portraits with St. Eugenios of Trebizond (1184–6). Church of the Dormition of Varzia.

sporadically. Therefore, the portrait of Varzia is currently the earliest representation of this soldier saint in monumental art.

St. Eugenios also appears in Timot‘esubani where he is represented next to the west entrance. His appearance here is usually considered as a testament to the participation of the church’s donors, Shalva and Ivane Akhaltsikheli, in the military campaign of Trebizond.⁷² Therefore, it is fair to say that the cult of St. Eugenios serves as a declaration of Georgia’s strategic objectives in the era of Queen Tamar. St. Eugenios is also highlighted in the late thirteenth-century decoration of Ači, which reveals some other notable features of affinity with the Empire of Trebizond.⁷³

Varzia preserves an important depiction of the five martyrs of Sebaste—Eustratios, Mardarios, Eustathios, Orestes, and Eugenios. This is the earliest representation of these saints in Georgia to date (Fig. 1.56).⁷⁴ They are shown on the north wall alongside the donor’s portrait of Rati Surameli. The five martyrs appear more systematically in thirteenth-century monuments, such

1.56 *Martyrs of Sebaste* (1184–6). Church of the Dormition of Varžia.



as those in Qincevisi, Ači, Timot‘esubani, and Maǵalaant‘ Eklesia, as well as later in the sixteenth-century decoration of the Church of St. George in Gelat‘i and Korc‘xeli (seventeenth century).

I would like to briefly discuss the tradition of depicting the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, who are highly venerated in the Eastern Christian tradition.⁷⁵ In Georgian art, the XL Martyrs predominantly appear in murals. The twelfth-century icon from Latali is the only known example of their depiction in an icon painting in Georgia (Fig. 1.57).⁷⁶ This icon is regarded as “the most poignant scene among all the Byzantine samples.”⁷⁷

In Georgia, as in other regions, the martyrdom scene of the Forty Martyrs is most widely recognized. This scene is prominently featured in the stoa space of Varžia (early thirteenth century)⁷⁸ and in the wall paintings at Axtala (c.1205) (Fig. 1.58), Tsalenjikha (1384–96) (Fig. 1.59), and Korc‘xeli (seventeenth century).⁷⁹ There is a notable topographic tradition as well, with the martyrs commonly depicted next to the altar apse (as seen in Tselenjikha and Korc‘xeli). In the Čala church (late fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries), they are depicted on the architrave of the chancel screen, presenting a highly unusual iconographic version: the group of martyrs stands in a row, blessed by Christ Emmanuel (Fig. 1.60).

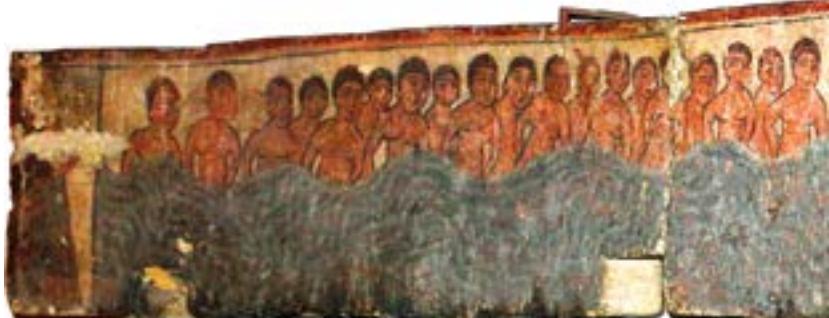
In contrast to traditional iconography, each martyr is portrayed as a youth, and remarkably, Christ Emmanuel is also depicted naked, standing next to the martyrs rather than in heaven. This portrayal likely emphasizes the sacrament of Baptism, often associated with the scene of their martyrdom in ice water.⁸⁰



1.57 Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, Latali icon (twelfth century). Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography.



1.58 Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (c.1205). Church of the Mother of God of Axtala.



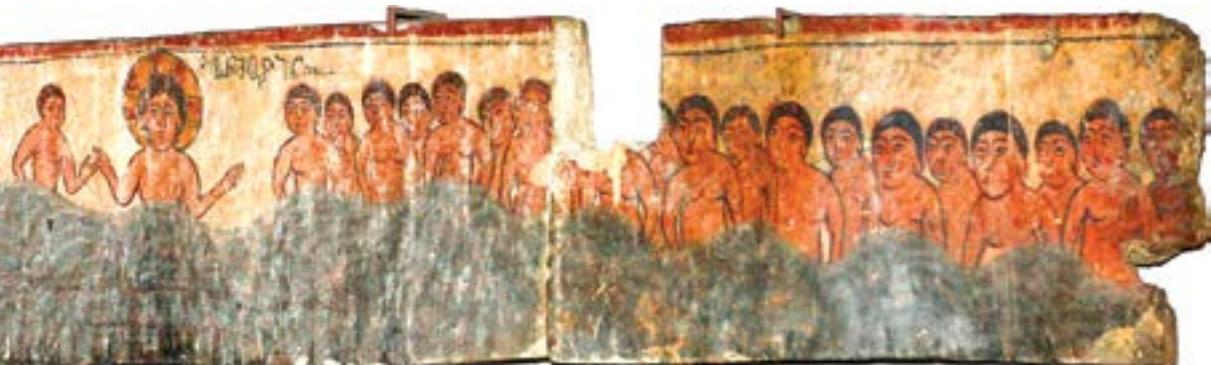
1.60 Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (fifteenth–sixteenth century), altar screen. Church of St. George of Čala, Georgian National Museum.



1.59 *Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (1384–96), detail.*
Church of the Savior of Tsalenjikha.

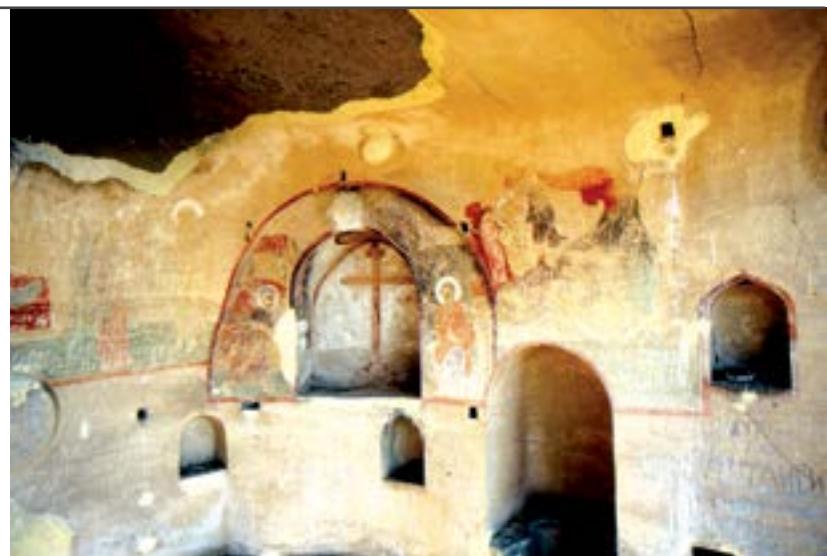
The Martyrs of Sebaste are frequently incorporated into depictions of the Last Judgment, particularly within Cappadocian art.⁸¹ This trend is also apparent in Georgian art, as seen in Varžia and Axtala. This connection can be attributed to the narrative of the martyrs' suffering, in which the overseer witnesses Christ in heaven bestowing crowns upon them. Thus, their martyrdom often serves as an iconographic representation of the righteous in heaven.

Another warrior saint attested in Georgian art, albeit less commonly seen in the Christian East, is James the Persian (the Mutilated). In Byzantium, James's depiction appears on ivory triptychs linked to the royal court of Constantinople from the tenth to eleventh centuries, as well as on various liturgical objects from the same period. According to Antony Eastmond, the activation of the cult of this "unusual saint," together with personal piety, should be understood within the context of the renewed interest in





1.61 *St. Constantine and St. Helena, James the Persian (the Mutilated)* (sixteenth century). Church of the Archangels of Gremi.



1.62 *Martyrdom of St. James the Persian* (twelfth-thirteenth century). Čičxituri monastery, Davit'gareja.

Persian and Eastern martyrs that characterized Byzantine culture of the time.⁸² In Georgia, his representations can be found in Ateni Sioni (c.1070), Tsalenjikha (1384–96), and the Church of St. George in Gelat'i (sixteenth century). James is especially highlighted in the sixteenth-century decoration of the Church of the Archangels in Gremi (Fig. 1.61). Here, James is situated next to the Emperor Constantine and Helena venerating the cross, serving as the central figure in the decoration of the north transept. Such emphasis on this martyr saint can be attributed to Georgia's political landscape and the threats of Islamization during that time.

A succinct account of his martyrdom and death is also found in the Monastery of Mravalmt‘a at Davit‘gareja, in the murals of Č‘ič‘xituri, which shows the dismemberment of his body and his beheading (Fig. 1.62). Vladimer Mirianashvili dates the murals in Č‘ič‘xituri to the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. James’ popularity in Georgia was likely enhanced by the presence of his relics, including a golden reliquary housed in the Museum of Kutaisi, commissioned by Vardan Dadiani (1100s–1200s), which contained James’ relics in a golden medallion (Fig. 1.63).

Georgian art also preserves a rare depiction of St. Sisinnios. Oddly, he appears in the sixteenth-century decoration of the Church of Martvili, where he is included in a panel of warrior saints (Fig. 1.64).⁸³ Nino Chikhladze identifies this figure as Sisinnios of Antioch, who primarily appears in early Christian art as a slayer of a demon or dragon, paralleling the demon-slaying imagery of Solomon.⁸⁴ Since St. Sisinnios is practically entirely absent in Georgia, the depicted saint could be one of the XL martyrs.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the latter saint is never depicted separately.

Local warrior saints appear early in Georgian art, with this



1.63 James the Persian, reliquary of St. James (twelfth–thirteenth century). Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum.



1.64 Warrior saints (St. Theodore Tēron and St. Sisinnios) (sixteenth century). Church of the Dormition of Martvili.



1.65 St. David of Argvet'i, c. 1040. © The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

emphasis often linked to the unification of the Georgian kingdom.⁸⁶ A figure named David, depicted on a metalwork icon from Ušguli dated to the eleventh or twelfth century, is recognized as David of Argvet'a.⁸⁷ He is illustrated as a martyr holding a cross, positioned between St. Theodore and St. Kyrikos. The same David of Argvet'a is also identifiable on a metal medallion in the Botkin Collection (Fig. 1.65). This medallion, currently preserved in the Russian Museum, is dated to the 1040s and is believed to be part of the decoration for the reliquary of David and Constantine.⁸⁸

The martyrs David and Constantine, who suffered during the invasion by Marwan the Deaf, are depicted in Timot'esubani (c.1220), Sori (fourteenth century), Ubisa (fourteenth century), and Tsalenjikha (1384–96). They hold particular significance in the decoration of the Church of St. George in Gelat'i (sixteenth century) (Fig. 1.66), where the martyrs of Argvet'a are represented in the west arm of the church, flanking the entrance. Currently, only the figure of Constantine is identifiable by an inscription, prompting Nino Chikhladze to classify them as the warrior saints of Argvet'a. The existence of the sepulcher of the martyrs of Argvet'a near Gelat'i at the monastery of Mocomet'a supports this identification.

1.66 Sts. David and Constantine (1578–83). Church of St. George of Gelati.



1.5. WARRIOR SAINTS IN FAÇADE DECORATIONS

1.5.1. FAÇADE RELIEFS

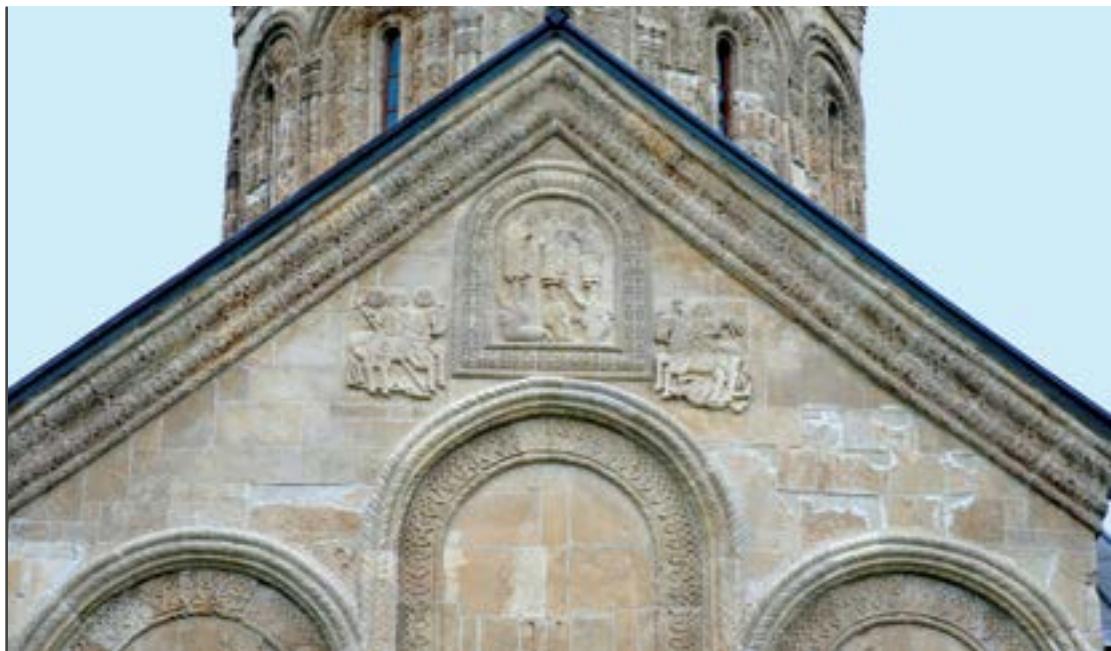
The abundance of stone-cut icons with images of warrior saints in Byzantium has often been pointed out in scholarship (e.g., steatite icons). This feature is usually explained by the function of the warrior saints and their associations with rocks, a metaphor for Christian fortitude.⁸⁹ The decoration of the Georgian church facades with the multiple images of holly warriors aligns seamlessly with this theological idea.

One of the outstanding examples is the now severely damaged relief of the south facade of the church of Jvari in Mtskheta (c.586/87–604),⁹⁰ which represents the church donors in front of a saint (Fig. 1.67). Giorgi Chubinashvili has identified them as members of the house of the *Erimst’avaris* (Dukes) of Kartli standing in front of Christ.⁹¹ Recent studies, however, and the graphic drawings of the scenes (authored by Neli Chakvetadze) have revealed that the central figure is an armed warrior saint (with shield and spear), perhaps the patron saint of the *Erimst’avaris* house.⁹² This model of the donor’s image appears much later, in the ninth–tenth centuries, in Eastern Christian art, and represents the warrior saints as the donors’ “friends” or “allies.”⁹³

One of the principal themes of Georgian relief decorations is that of the warrior saints (most commonly Sts. George and Theodore) vanquishing evil, a theme that has gained particular



1.67 Warrior saint with
donors (c.586/87–604),
schema. Jvari church (Holy
Cross) of Mtskheta.



1.68 *Transfiguration of Christ with St. George and St. Theodore (1010–1014). Church of St. Nicholas of Nikorcminda.*

momentum since the tenth century.⁹⁴ Warrior saints are mostly placed on tympanums, near the openings. They often appear on the east walls and facades of altar apses. The contexts of their depiction are also diverse; they may be positioned next to Old and New Testament scenes, as well as next to the donors, and thematically they always vary. In addition, warriors appear most commonly next to the Cross of Golgotha and the blooming cross.

The tradition of depicting warrior saints in the upper registers also transpires in facade decorations. One of the most notable examples is the facade of Nikorcminda (1010–4) (Fig. 1.68), where Sts. George and Theodore are depicted in the gable of the eastern transept along with the scene of the Transfiguration (see St. Theodore's chapter). In this unusual program, along with the eschatological meaning of the cross dominating the east facade,

1.69 *St. George slaying the dragon (seventeenth century). Church of St. George of Sadgeri.*



one can arguably also discern the triumph of Christianity in Mt-skheta as narrated in the *Conversion of K‘art‘li*, more precisely in the episode of the destruction of idols through the miracle of Christ’s cross by St. Nino on the day of the Transfiguration. This seems to explain the image of the Transfiguration accompanied by the warrior saints, who had vanquished paganism and idols (see Tamar Dadiani’s chapter).

Although more rarely, warrior saints still appear in dome decorations. For example, a warrior saint is inscribed in the ornamental frame of the dome window in P‘itaret‘i (thirteenth century). Uncharacteristically, a scene with St. George is moved up on the cornice of the church of Sadgeri (seventeenth century (?), Borjomi Municipality) (Fig. 1.69).

1.5.2. FACADE PAINTINGS

Warrior saints also appear prominently in the facade decorations of the churches from Georgia’s north-western mountainous region, Svaneti. Triumphant images of Sts. Theodore and George dominate the facades.⁹⁵ There are also several examples of facade decorations featuring St. Eustathios.⁹⁶ The prominence of warrior saints in medieval Georgian art has indubitably affected the imagery from the medieval Georgian epic *Amirandarejaniani*. Episodes from this twelfth- or thirteenth-century Persianizing epic appear on the facades of two churches in Svaneti: the Lašdžveri church of the Archangels and the church of Č‘ažaši in Ušguli. The relatively better-surviving fourteenth–fifteenth century image of Lašdžveri shows two episodes from the romance: “Amiran’s emergence from the dragon’s belly” and “Amiran defeating the Baq-Baq Devi” (Fig. 1.70). The incorporation of scenes from this “Georgian epic romance of the Bagratids” (S. Rapp) was deter-



mined by the warrior and knightly spirit of the epic. The artist of Lašdgveri has depicted Amiran and his companions (Badri and Usib) with traditional Christian iconography (with crosses featuring on their shields). The composition also conveys an obvious Biblical allusion. Amiran's emergence from the dragon's belly resonates with the Biblical story of Jonah and the idea of the resurrection. The figure of the Devi iconographically imitates the personification of Hades in the scene of the Last Judgement. These allusions would likely have been apparent to contemporary viewers. The defeat of the Devi explicitly relates to the triumphant imagery of warrior saints, illustrating how epic heroes have integrated into sacred history, serving as a visual metaphor for the Christian struggle against evil and sin.⁹⁷

Another example of a curious merging of the epic and the sacred is an MS with the *Martyrdom of St. George* (MS NCM Q-296), which, apart from the martyrdom account, also contains the text of the *Knight in the Panther's Skin*. As observed by Liana Kvirikashvili, this fusion points to St. George's establishment as an epic hero of Georgian lore.⁹⁸ In both cases, it is clear that the warrior saints have become parts of epic narrative, and the other way around, epic histories have acquired the "reality" of the lives of the warrior saints.

1.70 "Amirandarejaniani" (fourteenth–fifteenth century), Facade painting, detail. Church of the Archangels of Lašdgveri.



1 For high crosses in Georgia, see Machabeli, 1998; Machabeli, 2008; Chubinashvili, 1972; Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, 54–105; Cf. Kuehn, 2011, 102, note 158, where he traces the beginning of this imagery from the seventh century.

2 For the genesis of the iconography of riding soldier saints, see Kuehn, 2011, 92–95, 107.

3 Machabeli identifies the saint on the Xandisi stele as St. George. Machabeli, 2008, 116. While Niko Chubinashvili did not specify the identity of the saint. Chubinashvili, 1972, 15, 23.

4 Hakobyan, 2023, 83–84. Kakhiani does not identify the martyr. See Kakhiani, 2012, 55–83.

5 Tumanishvili, 2014, 155. Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, 49–50.

6 Machabeli, 1998; Machabeli, 2008.

7 See Kuehn, 2011, 92–111; Walter, 2000, 59–65. For battle against evil, see *ibid.*, 51–65; Pitarakis, 2021, 528–529.

8 Maguire, 1996, 21.

9 *Ibid.*, 16. For details, see Grotowski, 2010, 125–378.

10 Machabeli, 2008, 116.

11 *Ibid.* For the iconography of Crux Hastata, see Grotowski, 2010, 334–340.

12 Pentcheva, 2006, 21; White, 2013, 195–198.

13 Pentcheva, 2006, 60–61.

14 See Aleksidze, 2024, 166–188.

15 For example, according to Juanšer’s chronicles (800s or 1000s), the fortress of Anakop’i owned a miraculous image of the Theotokos. Before the siege of Murvan the Deaf (Umayyad Caliph Marwan II), Arč’il and Mir prayed to “the all-holy Mother of God—not painted by human hand,” asking for the intercession of the Theotokos. Subsequently, “Lord gave the victory to a small group of Christians” against the numerous Arab armies. Thomson, 1996, 244–245.

16 For the report by *istoriani da azmani šaravandedt’ani*, see Kaukhchishvili, 1959, 66; See also Tvaradze, 2004, 51–52

17 Pentcheva, 2006, 70. For Brili Cross, see recently published Burchuladze, 2021–2023, 303–307.

18 Khundadze, 2018, 21–22.

19 Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze, 1975, 29.

20 For examples, see Chubinashvili, 1959.

21 Akhobadze, 2017, 193.

22 Tvaradze, 2004, 24.

23 For details, see Gedevanishvili, 2023, 121–138.

24 Pataridze, 2020, 60; see Pantskhava, Lortkipanidze, Pataridze, 2020, 112, fig. 43.

25 For examples of the repoussé metalwork, see Chubinashvili, 1959.

26 Bacci, 2016, 214

27 For the symbolic interpretation of the frame, see Peers, 2004, 106–107.

28 For example, the appearance of female saints (Anna, Barbara, and Thekla) with the warrior saints on the wings of the Borradaile triptych is considered “unusual” by Antony Eastmond. For an interpretation, see Eastmond, 2015, 83.

29 In Byzantium, the lives of individual saints appear only sporadically on processional crosses. See Evans, Wixom, 1997, 65–66. An outstanding example is the cross preserved in the Museum of Geneva with the life of the Prophet Elijah. Another example is the eleventh or twelfth-century processional cross with the Mother of God. Pentcheva, 2006, 129–130, Fig. 86. The cycle of the invention of the True Cross is represented on a twelfth-century stone cross from Durham, England. Lapina, Morris, Whatley, Throop, 2015, 60, Fig. 3.2.

30 Pentcheva, 2006, 70.

31 For the vita icons see Patterson Ševčenko, 1999, 149–165; Peers, 2004, 80–81.

32 Badamo, 2023, 3. Zaza Skhirtladze identifies this icon as the main icon of the Georgian church of St. George on Mt Sinai. Skhirtladze, 2023, 454.

33 Ioseliani, 1973, 75–78.

34 See Walter, 2003, 94–100. St. Prokopios was especially popular in Cappadocia, where multiple scenes of his conversion can be found. *Ibid.*, 96–97.

35 I would like to thank Dali Chitunashvili for sharing this unpublished material.

36 For the adornment of the altar screen, see Schmerling, 1962; Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, 230–267; Iamanidze, 2010, 115–241.

37 Walter, 2000, 246–247, 249. E. Bolman dates the emergence of figurative images as chancel decorations to the fourth century, specifically in Egypt. Bolman, 2006, 78. Bolman provides an example of a figure identified as warrior saint. *Ibid.*, 87–88.

38 For the date of Cebelda, see Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, 230, note 6; Sidorenko, 2000, 249.

39 For the insertion of warrior saints in the altar screens in Egyptian churches, see Snelder, Jeudy, 2006, 114–115. The authors provide Georgian, Armenian, and Cappadocian evidence as parallels to this Egyptian practice. *Ibid.*, 119. For the eschatological function of warrior saints depicted on chancel screens, see Sidorenko, 2000, 249–250. On an eleventh-century chancel plate found near Sokhumi, Georgia, the warrior is holding a ripidion-shaped banner. The figure is tentatively identified as St. George. Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, fig. 519. Khrushkova argues that here the warrior is participating in a divine liturgy. Khrushkova, 2006, 153.

40 Mamaisvili, 2005, 192. A similar solution can be found in the murals of Eski Gumus in Cappadocia, where St. George appears in the program of the sanctuary. See Jolivet-Lévy, 2001, 138. St. George can also be found in the sanctuary program of San Giorgio in Velabro (Rome).

41 The inscriptions on a nineteenth-century icon-reliquary of Gelat'i point to the skulls of Theodore Tēron and Theodore Stratēlates. The repoussé artwork adorning the skull can be dated to the fourteenth or fifteenth century. It bears an image of the saint as well as his identification (St. Theodore).

42 Iamanidzé, 2010, 88.

43 Eastmond, 2023, 171.

44 Skhirtladze, 2008, 176–177.

45 For the distribution of saints inside the church, see Kudia, 2017; Zakharova, 2015, 31–62.

46 Skhirtladze, 1985, 46.

47 Kenia, 1997, 10.

48 Chikhladze, 2004, 99–101.

49 Jojua, 2022.

50 Gabidzashvili, 1991, 255.

51 Stierlin, 1978, for examples, see fig. 218, fig. 194.

52 Bhalla, 2021, 94–99.

53 An interesting parallel is the decoration of several sarcophagi that show heraldic images of warrior saints. E.g., the twelfth-century sarcophagus of Doña Sancha. See Dodds, Reilly, Williams, 1994, 229–230.

54 See Gedevanishvili, 2012, 186–198.

55 Eastmond, 1998, 121.

56 Badamo, 2023, 75.

57 Ekaterina Privalova dates the murals of Timot'esubani to 1205–12. See Privalova, 1980, 124.

58 Skhirtladze, 2008, 179.

59 Kenia, 1997, 7. For the date of the murals, see *ibid.*, 15.

60 Artemios also appears in the decoration of the Hagia Sophia of Kyiv. See Zakharova, 2015, 55. Arcangelo Lamberti points to the existence of a church of St. Artemios in Georgia. Lamberti, 2020, 60.

61 For the date of the wall painting of Ateni, see Virsaladze, 2007, 126–259; for a different opinion, see Abramishvili, 2012, 158–187.

62 Snelders, Jeudy, 2006, 119–120; Badamo, 2023, 85–86.

63 Bulia, 2010, 89–98.

64 See Badamo, 2019, 157–181. Bulia suggests that this tradition may be explained by the memorial function of Gareja and points to its apotropaicity. Bulia, 2010, 89–98.

65 Privalova, 1979, 154.

66 For the dating, see Didebulidze, 2016, 58.

67 See *ibid.* 11.

68 Cf. Skhirtladze, 2008, 182.

69 Chikhladze, 2010, 465–473.

70 *Ibid.*, 466–467. See also Chikhladze, 2019, 38–44.

71 Martin-Hisard, 1980, 307–343; Martin-Hisard, 1981, 115–185.

72 Privalova, 1980, 121

73 For details, see Iosebidze, 1989, 31, 61–62.

74 Chikhladze, 2010, 472.

75 For the popularity of these saints, see Lidov, 2014, 435–435.

76 Burchuladze, 2016, 195–197.

77 Walter, 2003, 176.

78 Kldiashvili, 2006, 50.

79 For the images of the XL in Georgian art, see Lortkipanidze, 1992, 51–52; Studer-Karlen, 2023, 209–215.

80 For the reading of this scene, see Chikhladze, 2013, 365–385

81 Bhalla, 2021, 94–99.

82 Eastmond, 2015, 84–90.

83 Chikhladze, 2024, 17.

84 For the image of St. Sisinnios, see Walter, 2003, 37, 271.

85 For the *Vita*, see Gaprindashvili, 2024, 282.

86 For the process of formation of a national saint on the example of St. David of Gareja, see Abramishvili, 1972, 21–129, Popović, 2016, 119.

87 Burchuladze, 2007, 128–129.

88 For the image, see Novakovskaya-Bukhman, 2021, 40–55.

89 Maguire, 1996, 78.

90 Beridze, 2014, 80.

91 Chubinashvili, 1948a, 147–148.

92 I would like to thank Neli Chakvetadze for this schema and information.

93 Nelson, 2007, 1.

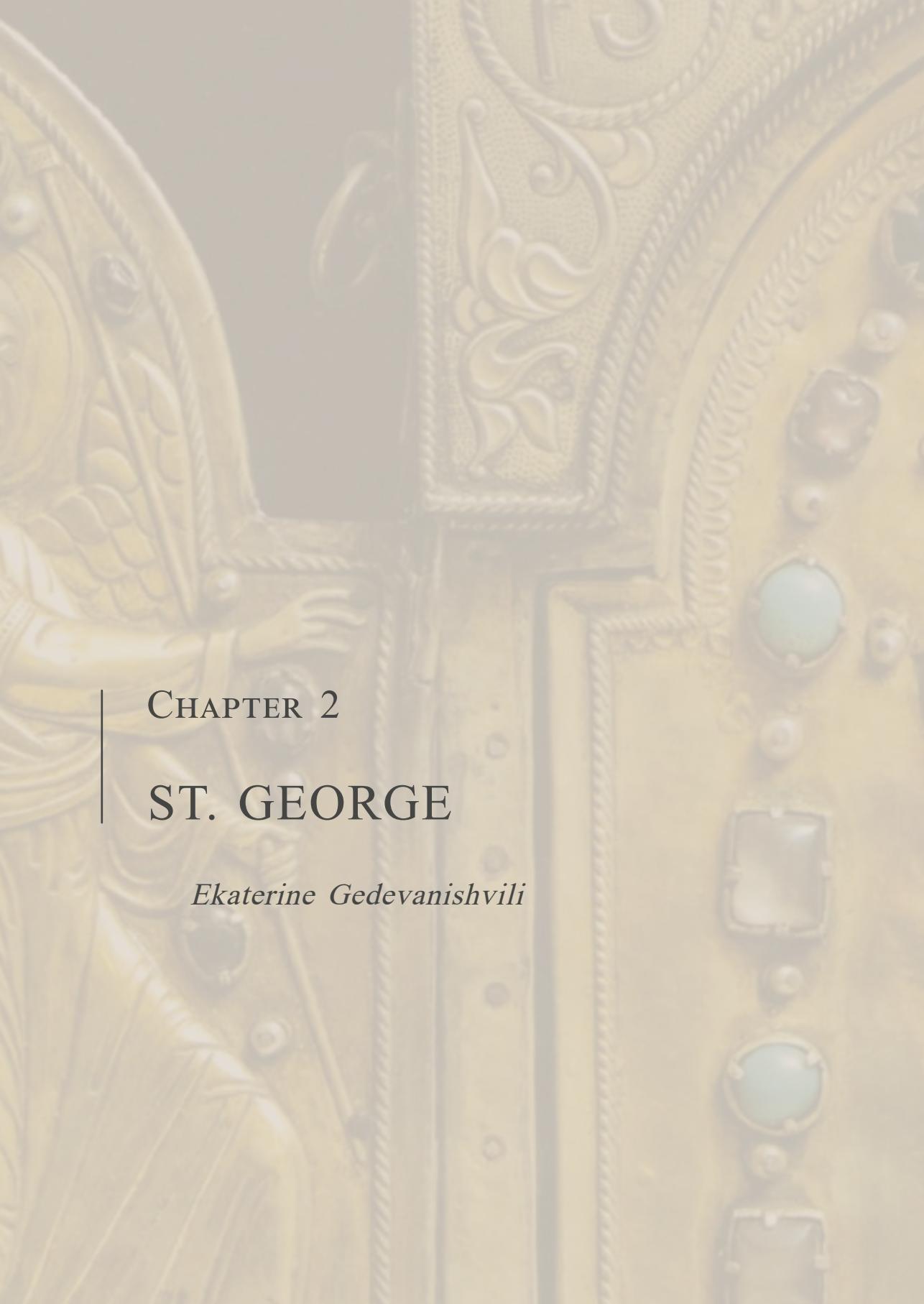
94 For examples, see Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017.

95 Svaneti has preserved the largest number of facade decorations. For Georgian facade paintings, see Aladashvili and Volskaia, 1987, 94–120; Cheishvili, Buchukuri, 1983, 1–20; Chichinadze, 2014, 69–94. Gedevanishvili, 2024.

96 In Western European art, especially in the Alpine regions, it is common to show St. Christopher on church facades since he was perceived as the protector of travelers. St. George appears much less on the facades.

97 Bacci, 2023, 35.

98 Kvirkashvili, 1970, 94.



CHAPTER 2

ST. GEORGE

Ekaterine Gedevanishvili

2.1. INTRODUCTION: THE CULT OF ST. GEORGE IN GEORGIA

„მსწრაფლი და მკურვალე, მეოხი და მფარველი და ჭელის-ამპყრობელი ყოველთა მორწმუნეთად, და უფრომსად ნათესავისა ჩუენისა“ (Warrior of the Great Lord, protector, intercessor, and supporter of all the helpers of the faithful, and especially of our kin).¹ This particularly pious sentiment toward St. George, expressed by monk Arseni in the twelfth century, seemingly stems from the very origins of Georgian Christianity. St. George, one of the most outstanding martyrs of Christendom, a patron saint of many Christian nations, whose global cult extended across Christendom as well as Islam,² and a figure who was perceived as a commander of sorts of the “army” of warrior saints, has been central to the spiritual life and imagery of the Georgian people since the early Middle Ages.

Symbolically, in the *Conversion of Kartli*, Georgia’s Christianization is closely connected to St. George. First of all, Kartli’s conversion is dated according to the martyrdom of St. George, and the life of Georgia’s illuminatrix, St. Nino, is calculated from the same date, followed by a story of supposed geographic and chronological affinities between the two saints: “It happened in those times when St. George of Cappadocia was martyred for Christ, there was a certain man (Zabulon, St. Nino’s father) from a city in Cappadocia.”³ In later reimaginations of Georgia’s conversion story, the friendship between St. Nino’s father, Zabulon, and St. George is highlighted. Some early modern historians even claimed that the two were relatives. According to church tradition, Nino’s resting place was, as per the will of the equal to the apostles, dedicated to St. George.⁴ In a twelfth-century edition of Nino’s *Life*, it is claimed that a church of St. George was built on the site of King Mirian’s conversion on Mt T’xot’i.⁵ Therefore, in medieval Georgian thought, the cult of this warrior saint was intricately linked to the apostolic mission of St. Nino and regarded as a powerful symbol of Christian faith in Georgia. This enduring association between St. George and St. Nino is reflected in the composition of the Čeliši Codex, which encompasses the *Conversion of Kartli*, the *Life of St. Nino*, a hymn dedicated to her, as well as the *Martyrdom of St. George*, along with his encomium and hymns.⁶

St. George was considered Georgia's patron saint, and over time, he became a quintessential symbol of Georgia, having forged a unique relationship between the saint and the nation, determined, among others, by Georgia's very name. St. George was so intimately associated with Georgia that some European pilgrims and crusaders in the Holy Land came to believe that the name "Georgia" stemmed from St. George's name.⁷ They pointed to a particular devotion to St. George as one of the principal characteristics of the Georgian people.⁸ Among many monks of different nations that dwelled in the monasteries of the Holy Land and its vicinities, St. George became a certain spiritual portrait of the Georgians, through which this nation represented itself in the oikumene. Among many testimonies, the report of the thirteenth-century bishop of Acre, Jacques de Vitry, is perhaps one of the most typical and narrative examples: "There is one more Christian nation in the east. These people are mighty warriors, brave in battles, strong and powerful with innumerable warriors, and they terrify the Saracens... These people are called Georgians, due to their particular reverence toward St. George, whom they consider their protector and flagbearer and whom they honor more than any other saint."⁹

European pilgrims report that on the battlefields, the Georgians raised banners with St. George's image and shouted out his name as their battle cry.¹⁰ In the early nineteenth century, historian Teimuraz Bagrationi wrote that "the kings painted the image of the great martyr St. George on their banners and coats of arms, as well as the armors and helmets of the warriors."¹¹ Indeed, numerous depictions of St. George on medieval Georgian banners have survived, where he is shown as either mounted on horseback or as standing upright, slaying either the Emperor Diocletian or the dragon (Fig. 2.1).¹² Apart from anthropomorphic images, flags with St. George's symbolic representations, i.e., a red cross painted on a white banner, have also survived.¹³

The etymological association of Georgia with St. George appears also in Georgian writing. The eighteenth-century historian and geographer Vakhushti Bagrationi derived the name of the



2.1 *St. George slaying the dragon, the liberation of the princess and rescuing the youth from captivity* (seventeenth century). Nikoloz Magaladze's banner. Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut. Photo by Dror Maayan.

Kingdom of Kartli from the cult of the great martyr. Vakhush-ti, however, added an additional nuance and claimed that *georgianeloba* also described the supposed Georgian character of “prudence and hard work.”¹⁴

The chronology of the spread of the cult of St. George in Georgia is also noteworthy. St. George’s cult emerged in the early fourth century and initially spread in Palestine and the Near East.¹⁵ According to established tradition, the completion and dedication of the martyrium of St. George of Lydda took place during Constantine the Great.¹⁶ By the sixth century, churches dedicated to St. George emerged in other major and smaller cities across the Roman Empire (Rome, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Ezra, etc.).¹⁷ In the seventh-century homily of Bishop Arkadios of Cyprus, St. George is already presented as a principal celestial aid to earthly warriors.¹⁸ Yet, since the early days of the emergence of St. George’s cult, along with his military aspects, his other cultic functions have also transpired, such as healing and protection of refugees, etc.¹⁹

Medieval Georgian tradition, which has internalized its with St. George, claims that some of the earliest churches in converted Georgia were dedicated to St. George.²⁰ There is some indirect, mostly prosopographical, evidence that the knowledge of St. George’s cult existed in the Georgian-speaking milieu in Late Antiquity. A Georgian inscription found in Nazareth, on a church destroyed in the first half of the fifth century, includes, according to Zaza Aleksidze, an abbreviation of St. George’s name. If the reading is indeed correct, then this is the earliest reference to this name in the Georgian language.²¹ The name Giorgi/George also appears quite early in a list of Georgian katholikoi (E.g., Katholikos Giorgi I of Kartli (673–8)).

The outstanding veneration of St. George is also evident from medieval Georgian church calendars, where his feast is celebrated twice: on April 23 (6 May) and November 10 (23 November).²² The latter feast celebrates St. George’s martyrdom on the wheel, a day that has, over time, acquired national significance. Several Georgian monasteries practiced their own feasts of St. George. For example, according to the *Typikon* of the Petritoni Monastery in Bulgaria, together with the feast of the Dormition, in August, the Georgian monks celebrated the feasts of St. George and John the Baptist.²³ Evidently, this tradition finds its origin in the shrine of “T‘et‘ri Giorgi” in Kakheti, where the feast of Dormi-

tion and St. George's feast coincided.²⁴ Along with officially celebrated feast days, there exist numerous local folk festivals and feasts of St. George, such as Arbooba, Atoc'oba, Gerist'oba, Lomisoba, Gorisjvroba, Rkonisoba, Saǵolašenoba, etc., all of which stem from local cults of St. George.²⁵

Some of the most influential Georgian authors internalized him as the principal patron saint of the Georgian people, the church and the kings. In the hymns of Mik'ael Modrekili (tenth century), for example, St. George, along with the Mother of God, appears as the principal patron of Georgia and the hymnographer beseeches him to deliver Georgians from the "Ishmaelites" and to unify the people in this struggle.²⁶

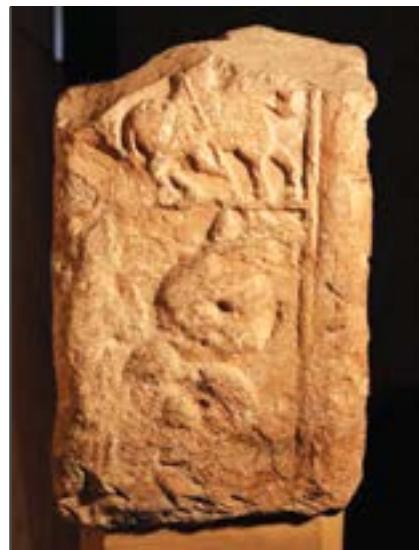
2.2. EARLIEST IMAGES OF ST. GEORGE: GEORGE THE DRAGONSLAYER

The earliest depictions of St. George on Georgian territory are found in stonework and are among the foremost visual representations of warrior saints. A few surviving images of dragon-slaying warriors on sixth–seventh-century stelai, such as the small and large stelai of Brdažori and the Xožorna stele, are commonly identified as St. George.²⁷ In this respect, the Xožorna stele, dating from the second quarter of the sixth century, is particularly noteworthy (*Fig. 2.2*). Ekaterina Privalova notes that the stele once bore an inscription identifying the figure as St. George, indicated by the letters "rg" and "i." Currently, it features only a single inscription: "ეს არს ვეშაპი" (this is a dragon).²⁸

The warrior saints on the Xožorna and smaller Brdažori stelai are compositionally nearly identical (*Fig. 2.3*). In both instances, the composition is two-tiered. The warrior saint and the dragon are separated by a relief shaft, which serves as a symbolic border between the earthly and underworld realms.²⁹ In both cases, the scale of the dragon, a large body rolled in circles, is striking. Tamar Dadiani argues that such a representation of the dragon in sixth-century Georgia points to the surviving pagan elements. The dragon appears not as a forgotten symbol of olden days or of by-



2.2 St. George slaying the dragon (sixth century). Xožorna stele. Georgian National Museum.



2.3 St. George slaying the dragon (sixth century). Brdažori smaller stele. Georgian National Museum.

gone paganism but as a living reality.³⁰ The smaller Brdažori stele, along with the warrior saint, shows astrological symbols (the sun, the ox-headed moon, and the stars) inscribed in a medallion. Both stelai also show the stylized Tree of Life.

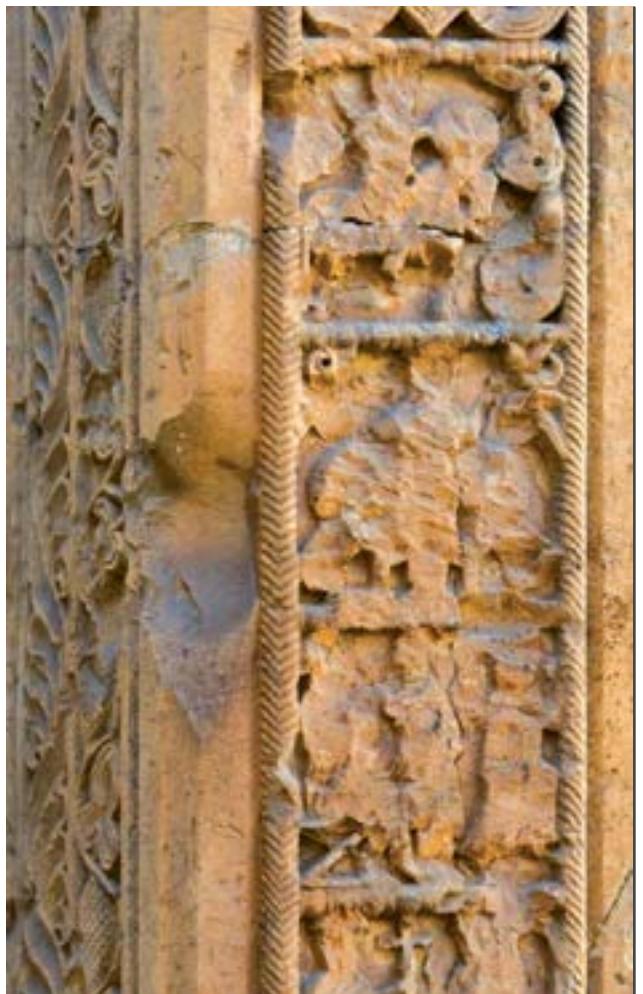
The larger Brdažori stele offers a compositional solution that differs from the two above-discussed ones (Fig. 2.4). Here, the dragon is placed next to the warrior saint. This image is more explicit in depicting the warrior's attributes (the warrior's shield and the spear crowned with a cross). If on the smaller Brdažori and Xožorna stelai, Hellenistic elements are more prominent, here the Sasanian influence is more tangible (e.g., the horse's static movement, the warrior's pose, etc.).³¹

In his examination of the origins of the iconography of equestrian warrior saints, Piotr Grotowski emphasizes the significance of the “Hellenistic” style of the mounted warrior saint image. He also considers Georgian examples, identifying them as a distinctive “Sasano-Georgian” type.³² Nonetheless, although apart from the barely legible Xožorna stele, there are no other identificatory inscriptions, the iconographic peculiarities and their chronological and geographic proximity suggest that they indeed depict St. George.³³ Iulon Gagoshidze argues that on the smaller Brdažori stele, such identification is also supported by astral

symbolism (sun, moon, and stars), which, arguably, points to the possible association of St. George with some solar deity.³⁴

There have been multiple attempts in Georgian scholarship to identify the pre-Christian origins of the cult of St. George. Ivane Javakhishvili famously connected the cult of St. George with the supposedly supreme divinity of the Georgian pagan pantheon—the moon.³⁵ Others preferred the association with the cult of the sun.³⁶ Iulon Gagoshidze emphasizes the link between St. George and the pre-Christian local major deity of Armazi.³⁷ Yet others have suggested St. George's association with Mithras, etc.³⁸ Admittedly, however, the quest for “genetic” and pre-Christian origins of the cult of St. George remains hypothetical and as complex as the many cults and cult practices related to the saint himself.

The pre-Christian sources for the cult of St. George and warrior saints in general supposedly also appear in multiple depictions of horse riders in pre-Christian Georgia (fifth and fourth centuries B.C.).³⁹ Astral symbolism is one of the central aspects in the depictions of warrior deities as they appear on antique seals, bronze belts and gemmae.⁴⁰ Sporadically, other motifs that later became associated with St. George can also be identified, such as the serpent wrapped around the Tree of Life, which was apparently later substituted by the image of the dragon-slaying martyr.⁴¹ In their content as well as iconography, these pre-Christian syncretic images have seemingly paved the way to the multiplicity of meanings and valences of the cult of St. George: the defeater of evil, the slayer of a chthonic beast, the protector of the Tree of Life and the patron of agriculture, as well as a polymorphic image of celestial bodies.



2.4 St. George slaying the dragon (sixth–seventh century). Large stele of Brdažori. Georgian National Museum.

2.3. TRIUMPHANT IMAGES: ST. GEORGE SLAYING DIOCLETIAN

Similarly to the broader trends observed across Christendom, the earliest images of equestrian warrior saints in Georgia featured the traditional iconographic portrayal of a dragon-slayer. However, over time, this motif evolved into the depiction of the rider slaying Emperor Diocletian, which has since become a conventional representation in Georgian art.

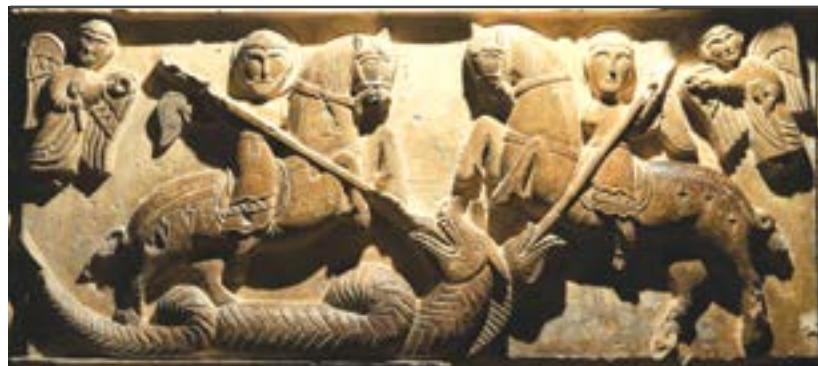
One of the most striking examples of this imagery can be found in the relief at Martvili. On the west facade of the Cathedral Church of the Theotokos in Martvili (Samegrelo), St. George is depicted slaying an anthropomorphic figure, positioned alongside Samson wrestling with a lion (Fig. 2.5).⁴² This entire frieze on the west facade presents a triumphant array of warrior saints, who are portrayed several times throughout the composition.

The first scene of the frieze illustrates the slaying of the emperor. Although this composition lacks an explanatory caption, the prostrate figure and the traditional iconography of St. George, depicted as a beardless warrior, clearly reveal his identity.⁴³ Diocletian is shown adorned with military regalia: he wields a sword in one hand and a sheath in the other. A notable aspect of this depiction is that St. George is illustrated at the moment of charging into battle, holding a spear in one hand while embracing the horse's neck with the other, imbuing the relief with a sense of liveliness and dynamism. Next to St. George and Samson there are two warrior saints who are engaged in the act of

2.5 *St. George slaying Diocletian, Samson wrestling the lion (tenth century (?). Church of the Dormition of Martvili.*



slaying a two-headed dragon. One of these warriors is beardless, while the other has a beard. Some scholars suggest they represent St. George and St. Theodore, while others argue for their identification as St. Demetrios and St. Theodore (Fig. 2.6).⁴⁴ The absence of identificatory inscriptions complicates their identification, especially given that it is not uncommon for Christian iconography to depict the same saint multiple times within a single scene. This scene not only depicts the slaying of the dragon but also includes the episode of the coronation and blessing of the saints by the angels.



2.6 *Warrior saints slaying the dragon, coronation of the warriors by Angels* (tenth century (?). Church of the Dormition of Martvili.

The next scene shows Christ's ascension, followed by the image of the Prophet Daniel, a Biblical prefiguration of resurrection and salvation, whose victorious image is highlighted by the lions prostrated vertically upside down at the prophet's feet, thus emphasizing the triumphal significance of the frieze decoration.

While some scholars date the relief decoration of the west wall of Martvili to the seventh century,⁴⁵ a tenth-century date is more plausible, aligning with the period of the church's restoration.⁴⁶

Since the tenth century, the image of St. George slaying the emperor has emerged as a dominant theme in nearly all forms of Georgian visual art.⁴⁷ This motif, featuring many variations of the emperor-slaying St. George, is most prominently represented in the principal medium of Georgian art: repoussé metalwork. One of the earliest examples is the early eleventh-century icon from Xirxonisi (Oni Municipality, Racha) (Fig. 2.7), which depicts two warrior saints: one slaying Diocletian and the other vanquishing the dragon. The images, however, lack captions.

The iconographic richness of this subject is further illustrated by several remarkable examples, including two eleventh-century

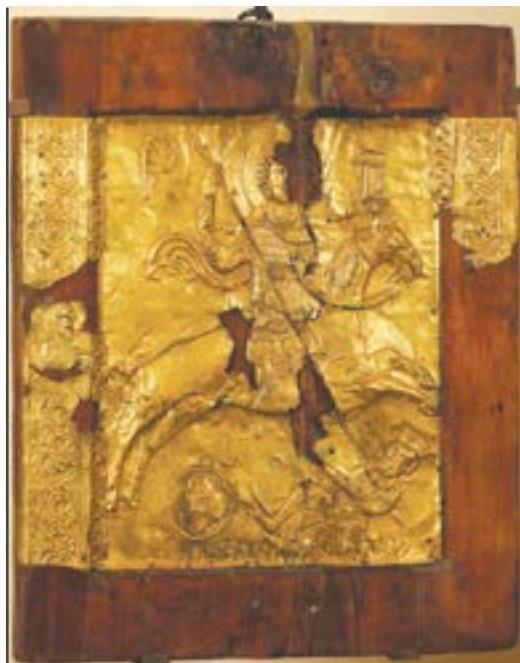


2.7 *Warrior saint slaying the dragon and warrior saint slaying a man* (tenth–eleventh century). *Xirxonisi icon*. Georgian National Museum.

icons from Nakip‘ari (Upper Svaneti), both created by the same goldsmith, Asan. Despite being attributed to the same artist, these icons exhibit distinctly different iconographic schemas, demonstrating a creative and imaginative approach to this traditional theme (*Figs. 2.8; 2.9*). In one icon, Asan portrays a defeated and prostrated Diocletian, face down and disarmed. In contrast, the second icon depicts Diocletian lying on his back, slain with a dagger.⁴⁸



2.8 *St. George slaying Diocletian* (eleventh century) by Master Asan. Church of St. George of Nakip‘ari.



2.9 *St. George slaying Diocletian* (eleventh century) by Master Asan. Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnology.

Another noteworthy example, particularly in its representation of the vanquished Diocletian, is the early eleventh-century icon from Seti (Mestia, Upper Svaneti), which shows Diocletian with a facial wound inflicted by St. George’s spear, reaching out in supplication (*Fig. 2.10*). The icon, which intentionally mimics a haut relief, captures the emperor’s bleeding face through intricate weaving contours. The icon from Sakao (early eleventh century) (Racha) represents the emperor’s silhouette as serpentine, characterized by an arched back and a winding form (*Fig. 2.11*). While on the icon from Labečina (Racha) (early eleventh century), Di-



ocletian is depicted kneeling, pierced in the back by the megalomartyr, who presses his foot against the emperor as a symbol of victory (Fig. 2.12).⁴⁹

The scene of the Emperor's slaying on the repoussé pre-alter cross by "Master Mamne" from Sadgeri (sixteenth century,

2.10 St. George slaying Diocletian, Seti icon (eleventh century). Church of St. George of Seti.



2.11 *St. George slaying Diocletian, Sakao icon (eleventh century)*. Georgian National Museum.



2.12 *St. George slaying Diocletian, Labečina icon (eleventh century)*. Georgian National Museum.

Borjomi Municipality, Samtskhe) is altogether unique in Georgia and portrays St. George slaying the horse-riding Diocletian (Fig. 2.13).⁵⁰ It is also common to depict the emperor's broken weapons (e.g., the facade decoration of the Church of St. George of Hadiši (Mestia Municipality, Upper Svaneti) and his overturned shield as a sign of defeat. In some instances, the emperor appears to be dead.

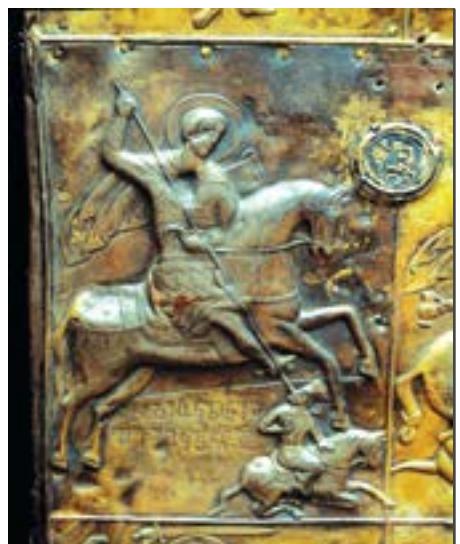
Giorgi Chubinashvili identifies two principal types of images of St. George battling the emperor: those that highlight George's triumphant victory and those that illustrate various phases of the battle.⁵¹ St. George either rides victoriously, as if in a triumphal parade, or gallops fiercely into combat. The direction of George's movement also varies among the images. Chubinashvili highlights that the striking contrast between the dynamic figure of the warrior saint and the static forms of his defeated foes captivates the observer.⁵² He also suggests that such a wide thematic and iconographic diversity of the St. George-Diocletian pair points to this theme's Georgian origin.⁵³

In metalwork, this theme is further diversified by the varieties of decorations on the icons' frames that show plant ornaments or

edges decorated with cuneiform shapes, or even small images of solider or other categories of the saints in half or full figures arranged along the icons' rims. Notably, the icon from Seti (early eleventh century, Mestia, Upper Svaneti) stands out in this regard, as its side rims showcase unique frontal, centaur-like images of equestrian warriors, specifically Sts. Demetrios and Theodore, who are represented as companions of St. George (Fig. 2.14).

While the man-slaying motif occurs sporadically in Eastern Christianity, in Georgia, it has attained an almost canonical status.⁵⁴ Christopher Walter connects the emergence of this motif to a miracle associated with the martyrium of St. George in Lydda, as recorded in Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic sources. He posits that it may illustrate the story of Diocletian's arrival at St. George's martyrium, his miraculous blinding, and his eventual death.⁵⁵ However, even if this narrative served as the foundation for the George-Diocletian iconography, medieval Georgian literature is unaware of this episode, suggesting that its origins may reflect a different trajectory within Georgian artistic expression.

Scholarship has examined extensively the genesis of the imagery surrounding St. George and his battles, often attributing its origins to the ancient tradition of depicting defeated enemies, entire nations, demons, or evil in general.⁵⁶ One notable example is a chalice from the Ushguli Ethnographic Museum (Upper Svaneti), where the warrior saint is situated between scenes of the Entry into Jerusalem and the Crucifixion (Fig. 2.15). Ekvtime Takaishvili identifies the figure as St. George, whereas Giorgi Chubinashvili does not provide any positive identification.⁵⁷ In this depiction, the warrior saint is shown trampling an anthropomorphic chthonic creature, its demonic nature emphasized by elongated ears. Walter interprets this composition as a transitional phase in the evolution of apotropaic imagery within the Judeo-Christian context, crystallizing pre-Christian iconography into canonical Christian representations. He connects this image to the widely spread motif of Solomon trampling a female demon, identifying it as a precursor to the established iconography of mounted warrior saints defeating their enemies, which ini-



2.13 St. George slaying Diocletian. Sadgeri pre-altar cross (sixteenth century). Georgian National Museum.



2.14 St. Theodore, Seti icon (eleventh century). Church of St. George of Seti.



2.15 *Entry into Jerusalem, holy rider vanquishing the devil, chalice (sixth century?). Ushguli Ethnographic Museum.*



2.16 *St. George vanquishing the devil, Icon of the Archangel Michael (thirteenth century). Treasury of the Church of the Archangels of Labsqaldi.*

tially defined the visual tradition for St. Theodore and St. George, and subsequently for St. Demetrios as well.⁵⁸

The iconographic program of the Ušguli chalice symbolically aligns the warrior with Christ. At first glance, the figure could indeed be mistaken for Christ; however, the two are differentiated by the portrayal of their nimbus. The visual similarity between the two figures offers key insight into their symbolic interpretation: the Entry into Jerusalem, the first scene of the Passion Cycle, also

encapsulates elements of the Harrowing of Hell and the Resurrection.⁵⁹ Consequently, placing an analogous image of a triumphant warrior alongside it underscores the universal theme of victory over evil, embodied by the figure of the warrior saint.

Evidently, the pre-Christian demon-slaying motif was deeply embedded in Georgian culture. This is particularly evident in a repoussé icon of the Archangel Michael (thirteenth century) from the treasury of the church of Labsqaldi (Upper Svaneti), which features an unusual representation of St. George.⁶⁰ On the frame of this icon, instead of Diocletian, the warrior saint slays a naked, long-haired woman (Fig. 2.16), reflecting the common depiction of female demonic figures in pre- and early Christian art, such as Solomon slaying a demon or St. Sisinnios of Antioch confronting the devil.⁶¹ A stamp made from this

image of Labsqaldi has been used in the decorations of numerous other Svan icons and crosses.⁶² The lost relief from the church of Sakao (Racha), known only through Giorgi Bochoridze's description, depicted St. George slaying a dragon with a human face, indicating the existence of various interpretations of this theme in medieval Georgia.⁶³

The tendency to Christianize the universal motif of a warrior conquering his foe is most prominently illustrated in Eusebius'

Life of Constantine. Eusebius reports that Constantine commissioned the creation of an encaustic icon, described as a symbolic representation of a warrior saint. This prominent icon, placed at the entrance of the palace, supposedly depicted the Emperor himself mounted on a horse and slaying a dragon. Eusebius likens the dragon to the “invisible foe of humanity,” identifying it with the Leviathan from Isaiah 27:1.⁶⁴ This description likely inspired the illustration in the renowned Chludov Psalter (Moscow Historical Museum), where Emperor Constantine is portrayed as a typical warrior saint, triumphantly wielding a spear topped with a cross and defeating a trampled anthropomorphic enemy.⁶⁵

Interestingly, in the earliest Greek manuscripts of the Martyrdom of St. George, the episode of the dragon-slaying is notably absent, while the emperor who persecuted Christians referred to as a dragon.⁶⁶ In Georgian hymns, he is identified as “the dragon of hell,” “the vessel of the devil,” or just the “dark one.”⁶⁷ Giorgi Chubinashvili rightly notes that the common practice of substituting the dragon with an anthropomorphic figure does not necessarily reflect specific event; rather, it serves as a universal symbolic representation. However, he provides a more concrete historical interpretation of this phenomenon by referencing the political climate in Georgia and the tense relations between the Kingdom of Georgia and Constantinople. Thus, the figure, while symbolizing evil, also signifies a specific Byzantine emperor.⁶⁸

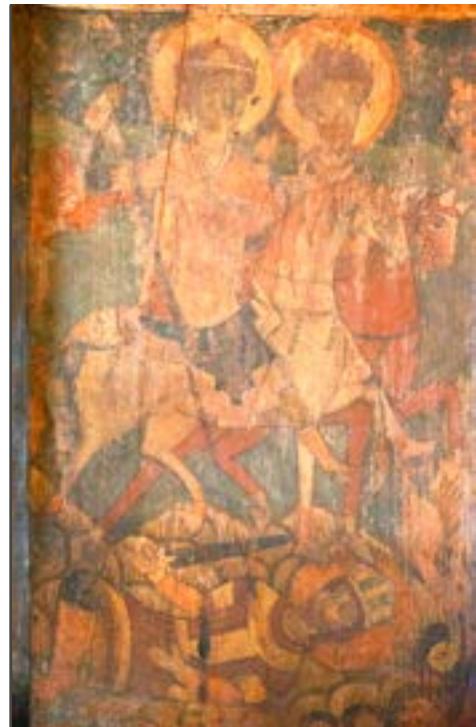
A parallel can be drawn with the symbolic image of St. Demetrios of Thessalonike slaying the Bulgar Tsar Kaloyan,⁶⁹ or with the image of St. Merkourios killing the Emperor Julian the Apostate. A similar motif is attested in St. Theodore’s imagery, where the warrior saint slays a human-faced dragon, identified as a Persian ruler.⁷⁰ All these symbolic images, in one way or another, convey historical realities and can be linked with the version common in Georgia. An important feature of the Georgian samples is that the prostate monarch typically wears a halo, as seen in the Joisubani relief (tenth century) (Racha) (Fig. 2.17), the Svip’i repoussé icon (Upper Svaneti) (thirteenth



2.17 Decoration of the window (tenth century).
Joirsubani. Museum of Local Lore of Oni.



2.18 *St. George slaying Diocletian*.
Icon from the Treasury of the
Church of St. George of Svip'i
(thirteenth century).



2.19 *St. George and St. Theodore slaying
Diocletian and the dragon* (twelfth–thirteenth
century). Icon from the treasury of the church
of Savior in Latali (Mac'xvariši).

century) (Fig. 2.18) or the supposedly thirteenth-century painted icon from the church of the Savior (Latali, Upper Svaneti) (Fig. 2.19). In several instances, Diocletian also wears imperial clothing, which further intensifies this historical allusion.⁷¹ On the relief of Joisubani, for example, as a sign of his purple birth, the emperor wears red shoes, whereas his accentuated halo is painted in ochre, which points to his imperial charisma as well as the concrete attributes of a Byzantine emperor.

2.3.1. C'UC'XVAT'I

Similar allusions are encapsulated on the relief of the church of St. George of C'uc'xvat'i (early eleventh century).⁷² The stone slab that was originally used as a decoration of the chancel screen presents a unique version of the subject. Currently, only

two slabs have survived (Fig. 2.20).⁷³ Several iconographic details of the relief are unusual, especially in the representation of St. George. The most surprising detail, however, is the caption, which identifies the defeated monarch not as Diocletian but as Herod: “St. George slayed Herod.”⁷⁴ Evidently, this identification was particularly important for its author since it is the only one highlighted on a raised relief surface. Equally uncharacteristic is the double image of evil—an anthropomorphic image and a dragon.

The replacement of Diocletian with Herod may be explained by the Byzantine rhetorical trope of *exemplum* or *comparatio*,

2.20 *Crucifixion, Nativity, St. George slaying Herod and the Dragon, Biblical king David, and donors* (early eleventh century). *C’uc’xvat’i* altar screen, detail. Church of St. George of *C’uc’xvat’i*.



mastered in particular by Eusebius of Caesarea, where Biblical or historic monarchs were used as positive or negative models for contemporary rulers.⁷⁵ Along with favorable allusions and comparisons, such as comparing Byzantine emperors to Old Testament kings David and Solomon or prophet Moses and Joshua, negative comparisons were also widely used. The most common paradigmatic bad rulers were the Pharaoh or King Ahab, as well as King Herod.⁷⁶ Such a rhetorical allusion to Herod also transpires in Georgian written sources, such as, for example, *The Journey of Andrew*, where Herod's generalized image is alluded to when Apostle Andrew converts the people of Pontus, and Herod is called "an evil ruler and a slayer of people."⁷⁷ In another instance, a fourteenth-century anonymous Georgian chronicler known as the historian of Laša-Giorgi compared the Sultan who tortured the Georgian King David to a "murderous" Herod.⁷⁸ Seemingly, the C'uc'xvat'i relief reflects this tradition and replaces Diocletian with an equally paradigmatic evil king, Herod, the murderer of the infants.

The C'uc'xvat'i relief, however, offers an additional layer of interpretation. The author may have depicted the dragon as a general symbol of evil, whereas in Herod he encapsulated a specific historical allusion through the traditional Biblical symbolism. Arguably, this theory is supported by the halo-bearing figure standing next to the warrior saint and holding a small censer-like object. The image has an abbreviated caption *dvt'*. It is likely that this is King David with a sling in his hand, especially since there are few other similar depictions in Georgia that Ekaterine Kvachadze identifies as the Biblical king David.⁷⁹ This must be a laconic depiction of the triumph of King David, which further accentuates the triumphant image of the warrior saint under the Crucifixion by maintaining Biblical allusions through the image of King Herod. King David, who has by then been appropriated as the forefather of the Bagratid family, paired with their patron warrior saint, is represented as an antipode to King Herod, and thereby the contrast between good and evil rulers is highlighted. Interestingly, during our visits to C'uc'xvat'i, we were told a local tradition according to which the church was a historic sepulcher of deceased infants of the Bagrationi dynasty. It may be tempting to link the appearance of Herod to this legend; however, most likely, it was the unusual depiction of this Biblical king that inspired this local legend.⁸⁰

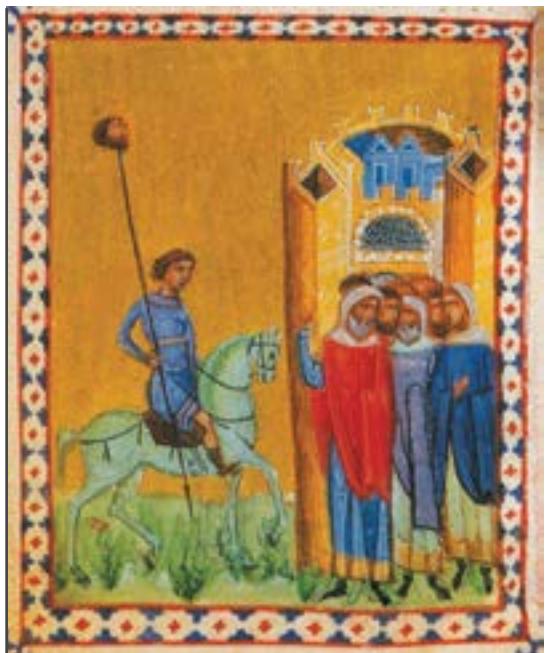
2.3.2. URT‘XVA

Medieval Georgian art has preserved yet another unique image of triumphant St. George, which, to my knowledge, has no parallels. On a slab from the chancel of Urt‘xva (c.1025, Khashuri Municipality, Shida Kartli), the mounted warrior is shown holding the head of his defeated foe on a spear, with the enemy’s body positioned upside down (*Fig. 2.21*).⁸¹ The image has a lightly carved graffiti-like inscription, “St. George.” The iconography of the figure—curly hair and beardless oval face—also suggests that this figure is indeed St. George. Renée Schmerling identifies this scene as St. George’s triumph over Diocletian and notes that the image has no parallel either in Georgian art or elsewhere in the Christian East.⁸² Indeed, there are several unusual details here, including the head mounted on a spear and the upside-down figure.

Vasily Putsko was the first scholar to identify as the image’s source King David the Psalmist defeating Goliath.⁸³ In Byzantine art, the representations of David vanquishing Goliath became particularly widely spread in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Yet, in those portrayals, David typically stands upright during the bat-

2.21 *St. George’s victory*
(c.1025). *Urt‘xva altar*
screen. *Georgian National*
Museum.





2.22 *Triumphal march of King David*, Miniature from Psalms (Cod. 761, fol. 13v.) (eleventh century). Vatopedi Monastery. Courtesy of Vatopedi Monastery.

tle rather than seated on horseback. However, there are exceptions. Putsko points to the eleventh-century Psalter of Vatopedi (Cod. 761, fol. 13v) as a direct parallel to the Urt‘xva slab.⁸⁴ In this manuscript, the King of Israel is depicted on horseback during a triumphant procession (Fig. 2.22), with a head mounted on his spear; however, Goliath’s body is absent.

An image reminiscent of the upside-down figure in Urt‘xva can be found in a tenth- or eleventh-century Irish Psalter, where Goliath is shown in a similar position before David, albeit without being beheaded.⁸⁵ These examples suggest that the artist of Urt‘xva drew inspiration from the story of David and Goliath, indicating that this scene represents yet another

iconographic transformation of the traditional George-Diocletian theme. Nino Iamanidze proposes that within this iconographic reference, David can be interpreted as a prototype for Christ, with the motif of the Israelite king’s battle against Goliath symbolizing the broader struggle between good and evil.⁸⁶ While this interpretation is compelling, it is probable that a more specific historical context underlies this iconographic allusion.

As previously noted, Byzantine literature frequently depicted pious rulers as figures who either imitated or contrasted with Biblical personalities.⁸⁷ One of the most well-established motifs was the symbolic association of virtuous rulers with Kings David and Solomon.⁸⁸ This allusion holds particular significance in Georgian tradition, largely due to the claims of Davidic descent made by the Georgian Bagratids.⁸⁹ The earliest record of this claim appears in Giorgi Merč‘ule’s *Life of Grigol Xanc‘t‘eli* (c.950).⁹⁰ As the Bagratid kings rose to prominence, royal chroniclers adopted and elaborated on this motif even further.

In the eleventh century, Sumbat Davit‘isže further enhanced the narrative surrounding Davidic descent by drawing more explicit connections between his patrons and King David. He claimed that the Georgian Bagratids had settled in Kartli after fleeing Palestine alongside Solomon’s sons.⁹¹ Beyond these local sources, Konstantinos Porphyrogenetos reports that the Iberians

claimed their ancestry from the lineage of David and, correspondingly, from the Mother of God.⁹² For the Bagratids—who successfully navigated a complex strategy to unify various Georgian territories—this claim served as a potent ideological tool for consolidating their authority. Consequently, in Urt‘xva, the thematic unity between St. George and King David can be interpreted as a dual homage: it honors King David as a figure emblematic of legitimacy for the Bagratid dynasty while simultaneously venerating St. George as patron saint of the Kingdom of Georgia itself.

In Bagratid anti-Byzantine rhetoric, the cult of King David functioned as a crucial strategic tool, enabling them to assert both historical and religious superiority over the Byzantines. The Bagratids distinguished themselves as the only ruling dynasty in their broader region to claim a dynastic connection to David. Consequently, both David and St. George emerged as patron saints of Georgia. The hymnographer Ioane Minč‘xi illustrates this parallel when he equates David’s victory over Goliath with St. George’s triumph in his hymn dedicated to the saint: “Goliath whom Saul could not slay, was brought down today by Christ’s warrior, the valiant George.”⁹³ A similar association is found in the Akathist of St. George, where George is compared to David. Parallelisms between the two figures are common in medieval writing, where the martyr and the holy king appear as models of steadfastness in faith.⁹⁴

From a stylistic and material perspective, specifically due to its use of green tufa, Giorgi Gagoshidze places the Urt‘xva chancel alongside the altar screens of Alaverdi, Šio Mgvime, and Svetic‘xoveli, suggesting that Katholikos Melk‘isedek I (1010–33) was likely involved in their creation.⁹⁵ Nino Iamanidze’s dating (c.1025)⁹⁶ based the chancel’s iconographic peculiarity, as well as its artistic merit, suggests that it also belongs to the same group and probably was created in the same workshop. We can suggest that it could have been commissioned directly by King Giorgi I (1014–27). If this is the case, the historical context of King Giorgi I’s reign further substantiates such an iconographic transformation. Known for his ongoing conflicts with the Byzantines, King Giorgi I provides a solid historical foundation for the imagery, allowing the universal representation of a virtuous ruler to intersect with local political concerns. Thus, the universal image of a good ruler likely intersects here with local political issues.

An inspiring episode from the *Life of King Vaxtang Gorgasali*

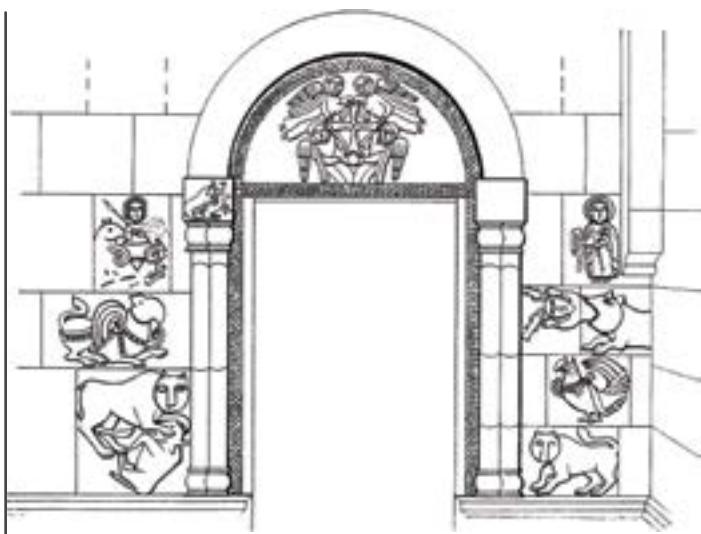


2.23 *Apotheosis of Alexander the Great (tenth century). Xaxuli church of the Mother of God.*

(800 or later), attributed to Juanšer, may have also influenced the Urt‘xva image. According to this account, during one battle against the Byzantines, King Vakhtang (c.449–502) prayed to God for strength akin to that of David, who had defeated Goliath. After his victory, he publicly paraded the severed head of a Roman general.⁹⁷ This narrative, coupled with the rhetorical devices and anti-Byzantine sentiments prevalent in Bagratid historiography, can be seen as literary inspiration for the scene depicted in Urt‘xva.

A parallel for the composite imagery of Urt‘xva can be found in the depiction of Alexander the Great on the facade of the church of Xaxuli (tenth century) (Figs. 2.23; 2.24). In this representation, Alexander’s “apotheosis” is marked by an unusual characteristic: he is portrayed as a youthful, beardless young man with curly hair, reminiscent of St. George’s iconography. These attributes led Takaishvili and others to initially mistake the figure for St. George.⁹⁸ Evidently, the Xaxuli image, like that of Urt‘xva, is a certain synthesis of royal and saintly imagery, a synthetic image of Alexander, the prototype of an ideal Byzantine ruler and St. George, whose cult had already been established as a national cult in Georgia.⁹⁹

Moreover, one could argue that, beyond the universal tendency to merge royal and Christian imagery, this particular instance reflects a distinctly Georgian context.¹⁰⁰ The image serves as a visual manifestation of Georgian historical narratives. As



2.24 *South entrance of the Xaxuli church (tenth century). Schema.*

noted by Nikoloz Aleksidze, the narrative of Georgia’s salvation depicted in the *Conversion of Kartli* begins with Alexander the Great’s invasion and culminates with a similar incursion by the Emperor Heraclius. Aleksidze identifies a compositional structure within the *Conversion of Kartli* narrative that seeks to integrate

Kartli into the Christian oikumene, linking its history with events of significant apocalyptic weight. In this context, Alexander appears as a forerunner to St. Nino, as if politically preparing Kartli for its eventual Christianization.¹⁰¹

Another crucial detail to consider is from the *Life of the Georgian Kings* attributed to Leonti Mroveli, which states that Alexander's invasion preceded the establishment of kingship in Kartli.¹⁰² Therefore, the image of Alexander the Great depicted at the entrance of the church of Xaxuli can be interpreted as a visual representation of the *Conversion of Kartli* narrative. Notably, at the opposite side of the entrance, Apostle Peter is illustrated holding the keys to heaven. Collectively, this imagery can be understood as embodying the unity of divinely ordained kingship and the church.

2.4. PAIRED IMAGES OF ST. GEORGE

In medieval Georgian art, particularly widely spread heraldic, i.e., paired images of triumphant warrior saints facing each other. Most commonly, this pairing includes St. George and St. Theodore, with St. George depicted slaying Diocletian and St. Theodore confronting the dragon.¹⁰³ While this pairing is systematic within the Georgian tradition, in neighboring Armenia, St. George is mostly paired with St. Sargis (Sergios).¹⁰⁴

Heraldic representations of warrior saints are frequently found in stonework and on liturgical objects, such as chancels, altar tables (e.g., *Iqalt’o*), and the sculptural decoration of facades. There are varied iconographic versions of paired images in Georgian art, e.g., the combination of St. George and St. Theodore—often portrayed on opposite walls or in close proximity, with one behind the other—is a characteristic feature of Svaneti art (*Figs. 2.25; 2.26*). This pairing appears in both interior and exterior church decorations, notably in places like the Hadiši church of St. George and the Church of the Archangels of Kaisē.

Oya Pancaroğlu suggests that the heraldic imagery of warrior saints originates from the pre-iconoclast period, when such images were common on textiles, resulting in a tendency toward com-

2.25 *St. George slaying Diocletian and St. Theodore slaying the dragon* (1130).
Church of St. George of Nakip'ari.



2.26 *St. George and St. Theodore* (1112).
Church of Sts. Kyrikos and Ioulitta (Lagurka).



positional symmetry. These representations served an apotropaic function while also enhancing their visual impact, as evidenced by the multiple depictions of warrior saints on church facades, such as those at Ałt'amar and Martvili.¹⁰⁵

Teodoro de Giorgio offers a different perspective on the pop-

ularity of this imagery in Georgia, referring to it as “classic Georgian imagery.” He argues that it was adopted from Sasanian culture as a rhetorical device within anti-Sasanian discourse, symbolizing Christianity’s triumph over Zoroastrianism and celebrating the ideological victory of Christ’s warriors.¹⁰⁶

Evidently, the pairing of Sts. George and Theodore is also rooted in liturgical tradition. The two warrior saints are mentioned together in the *Martyrdom of Gobron* (early tenth century) and the *Great Synaxarion* of George Hagiorites.¹⁰⁷ Their joint commemoration is based on parallelisms in the lives of these two saints and the similarities in the histories of their cults. The two saints are commemorated together on July 20, which coincides with the feast of the ascension of St. Elijah.¹⁰⁸ The two *sauroktonoi* warriors, i.e., the vanquishers of the dragon, who battle evil and paganism, are thereby associated with this Old Testament figure, who had also fought paganism. For example, Diadochos of Photiki calls the horses in Elijah’s fiery chariot steeds of virtue battling the devil.¹⁰⁹ Prophet Elijah was perceived as a figure who defended the true religion against the magi and guided the Israelites back to righteousness.¹¹⁰ This thematic parallel also surfaces in Georgian hymnography, where Elijah’s fiery chariot is compared to the wheel of St. George, conceptualized as a link between heaven and earth.

The triumph of the warrior saints is vividly expressed in the decorative programs of churches, where their imagery is complemented by adjacent thematic scenes. Svanetian art stands out for its extensive and systematic portrayal of warrior saints. Saints George, Theodore, and Demetrios are frequently depicted alongside scenes of the Resurrection, the Harrowing of Hell, and other images related to the Anastasis.

For instance, in the Church of St. George in Nakip’ari (1130), St. George and Diocletian are illustrated beneath the Harrowing of Hell, where St. George’s movement at the moment of Diocletian’s defeat mirrors that of Christ (*Fig. 2.27*). Numerous similar examples exist: in the Church of the Archangels at Lašdğveri (Lenjeri, Upper Svaneti) (fourteenth century), St. George is positioned directly under the Harrowing of Hell and the Myrrhbearers at the Tomb of Christ (*Fig. 2.28*), while St. Theodore is depicted opposite him, paired with the Resurrection of Lazarus. In the church at Kaiše (early fifteenth century) (Ec’eri, Upper Svaneti), St. George appears beneath the Resurrection of Lazarus, where-

2.27 Anastasis,
Baptism, and warrior
saints (1130). Schema.
Church of St. George of
Nakip'ari.



2.28 Myrrhbearers at the tomb of Christ, St. George slaying the dragon (fourteenth century). Church of the Archangels of Lašdžveri.





2.29 St. George slaying Diocletian (early eleventh century). Schema. Church of St. George of Lič'aniši (Hadiši).

as St. Theodore is shown under the scene of the Pentecost. Additionally, in the Church of Lamaria (Mother of God) (thirteenth century) (Ušguli, Upper Svaneti), the Resurrection of Lazarus is located above the pair of warrior saints. It is especially typical to represent the warrior saints in proximity to the Baptism.

The idea of triumph is conveyed most narratively in the decoration of the church of Lič'aniši in Hadiši (early eleventh century). In this small church, the decoration runs along a single register, with each wall featuring one scene. The north and south walls display large images of warrior saints (Fig. 2.29). On the south wall, St. George is depicted slaying Diocletian, while St. Theodore confronts the dragon opposite him. The west wall features unusual scenes of various tortures, typical of the Last Judgment imagery (Fig. 2.30).

Tatiana Sheviakova notes that the portrayal of torture scenes in Hadiši is unique, since while these depictions typically form an integral part of the Last Judgment iconography. Here they replace the Last Judgment program, especially since the conch depicts a composition of the Deesis (Fig. 2.31).¹¹¹

Consequently, the symbolic imagery of the vanquishing of evil, as embodied in the triumphant portrayals of warrior saints, gains added depth against the backdrop of hell's tortures. Sheviakova also highlights the presence of angels who accompany



2.30 Tortures of Hades (early eleventh century). Schema. Church of St. George of Lič'aniši (Hadiši).



2.31 Deesis (early eleventh century). Schema. Church of St. George of Lič'aniši (Hadiši).

the warrior saints. Rather than crowning or blessing the martyrs, as is usually expected, the angels in Hadiši are shown raising their arms to present the warrior saints to the judging Lord in the conch. Thus, these earthly warriors, alongside their celestial counterparts, are depicted as participants in the end of the world, contributing to the Battle of Armageddon.

The decorative program of the Church of St. George in Kalaubani (c.1150) features paired Sts. George and Theodore, but St. George is shown in a uniquely triumphant version, where he is neither slaying Diocletian nor the dragon. Instead, St. George is portrayed marching triumphantly toward the sanctuary (Fig. 2.32), a representation that is otherwise unattested in medieval Georgian art.¹¹²



2.32 *St. George's triumphal march (c.1150). Schema. Church of St. George of Kalaubani.*

2.5. “BEARDED ST. GEORGE:” IMAGES OF MRAVALŽALI AND ILORI

In a relatively rare depiction of the triumphant St. George within medieval Georgian art, the martyr is portrayed standing upright as he slays Diocletian—a motif that likely originated from early Christian iconography of Christ treading on evil.¹¹³ The earliest instance of such imagery can be found in the tenth-century decoration of the T'elovani Church of the Holy Cross (Shida Kartli),¹¹⁴ and later, in the early eleventh-century sculptural decoration of the Church of Mravalžali (Oni Municipality, Racha) (Fig. 2.33). In Mravalžali, St. George is shown alongside St. Theodore. The sanctuary window is flanked by figures of the warrior saints, accompanied by the inscription: “შმინდათ გოორგი, შეიწყალენ კეთილდად მოღუაწენი ამის ეკლესიასანი” (St. George, have mercy on the good laborers of this church).¹¹⁵

The Church of Mravalžali is situated atop a high mountain,



2.33 Crucifixion,
St. George slaying
Diocletian, and
St. Theodore slaying the
dragon (early eleventh
century). Church of
St. George of Mravalzali.

accessible from the east, where visitors are first greeted by impressive reliefs of the warrior saints and the Crucifixion adorning the east facade. The images of the soldier saints are inscribed on the columns beneath a canopy with the flourishing cross, which evokes the aesthetics of antique and Hellenistic shell-like motifs. The triumphant portrayals of the warrior saints culminate in an equally triumphant representation of the Crucifixion. The iconographic characteristics of this scene present Christ's passion as a moment of salvation for humanity. Notably, the usual symbolic representation of Adam as a skull is replaced by a living Adam, with eyes wide open, whose massive head serves as a pivotal image connecting the two scenes.

St. George is depicted here in a nontraditional way, with long hair and a beard (Fig. 2.34). This rare iconographic version appears only sporadically in Georgia. For instance, an early eleventh-century relief in Ilori, Apkhazeti, also portrays a bearded St. George (Fig. 2.35).¹¹⁶ Bearded St. George appeared twice on the now lost relief of Samziri in Sakao (Oni Municipality, Racha). Unlike Mravalzali, here he was shown on horseback.¹¹⁷ A similar iconographic type is attested on the reliefs of Dedoplistskaro and the bell tower of the Green Monastery (Borjomi mu-

2.34 St. George (early eleventh century). Detail.
Church of St. George of
Mravalzali.



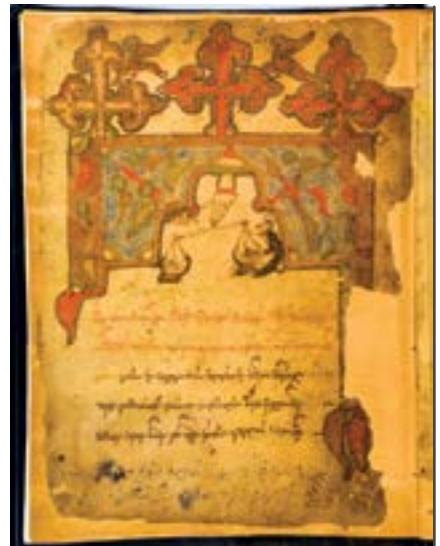
2.35 St. George slaying Diocletian (early eleventh century). Church of St. George of Ilori.

nicipality). Both are dated to the late Middle Ages. A reflection of the Georgian samples is a fourteenth-century Armenian Manuscript (*Matenadaran MS. 6305*, f. 282 a), where the image of bearded St. George unifies two scenes: the slaying of the dragon and the saving of the princess.¹¹⁸

Dadiani attributes the shifts in the iconography of St. George to his immense popularity within folk traditions that have developed around his figure.¹¹⁹ Similar composite motifs also appear in Anatolian art, where the dragon-slaying warrior saint, Khidr, simultaneously embodies the iconographic elements of the Archangel Michael, Prophet Elijah, and St. George.¹²⁰

The Church of Ilori emerged as one of the most significant cultic centers for St. George. Local tradition recounts that every November, on the feast of St. George, a miraculous sacrificial bull would appear at Ilori.¹²¹ At his shrine, St. George's most important valence was that of a judge or arbiter, and, as such, he was considered a champion of justice and virtue.¹²² This aspect of his persona was symbolically represented by a purportedly miraculous golden scale of justice, which was lowered from the ceiling in the church's center. Locals believed that St. George mediated disputes, ensuring that justice was served through his scales. Opposing parties would stand beneath the scales, invoking the icon of St. George in prayer.

This practice is arguably reflected in the illustration of Dat'una K'variani's poetic adaptation of the *Life of St. George*. The seventeenth-century manuscript of this poem shows the headpiece with an arch with three crosses on top, under which are the blessing hand and scales (Fig. 2.36). The inclusion of the scales, which is usually part of the scene of the last Judgement, must be a symbolic echo of the aforementioned practice in Ilori.¹²³ A scale also appears next to St. George in the newly-discovered seventeenth-century scroll in Racha, along with the scenes from the *Life of St. George* (Fig. 2.37). This illustrated scroll stylistically resembles the illustrations of Dat'una



2.36 Headpiece with the image of scales of justice (seventeenth century).
Dat'una K'variani, *Life of St. George in Verse*.
Courtesy of National Archives of Georgia, Central Historical Archives.



2.37 Scales of Justice (seventeenth century).
Scroll with St. George's Life.

K‘variani’s poem, suggesting that both manuscripts are either authored by the same artists or belong to the same workshop.¹²⁴

Given these contexts, the depiction of a bearded St. George can be interpreted as an iconographic allusion to Christ as the Judge, the Pantokrator, reflecting this particular aspect of the St. George cult in Ilori. The existence of this representation should not be considered coincidental in Mravalžali either. Historically, Mravalžali was the principal site for the veneration of St. George, a fact supported by its name, which in Georgian translates to “almighty,” an epithet that has become associated with St. George and suggests a parallel to Christ. This brings us back to the famous Ušguli chalice, which, as observed by Giorgi Chubinashvili, contains many iconographic anomalies. One of such anomalies is that the majority of the figures wear beards, perhaps as a sign of universal and genderless power.¹²⁵

2.6. STANDING REPRESENTATIONS OF ST. GEORGE

The depiction of warrior saints in a standing pose was a standard practice. However, Georgian sources offer a remarkable illustration of this artistic tradition, showcasing distinctive iconographic variations. The earliest known representation of St. George in a standing posture is typically attributed to the Xandisi stele, which dates to the sixth century.¹²⁶ This particular iconographic type began to gain prominence in the tenth century, becoming widespread across various artistic forms, especially in painted and repoussé icons.

Typically, these figures are centrally positioned or arranged along the rims and frames of the icons. St. George often occupies a central location or is depicted along the edges. He is frequently seen on pre-altar crosses, rendered frontally and fully armed. The frontal orientation of the warrior saints may have drawn inspiration from imperial iconography, particularly representations found on coins.¹²⁷ St. George is illustrated in various poses, whether with both feet firmly planted on the ground or in a light and graceful contrapposto, as if echoing the description of John Sinaites (see Nikoloz Aleksidze’s chapter).

Georgian art has preserved several notable examples of repoussé icons of St. George, with the icons from Jumat‘i, Xidist‘avi, Sujuna and Lašdğveri emerging as some of the most significant (*Figs. 2.38; 2.39*).



2.38 *Xidist‘avi icon of St. George (eleventh century).*



2.39 *Sujuna icon of St. George (eleventh century).*

2.6.1. ICONS OF BOČORMA AND SINAI

From an iconographic perspective, the early eleventh-century reliquary icon of St. George from Bočorma (Gare Kakheti) is entirely unique.¹²⁸ This large high-relief image (133 × 104 cm.) features the saint turning at a $\frac{3}{4}$ angle, facing Christ with his arms extended toward Him (*Fig. 2.40*). Notably, St. George’s weapons are set aside, emphasizing his intercession. It is significant that non-frontally standing saints began to appear relatively late in Eastern Christian art, primarily from the twelfth century onward, which makes the Bočorma icon innovative for its time.

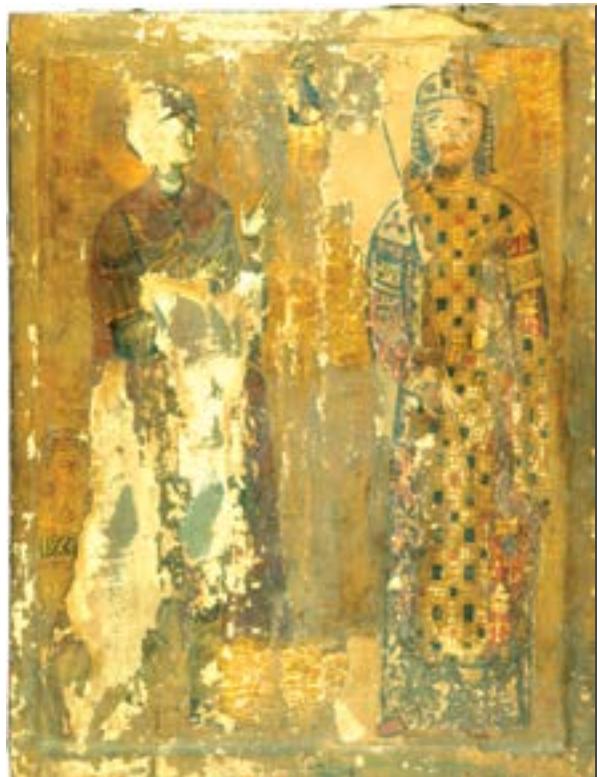


2.40 Bočorma icon of St. George (eleventh-twelfth, sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century). Georgian National Museum.

Grotowski questions the Georgian provenance of the icon, stating: “The isolated nature of this example, the Greek inscription in medallions, as well as the style, which is close to that of Byzantine works, indicate that great care is required in attributing it to a Georgian workshop.”¹²⁹ Nevertheless, Grotowski omits the fact that, along with a Greek inscription, the Icon of Bočorma also has a Georgian one.

The significance of the Bočorma icon can be seen reflected in the icon of David the Builder (early twelfth century), which is preserved in St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai (Fig. 2.41).¹³⁰ In this icon, the Georgian king, clad in imperial chlamys, stands facing St. George, seeking the megalomartyr’s intercession and support against his enemies.¹³¹ Christ’s half-figure is positioned between the king and St. George. The addition of the title “King of Kakheti” to King David suggests a more precise dating of the icon; in 1104, David abolished and annexed the kingdom of Kakheti, and the creation of the icon likely reflects these events.¹³² Consequently, the reference to the Bočorma reliquary icon (including St. George’s pose and the shield placed behind him) in the Sinai icon may have carried a significant political message.

During the process of unifying the Georgian kingdom, the incorporation of the easternmost kingdom of Kakheti was crucial. The Bočorma fortress and its church were central to these events, so the depiction of its principal holy object can be interpreted as a reflection of these political developments. It is conceivable that a replica of the Bočorma reliquary was commissioned in anticipation of Georgia’s unification. With its distinctive iconography and bilingual inscription, this unique icon, created specifically for St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai, served to highlight the exclusive patronage of St. George over the Georgian king and his people.¹³³



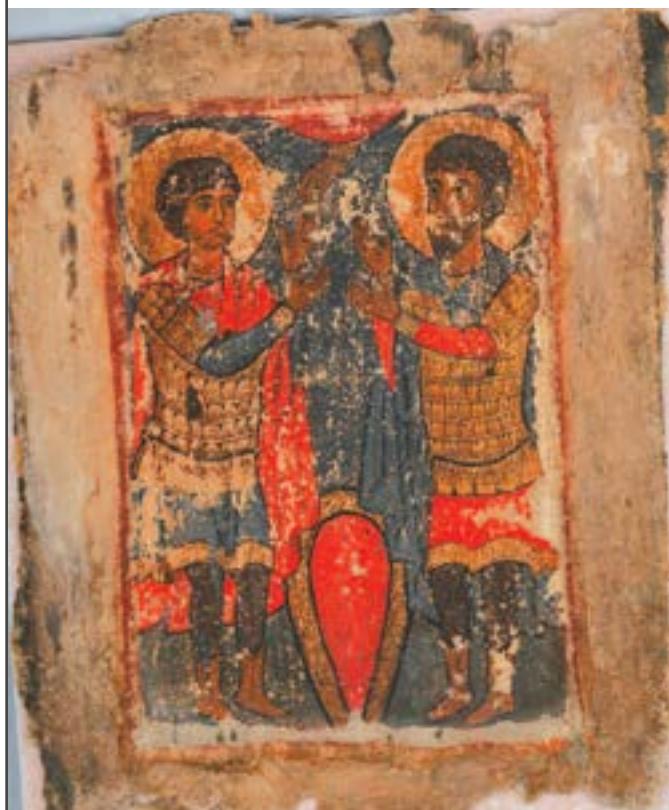
2.41 *Icon of Christ, St. George and King David IV the Builder* (early twelfth century).
St. Catherine’s Monastery of Mt. Sinai. Permission of Saint Catherine’s Monastery, Mt. Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria expeditions to Mt. Sinai.

As a parallel, one may consider the image of St. George that Jean Cheynet associates with the bull of Alexios Komnenos. The founder of the Empire of Trebizond is depicted here, much like David the Builder, as being accompanied by St. George. Cheynet notes that the emperor's attire carries a stylistically "Georgian" quality, likely alluding to Queen Tamar's influential role in the establishment of the Empire of Trebizond.¹³⁴

2.6.2. NAKIP'ARI ICON

2.42 Nakip'ari icon of St. George and St. Theodore (eleventh century (?)). Georgian National Museum.

Among the numerous representations of standing saints, the renowned icon of St. George and St. Theodore from Nakip'ari (41 × 33 cm.) in Upper Svaneti merits special attention (Fig. 2.42).¹³⁵ Most scholars date this work to the twelfth century; however, Mariam Didebulidze proposes that it may originate from the middle or late eleventh century.¹³⁶ In the icon, the two warrior saints stand against a blue background, facing each other at a three-quarter angle with their arms extended in a prayerful gesture, addressing the blessing hand of Christ depicted in the center. Positioned between them is a single shield. Didebulidze notes that this composition reflects the influence of the Bočorma icon, highlighting that depiction of the standing figures of St. George and St. Theodore facing each other is uncommon for this time. Consequently, the Nakip'ari icon represents, if not the earliest, one of the earliest and, undoubtedly, a unique example of this type (see St. Theodore's chapter). The uniqueness of this icon is further underscored by the portrayal of just one shared shield—a distinctive feature, as similar depictions often include a proliferation of weapons.¹³⁷



2.6.3. BET‘ANIA

In the twelfth and particularly thirteenth centuries, the depiction of standing warriors became common in monumental art characterized by increased scale and centrality. The warrior saints were often illustrated on the first, lower register, as if they were present in the very space of the church.

In this context, an outstanding witness to the cult of St. George, especially its royal patronage, is the decoration of the church of Bet‘ania (*Fig. 2.43*).¹³⁸ Antony Eastmond addressed the “unusual hierarchical structure” of the donors’ program: On the royal panel, portraits of the Bagratids—Giorgi III, Tamar, and Giorgi IV “Laša” (1213–23)—are depicted facing St. George. In contrast, representatives of the Orbeli family, who were the church’s donors, appear on the opposite side, on the south wall, presenting a model of the church to the Mother of God with the infant Christ. Eastmond argues that, considering other portraits of Tamar, it would have made more sense to position the royal panel in front of Christ or the Mother of God. He also notes that St. George is portrayed frontally and statically, holding a lance, seemingly not engaging with or acknowledging the prayers of the Bagratid rulers. Thus, George was intended not as the addressee of these prayers but rather as a protector of the royal family, while the royal supplications were directed to Christ in the altar apse.¹³⁹

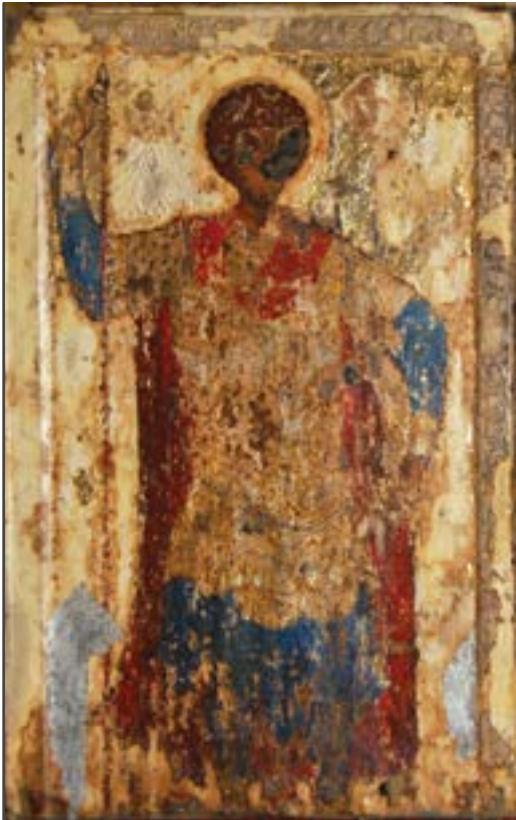
It has been argued in scholarship that the two images, those of the warrior saints (Demetrios and George) and the royal portraits, are of different eras. The former is usually dated to c.1150, while the latter to the early thirteenth century. Even if they are indeed from different periods, the donors’ desire to be placed in-between the two patron saints of the Bagratids is telling.¹⁴⁰ After all, St. George was the namesake of both Giorgis, apart from being perceived as

2.43 *Passion scenes, royal panel: King Giorgi III, Queen Tamar, and Laša-Giorgi with St. George and St. Demetrios (middle of the twelfth and early thirteenth century).*
Bet‘ania. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.





2.44 St. George, relic-container ring from the Gelati treasury (twelfth century). Dimitri Ermakov's photo collection.



2.45 St. George (twelfth century). Saqdati Church of St. George.

the protector of the royal family and dynasty. In a description of the Battle of Ani, the *History and Eulogy of Monarchs* (1200s) specifically stresses the affinity in names and, correspondingly, the spiritual association between Giorgi III and St. George. The episode narrates king Giorgi's willingness to engage the Muslim enemy despite his generals' insistence not to do so: "He did not listen to them, the one who was the namesake and similar to St. George in his valiance as well as name. If he [St. George] slayed one dragon, this invincible warrior [Giorgi] annihilated many serpents and echidnas."¹⁴¹

Supposedly another piece of evidence of King Giorgi's personal devotion to St. George is the now-lost relic-container ring from the Gelati treasury (Fig. 2.44). Nikodim Kondakov reports that the ring depicted a standing St. George and had an inscription:

“წმინდათ გიორგი, მთხავი შენი გიორგი, ძალითა შენითა გსძლევ მცერთა ჩემთა” (St. George, through your power, I, your adorner, Giorgi, defeat my enemies).¹⁴² Yet another item that points to the association between St. George and Giorgi III is the icon of St. George (90 × 63 cm.) now kept in the church of Saqdati (Lower Svaneti) (Fig. 2.45). This large and exquisitely crafted icon depicts standing St. George and, as reported by Ekvtime Takaishvili, was accompanied by a now-lost inscription: “ა მიღ მამკობი შენი, მთავარმოწამეო, მეფე გიორგი სახელ სეხნია ქმნილი, შენ მიერ, მიღს ჩემთვის წინაშე უფლისა” (Intercede on my behalf, your namesake, your adorner, King Giorgi, in front of the Lord).¹⁴³ Takaishvili dates the icon to the twelfth or thirteenth century, yet he does not suggest the identity of the mentioned king. Later, Nino Chichinadze dates the icon to the twelfth century.¹⁴⁴ The date of the icon's creation, its superior artistic quality, and the content

of the inscription suggest that the reference is indeed made to King Giorgi III.¹⁴⁵ This theory is supported by the "namesake" reference, which appears in historiography, as quoted above.

Georgian monarchs have considered St. George their person-

al protector since an early date, at least since the tenth century. Church tradition, however, dates this association to an even earlier period, the reign of Iberia's first Christian king Mirian. This idea transpires most clearly in the Kingdom of Apkhazeti (see Nikoloz Alekisdze's chapter). Somewhat later, the inscription on the relief tympanum of the church of Nikorcminda identifies the son of King Bagrat III, the future king Giorgi I, as exclusively protected by Christ and St. George

2.6.4. ILORI ICONS

A unique iconographic theme is shown on the icon of St. George of the Miracle of Ilori (*Fig. 2.46*). The central part of this sixteenth-century triptych reliquary (42 × 30 cm.), now kept in the Museum of Zugdidi, depicts the miracle of the shrine of Ilori (Apkhazeti)—the miraculous appearance of the sacrificial bull (see the chapter below). Positioned between the scenes of the Annunciation, which are distributed across two doors, is a standing image of St. George, depicted in an unusual pose—at the moment of unsheathing his sword. A shield, adorned with a relief image of an eagle, hangs on his back. In the lower section of the composition, the sacrificial bull is shown on one side, while the donor, Metropolitan Kvirile, appears on the other. The martyr's



2.46 *Icon of St. George with the sacrificial ox and portrait of Metropolitan Kvirile of Bedia (sixteenth century). Dadiani Palaces Historical and Architectural Museum. Source: Beraia. 2020.*

emphatic gesture, accentuated military attire, and weapons embellished with precious stones impart an especially solemn character to the repoussé icon.

Apart from the Ilori icon, a later icon (c.1640) has survived with an identical scene, evidently commissioned by Prince Levan Dadiani of Odiši (*Fig. 2.47*).¹⁴⁶ The *mxedruli* inscription points to a direct link between the scene and the “miracle of Ilori”: “წმინდა გიორგის თდიშის ილორის ხატის მოყვანის სახე გიორგობის დღეს” (The image of the bringing of St. George of Ilori of Odiši on the feast day of St. George). Evidently, both icons were owned by the church of St. George of Ilori.¹⁴⁷ The shrine of Ilori was considered so powerful that many icons named “St. George of Ilori” have survived, which include images of both standing and riding St. George.

2.47 *Ilori miracle of St. George (1640).*
Georgian National Museum.
Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation,
Sergo Kobuladze
Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.



2.6.5. XVAMLI ICON

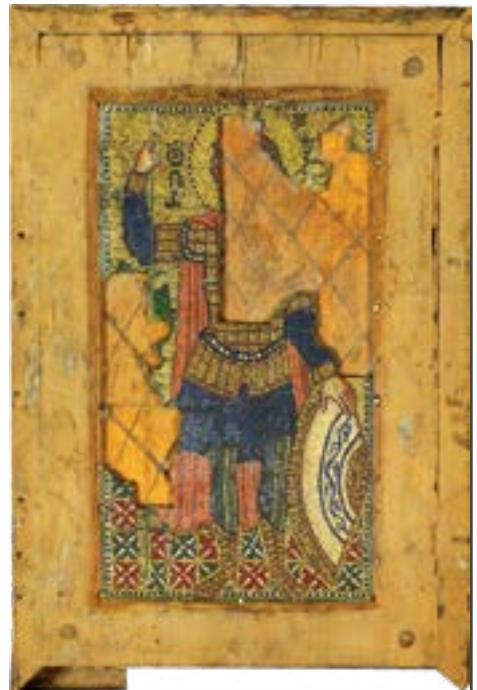
Equally remarkable is the repoussé icon of St. George of Xvamli, which once served as the central piece of the triptych.¹⁴⁸ At its center (170 × 84 cm.), just beneath the Deesis, stands a substantial figure of St. George (Fig. 2.48). This warrior saint is blessed by the right hand of Christ, depicted in the upper right segment of the sky. St. George dramatically dwarfs the scene of the Deesis and the other figures within the frame, marking him as the focal point of the composition. While the face of the icon is now lost, the arms are crafted from vitreous enamel, suggesting that the head was originally executed in a similar manner.¹⁴⁹ According to the inscription deciphered by Marie Brosset and Ekvtime Takaishvili, the icon was restored through the patronage of King Bagrat III of Imereti (1510–65) and his wife, Elene, in 1536 at Gelat'i. Along with other commissioned items by the king of Imereti, it is regarded as one of the most exquisite works of its time.¹⁵⁰



2.48 *Deesis and St. George with the saints* (1536),
Xvamli icon. Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut. Photo Dror Maayan.

2.6.6. MOSAIC ICON OF ST. GEORGE

Georgian art has preserved a single mosaic icon of St. George, which stands as the only surviving example in this medium (25.5 × 17 cm.). Armed and standing, St. George is identified by a Greek inscription (Fig. 2.49). The dating of this piece is uncertain; some scholars attribute it to the eleventh century (Gaiane Alibegashvili) or the twelfth century (Nana Burchuladze), while others propose a thirteenth-century date (Leila Khuskivadze). Burchuladze suggests that it was inspired by the mosaics of the Gelat'i monastery, indicating it may have been a royal donation, with potential donors identified as David IV or Demetre I.¹⁵¹

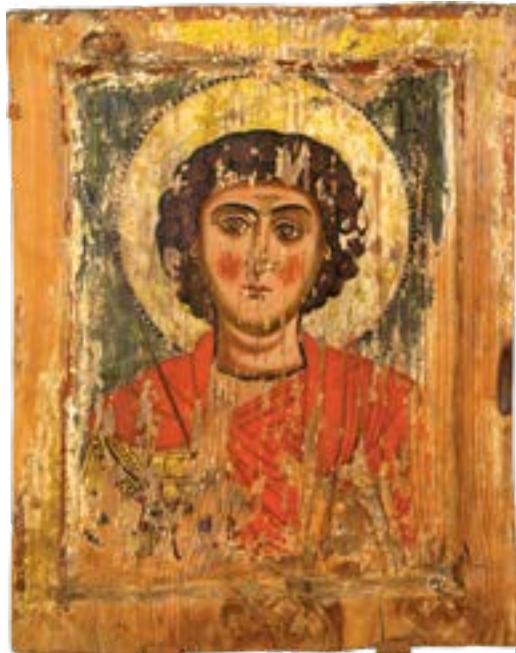


2.49 *St. George, mosaic icon* (twelfth century?). Georgian National Museum.

2.6.7. ST. GEORGE'S HALF-FIGURES

This iconographic type is perhaps the most widely disseminated and standard representation of St. George. It can be found on icons, in monumental art, and in the ornamentation of liturgical items, though it is particularly prevalent in enamel art.

In the depiction of half-figures of warrior saints, mostly the formats vary; the images may be rectangular or framed within medallions. The weapons of the warriors are typically emphasized (*Fig. 2.50. 2.51*). However, Georgian art also represents warrior saints as martyrs, especially in the late Middle Ages.



2.50 *Ip'ari icon of St. George (thirteenth century).*
Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography.



2.51 *Xobi icon of St. George (thirteenth century).*
Georgian National Museum.

2.7. ST. GEORGE'S CYCLES ON PRE-ALTAR CROSSES

2.7.1. THE CROSS OF MESTIA

Crosses dedicated to saints are common in medieval art.¹⁵² However, in the Eastern Christianity, the cycles of individual saints are rarely represented in the decoration of crosses (see Ekaterine Gedevanishvili's introduction). In medieval Georgia, however, the vast majority of crosses were dedicated to St. George, depicting various scenes from his life. In fact, St. George is the only saint whose life cycle appears on Georgian pre-alter crosses, which underscores the significant contribution of Georgian art to the narrative of St. George's life.

In this respect, an important and artistically outstanding piece is the pre-alter cross (125 × 77 cm.) of Mestia (c.1030) (*Fig. 2.52*). This cross features nine scenes and represents the earliest visual portrayal of the extended cycle of St. George.¹⁵³ Chubinashvili suggests that originally it also included St. George's triumphant equestrian image slaying Diocletian.¹⁵⁴ Unlike tenth- and eleventh-century Cappadocia, where most typical scenes were shown (e.g., St. George facing Diocletian, martyrdom on the wheel, or trial by iron shoe), the artist of the cross of Mestia has selected relatively unusual scenes, such as the resurrection of the bull and the beheading of Glykerios, scenes that have become popular only at a later date.¹⁵⁵

According to Chubinashvili, the sequence of the scenes on the cross follows a coherent principle. The artist has arranged the scenes of passion along the vertical line. At the intersection, instead of Christ's crucifixion, is the laceration of St. George (*Fig. 2.53*). Temily Mark-Weiner suggests that this composition is the earliest surviving image of its kind.¹⁵⁶ It is noteworthy that instead of the martyrdom on the wheel, a tremendously popular



2.53 Scrapping of St. George (c.1030). Seti pre-alter cross, detail. Seti church of St. George. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording.



2.52 St. George's life cycle (c.1030). Seti pre-altar cross, Seti church of St. George. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.

scene in Georgia, the artist has chosen this particular episode, arguably, specifically because of its visual allusion to the Crucifixion. Indeed, it is placed on the largest plate and with its arrangement and iconographic details, may be perceived as an emulation of the Crucifixion.¹⁵⁷ St. George is tied to a vertical column and is flanked by two henchmen wielding toothed rods. The composition has an inscription: “წმ. გომრგის ხვევა” (Laceration of St. George). The symbolic and visual association is further enhanced by a hill-like image, evidently an allusion to Golgotha, which, due to its stepped structure, Mark-Weiner identifies as unique.¹⁵⁸ The parallelism between this scene and the Crucifixion is echoed in the decoration of the Church of St. George in Ubisa, where one henchman holds a toothed rod while another wields a spear, an iconographic reference to the Crucifixion, as noted by Inga Lortkipanidze (*Fig. 2.54*).¹⁵⁹



2.54 *Scraping of St. George* (fourteenth century). Church of St. George of Ubisa.

The scene of St. George's laceration is followed vertically by the laconic composition of the martyrdom on the wheel, arguably the most popular episode from St. George's cycle (*Fig. 2.55*).¹⁶⁰ St. George is shown alongside two henchmen. The earliest visual witness of this scene is the Chludov Psalter (ninth century), which later became an inseparable episode of the cycle (for the wheel scene, see feast of the tenth of November).¹⁶¹

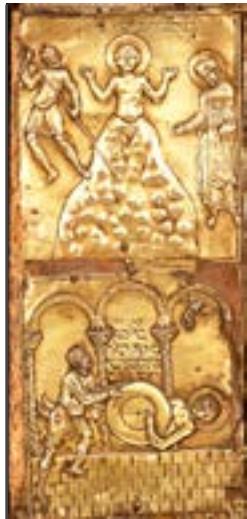
The wheel scene is then succeeded by the flagellation, acting as the culmination of the distinctively vertical compositions portrayed below (*Fig. 2.56*). By contrast, this scene has a horizontal orientation and acts as the culmination of the vertically aligned scenes. It has an accompanying inscription: “წმიდისა გომრგისა



2.55 Martyrdom on the Wheel,
Seti pre-altar cross (c.1030).
Detail. Church of St. George
of Seti. Courtesy of the Giorgi
Chubinashvili National Research
Centre for Georgian Art History
and Heritage Preservation, Sergo
Kobuladze Monuments Photo
Recording Laboratory.



2.56 Beating of St. George,
Seti pre-altar cross (c.1030).
Detail. Church of St. George
of Seti. Courtesy of the Giorgi
Chubinashvili National Research
Centre for Georgian Art History
and Heritage Preservation, Sergo
Kobuladze Monuments Photo
Recording Laboratory.



2.57 Martyrdom
in the lime pit,
martyrdom with the
stone. Seti pre-altar
cross (c.1030). Detail.
Church of St. George
of Seti.

გეგა” (Beating of St. George). The number of henchmen depicted in the flagellation scene varies; typically, there are two, although over time, this number has increased, with three or more figures often positioned alongside St. George. On the cross of Mestia, the instruments of torture are unconventional; rather than the whips made from a bull’s intestines, as described in martyrdom accounts, the henchmen brandish rods.¹⁶²

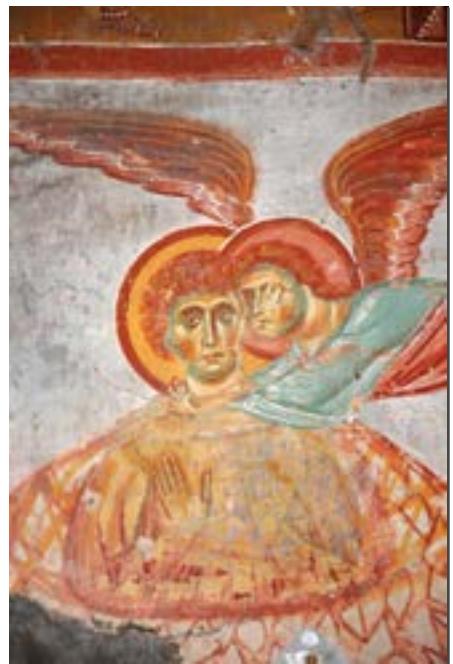
In the lower vertical zone of the cross’s arm, following the laceration of the body, is the martyrdom in the lime pit (Fig. 2.57). This episode is a prevalent theme in St. George’s iconography and carries a general symbolism of victory over fire and evil, as well as Zoroastrianism and paganism, while also carrying an allusion to baptism by fire.¹⁶³ In hymnography, the various episodes of the martyrdom are explained symbolically. For example, George Skylitzes compares the heat of the fiery pit to the fire of Christ’s love, implying a triumph over the everlasting fire of hell.¹⁶⁴ Whereas in a hymn incorporated in George Hagiorites’ *Menaion*, St. George’s torture in the lime pit for

three days is an allusion to Christ's burial and resurrection.¹⁶⁵ It is perhaps for this reason that St. George is often depicted in this scene wearing a crown or a diadem, for example in Zenobani (thirteenth century) or the church of St. George of Perevisi (fourteenth to early fifteenth century).

The iconographic schema of this scene is fairly standard and usually depicts St. George's naked figure in a cone-shaped pit, with his arms outstretched in prayer. His calm, praying pose signifies victory over passions and presents the martyr to the Lord, "as a groom standing inside the church."¹⁶⁶ Often, this scene shows an angel aiding St. George. In a somewhat unique rendition, in the thirteenth-century decoration of Ači (Guria), instead of the traditional blessing gesture, the angel embraces St. George with both arms, resting his head on St. George's (*Fig. 2.58*). The widely unfolded, symmetrical wings seemingly protect St. George from the heat. The iconography of Ači is arguably inspired by hymnography: "The angel of heaven descended, as if sprinkling on him a heavenly breeze, defeating the heat, and dispersing the flame."¹⁶⁷

The composition of the martyrdom in the lime pit represented on the cross of Mestia is equally unconventional. It shows three figures: St. George, the henchman, and a crowned figure, whom Chubinashvili identifies as Diocletian.¹⁶⁸ The scene is accompanied by an inscription: "St. George is standing in lime." Chubinashvili suggests that it captures the moment when Diocletian discovers the beaten but unharmed St. George, as indicated by the Emperor's surprised expression and his outstretched arm reaching toward St. George in a gesture of awe. Diocletian's surprise is further emphasized by his position, squeezed into a corner and practically leaning over the frame, which conveys a sense of fear.¹⁶⁹

The scene of the lime pit is followed by the episode of St. George's torturing by stone. Traditionally, this scene is set in a jail, often illustrating the martyr lying beneath an arch while one torturer places a massive stone on his chest and another ties his feet. In this regard, the iconography of the Cross of Mestia aligns with tradition. St. George is portrayed lying down in front



2.58 *Matyrdom in the lime pit (late thirteenth century). Church of St. George of Ači.*



2.59 *Martyrdom of St. George with the stone, Barakoni pre-altar cross (sixteenth century).*
Niko Berdzenishvili
Kutaisi State Historical Museum.

of a triple arch, with a henchman placing the stone on his chest. This stone is circular, a less common choice for this composition; typically, the stone appears more elongated and rectangular, as seen in the depiction on the cross of Barakoni (Fig. 2.59). Mark-Weiner observes an allusion to the resurrection of Lazarus in this scene.¹⁷⁰ In Barakoni, the stone is deliberately designed to resemble a tombstone, a detail evidenced by the inscription inscribed on the representation of the stone.

The martyrdom with the stone also encapsulates St. George's deliverance. In the left corner is the Lord's blessing hand, accentuated by its haut-relief-like shape, which looks almost like a three-dimensional figure. The miracle is also accentuated by the henchman's raised head and surprised expression.¹⁷¹

On the horizontal arm of the cross, two scenes are depicted on a single plate. The first composition on the left arm illustrates the distribution of alms by the martyr, depicted in patrician attire, marking the moment in the martyrdom account where St. George confesses his faith (Fig. 2.60). The Cross of Mestia features one of the earliest surviving depictions of this scene.¹⁷² Among the group of beggars, some hold canes, suggesting that the scene blends elements of both almsgiving and healing. This scene bears the inscription: “წმიდა გოორგი ქველისა საქმესა განუყოფს გლასხაგთა” (St. George does good deeds, distributes alms to the poor).

Next, St. George's interrogation by Diocletian unfolds. This composition is one of the most popular images within St. George's cycle and typically appears at its beginning.¹⁷³ The composition is traditional; in one corner is the enthroned emperor, with St. George standing opposite him, presented to the emperor by a servant. The gesticulation of St. George and Diocletian suggests that they are involved in a dispute, as described in the martyrdom account. The rhythmic structure, compositional layout, and distribution of figures are analogous to the neighboring scene of the distribution of alms, thereby creating a single whole. Evidently, this compositional unity was determined by the narrative structure of the *Martyrdom*, where the two episodes appear next to each other and the distribution of alms is tied to

St. George's confession of faith in Diocletian's presence. The scene lacks an identificatory inscription, apart from St. George's and Diocletian's names. Diocletian is depicted with a halo, which, as Chubinashvili correctly notes, signifies imperial authority rather than sanctity.¹⁷⁴

The two remaining scenes on the horizontal arm are structurally similar. One depicts the resurrection of the bull and the other features Glykerios' beheading, as described in the martyrdom account. The story of the resurrection of the bull is recounted in various ways across narrative sources. In the earliest versions of St. George's martyrdom, a woman named Scholastica owns the bull that George resurrects.¹⁷⁵ In more widespread accounts, the farmer's name is Glykerios, who visits St. George in prison and requests the resurrection of his bull. St. George promises to perform the miracle in exchange for the man's conversion. The Cross of Mestia represents this latter version and is considered its earliest depiction (Fig. 2.61).¹⁷⁶ The artist has expanded the scene and united the episodes of the resurrection of the bull and the arrest of St. Glykerios. The caption says: “წმ. ღლუკერი, რომლისა ხარი აღდგა” (St. Glykerios whose bull was resurrected). These two compositions, along with the scene of the beheading of Glykerios, are read as one whole. The visual effect of narrative unity is enhanced by the movement of the peripheral figures in the scene of the resurrection of the bull, who seemingly move toward the next scene that shows Glykerios' prayer and beheading.¹⁷⁷ This



2.60 *Distribution of wealth to the poor, Seti pre-altar cross (c.1030).*
Church of St. George of Seti. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.



2.61 *Resurrection of the ox and beheading of St. Glykerios. Seti pre-altar cross, (c.1030).*
Church of St. George of Seti. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.

extended version of Glykerios' conversion and martyrdom is unique to the Cross of Mestia, and as suggested by Mark-Weiner, the display of the sub-cycle of Glykerios along with George, is the artist's/donor's original solution. Asmat Okropiridze suggests that the resurrection of the bull and its prominence in the program of the cross decoration may be rooted in the ancient cult of the bull in Georgia, as attested in the histories of Ilori and Lomisi (see subchapter on 10 November).¹⁷⁸ The same scene is highlighted in the decoration of the church of St. George in Ubisa, where it is depicted above the entrance and is particularly imposing (*Fig. 2.62*).

2.62 *Resurrection of the ox by St. George* (fourteenth century). Church of St. George of Ubisa.



2.7.2. BARAKONI AND SADGERI CROSSES

On pre-altar crosses, scenes from George's life are distributed in a number of ways. For example, in some cases, like on the Cross of Mestia, discussed above, they depict only the life of St. George; however, it is more common to show the Crucifixion at the intersection of two arms (e.g., Gorisjvari and Vani Cross, both sixteenth century) (*Fig. 2.63*).¹⁷⁹ In other instances, instead of the Crucifixion, the central area is occupied by the Deesis (Sadgeri Cross) (*Fig. 2.64*) or both (Barakoni Cross) (*Fig. 2.65*).

Somewhat uncharacteristically, on the Barakoni pre-altar cross (sixteenth century), while the center is occupied by the Crucifixion, the figures of the Deesis are moved to the edges

2.63 *Gorisjvari pre-altar cross (sixteenth century)*. Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.



2.64 *Sadgeri* pre-altar cross (sixteenth century). Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.





2.65 Barakoni pre-altar cross (sixteenth century). Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum.



2.66 Deesis and St. George holding his head in his hands, Sadgeri pre-altar cross (sixteenth century). Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.

of the cross's arms.¹⁸⁰ As a result, scenes of George's life appear between the Crucifixion and the Deesis, which places St. George in a group with Mary and John the Baptist, as one of the participants of the supplication scene. On some crosses, instead of narrative scenes, the entire surface is occupied by small icon-like half-figures, full-figures, or riding saints, where once again St. George is the most prominent character.

More traditional, however, are mixed iconographic versions, where the scenes from Christ's and the martyr's lives co-

exist and the latter emulate the former.¹⁸¹ An outstanding example is the pre-altar cross of Sadgeri (230 × 106 cm.), arguably goldsmith Mamne's most striking achievement.¹⁸² The cycle of St. George's life that appears next to Christological scenes, consists of two thematic groups: scenes of martyrdom and miracles. In the center of the cross is the Deesis, in which Teimuraz Sakvarelidze identifies the influence of Georgian wall paintings (Fig. 2.66). One particularly striking iconographic detail is the incorporation of a decapitated half-figure in the Deesis. The caption says: “მოკვეთილი თავი ხელთა აქო” (He holds his own severed head).¹⁸³ Sakvarelidze attributes the inclusion of the beheaded St. George in the iconography of the Cross of Sadgeri to Athonite influence, noting that this depiction is rare elsewhere. Sakvarelidze explains its appearance in Georgia by the close ties that the Atabegs of Samtskhe, the donors of the Cross, maintained with the monasteries on the Holy Mountain.¹⁸⁴ The plate depicting the Deesis served as the lid of a reliquary and, as reported by Russian ambassadors, housed St. George's relics (a piece of his bone and skull), which may explain the image of the decapitated St. George on the lid.¹⁸⁵

Another unique feature of the Cross of Sadgeri is the depiction of four riders (Fig. 2.67). Compared to the scenes of the life cycle, these paired warrior saints are much larger. The equestrian figures differ from each other. Under St. George slaying Diocletian, St. George is shown slaying the dragon. The two remaining images of the dragon-slaying saints depict the return of the youth and the rescue of the princess. The unity of these four triumphal

images creates a powerful culminating accord for the entire ensemble.¹⁸⁶ The Cross of Sadgeri also has a hat, which, according to Teimuraz Sakvarelidze must be of a somewhat earlier date than the decoration. The decorative program of the hat repeats the central theme of the cross: the Deesis and St. George.¹⁸⁷

The medieval Georgian tradition of linking St. George with the cross gave birth to a unique iconographic redaction of the processional cross (44 × 39 cm.) kept in the treasury of Lomisi (Tianeti Municipality) (Fig. 2.68) dated tentatively to the sixteenth century.¹⁸⁸ At the intersection of the arms, St. George is slaying a dragon (see also Fig. 1.20). The unusual feature of the cross is the depiction of the Crucifixion on the edges of the arms. Another striking example is the supposedly seventeenth-century repoussé relic-container cross (collection of the Patriarchate of Georgia), where on the intersection of two arms, the dragon-slaying St. George is depicted with a cross-inscribed halo (Fig. 2.69).¹⁸⁹ An identical motif is repeated on the cross's lower section of the vertical arm.¹⁹⁰ Another unique expression of



2.67 *Triumphal images of St. George, Sadgeri pre-altar cross (sixteenth century).* Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.



2.68 *Lomisi cross (sixteenth century).* Lomisi treasury.



2.69 *St. George slaying the dragon, Cherubims. Processional cross (seventeenth century?). Patriarchate of Georgia.* Courtesy of the Patriarchate of Georgia.

the association between the Crucifixion and St. George is reflected on an icon of the Crucifixion (probably early fifteenth century) kept in the church of Sts. Kyrikos and Ioulitta (Lagurka) in Kala (Upper Svaneti), instead of traditional figures (the Theotokos and St. John), the crucified Christ is flanked here by two standing figures of St. George with raised swords and shields (Fig. 2.70). This unusual theme may be yet another reflection of the parallelism between George and Christ, which may have been further accentuated by the association of several shrines dedicated to the Cross with St. George.¹⁹¹

2.70 *Crucifixion and St. George (fourteenth–fifteenth century?)*
Treasury of the church of Sts. Kyrikos and Ioulitta (Lagurka).



2.8. THE FEAST OF 10 NOVEMBER: “MARTYRDOM ON THE WHEEL”

The feast of November 10 is first recorded in the Georgian Lectionary of Jerusalem from the seventh century.¹⁹² By the ninth century, it had become so significant that the month of November was referred to as *Giorgobist’ve*, meaning the month of the feast of St. George. In the monasteries of Tao and Klarjeti, a nine-day fast was established in honor of this feast.¹⁹³ In Ioane-Zosime’s tenth-century Palestinian calendar, a forty-day fast is noted, beginning on September 15 and concluding on November 10, the

feast of St. George. The prominence of this day is further evidenced by its inclusion in Georgian manuscripts of the *Martyrdom of St. George*, highlighting November 10 rather than April 23.¹⁹⁴

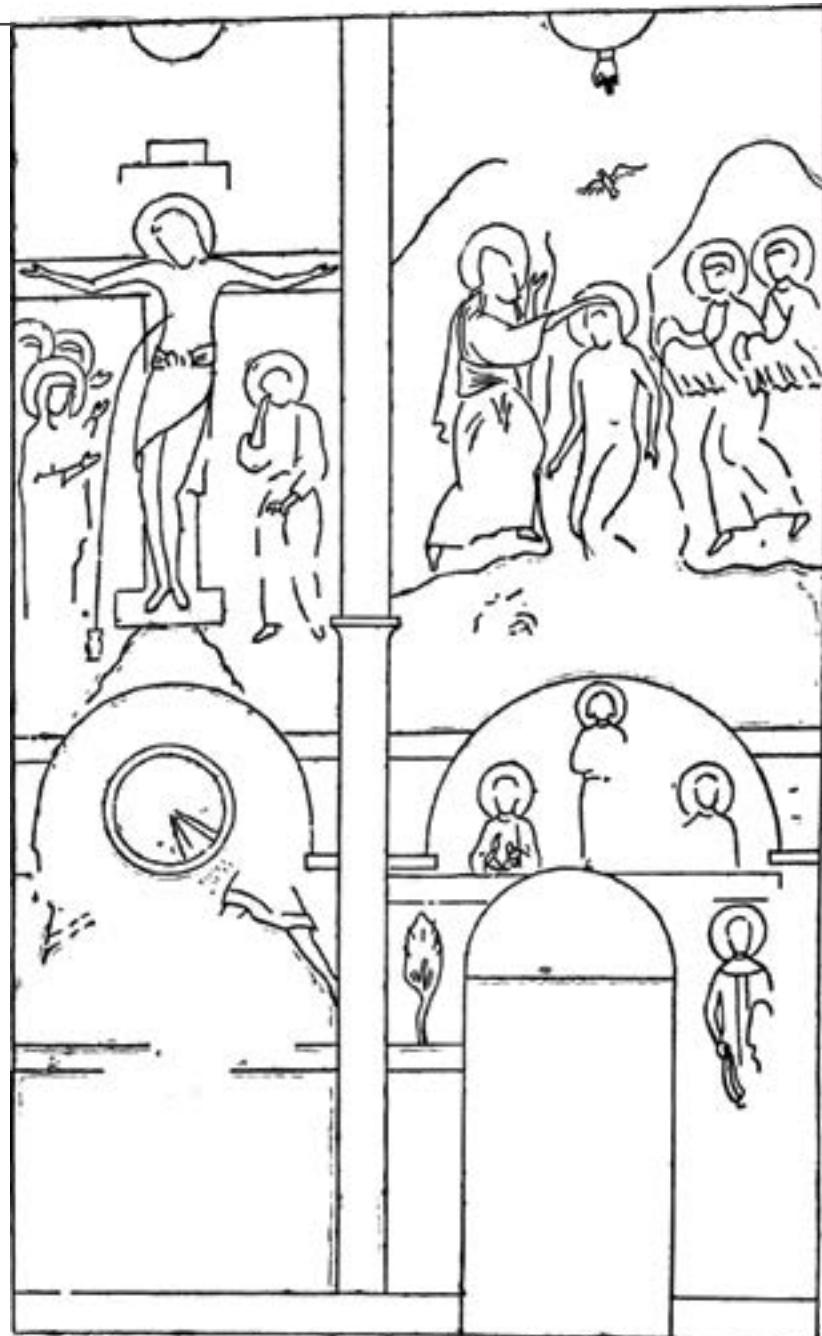
The feast of November 10 was most probably adopted in Georgia from Palestine.¹⁹⁵ In agreement with Korneli Kekelidze, Kakha Scherbakovi links this feast to the dedication of the shrine in Lydda. Over time, the Georgian tradition replaced the encaenia celebration with the martyrdom on the wheel, likely due to the shift to the Constantinopolitan rite.¹⁹⁶ In Constantinopolitan typika, church dedications were not emphasized as strongly as they were in Palestinian and Hagiopolite traditions. Consequently, the fervent veneration of St. George may have contributed to this transformation.¹⁹⁷

In George Hagiorites' *Great Synaxarion* 10 November is marked with a title: "St. George entered the cartwheel when he was bound to the wheel."¹⁹⁸ Asmat Okropiridze explains the exceptional popularity of this scene in Georgia through a connection between a church's encaenia and the martyrdom on the wheel. Just as Encaenia marks the cycle of time, the wheel is interpreted as a symbol of the passing of time.¹⁹⁹

This choice was likely influenced by the symbolic significance of this episode. The martyrdom account draws a notable symbolic parallel between St. George on the wheel and the Crucifixion.²⁰⁰ This association is also present in Mik'ael Modrekili's hymns for November 10, where St. George is likened to Christ for being bound to the wheel much like the crucified Christ. In other instances, he is referred to as "Christ's warrior, who was crucified like him."²⁰¹ The literary references to this connection between the martyrdom on the wheel and the crucifixion are vividly illustrated in visual art, where the martyrdom on the wheel is often depicted alongside the Crucifixion, as seen in the decoration of the Church of the Savior in Cvirmi from the twelfth century (Fig. 2.71).

The episode of St. George's martyrdom on the wheel is notable for being the account where his cut and beaten body is miraculously healed by an angel, symbolizing the significance of the Resurrection. The canon of George Skylitzes describes the resurrection of St. George following his martyrdom on the wheel, along with the subsequent miracle of the destruction of the wheel and the chains. This narrative echoes the destruction of the gates

2.71 *Crucifixion, Baptism, and martyrdom of St. George on the Wheel (twelfth century). Schema. Church of St. George of Cvirmi.*



of hell that followed the Resurrection. Such associations are reflected in the illustrations of the Chludov Psalter (c.850), where the scenes of the wheel and resurrection are shown alongside the myrrhbearers at Christ's grave.

The idea of the Resurrection encapsulated in this episode

is reflected in the decorative program of the pre-altar cross of Gorisjvari, where this scene is divided into two equal compositions: St. George martyred on the wheel and the saved and healed martyr (Fig. 2.72). The artist has positioned the scene of the resurrection at the apex of the vertical arm of the cross, thereby imparting it with significant importance.²⁰²

The triumphal context of the Resurrection suggested by the miracle of the wheel is represented in a distinctive manner in the twelfth-century church of Ikvi (Fig. 2.73). Here, the martyrdom on the wheel is located close to the altar apse and paired with one of the rare scenes from St. George's cycle: the enclosing of the devil into a mountain. This scene can be symbolically associated with the episode of the chaining of the devil in the Anastasis, a motif particularly common in the art of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²⁰³ The painter of Ikvi appears to have been inspired by this iconographic theme, especially since Georgian hymnography often conceptualizes the miracle of the wheel and the Resurrection simultaneously as the defeat of evil—"...you vanquished the power of the enemy with the wheel."²⁰⁴ By uniting these two scenes, Ikvi's artist narratively underlines the analogy between the Resurrection and the martyrdom on the wheel.

In both art and literature, the martyrdom on the wheel also seems to carry Eucharistic associations, as highlighted in the hymns of Romanos Melodos.²⁰⁵ Later Georgian hymnographers provide direct analogies: "...your flesh handed over to be cut..."²⁰⁶ and "the terrible wheel, and inside, the pieces of flesh were found incorruptible."²⁰⁷ It is likely due to this same analogy that the miracle of the wheel and the laceration appear intertwined in Byzantine and post-Byzantine iconography.

While discussing the image of martyrdom on the wheel in the Mestia cross, Mark-Weiner points out one feature of the wheel, defining it as anomalous—the assortment of sharp implements projecting from a rectangular platform. In canonical representations of St. George's martyrdom, the various pointed in-



2.72 *Resurrection of St. George and the martyrdom on the wheel, Gorisjvari pre-altar cross (sixteenth century). Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of Giorgi Chubinashvili National Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.*



2.73 Martyrdom on the wheel and the enclosing of the devil into a mountain by St. George (middle of the twelfth century). Schema. Church of St. George of Ikvi.

struments project from a platform that sits on the ground.²⁰⁸ The original conception of the platform shown in the scene of the Mestia Cross was no doubt a *suppedaneum*, in dialogue with scenes of the Crucifixion.²⁰⁹ Another curious feature of the decoration of the Cross of Mestia is the shape of the wheel (*Fig. 2.55*), which resembles a flower or a rosette. In Christian art, it is common to semantically identify the cross with a rosette.²¹⁰ Perhaps a similar association is also conveyed on the cross of Mestia. Over time, such a depiction of the wheel has become traditional for Georgian art, which has even further accentuated the connection between the wheel and the Crucifixion.²¹¹

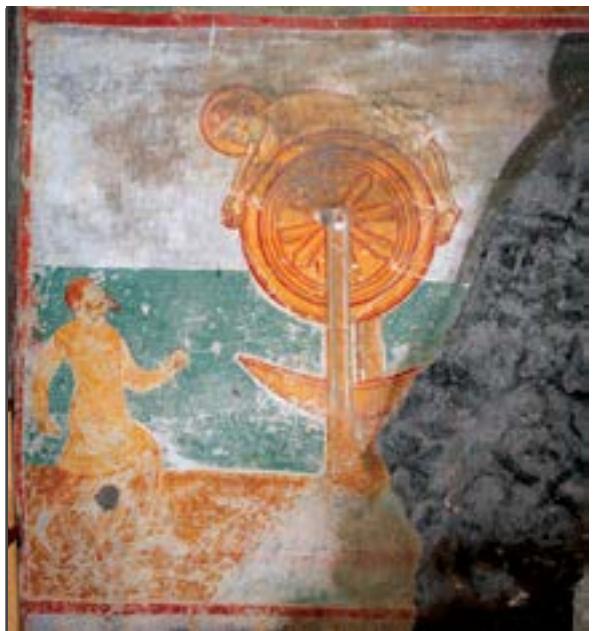
The repoussé of Vani Cross (sixteenth century) serves as another illustration of the eucharistic context of the wheel (*Fig. 2.74*). Here, the wheel is entirely unique; its base is a vessel-like item that resembles a communion chalice or, according to Teimuraz Sakvarelidze, a baptismal font. A similar image appears as an illustration in Dat‘una K‘variani’s poetic *Life of St. George* (*Fig. 2.75*). Another image, although less developed, is found in the thirteenth-century decoration of Ači: the wheel is based on the chalice-shaped surface (*Fig. 2.76*). This unique iconography is

2.74 Martyrdom of St. George on the Wheel, Vani pre-altar cross (sixteenth century).





2.75 Martyrdom of St. George on the Wheel. Dat‘una K‘variani, *Life of St. George in Verse*, 1446/373 (seventeenth century). Courtesy of the National Archives of Georgia, Central Historical Archive.



2.76 Martyrdom of St. George on the wheel (late thirteenth century). Church of St. George of Ači.

echoed in the encomium to St. George by Priest Theodula: “George, who poured wine into a chalice, which is the blood of martyrdom and he mixed it for the faithful and made them drunk with the fiery spirit.”²¹²

An interesting iconographic solution to the same scene is the composition of the wheel of Ugvali (fifteenth century) (Fig. 2.77), whose circular shape resembles a cross inscribed inside a sphere. The impression is further enhanced by floral decorations inscribed at the intersection of the cross’s arms, which gives the appearance of St. George being crucified on a flourishing cross.

The miracle of the wheel and its eucharistic association evoke the famous miracle of Ilori, documented by the Italian missionary Arcangelo Lamberti and the French traveler Jean Chardin, which



2.77 Martyrdom of St. George on the wheel (fifteenth century). Church of St. George of Ugvali.



2.78 *Lomisi icon, Lomisi treasury.*

supposedly occurred every November 10.²¹³ On the eve of the feast, the church of Ilori was locked, and the prince of Odiši, along with his men and bishops, sealed the doors. The following morning, upon opening the doors, the prince, priests, and bishops discovered a sacrificial bull inside, allegedly brought there by St. George himself.²¹⁴ It is reported that even Muslim Turks came to witness this miracle. The meat of the slaughtered bull was distributed among the people and preserved for the entire year, as it was believed to have healing properties. The bull's horns were gilded and adorned with precious stones by the Prince of Samegrelo.²¹⁵ Thus, the miracle of Ilori, featuring the sacrificial bull, is perceived as a zoomorphic symbol of Christ's sacrifice. As noted previously, this miracle also inspired a distinctly Georgian representation of the imagery of St. George.²¹⁶

The firm association of Christ and St. George, engrained in Georgian vernacular Christian tradition, can be witnessed by another important shrine of St. George of Lomisi. The origin story of this shrine recounts the Georgians' deliverance from the Khorezmians by an icon of St. George placed on a bull's back. The sacrificial bull featured in this story was also called a lion (Lomisi), thus enriching this story with the symbolism of lion.²¹⁷ The meaning of lion is multi-layered and ambivalent.²¹⁸ In the *Physiologos* lion is called the king of the beasts and stands for



2.79 *Lemi banner. Dimitri Ermakov's photo.*



2.80 *St. George and prophet Jonas (thirteenth century). Head of the Lemi banner. Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography.*

the image of Christ encompassing the symbolism of Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.²¹⁹ These symbolic links can explain the origin and function of the repoussé liturgical item known as the Lomisi Icon (*Fig. 2.78*), which, with its unusual shape, reminds us the “Banner of Lemi,” a lion-shaped textile banner attached to a pole (*Fig. 2.79*), whose top is adorned by the images of St. George, the Archangel and St. Jonas (*Fig. 2.80*).²²⁰

It is worth noting that the feast of Lomisi (Lomisoba) was not celebrated in November but on the day of Georgia’s conversion to Christianity and the feast of the Holy Cross of Mtskheta, which points to deeper ties between St. George and the Georgian Church.

2.9. ST. GEORGE’S HAGIOGRAPHIC CYCLES

Many Georgian churches are decorated with hagiographic cycles of individual saints (the Mother of God, John the Baptist, Sts. Demetrios, Barbara, and Eustathios). Since the eleventh century, it has become increasingly common to spread the narrative cycle across the entire interior of churches instead of decorating them partially. Wide and spacious walls allowed for freer and more extensive narratives. The popularity of narrative decorations that became particularly popular in the Orthodox world since the eleventh century coincides with the rise of the cult of St. George in Georgia, stimulating the creation of the extended cycles. George, in this respect too, is exceptional, with a particularly large number of churches visually narrating his life and martyrdom.²²¹ Some of the earliest and most outstanding examples of such cycles are found on the monuments of Svaneti. The only surviving church where St. George’s life is the only theme of the church’s (except the sanctuary) decorative program is the church of St. George of Hadiši (Upper Svaneti). The decoration of Hadiši is usually dated to the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century and includes two of the most typical and outstanding scenes from St. George’s life: the rescue of the princess and the return of the youth.²²²

2.9.1. THE RESCUE OF THE PRINCESS

In Eastern Christian art, especially at an early stage, the rescue of the princess appears relatively rarely among the scenes from George's life (some of the notable examples are Old Ladoga, in Russia (twelfth century), the church of Anargyroi of Kastoria (1170–80), and the church of St. George of Lampini on Crete (twelfth century), becoming popular at a relatively later date.²²³ It is not typical of Western art and started to appear mostly during the Crusades, reflecting the court tastes and aesthetic principles of the era.²²⁴

The situation is diametrically opposite in medieval Georgia. The episode which is commonly referred to as the "Miracle of Lassia" is one of the most popular motifs of medieval Georgian art, appearing virtually in all of its media: monumental art, manuscript illuminations, repoussé metalwork, and embroidery. Georgian art has preserved a unique enamel sample as well (*Fig. 2.81*).

Christopher Walter argues that Georgia was the place of its textual as well as iconographic origin. The episode of the rescue of the princess first appears in the eleventh-century Georgian manuscript from Jerusalem (MS *Jer. Georg. 2*), and only later, in the twelfth century, in Byzantine and western literature.²²⁵ Lazarev, however, points to an oral source of this miracle, arguing that it must have existed much earlier, in the ninth century, and was written down at a later date.²²⁶

The plot of the miracle of Lassia is as follows: in the kingdom of an idolator king, Selinos, a dragon occupied the lake near the city of Lassia. The citizens regularly sacrificed their children to the dragon. On the king's order, the last person to be sacrificed was his own daughter. On that same day, when the princess was supposed to be delivered to the dragon, St. George was passing by. He stopped near the lake, where he saw the saddened maiden. The maiden told the saint everything and begged him to leave and save himself. Then the dragon appeared. The warrior saint prayed to Christ and made a sign of the cross on the dragon, who miraculously turned into a meek and obedient creature. Then, the saint took the maiden's belt and tied it to the monster. The maiden led the tamed dragon into the city. The miracle was followed by Lassia's conversion to Christianity.²²⁷ Some scholars identify in this story an echo of an episode from the *Shahna-*



2.81 *Liberation of the princess* (fifteenth century). Enamel. Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut. Photo by Dror Maayan.



2.82 *Liberation of the princess* (early twelfth century). Church of St. George of Hadiši.

meh,²²⁸ whereas others see a universal theme of a knight saving a maiden (e.g., the myth of Theseus and Andromeda). Lazarev argues that the miracle of Lassia is derived from the dragon-slaying image of St. George and that both motifs originate from the same literary source. The image of the dragon-slaying saint is, according to the scholar, an abridged version of the episode with the maiden.²²⁹ Ekaterina Privalova disagrees, suggesting that the two images are entirely unrelated.²³⁰

As pointed out above, the earliest image of this scene is in the church of St. George of Hadiši (Upper Svaneti) (Fig. 2.82). Here the Miracle of Lassia is depicted in a well-lit, easily visible and spacious section of the church. The scene occupies the entire north wall of the church. St. George is mounted on a white horse, while the princess, a large crowned figure dressed in a crimson dress and pointing her hand toward the city of Lassia, is leading the dragon. The importance of the image is highlighted by a light gray-bluish sky and bright yellow ground. The brightness of ochre and intense crimson accentuates the composition even further, making it a dominant scene in the entire decoration. The composition is bordered by a wide, so-called ladder-like ornament (53 cm. in height), which is substantially elevated (begin-

ning nearly at 1 meter above the ground level), giving it an even deeply solemn feeling.

The city is represented fairly schematically, as it was common for the age—a simple structure with a wall and a gate. The scene is made even livelier by the figure of the messengers—one has his head stuck out of the gate, and the other is turned toward the observer, pointing the hand toward the miracle and at the same time moving toward the city. The scene also features the traditional image of the king and the queen. Privalova specifically addresses the depiction of the horse's face, which became traditional in this scene. It is $\frac{3}{4}$ turned, has accentuated almond-shaped eyes, and a very anthropomorphic look, resembling a human portrait.²³¹

Jilda Iosebidze suggests that this version of the rescue of the princess may be exclusively Georgian, since in Byzantine counterparts, the scene unfolds against the background of a landscape or architecture, and the rescued princess is an element of this entourage. By contrast, in the Georgian samples, the princess and the city are accentuated separately to emphasize their centrality in the narrative.²³² In Byzantine images, the scene is divided into two parts: St. George, on the one hand, and the maiden at the city on the other, whereas the Georgian scenes are tripartite: with St. George, the maiden, and the city. Although in Georgian art we encounter some Byzantine-type images as well, this local version is far more dominant.²³³

Such an accentuation of the princess in Georgian samples creates symbolic and iconographic allusions to the Mother of God.²³⁴ Similar allusions appear in many literary versions of the martyrdom of St. George. Especially in Georgian versions, the parallels from the New Testament are particularly abundant. An allusion to the Old Testament prefiguration of the Mother of God transpires in the episode where the princess is prepared: "...and he dressed his daughter in royal porphyry and prepared her as a bride."²³⁵ Apparently these visual and linguistic associations have determined the wide symbolic range of the princess, since some see in her Queen Alexandra, whereas others see her as a symbol of the Church (The Bride of Christ).²³⁶ Liana Kvirikashvili explains the particular interest that the hymnographers have expressed toward this figure through her association with the Theotokos.²³⁷ It is perhaps not surprising that in Bulgarian literature, the princess is called Mary.²³⁸ Thus, this image has been interpreted in a wide

range as Queen Alexandra, the Church, or a personification of Christianity, whereas they see the dragon as a traditional symbol of evil and paganism.²³⁹

The ecclesiological context of the scene is conveyed in the thirteenth-century decorative program of Ači (Guria). The artist of Ači offered an entirely novel solution to the scene, depicting the entry into the city of Lassia and the handing over of the girdle independently (*Figs. 2.83; 2.84*).²⁴⁰ The composition has only a partially visible Greek inscription: (St. George and then... everyone believed).²⁴¹ To the best of our knowledge, such an ex-



2.83 *Liberation of the princess and giving the girdle to the princess (late thirteenth century). Church of St. George of Ači.*



2.84 *Entry into Lassia (late thirteenth century). Church of St. George of Ači.*

tended version of the composition of the miracle of Lassia is unique. Iosebidze explains this solution through the tradition of pairing the miracle of Lassia with the scene of the deliverance of the youth in medieval Georgian art. Its expansion into two scenes can also be explained by the tendency toward more narrative expressionism in the era. However, the fact that the artist has specifically highlighted the handing over of the belt must point to the exceptional importance of this episode. The scene of the mir-

2.85 *Hetoimasia, Pentecost and the scenes from St. George's life (late thirteenth century)*. Church of St. George of Ači.



acle of the Lassia is also highlighted by its scale; it is depicted as a single register on the entire surface of the well-lit west wall and is equal in size to the scenes of the Pentecost and Hetoimasia (*Fig. 2.85*). Thus, the scene, placed next to the Pentecost, the scene conveying the birth of the earthly church, transcends the life of St. George and calls the observer for a wider ecclesiological interpretation.

In his interpretation of ecclesiastical symbolism, Basil of Caesarea examines the semantic significance of girdles within ecclesiastical attire. He refers to them as holy girdles and describes their function as a restraining force against passions and a symbol of asceticism.²⁴² In this context, the girdle or belt serves as a tool for defeating and subduing sin, personified here by the dragon. For instance, in Mravalžali, St. Theodore is depicted taming the dragon bound with a belt (see T. Dadiani's chapter). Another iconographic detail supports a similar interpretation: it is common to portray the horses of warrior saints with their tails tied, which is typically understood as a symbol of victory over passions and reflects the symbolism of the girdle of Lassia.²⁴³

The reading of the miracle of Lassia and its ecclesiastical symbolism becomes even more transparent considering its genetic relationship with the scene of the Entry into Jerusalem. Its general schema stems from this Christological scene and is related to it not only iconographically but also in terms of its content (a triumphal entry into the city and its conversion and liberation, which encapsulates the symbolism of the heavenly Jerusalem). Therefore, in Georgian monuments, the Miracle of Lassia is commonly paired with the Entry into Jerusalem, where the city of Lassia is a symbol of Jerusalem.²⁴⁴

The fifteenth-century church of Uğvali (Lower Svaneti) creates a more explicit parallel between the city of Lassia and Jerusalem. Marina Kenia has observed that the portrait of the king of Lassia is a copy of a Biblical king from the neighboring scene of the Harrowing of Hell (*Fig. 2.86*).²⁴⁵ Both the king and queen of Lassia are wearing haloes. This scene and the Entry into Jerusalem are paired on the south wall. The miracle of St. George is at least twice the size of the Christological scene and is essentially shown on two registers: the taming of the dragon and the image of the princess are placed in the lower register, whereas the city itself is above it and is striking with its architectural details and scale, making it the most dominant section of the decoration.

2.86 *Liberation of the princess* (fifteenth century).
Church of St. George of
Ugvali.



This association is even more candid in another church in Lower Svaneti, the thirteenth or fourteenth-century decoration of the church of St. George of Saqdari (Fig. 2.87).²⁴⁶ The large image of the miracle of Lassia is placed underneath the Entry into Jerusalem. The two compositions are shown on two large segments of the north wall, divided by pilasters. In the first segment is St. George slaying the dragon, accompanied by an identificatory inscription, whereas the second segment shows the city of Lassia. The two segments are divided by the crowned princess on the pilaster who is turned toward the sanctuary with the in-

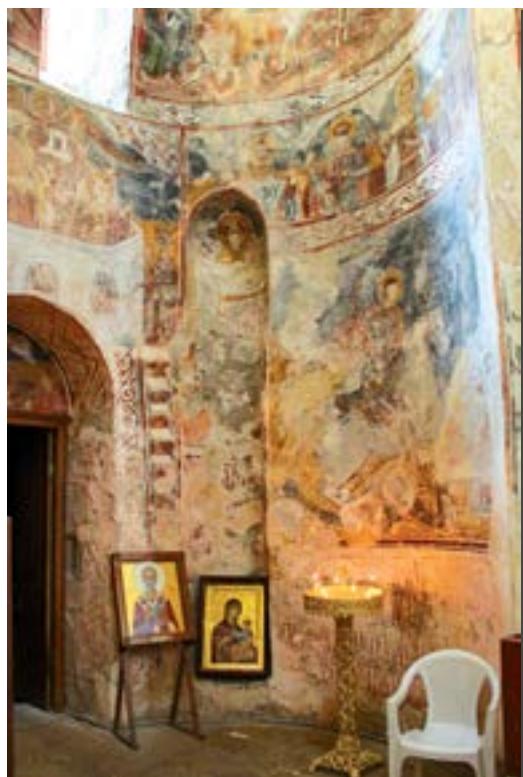
2.87 *Entry into Jerusalem, liberation of the princess* (thirteenth–fourteenth century). Church of St. George of Saqdari.



scription “Lassia.” Above this composition is Entry into Jerusalem, with Christ on an ass in one segment and the depiction of Jerusalem in another. In the middle, on the pilaster, are shown the youths who witnessed Christ’s divinity. Among the individuals greeting the Messiah in Jerusalem, one man with an impressive head garment and greeting Jesus with raised hands stands out in particular. He seems to be the Prophet Zechariah, whose words (Zech 9:9) were famously considered a prophecy of this event.²⁴⁷ The crowned princess of Lassia, depicted in a crimson dress on the pilaster, appears as a certain embodiment of Zechariah’s prophecy, alluding to the “daughter of Zion and daughter of Jerusalem.” The fact that the princess of Lassia is depicted on the pilaster, a place normally allocated to saints, emphasizes this symbolic association.

The triumphal and symbolic meaning of the miracle of Lassia is conveyed in the south apse of the Church of Nikorcminda, where it appears next to the Resurrection of Lazarus and the Entry into Jerusalem (Fig. 2.88). The central image of this apse is the youths of Babylon, a symbolic representation of the Resurrection, whereas the culmination of the conch is the Transfiguration, which can be considered a reprisal of the theme of the Transfiguration and warrior saints on the facade of the same church.

This symbolic context of the miracle of Lassia is conveyed even more vividly in Western European images, where in the same scene, in the background, it is common to show the princess with a lamb on a leash (Fig. 2.89), which further accentuates the ecclesiological symbolism of Christ’s sacrifice. An outstanding example is the image of St. George at the Kunstmuseum Basel, where the rescue of the princess is paired with the slaying of the dragon. In the background, the princess wearing a crimson dress is leading a lamb on a leash. The early sixteenth-century image of the Museum of Art in Hamburg shows a similar image. The artist has highlighted the princess marching triumphantly toward the city and leading a dragon with a girdle. In addition,



2.88 *Liberation of the princess* (seventeenth century). Church of St. Nicholas of Nikorcminda.

2.89 St. George slaying the dragon and the liberation of the princess (1590). Church of Zweisimmen, Canton of Bern.



we can observe a separate image with the princess and the lamb forming part of this scene.

An unusual iconographic solution to the miracle of Lassia is the now-lost decoration of Kldemagala (Shida Kartli). The scene has only survived through a copy (Fig. 2.90) The dwellers of the city shown at the entrance are all women, unlike the traditional depiction of men, women and children. The group of women evokes the traditional image of the Myrrhbearers or “Daughters of Jerusalem” from the Gospel who followed Christ and announced his resurrection (Luke 24:10; Mark 15:40–41). In addition, the image shows two crowned figures, both women, unlike the tra-

2.90 Liberation of the princess (twelfth century), copy of the lost scene from the Church of St. George of Kldemagala. Drawing by Teimuraz Japaridze.



ditional king and queen. A probable key to this iconographic solution is Katholikos Nikoloz I Gulaberisže's *Homily on Svetic'xoveli* (probably late twelfth century) which discusses the role of women in Georgia's conversion and explains the reasons why God chose a woman (St. Nino) to illuminate Georgia. The homily also addresses the contemporaneous claim that Georgia is the Lot of the Mother of God.²⁴⁸ The katholikos explains that, among other reasons, the women were the first to witness Christ's resurrection. Antony Eastmond suggests that the katholikos raised the issue of female apostolicity to justify Queen Tamar's reign in her own right, which required rigorous legitimization. Thus, Gulaberisže's homily indirectly presents the female monarch as a legacy of this divine dispensation.²⁴⁹ With this context in mind, the image of Kldemagala may be understood as a reflection of Georgia's immediate political and religious state of affairs.²⁵⁰

Another noteworthy interpretation of the Miracle of Lassia is the facade relief of the church of Niabi (1682) (Fig. 2.91). The relief shows a fairly unusual iconographic detail: the princess has her foot placed in the mouth of the tamed dragon. This detail arguably conveys an allusion to the "new Eve" – the Virgin Mary who tramples the serpent. An original version of this scene is shown in the embroidery of the Gelat'i sakkos (eighteenth century) (Fig. 2.92), where the saved princess is standing atop a rock, as a symbolic allusion to the Church.



2.91 *Liberation of the princess* (1682).
Church of St. George of Niabi.



2.92 *Liberation of the princess* (eighteenth century).
Gelat'i sakkos. Georgian National Museum.

As pointed out above, Georgian visual art knows a certain synthetic image of the slaying of the dragon and the miracle of Lassia, where the two themes are represented together, for example, in the churches of the above-mentioned Saqdari (late thirteenth-early fourteenth century) and Tabakini (sixteenth century). The former, however, depicts the slaying of the dragon, whereas the latter shows Diocletian. In the decoration of Tabakini, in front of the massive figure of the emperor-slayer stands a haloed figure. Irina Mamaiašvili argues that this damaged image belongs to the princess of Lassia.²⁵¹ The red garment typical of this scene supports this identification. Therefore, the artist of Tabakini unites these two themes and makes the traditional triumphant image part of the Miracle of Lassia.

In the chapel of Tsalenjikha, the Miracle of Lassia shows both the slaying of the dragon and the liberation of the youth (probably sixteenth century) (Fig. 2.93). Within the cycle of St. George, this scene is particularly accentuated and stands apart on the north wall, dominating the entire decoration. In this dynamic, lively image, St. George is slaying the dragon with a spear, whereas the dragon has its tail tied around George's legs. The artist made sure to depict the view of the city of Lassia, the figures of the king and queen, as well as the boy sitting on the horse behind St. George.

2.93 *St. George slaying the dragon and liberation of the princess and the youth (sixteenth century?). Church of the Savior of Tsalenjikha. The annex of Manuč'ar.*



A similar hybrid version is shown in the decoration of Č'ukuli and Nakuraleši (Fig. 2.94). These themes are also sporadically united in Georgian manuscript illuminations. In one MS (NCM Q-103), these two scenes are accompanied by the composition of the crowning by the angel and the blessing of St. George by Christ. This synthesis effectively conveys the semantic identity of the triumphant slaying of the Dragon and Diocletian, as shown on the cross of Sadgeri where St. George's triumphant image is depicted four times (Fig. 2.67), as well as the Miracle of Lassia shown on the banner (Fig. 2.1).



2.94 *St. George slaying the dragon and liberation of the princess and the youth (seventeenth century).*
Church of the Archangels of Č'ukuli.

The miracle of Lassia was internalized by Georgian culture to such an extent that it gave birth to multiple legends and lore. Such is, for example, the story of St. George raiding the fortress of *K'ajavet'i*, which recounts the story of St. George kidnapping Samzivari, the daughter of the king of the *K'aj* from the underworld. The rescued woman was Christianized and became a servant of the shrine of St. George.²⁵² This Khevsuretian story essentially repeats the story of St. George and the princess of Lassia, with *K'ajavet'i* replacing the city of Lassia.²⁵³ A similar theme can be identified in the story of the shrine of Lašaris Jvari, where, along with St. George appears a healer named Tamar, a mythological character probably based on the image of the historical queen Tamar. The same story is also reflected in the *Knight in the Panther's Skin*, where the fortress of *K'ajet'i* is

the primary target of the protagonists. The Georgian versions of St. George's life expand the miracle of Lassia with other healing miracles that St. George performs in the city.²⁵⁴

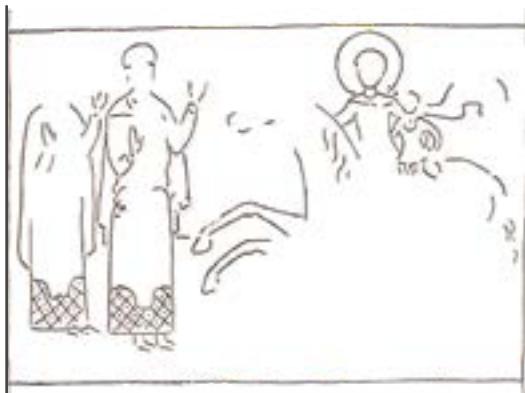
2.9.2. THE RESCUE OF THE YOUTH

Another exceptionally prominent scene in medieval Georgian art is the rescue or return of the youth by St. George.²⁵⁵ One of the factors that determined its popularity was perhaps the prominence of the theme of the liberation of hostages and the victory over enemies in the Georgian redactions of George's *Life*.²⁵⁶ In Georgia, mainly two versions of the deliverance of the Paphlagonian

youth are common. According to the first version, Muslims kidnapped a young servant of the church of St. George and demand that he abandon his faith. The youth refused, leading the Muslims to subject him to heavy labor. Eventually, St. George delivered the youth from servitude and returned him home.²⁵⁷ The second version is more extended: Here the youth is the son of a famed commander, Leon. Due to his old age, Leon is unable to go to war himself so his son goes instead to liberate

their land from the enemies. The boy, however, was captured. His parents prayed to St. George who ultimately rescues the boy and reunites him with his parents on St. George's feast day.

The oldest surviving example of this scene is found in the church of St. George of Hadiši (Fig. 2.95).²⁵⁸ Like the Miracle of Lassia, this scene too occupies the entire wall. There are many iconographic variations on this theme in Georgian art. In Hadiši, St. George appears only with the boy and his parents, which Privalova interprets as a laconic version of the feast of Leon. Whereas Bočorma (c.1130) shows a more extended version (Fig. 2.96), with an architectural background, which, according to Privalova, is a reference to a church. There is only one figure depicted in front of St. George. This composition points to the existence of yet another redaction, which Privalova identifies with St. George's miracle in Cyprus, according to which it was a priest's son who was delivered from bondage and returned to the



2.95 *Rescuing the youth from captivity* (eleventh–twelfth century), schema. Church of St. George of Hadiši.



2.96 *Rescuing the youth from captivity* (c.1130), copy made by Tatiana Sheviakova. Church of St. George of Bočorma. Courtesy of the archive of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation.

church.²⁵⁹ Ikvi (Fig. 2.97) (c.1150) and P‘avnisi (Fig. 2.98) (late twelfth century) show the extended scenes of the feast of Leon. It is this latter version of the story, i.e., the liberation of Leon’s son, that is especially preferred by Georgian artists. However, later examples are also familiar with the so-called “Mytilene redaction,” according to which the city of Mytilene was sacked by the Arabs who kidnapped the boy.²⁶⁰ Georgian wall paintings



2.97 *Rescuing the youth from captivity* (middle of the twelfth century). Church of St. George of Ikvi.



2.98 *Rescuing the youth from captivity* (c.1180), schema. Church of St. George of P‘avnisi.



2.99 *Rescuing the youth from captivity* (early thirteenth century), schema. Church of the Ascension of Ozaani.

know yet another, more autonomous version, which depicts only the boy and the martyr (e.g., Upper Arc‘evi, twelfth century), or the early thirteenth-century decoration of Ozaani (*Fig. 2.99*).

In Byzantine art, the liberation of the youth appears relatively late, by the end of the twelfth century. Grotowski points to Georgian monasteries in the Holy Land as its possible source and identifies its iconographic homeland in Georgia, suggesting that the anti-Muslim context of the imagery has strongly contributed to its spread.²⁶¹

The scene is particularly interesting in the decoration of Ikvi, where it is placed on the north wall, and is paired with the Miracle of Lassia (*Fig. 2.100*). The composition is split into two parts: St. George and the youth are placed on the left section of the wall, while the right part of the composition is occupied by the boy’s family members. The rescued boy presented once more in the middle creates a certain center of gravity for the entire composition. In the right corner, one can observe a group of people with individual features, with their faces simultaneously conveying sadness and joy and gesturing in a lively manner. They are dressed in highly decorated attire and headwear, with ornamental margins and other intricate details, all of which are typical of eleventh- and twelfth-century Georgian art. The artist’s tendency toward expressive and narrative details also transpires in his detailed depiction of the feast table. Privalova suggests that this may be considered a typical example of medieval “nature mort.” Notably, a similar motif of feast is repeated in the same scene in P‘avnisi.

Above the rescue of the boy, the artist has placed a structurally and rhythmically similar Miracle of Lassia. Privalova explains their pairing by their formal similarity and suggests that, thereby, the artist has accentuated the triumphal nature of the decoration even further.²⁶² This solution could have been inspired by the popular tradition in medieval Georgian art of pairing warrior saints. But the pairing of the two compositions can also be explained by their symbolic associations. Both the youth and the princess were returned home from captivity. The city can be identified with Jerusalem or the heavenly fatherland of all Christians, often alluded to in medieval theological literature, which makes the two scenes symbolically identical. If in Ikvi the two scenes are placed on top of each other, in Magalaant‘ church, the two are arranged horizontally on a frieze. Here, the depictions of



St. George are explicitly heraldic: on the opposite corners, the two symmetrical figures of the martyr are depicted marching toward each other.

Grotowski points to the icon of St. George slaying the dragon (c.1650) from the Monastery of Ilori, which also illustrates the scene of the liberation of the youth by St. George—the saint is accompanied by a small figure of the boy, which is referred to in the inscription: “St. George is rescuing the prisoner from captivity in Khorasan.”²⁶³ The traditional toponym mentioned in the original martyrdom account is substituted by a Persian place name, which suggests a historical reference in the scene. A similar appropriation of the cult of St. George appears also in original Georgian writing, where the *Martyrdom* is expanded with local miracles. Some place names and personal names are Georgianized as well.²⁶⁴ Particularly noteworthy is the account of Abuserisze Tbeli, which links the story of the liberation of the boy from Bulgaria with the story of a boy liberated from Ganja and returned to Alaverdi by St. George: „ყრმა ვინმე გამოიყვანა, ვითარცა ძუელ ოდესმე ბორღალეთით, აღიგაცა განძაღო და დასუა ალავედს, კარსა წმიდისა მოწამისასა“. ²⁶⁵ “He brought a certain youth, just like earlier from Bulgaria, took him from

2.100 Rescuing the youth from captivity and the liberation of the princess (middle of the twelfth century). Church of St. George of Ikvi.

Ganja and placed him in Alaverdi, at the door of the holy martyr's church." The iconographic choices made by the artist of the Church of St. George of Alaverdi—the placing of the rescue of the Youth and of the Princess of Lassia (Fig. 2.101) on the tympanum—can arguably be explained by this strong local tradition, i.e., the bringing of the boy to the church's doorsteps.

2.101 *Rescuing the youth from captivity and the liberation of the princess* (seventeenth century).
Cathedral Church of St. George of Alaverdi.



Tbeli recounts yet another miracle of the liberation of the youth—that of the return of a soldier from Persia by St. George.²⁶⁶ This episode is reimagined in Dat‘una K‘variani’s poetic *Life of St. George* (seventeenth century). Instead of Leon, here the boy’s father’s name is Levan and the manuscript illumination depicts the deliverance of Levan’s son from Khorasan (Fig. 2.102).²⁶⁷ In the illustration, apart from the representation of a traditional feast, a church is also discernable, pointing to a synthesis of several different redactions. In the same manuscript, the scene of the rescue of the youth is depicted next to the image of Jonah emerging from the whale (66v, 67r),²⁶⁸ which must be a further allusion to the motif of the resurrection and the return of righteous souls to heavenly Jerusalem.²⁶⁹

On the west annex of the church of Martvili, in the vast program of the Last Judgment (sixteenth century), we unexpectedly see the figure of St. George returning the youth (Fig. 2.103). He is paired with the dragon-slayer St. Theodore. Instead of the tra-



2.102 Rescuing the youth from captivity (seventeenth century). *Dat'una K'variani, life of St. George in Verse, 1446/373*. Courtesy of the National Archives of Georgia, Central Historical Archive.



2.103 *Rescuing the youth from captivity* (sixteenth century).
Church of the
Dormition of Martvili.

ditional heraldic image, the artist of Martvili chose this particular miracle and accentuated it even further: St. George is riding a horse, while the boy is standing in front of him, gesticulating lively, as he does in the other images representing the reunion of the boy with his family (though the family is missing here).²⁷⁰ Nino Chikhladze points to a historical allusion and suggests a connection between the highlighted scene of robbers and bandits within the larger schema of the Last Judgement and the church council convened by Katholikos Evdemon (1543–78), which specifically anathematized bandits and slave traders. The council was attended by the patron of the artist, Zosime Kopaladze.²⁷¹ Therefore, St. George the liberator was conceptualized as a punisher for the sin of the slave trade, which by then had become woefully common in Georgia. Not coincidentally, this scene is also paired with St. Theodore slaying the dragon. Thus, the two seemingly unrelated scenes unite into a single idea of victory over abstract or widely practiced evil.

2.10. THE CYCLE OF ST. GEORGE'S LIFE IN TWELFTH-CENTURY ART

The cult of St. George saw significant growth in Georgia during the twelfth century, likely as a direct consequence of the military successes of the Georgian monarchy, particularly following the decisive battle of Didgori. According to the historian chronicling the reign of David the Builder, St. George visibly led David's armies against the Muslim coalition:

ხელი მაღლისა შეეწეოდა და ძალი ზეგარდმო ფარვი-
და მას და წმ. მოწამე გიორგი განცხადებულად და ყო-
ველთა სახილველად წინაუძღვოდა მას და მკლავითა
თვისითა მოსრვიდა ზედამოწევნულთა უსჭულოთა მათ
წარმართთა. ²⁷²

For the hand of the One on High assisted him, and strength from heaven protected him, and the holy martyr Giorgi, clearly and in the sight of all, guided him and with his own arm destroyed all the impious heathen who fell upon him.”²⁷³

The victory at Didgori proved decisive, not only for Georgia and Caucasia but also for cities like Jerusalem and Antioch. For example, the Chancellor Galterius (c.1114–22) points out that by fighting Il-Ghazi, David essentially defended Jerusalem and the Crusaders.²⁷⁴ In Georgian thought, this triumph became inextricably linked to the veneration of St. George (see Nikoloz Alek-
sidze's introduction).

The study of the church of Ikvi revealed that there are many other churches dedicated to St. George or featuring decorative programs depicting his life in Težami Valley (Kartli). Churches such as Ikvi, Saorbisi, Samočalo, Barnabiani, and P‘avnisi are notably situated close to the Didgori Valley, a connection highlighted by Vakhushti Batonishvili. The triumphant character of these churches, along with their decorative programs, reflects the victory at Didgori. Clearly, this historic event played a crucial role in the proliferation of churches dedicated to St. George and their accompanying iconographic cycles.²⁷⁵

2.10.1. HADIŠI

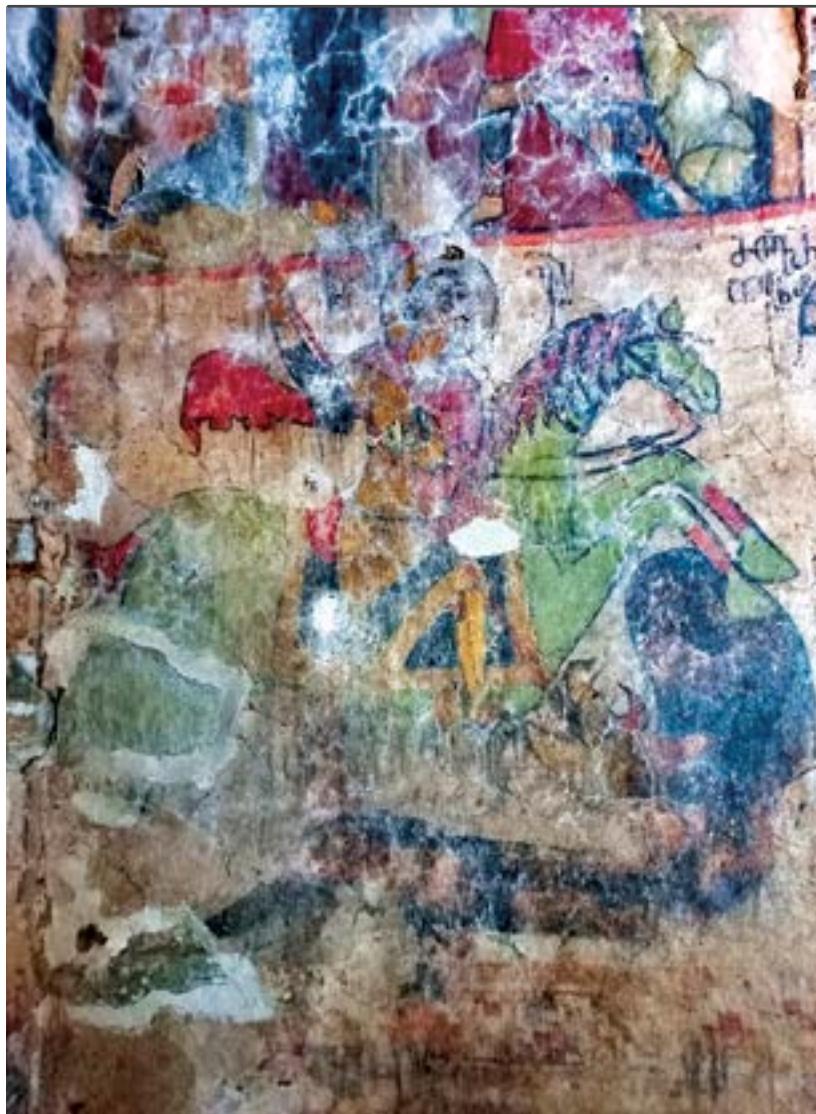
One of the most remarkable examples of the life cycle of St. George is the previously discussed early twelfth-century church of Hadiši, which features another symbolic image related to his life. The west wall displays Christ crowning St. George and St. Theodore. This composition of warrior saints in Hadiši represents the earliest known instance of the coronation of the standing saints in Georgian art (*Fig. 2.104*). The half figure of Christ, positioned above the window, is bathed in golden light, with his halo radiating a vibrant yellow. Both warrior saints are depicted in contrapposto; St. George raises his right hand, pointing his index finger toward Christ. In the same hand, he holds a spear, while his other hand rests on a shield. Christ blesses the warriors while holding a crown.²⁷⁶

2.104 Coronation of Sts. George and Theodore by Christ (eleventh-twelfth century). Church of St. George of Hadiši.



There are several variations of this scene in Georgian iconographic tradition. In some instances, an angel, rather than Christ, is shown crowning the warrior saints. In these compositions, the warrior saint may be represented riding a horse, as seen in Martvili, or the twelfth-century church of St. George in Mzecveri (*Fig. 2.105*).²⁷⁷ In other instances, the saint is standing on his feet, as depicted, e.g., in the church of St. George in Saqdari. In the latter, the angel crowning the saint is accompanied by the blessing hand of God.

2.105 *St. George slaying the dragon and coronation of St. George (twelfth century), detail. Church of St. George of Mzecveri.*



The decoration of the upper register of the north wall in Hadiši has only survived in fragments. A heavily damaged composition in the northwestern section can confidently be identified as the martyrdom on the wheel. This conclusion is supported by the depiction of the wheel's base, represented as three vertical columns, along with a fragmentary yet symmetrical portrayal of two henchmen flanking the wheel.²⁷⁸ In the eastern section, only a small fragment of a foot remains visible. Chakvetadze identifies this scene as St. George's beheading, suggesting that Hadiši is one of the rare churches that depict solely the cycle of its patron saint.

The cycle of St. George within the church resonates with the scene on the facade, which amplifies the triumphant aura of the interior (*Fig. 2.106*). The facade depicts two mounted warrior saints: St. George on a white horse and St. Theodore on a red one, both galloping forwards. Similar to the figures inside, these dynamic representations are positioned high above the ground. The nimbs of both figures nearly reach the church roof. The artist omits the usual ground line, creating an illusion that the two riding warriors, seen near the edge of a ravine, resemble celestial beings charging through the heavens. This impression is further enhanced by the natural setting surrounding the church; the expansive valley filled with birches appears as an integral part of the decorative space. Aneli Volskaia notes that the horses are oriented toward the village, thus emphasizing their protective powers.²⁷⁹

2.106 *Hadiši church of St. George, General view.*



2.10.2. BOČORMA

Given the historical context, it is fitting that some of the most impressive depictions of St. George's cycle are found in twelfth-century art. A prime example of this is the decoration of the Church of St. George in Bočorma, which may have been commissioned by David the Builder himself.²⁸⁰

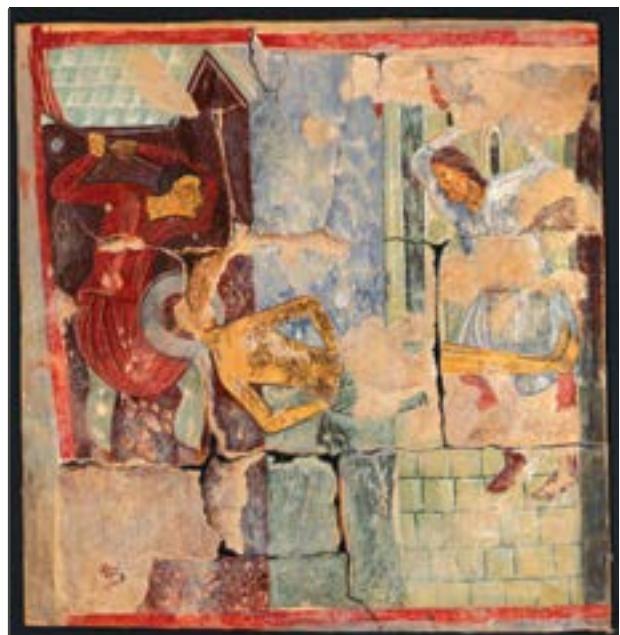
The six-apse church of Bočorma, dating back to the tenth-eleventh centuries, was originally intended as a shrine

to St. George, as indicated by its principal repoussé icon. The church's decoration occurred later, in c.1130, and features a continuous design across the entire interior in uniform registers.²⁸¹ The decoration follows the entire interior in uninterrupted, equal registers. Scenes depicting the life of the patron saint are located in the west apse. The conch displays the presentation of the megalomartyr to Diocletian (*Fig. 2.107*), while the second register illustrates his flagellation (*Fig. 2.108*) and martyrdom on the wheel. The lower register features the beheading and the Miracle of Lassia. Asmat Okropiridze points out that the scenes of St. George's martyrdom in the west apse culminate in the triumphant depiction of the Miracle of Lassia, placed next to the beheading. This arrangement implies that the conclusion of St. George's martyrdom is crowned by the triumph of the Miracle of Lassia, symbolically guiding the warrior into heaven.²⁸²

The theme of the liberation of the youth is represented independently within the church. While most of the cycle's scenes



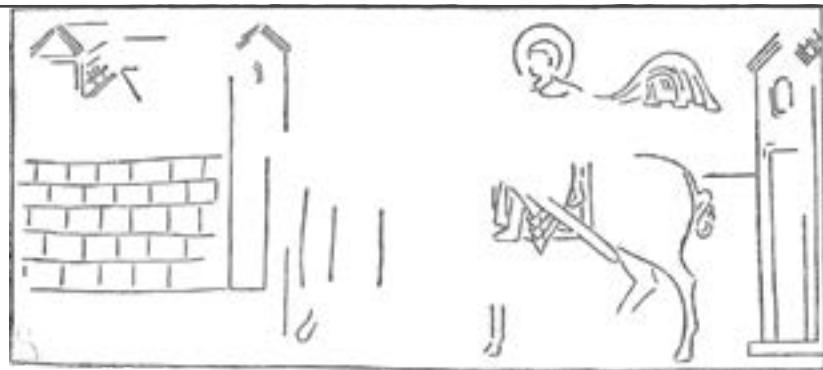
2.107 Interrogation of St. George, beating of St. George, martyrdom on the wheel, the beheading of the martyr, the miracle of Lassia (c.1130), schema. Church of St. George of Bočorma.



2.108 Beating of St. George (c.1130). Church of St. George of Bočorma. Copy made by Tatiana Sheviakova. Courtesy of the Crchive of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation.

are contained in the west apse (*Fig. 2.109*), this pivotal scene is located in the lower register of the southeast apse, where it occupies the entire register. Its scale and positioning suggest it visually “holds” the images above it, depicting Entry into Jerusalem and the Crucifixion. By portraying the liberation of the boy separately, the importance of this scene within the overall cycle is underscored.

2.109 *Rescuing the youth from captivity (c.1130).*
Schema. Boćorma church of St. George.



Triumphant images of the warrior saints appear once more in another apse. In the northwest section, heraldic images of warrior saints are positioned on either side of the door (though these images are now faintly discernible). Thus, the theme of the warrior saints serves as a recurring leitmotif throughout the decoration of Boćorma, spanning three apses and embodying a nature that is both triumphant and celebratory, reflecting the glory and might of David’s era.

2.10.3. NAKIP‘ARI

One of the most striking monuments depicting episodes from the life of St. George was created during the reign of Demetre I, son of David IV the Builder. The decoration of the Church of Nakip‘ari in Upper Svaneti was executed by the “king’s artist” T‘evdore in 1130.²⁸³ Among its many features, the wall paintings are remarkable for their scale, as the Church of Nakip‘ari is considerably larger than the typically small churches found in Svaneti.

Several episodes from St. George’s martyrdom are portrayed; the south wall features scenes of the lime pit, the laceration of

the body, and the beheading (Fig. 2.110). The west wall depicts St. George's martyrdom on the wheel and the destruction of the idols (Fig. 2.111). Here, the scenes are arranged thematically, with scenes of martyrdom leading into scenes of triumph.



One particularly unusual iconographic feature in Nakip'ari is the image of St. Stephen the Protomartyr on the south wall. In Svan art, it is customary to depict St. Stephen outside the altar apse. However, in this instance, Stephen seems to participate directly in the scene of George's beheading, as if performing a rite (Fig. 2.112).²⁸⁴ This unity symbolizes the meeting of the first martyr and the great martyr in heaven, a theme also reflected in literature. In the *Martyrdom of Longinus the Centurion*, as he prepares to die and anticipates his encounter with the Lord, Longinus expresses his hope to meet St. Stephen the Protomartyr: "I will henceforth follow the voice of the first martyr Stephen, whose brilliant voice called me to death: Lord Jesus Christ, accept my soul."²⁸⁵ In this context, Stephen the Protomartyr appears as a helper and protector of martyrs for Christ, serving a similar purpose in Nakip'ari.

2.110 Martyrdom of St. George: lime pit, scraping of the body and beheading (1130). Church of St. George of Nakip'ari.





2.112 Service of St. Stephen proto-martyr and beheading of St. George (1130). Church of St. George of Nakip'ari.



2.113 Deesis (1130). Church of St. George of Nakip'ari.

T‘evdore, the king’s artist, encapsulates another symbolic aspect in his work: in Christian tradition, St. Stephen is recognized as the first saint to behold “the Lord’s glory.” This symbolic allusion is accentuated by the prominent and monumental depiction of the “Majestas Domini” in the decoration of the altar apse (Fig. 2.113).

The most striking image in Nakip‘ari is the large scene of the wheel on the west wall. In terms of importance and prominence, this scene rivals the “Majestas Domini” on the opposite side in the altar apse. In medieval art, there are two iconographic versions of the wheel composition: a laconic version that depicts the megalomartyr tied to the wheel and mostly flanked by two henchmen, and an extended version that includes additional executioners as well as members of the king’s entourage.

The scene in Nakip‘ari is further expanded, featuring not only Diocletian and Magnetios but other members of the royal court as well. This depiction is accompanied by an unusual caption: “On November 10, the martyrdom of George, when he was nailed to the wheel of a cart.”²⁸⁶ The inscription next to Diocletian states: “The ungodly king Diocletian tortures St. George.”²⁸⁷ Above the scene of the wheel is a particularly dramatic and expressive portrayal of the destruction of the idols (Fig. 2.114). This episode is widespread in Georgia and is represented in numerous versions. Alongside the more typical extended portrayals, which include the king and his entourage (e.g., Nakip‘ari or the sixteenth-century decoration in the church of St. George in Gelat‘i), there are more succinct versions of the same scene (e.g., the twelfth-century decoration of the Kalaubani church), where

2.114 *Destruction of the idols by St. George (1130).*
Church of St. George of
Nakip‘ari.



George stands alone before the column of the idol (Fig. 2.115). It is noteworthy that the artist of Kalaubani chose this single moment from the entirety of St. George's life.²⁸⁸

The scene of the destruction of idols also appears on icons and cross decorations. However, in Nakip'ari, it is positioned alongside the episode of the wheel and is essentially an integral narrative component inspired by the text of the *Martyrdom*. After enduring his passion on the wheel, resurrected George desecrates and demolishes the idols. Consequently, the entire west wall can be interpreted as a grand composition dedicated to the martyrdom on the wheel. This episode is the key element of the overall narrative, with its scale and centrality reflecting the exceptional significance of the feast of the martyrdom on the wheel among the Georgians. St. George's story continues on the north wall, where a massive image of St. George and St. Theodore can be seen. The dynamic figures of the warrior saints occupy the entire first register of the painting, responding to the cycle of St. George depicted on the opposite side.

2.10.4. IKVI

Another noteworthy example of the St. George cycle is found in the Church of Ikvi (c.1150). Here, the hagiographic cycle is situated in the north transept of the church. Ikvi adheres to the classical decorative system, placing thematically independent cycles in each transept. As a result, St. George's cycle in the north transept contrasts with the Christological cycle on the opposite side. This arrangement also reflects a growing tendency to "equate" the Christological and St. George scenes.

The initial episode in Ikvi features the nearly entirely lost scene of George's interrogation by Diocletian. Below it, there are paired compositions depicting the miracles of Lassia and the rescue of the youth, accompanied by the inscription: „აქა მოჰვა-რა წ~6 გ~o გყოვ ბრდლთით მშობელთა მისთა“ (Here, St. George



2.115 Baptism, Transfiguration, destruction of the idols, St. Demetrios (middle of the twelfth century), schema. Kalaubani church of St. George.

brought the hostage from Bulgaria to his parents) (*Fig. 2.116*).²⁸⁹ On the west wall of the north transept, two scenes are presented: the martyrdom with the hot shoe and the miracle involving the Saracens (*Fig. 2.117*). The upper section of the east wall is entirely stripped, while the second register depicts the martyrdom on the wheel, beneath which lies the unique image of the devil being enclosed within a mountain (*Fig. 2.73*).

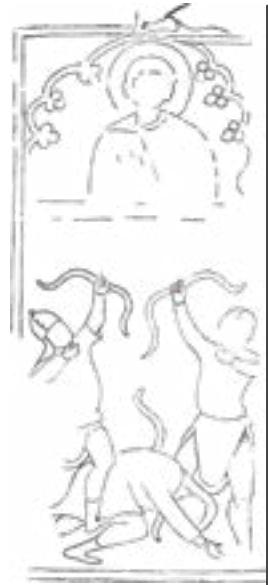


2.116 The interrogation of St. George, the liberation of the princess, rescuing the youth from captivity (c.1150), schema. Church of St. George of Ikvi.

2.117 Martyrdom with the iron shoes, the miracle of the Saracens (c.1150), schema. Church of St. George of Ikvi.

The cycle includes scenes that can be regarded as uniquely Georgian and are certainly absent from Byzantine art of the period. One such scene is the miracle of the Saracens punished by their own arrow, which is found in the eleventh-century redaction of St. George's martyrdom account. This scene only appears in a few post-Byzantine hagiographic icons, predominantly from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, making it so rare that Mark-Weiner does not even mention it in the catalog of the St. George cycle.²⁹⁰

The episode recounts the desecration of the icon of St. George by the Saracens.²⁹¹ The Saracens raided George's shrine with the intention of desecrating it. Yet the arrows they launched turned back on them. The images of Ikvi and P'avnisi are the earliest surviving depictions of this episode. Notably, these twelfth-century images provide two different iconographic versions of this scene (Fig. 2.118). In Ikvi, the icon represents a standing George, whereas in P'avnisi, St. George is half-figured. The figures of the Saracens are also different, as is the architectural background. P'avnisi ignores it altogether, whereas in Ikvi, the scene is placed against an architectural background. The thematic variation on this single scene in these neighboring monuments (both churches are located in the T'ejami valley) can be regarded as evidence of its Georgian provenance. Alongside the general anti-Muslim sentiments conveyed in this scene, it also carried dogmatic connotations. During Iconoclasm, John Damascene specifically discusses the history of "wounded" icons as a concept of image theology.²⁹² The miracle of the Saracens encapsulates this context even visually. It conveys the impression that under the arch is not an icon but the saint himself. It is for this reason that earlier, Natalia Tolmachevskaia considered it a figure of St. George and not an icon standing under the arch. For Georgia, where the tradition of the veneration of icons had a long and uninterrupted history, unlike Byzantium, this subject was particularly important.²⁹³ Especially, since one of the contested issues in religious debates with the neighboring non-Chalcedonian Armenian church was the veneration of icons.²⁹⁴ Therefore, in this miracle associated with St. George's martyrium, we may identify specific historical contexts, such as a polemical response against Armenian allegations.



2.118 *Miracle of the Saracens (c.1180). Schema. Church of St. George of P'avnisi.*

2.10.5. K'URAŠI

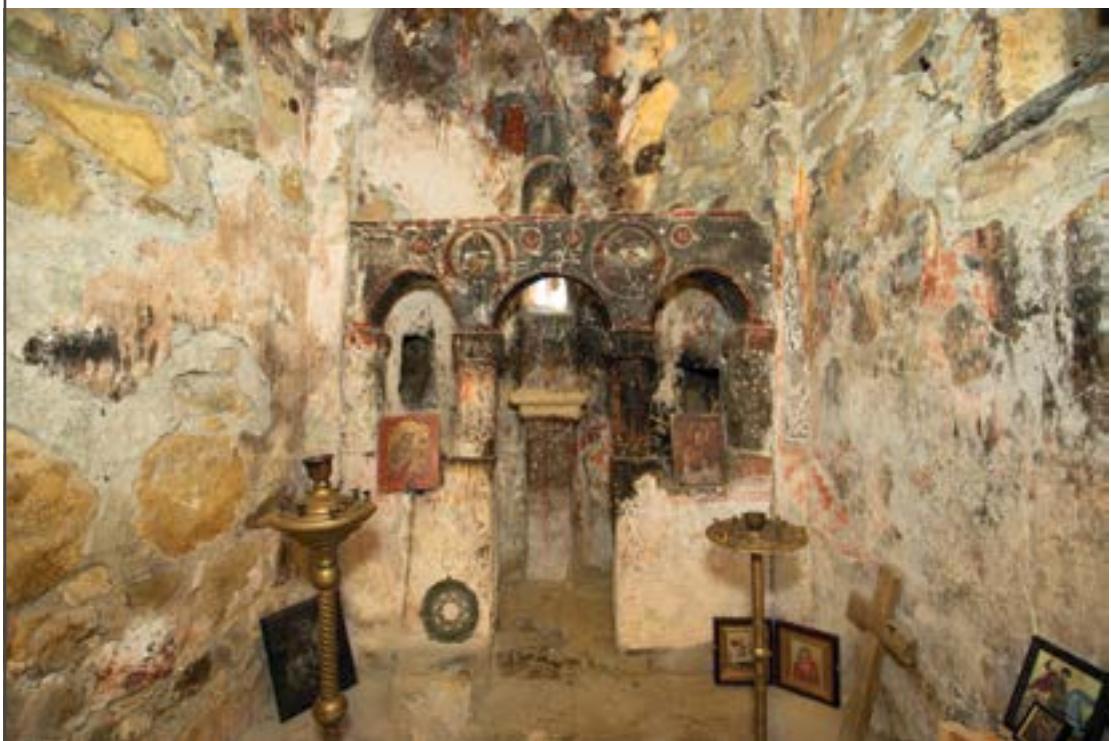
The decoration of the church of K'uraši in Upper Svaneti is almost contemporaneous with Ikvi.²⁹⁵ Renée Schmerling dates it to the twelfth century, whereas Nino Kitovani dates it to the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries.²⁹⁶ The church is very small, allowing only a limited number of scenes. On the south wall, we can identify a severely damaged Miracle of Lassia, placed next to the Crucifixion. St. George's cycle continues on the west wall, with the scenes of beheading and burial (Fig. 2.119).

Despite the extensive damage, the surviving fragments are still impressive and betray the high artistic quality of the paintings. St. George's rich attire, adorned with pseudo-Kufic ornamentation, is particularly striking. In the church of K'uraši is stored a small bronze disk, which the locals symbolically identify with St. George's wheel and which, as a sacred object, is still used in the blessing of families as well as oathtaking (Fig. 2.120).

2.119 *Beheading of St. George, burial of St. George (twelfth century). Church of St. George of K'uraši.*



2.120 *Kuraši church of St. George. General view of the interior with a symbolic wheel.*



2.10.6. CEDISI

Surprisingly, the decoration of the Church of Cedisi, located in the heart of Kartli, has remained relatively unknown to scholars until recently. This church is a part of the strategically significant fortification system in the Tana Valley and is fully adorned. Neli Chakvetadze has recently identified both the donor and several scenes from the life of St. George, numbering between five to seven distinct scenes.²⁹⁷

In the altar apse is a laconic scene of the Deesis, which, by its scale and a compositional schema (half figures), evokes the decorative programs of Svaneti. Upon entering the church from the south, visitors encounter a heraldic image of warrior saints with the praying donor standing beside them. (*Fig. 2.121*). The cycle of St. George moves clockwise from the southeast section, where a severely damaged image of a standing warrior saint can be seen, along with a surprisingly well-preserved shield and sheath. This figure is likely St. George, the church's patron saint. The cycle of St. George's *Life* follows this figure.

Above the door is a badly damaged composition featuring a half-figure with an architectural background. Chakvetadze argues that this is the image of St. George in prison (*Fig. 2.122*). If identified correctly, this would be the earliest surviving portrayal

2.121 *Warrior saints and donor Kut'lu Arslan (c.1180). Schema. Church of St. George of Cedisi.*





2.122 *St. George in prison (c.1180), schema. Church of St. George of Cedisi.*

of this scene in Georgia.²⁹⁸ The artist has positioned the scene along the south door's opening, so the door frame is interpreted as part of the prison cell's architecture.²⁹⁹

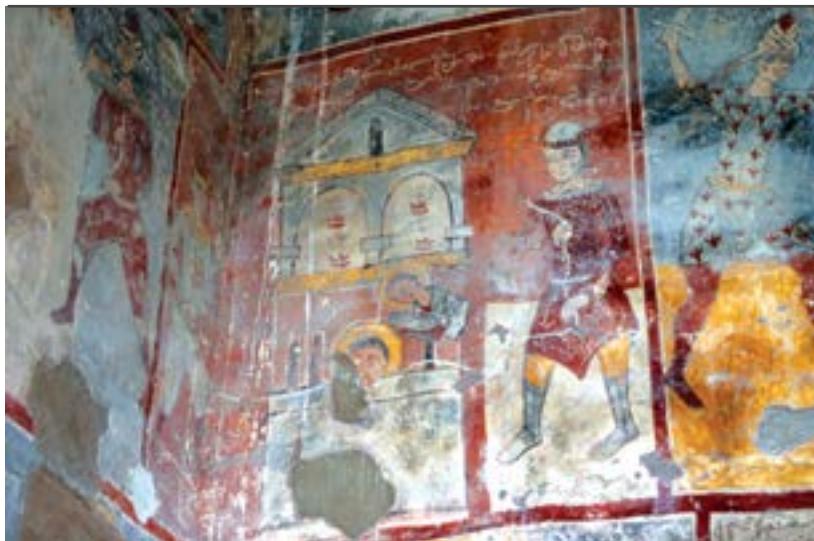
There are several variations on the theme of St. George in prison in Georgian monumental art. For example, in Ubisa, it appears next to the laceration of the body. In this fourteenth-century image, St. George is depicted unusually (Fig. 2.123). Against

an architectural background resembling a theater's backstage, St. George's bare upper body is depicted with a rock on his abdomen. The composition essentially unites two episodes: St. George in prison and his martyrdom with the stone. This synthesis is also explained by the caption: "Here St. George was thrown in jail and a stone was placed on his chest."³⁰⁰ In the sixteenth-century church of Tabakini, the prison is depicted as a vaulted tower, with St. George's head visible as though looking from a window (Fig. 2.124). Henchmen armed with ropes flank the tower (one henchman is on the west wall, while the central part of the scene is depicted on the north wall). Above St. George, his saving angel appears, accompanied by the inscription: "St. George was tortured in a cell; an angel came and healed him."³⁰¹

The next scene of Cedisi is the destruction of idols by St. George, an exceptionally common motif in medieval Georgian

2.123 *St. George in the prison, scraping of St. George (fourteenth century). Church of St. George of Ubisa.*





2.124 *St. George in the prison (sixteenth century).*
Church of St. George of Tabakini.

art that conveys the idea of the triumph of true faith. The scene can be identified by George's extended arm and characteristic architectural background.³⁰²

The martyrdom of St. George on the wheel is prominently featured in the upper register of the west wall, positioned above a large scene of the Annunciation (Fig. 2.125). This depiction adheres to the traditional representation of the scene, with the torturing wheel placed centrally and echoing the window's circular shape. Two henchmen are symmetrically arranged on either side of the wheel. The artist cleverly utilizes the conical shape of the window as a structural element, positioning the physical opening of the window as the base of the torturing wheel.³⁰³ The unity of the scenes of Annunciation and the martyrdom on the wheel rests on symbolic associations: the former represents the opening scene of the divine dispensation, while the latter marks victory over death and resurrection. In this visual unity, Neli Chakvetadze also sees verbal parallelism, namely in the word "rejoice!" The angel's declaration, "Rejoice, George!" evokes parallelism with similar words by the archangel Gabriel from the Annunciation.³⁰⁴

On the north wall of the church, two heavily damaged figures of warrior saints on horseback are depicted: dragon-slaying Theodore and Diocletian-slaying George. Next to them, without a separating line, is the donor, whom, based on the inscription ("this is Arslan, son of K'urdni"), Chakvetadze identifies with Qut'lu-Arslan, the treasurer at the court of Giorgi III, and dates the decoration to the 1180s.³⁰⁵



2.125 *Annunciation, martyrdom on the wheel, St. Demetrios (c.1180), schema. Church of St. George of Cedisi.*

Thus, the donor is located under the scene of St. George's beheading on the vault's north-eastern section. He has his arm extended in a praying pose, as if in addressing the martyr presented above.³⁰⁶ Chakvetadze suggests that the vault was also occupied by a cycle of St. George's life and therefore we must not expect a Christological cycle there. Naturally, the scene of the prison cannot be the initial scene of St. George's cycle. Most of the cycles begin with the scene of the interrogation of St. George or the distribution of alms. The existence of a scene of St. George's confession of faith in Diocletian's presence here is supported by the image of St. George in prison on the south wall, which is a logical extension of the narrative. The depiction of St. George's beheading inside the vault suggests that the final scene of the cycle must also be sought there.³⁰⁷

2.10.7. P'AVNISI

Of the same period is the decoration of the church of St. George of P'avnisi, which Ekaterina Privalova dates to the 1180s.³⁰⁸ Here, St. George's cycle is placed in the lower register. The narrative begins on the eastern section of the north wall and proceeds counterclockwise. Five scenes from the martyrdom of George occupy practically the entire first register of the decorative program.

The scenes mostly depict St. George's miracles, and their centrality is determined by their position and prominence in the whole church.³⁰⁹ The principal miracle is the miracle of Lassia, which is placed on the north wall, immediately adjacent to the altar apse. Its importance is accentuated by the scene of the entry into Jerusalem, placed on top of it, and these paired scenes in turn become the epicenter of the entire decorative program (Fig. 2.126).

Unlike the decoration of Ikvi, the composition of P'avnisi is denser and more compact, as well as aligned more vertically. The image of the city, which occupies half of the entire surface, is

particularly outstanding. Privalova calls the lively silhouette—multiple battlements, towers, and gates—a “fantasy of architectural forms.”³¹⁰ Its compositional share is so large that the warrior and the princess are almost squeezed by it. The king and the queen wear typical secular Georgian garments.³¹¹ At the entrance of the city, against the background of the gate, stands a boy who holds a chalice-shaped decorated vessel, something that is absent in all other depictions of this scene.³¹² It could be the case that this iconographic detail is a reflection of the ecclesiastical symbolism of this scene discussed above. Privalova compares the hieratic and celebratory character of P’avnisi’s scene with the epic, seemingly frozen in time, scene of the miracle of Lassia of the church of Old Ladoga (twelfth century).³¹³

Next to the rescue of Lassia, the western section of the north wall is entirely taken by the image of the donors. The laypersons are presented facing St. George as seen in Bet’ania or the decoration of Čule, where the At’abags of Samtskhe are facing St. George.³¹⁴

The donor portrait of P’avnisi can be read as a constituent part of St. George’s cycle (Fig. 2.127), since it is expanded with the scenes of the *Life*. St. George, dressed in a patrician’s rich attire, blesses the lords and their weapons.³¹⁵ Privalova notices that George normally appears in a patrician’s clothing in the scenes from his life, whereas in the donor’s portraits, he is dressed as a soldier. This further accentuates the integrity of the donor’s portrait into the narrative cycle of St. George’s life. The immediate tie of this portrait with St. George’s cycle is further strengthened by the fact that behind the portrait, on the west wall, two images



2.126 *Liberation of the princess (c. 1180), schema.*
Church of St. George of P’avnisi.

2.127 *St. George and the donors (c.1180), schema. Church of St. George of P'avnisi.*



2.128 *Presentation to the temple, Anastasis, Myrrhbearers at the tomb of Christ, St. George rescuing the youth, St. Demetrios and St. Theodore (c.1180), schema. Church of St. George of P'avnisi.*



of warrior saints appear immediately adjacent to the donor's portrait as if continuing the donor's panel. Privalova identifies them as Theodore and Demetrios (Fig. 2.128).³¹⁶

The largest part of the lower register of the west wall is occupied by the scene of the deliverance of the youth. On top of it, we can observe scenes from the resurrection: the harrowing of Hell and the Myrrhbearers. Both compositions are accentuated vertically, which makes the entire west wall perceived as a rhythmic vertical unity (the riding warrior saint, the angel who announces the Resurrection, and even the feast table presented vertically). Consequently, the theme of the rescue of the youth is tied to the subject of the Resurrection.

In the center of the composition appears the image of the mother greeting her child, which introduces an emotional aspect to the composition. Privalova connects this motif with the image of the mother with an arm reaching out in Ikvi and considers it Ikvi's artistic reimagination—the expressive gesticulation in Ikvi is reimagined in P'avnisi as a greeting and meeting of the two.³¹⁷

The next scene in the cycle is the miracle of the punishment of the Saracen, followed by two crucial but now nearly-lost scenes of the scraping of the flesh and the martyrdom on the wheel.³¹⁸ The cycle ends with a lengthy composition of the Dormition of the Mother of God, which adds a triumphal spirit to St. George's cycle. The subject of the Resurrection and salvation seems to be the principal symbolic message of the entire decoration.

2.11. THE CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE OF UBISA AND ITS ICON

Here I would like to discuss one of the most detailed and, from an artistic point of view, exceptional examples of a cycle as represented by the icon of St. George of Ubisa (*Fig. 2.129*). In the centerpiece of the icon (161 × 93 × 4 cm.), we observe a frontal image of the saint standing in Christ's presence, who is painted in the celestial segment. In the left corner of the composition is a small and damaged figure of the kneeling donor. St. George is clothed in a warrior's uniform, consisting of a short tunic and a red cape. In one hand, he holds a spear and the other rests on a shield. The inscription reads: "St. George, the megalomartyr of Ubisa."³¹⁹ The icon of Ubisa is one of the most outstanding icons of the hagiographic genre. Lazarev identifies it as one of the most notable monuments of medieval art.

The compositions illustrating the "Life" as depicted on the frame of the icon differ from the background of the central image. The central figure is set against a deep blue background (which has darkened over time), while the framed scenes feature a golden backdrop, enhancing the figure of the martyr and creating the illusion of actual golden framing.

The narrative starts with the scene of the distribution of alms, followed by various scenes of martyrdom: laceration of the body, St. George in prison, martyrdom on the wheel, and the martyr's resurrection by the angel, culminating in the destruction of the idols. The scenes of martyrdom continue on the opposite frame, which shows the scene of the lime pit, followed by St. George facing Diocletian, flagellation, St. George in the cell, and again St. George facing Diocletian. This composition is depicted oppo-

2.129 *Ubisa vita*
icon of St. George
(probably thirteenth
century). Georgian
National Museum.



site the scene of the wheel, which means that it shows the scene of George's resurrection and healing after the martyrdom on the wheel. The right frame ends with the scene of the raising of the dead by St. George. The lower horizontal kerb depicts the resurrection of the ox. The next scene shows Queen Alexandra facing Diocletian. The cycle ends with the beheading of St. George and his burial.³²⁰ It is noteworthy that in the entire cycle, the interrogation of St. George and defending the true faith is particularly prominent.

The upper segment of the frame is altogether unique. Here too, as is typical of medieval Georgian art, the miracle of Las-sia and the rescuing of the youth are presented at the corners of the frame. The scene of the virgin's rescue appears on the left edge of the icon, while the youth's rescue is depicted on the opposite side. Centrally, however, we encounter an unusual image identified by Nana Burchuladze as the march of St. George and St. Demetrios, along with their meal. These images are positioned between the two miracles of St. George, flanking the triumphant warriors depicted on horseback, serving as central events within the decorative program of the icon's frame.

While the image of St. George and St. Demetrios marching together is found in medieval art, the scene of their meal is unique, with no literary evidence to support such a theme. The cults of St. George and Demetrios developed independently; however, since the tenth century, they have increasingly been depicted side by side as exceptional warrior saints. The image of George and Demetrios sharing a feast likely reflects this trend and symbolizes a celestial banquet (see the chapter on St. Demetrios). The motif of a feast and wedding frequently appears in the Gospels as a reference to the celestial feast, which has also permeated martyrological accounts, where the feast symbolizes eternal life. In St. George's case, this symbolism is particularly fitting: he who tends the land reaps its harvest.³²¹

The image of Ubisa is echoed in Dat'una K'variani's poetic *Life of St. George*, where, before being tied to the wheel, the martyr calls himself a wedding guest on his way to Christ's feast:

თავს უთხრა: გიორგი, ...იქსო ქრისტე მიგელის,
გიო მექორწინე მზანია;
მას აქვს კარი განხმული, სერობად მიდის ყმანია,
კარის დახშვამდე მიმართე, ვერ მიგისწრობენ სხვანია.³²²

He told himself: George, ... Jesus Christ awaits you as a host of the marriage;

He has the door wide open; the lads are heading to the feast,

Hasten, to make it before the door closes, so that others are not there before you.

In the encomium of Priest Theodula, St. George is called Christ's spiritual dining table. "George, Christ's spiritual dining table, on which the host of the apostles and the holy martyrs lay."³²³

Nana Burchuladze suggests that the icon of Ubisa must have been created before the donation of icons by Bablak Lasxišvili to the Ubisa monastery and the creation of its decoration.³²⁴ Burchuladze relates the icon with some of the best specimens of monumental art and icon-painting from the era of Tamar and beyond.³²⁵ The identity of the kneeling donor, dressed in priestly attire, remains unknown, but it is evident that such an expensive icon would have been commissioned by someone of considerable wealth, particularly since the monastery of Ube/Ubisi was founded and supported by the highest echelons of nobility and ecclesiastical elites. Burchuladze suggests that the icon of Ubisa was created toward the end of David Narin's reign or during the reigns of his sons, Vakhtang (1289–92) or Constantine I (1293–1327). It may have served as an adornment for a yet undecorated church.³²⁶

It is noteworthy that St. Demetrios of Thessalonike plays a prominent role in the iconographic program of the Ubisa icon. He emerges as St. George's principal companion and a major protagonist of the cycle, appearing in the climactic scenes of the program. Typically, in hagiographic icons, the episodes of martyrdom begin at the upper horizontal rim and progress clockwise.³²⁷ However, this tradition is set aside here, as that section of the frame is dedicated to scenes of triumph, which are presented as the culminating moment of the entire cycle.

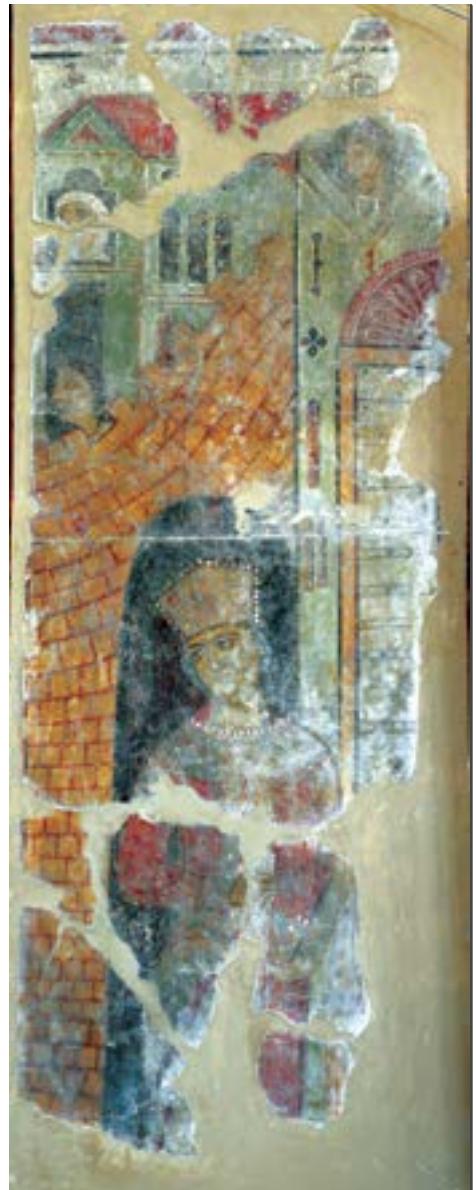
Considering the history of the Monastery of Ubisa, we should perhaps seek a historic reason for this choice. One significant period in the development of Ubisa was the twelfth century, as evidenced by the inscriptions on its tower. These inscriptions identify the builder of the tower called Sveti/pillar as Svimeon Čqondideli, the *mcignobart'uxuc'esi* of "Demetre, King of Kings and son of the great David."³²⁸ The monastery underwent renovation and expansion in 1141, and this revitalization during King

Demetre's reign likely explains the prominent depiction of St. Demetrios of Thessalonike on the icon. This inference is further supported by the portrayal of the donor, who is shown in monastic attire.

However, this historical interpretation is complicated by the stylistic elements of the icon, which more closely align with thirteenth-century production than with twelfth-century aesthetics.³²⁹ Notable stylistic idiosyncrasies include slightly larger heads in proportion to the bodies, or conversely, heads that are smaller than usual. The facial features and contours typically converge at the center, particularly evident in the case of St. George, where the eyes are placed closely together. Additional characteristics common to both the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, especially during the latter half of the thirteenth century, include architectural backgrounds adorned with simple geometric shapes. Bright red, expressive capes frequently appear, as do mountains which, while still lacking the distinctive features of the Palaiologan style, foreshadow this style with dynamic silhouettes.

Another detail worthy of note is that, as opposed to the common Georgian artistic tradition, the princess of Lassia is depicted directly at the city gate—an iconographic representation also found in the thirteenth-century decoration of the Church of St. George in Vani (*Fig. 2.130*) and in the thirteenth-century hagiographic icon of St. George from Mt. Sinai, which, according to a Greek inscription, was likely commissioned and created by the Georgian hieromonk Iovane (*Fig. 1.25*).³³⁰

As mentioned earlier, this iconographic element associated with the miracle of Lassia is more characteristic of later art. Burchuladze highlights the dragon in the Ubisa icon, which exhibits an unusual plasticity and vivid dynamism. Its curved form reflects the decorative tendencies prominent during and after the reign of Queen Tamar.³³¹



2.130 *Liberation of the princess* (early thirteenth century), detail. Church of St. George of Vani.

Niko Berdzenishvili
Kutaisi State Historical
Museum.

The mystery surrounding the icon of Ubisa can be elucidated by identifying the donor. It is evident that for the donor, the image of St. Demetrios alongside St. George held particular significance. This pairing is also prominently featured on the walls of the Church of Ubisa, where the two large figures of St. George and St. Demetrios appear beside the altar apse as the principal protectors of the sacred space (*Fig. 2.131*).

2.131 Sts. Eirene and Catherine, Sts. George and Demetrios (fourteenth century). Church of St. George of Ubisa.



That the painter of the church of Ubisa was inspired by the icon is corroborated by further evidence. Burchuladze discusses the direct influence of the miracle of Lassia as depicted in the icon on the wall painting (Fig. 2.132). The icon also played a pivotal role in the selection of scenes. In this context, the theme of Queen Alexandra, which is rare in Georgian art, is particularly significant. The scene of Alexandra's interrogation makes its first appearance in the eleventh-century decoration of the Church of Saint Sophia in Kyiv, accentuating the theme of defending Christianity and its confession.³³² The portrayals of Queen Alexandra before St. George and St. George's interrogation by Diocletian further reinforce this idea, enriching the decorative program of Ubisa, which seems to have drawn inspiration from the icon.



2.132 *Liberation of the princess (fourteenth century). Church of St. George of Ubisa.*

In the decoration of Ubisa, fourteen scenes are dedicated to the life of the great martyr.³³³ The cycle begins in the eastern section of the north wall, with the opening scene depicting the distribution of alms (Fig. 2.133), followed by the martyr standing before Diocletian. These two scenes form a cohesive composition, intentionally crafted to be perceived together without a vertical register dividing them. Their connection is reinforced by the inscription: „აქა განყო წმიდამან გიორგი ყოველივე საცხოვრებელი და მისცა გლახაკთა და წარსდგა წინაშე მეფისა“.³³⁴ (Here St. George distributed alms, gave everything to the poor, and presented himself to the king).

2.133 *Church of St. George of Ubisa (fourteenth century). North wall.*



2.134 *Christological scenes and scenes from St. George's life (fourteenth century), schema of the west wall. Church of St. George of Ubisa.*



As previously mentioned, the laceration of St. George's body and his time in prison are also presented as a single frame. The Christological scenes are arranged clockwise, while the cycle of St. George unfolds counterclockwise.³³⁵ The martyrdom of the wheel appears separately, occupying the western section of the north wall. The west wall showcases St. George before Diocletian and Queen Alexandra, followed by the martyrdom in the lime pit (Fig. 2.134). The entire lower register of the west wall is filled with the Miracle of Lassia, which stands out as the leading image of the composition due to its scale and dynamic composition. Particularly striking is St. George's majestic and elegant figure on horseback, characterized by a slightly twisted posture and an expressively extended leg, echoing the tension and anxiety typical of the Palaiologan era. Additionally, the city of Lassia is depicted as a fortified building from which the king and queen greet the city's savior.

The narrative proceeds to the south wall, where the composition of the flagellation appears, along with scenes of the destruction of

idols and the raising of the magus from the dead (Fig. 2.135). The resurrection of Glykerios' bull is also visible. The cycle concludes with the beheading of St. George, depicted in the eastern section of the north wall, directly beneath the initial composition of the cycle. This final episode is larger than the scenes above it (Fig. 2.136).

Inga Lortkipanidze has noted that, in contrast to earlier examples, the martyrdom scenes in Ubisa far outnumber the miracles, which the scholar attributes to the heightened emotional intensity characteristic of the Palaiologan period. She emphasizes the calm



2.135 *Life of St. George, various saints, general view of the south wall (fourteenth century).*
Church of St. George of Ubisa.



2.136 *Beheading of St. George (fourteenth century).*
Church of St. George of Ubisa.

and bold demeanor of the martyr during the scenes of suffering, contrasting sharply with the dynamic and expressive depictions of the henchmen, which naturally underscore St. George's triumph over death.³³⁶

The scene of the wheel is particularly emphasized in Ubisa. It is distinctly set apart and includes several intriguing iconographic details, positioned directly beneath Christ's ascension. The martyr's figure, affixed to the wheel, creates a dialogue with the oval representation of the Savior enclosed in a mandorla. Unlike the usual depiction of city walls or palace architecture in martyrdom scenes, this scene features dynamic hills flanking the image of the martyr. The sloped hill to the left mimics the form of the wheel with its rugged contours, echoing St. George's silhouette on the wheel. Thus, it seemingly participates in the scene, which can be both a stylistic as well as a narrative device. Furthermore, its placement just below Christ's ascension aligns with liturgical readings that describe nature's sorrow as it bids farewell to its creator, allowing for a traditional analogy between the Crucifixion

2.137 *Interrogation of St. George, healing of the blind* (fifteenth century). Church of St. George of Ubisa.



and the wheel.³³⁷ The attire of the henchmen, according to Lortkipanidze, contains elements of traditional Georgian costumes, while the shape of the wheel resembles a blooming rosette.³³⁸

Another notable imagery is found in the fifteenth-century decoration of a chapel in Ubisa (*Fig. 2.137*), depicting the miracle of St. George healing the blind. According to Nino Kopadze, this scene is inspired by the Gospel account of a similar healing.³³⁹ This aspect of St. George's miracles is often central to hymnography, where he is frequently referenced as both a physical and spiritual healer.³⁴⁰ Indeed, it was St. George's healing powers that first made his shrine in Lydda renowned.³⁴¹ Although healing themes appear in his martyrdom accounts, they are much rarer in iconography. As noted by Mark-Weiner, St. George's healing miracles are first represented in the scene of the distribution of alms on the Cross of Mestia, where among the beggars is a man with a walking stick, indicating a reference to a similar miracle. This theme later merges in subsequent monuments, where we see figures with walking sticks as well as blind individuals. In the decorative program of the Ubisa church, the scene of the distribution of alms includes a beggar who is blind in one eye.

The meaning of the scene in the chapel of Ubisa is evident—a spiritual eye opened through faith.³⁴² In a hymnographic canon dedicated to the martyr saint, George Skylitzes calls him the “light of the eye.” It is perhaps this theme that has influenced a curious tradition in Georgia. It was common to ask St. George for the healing or maintenance of eyesight and offer him “eyes” made of dough or clay. Some scholars identify this practice with pre-Christian pagan solar beliefs.³⁴³ This tradition seems to be reflected in the icons of St. George of Sujuni and Jumat’i, where St. George is clothed in an attire with the images of eyes (*Fig. 2.138*).

2.138 St. George's icon of Sujuna (eighteenth century). Georgian National Museum.



2.12. POST-BYZANTINE CYCLES OF ST. GEORGE'S LIFE

2.12.1. TSALENJIKHA

The decorative program of the fifteenth-century Chapel of St. George (the so-called annex of Manuč'ar) in Tsalenjikha stands out for its unconventional arrangement of episodes depicting the martyrdom of St. George. This cycle is located on the dome, surrounding a central medallion featuring the Theotokos (Fig. 2.139). The decoration is rich and dense, filled with numerous figures and architectural elements. The compositions lack distinct frames, with their edges embellished by images of buildings and cliffs.

2.139 *Cycle of St. George's life (fifteenth century), general view. Church of the Savior of Tsalenjikha. The annex of Manuč'ar.*

The narrative unfolds in an anti-clockwise direction, comprising five scenes that commence with St. George's interrogation by Diocletian. With the exception of the opening episode, the following scenes portray various moments of St. George's martyrdom. The second image depicts his flagellation, showcasing five



henchmen beating St. George, who is restrained on a stone-like bed. This scene is succeeded by the representation of the lime pit, where the henchmen are illustrated kindling a fire and preparing firewood. Their vigorous movements starkly contrast with St. George's triumphant figure, which is depicted in a quintessential prayerful stance.

Among the most striking scenes in Tsalenjikha is the depiction of St. George's martyrdom on the wheel. Unlike the other compositions, this scene features a distinctly vertical structure. The wheel is positioned atop a tall column, and various torture implements further emphasize this verticality. St. George's figure is stretched across the wheel, positioned toward the upper edge of the image, drawing him closer to Panagia Platytera in the circular medallion at the center. The significance of the wheel scene is heightened by the dynamic interplay between the adjacent circles of the Platytera and the wheel itself.

The climax of the dome's cycle is St. George's beheading. In striking contrast to the preceding episodes, this scene depicts only two figures: St. George and his executioner. Both figures are more prominent and emphasized compared to those in the other scenes. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the entire north wall of Tsalenjikha is dedicated to the Miracle of Lassia, portraying the deliverance of the youth and the slaying of the dragon (*Fig. 2.93*).³⁴⁴

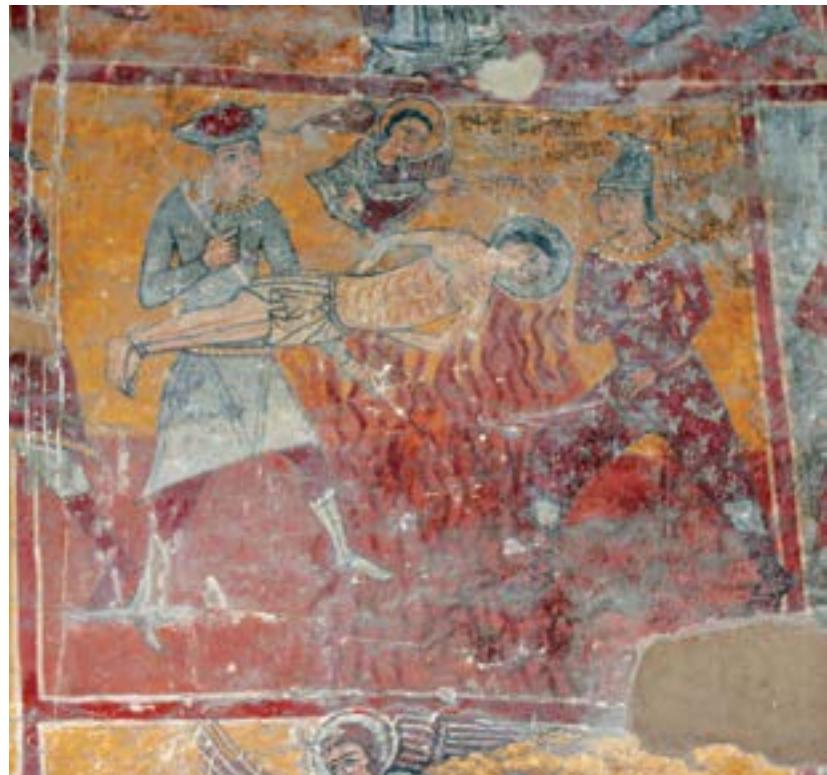
2.12.2. TABAKINI

A particularly extensive cycle of the saint's life is found in the church of St. George of Tabakini (Imereti). In addition to St. George's triumphant image, this sixteenth-century painting includes ten more scenes (*Fig. 2.140*).³⁴⁵ Along with the traditional scenes (e.g., interrogation by Diocletian, laceration of the body, flagellation, martyrdom on the wheel, lime pit, prison cell, and beheading), it also shows scenes that are unique for Georgian art, such as the scene of his martyrdom on a heated bed (*Fig. 2.141*) and St. George placed in a tub of boiling water (*Fig. 2.142*).³⁴⁶

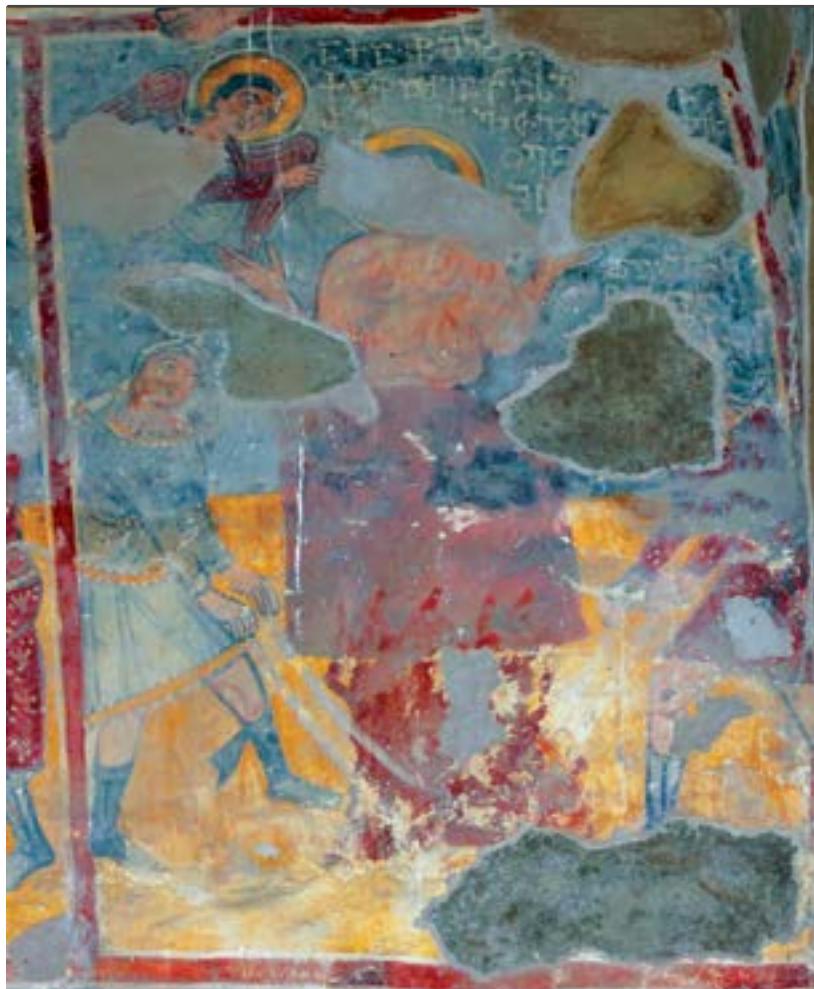
The cycle of St. George begins on the eastern section of the south wall, positioned directly beneath the Christological cycle. The compositional idiosyncrasies of the Christological cycle have seemingly influenced the structure of the martyr's cycle below it,



2.140 *Church of St. George of Tabakini, general view of the interior (sixteenth century).*



2.141 *Martyrdom on the heated bed (sixteenth century). Church of St. George of Tabakini.*



2.142 Martyrdom with boiled water (sixteenth century). Church of St. George of Tabakini.

which appears to attend to and emulate the narrative of Christ's life. This cycle also commences with George's interrogation by the emperor, followed in a clockwise manner by scenes depicting his passion.

The captions in Tabakini, much like the composition itself, are narrative in nature; they highlight the details of St. George's suffering while particularly emphasizing the miraculous deliverance by the angel. In many inscriptions, the author explicitly states, "the angel came and healed him." Each scene is thus accompanied by an image of St. George's assisting angel. Notably, in the majority of these images, the henchmen are depicted in Oriental attire (Fig. 2.143), with wide trousers decorated by trifoliate motifs and narrow hats emphasizing the cycle's casual character, echoing the oriental fashion of the epoch. Additionally,



2.143 *Interrogation of St. George (sixteenth century). Church of St. George of Tabakini.*

some original iconographic elements appear. For instance, in the scene of the torture in the lime pit, the henchmen wield ropes instead of the more traditional oars. Furthermore, rather than Diocletian, the emperor is identified as a figure named Lombioz.³⁴⁷

2.12.3. GELAT‘I

The sixteenth-century cycle of the megalomartyr in Gelat‘i Church of St. George is placed between the northwest and southwest transepts.³⁴⁸ The initial scene shows St. George in front of

2.144 *Interrogation of St. George, destruction of the idols (1578–83). Church of St. George of Gelat‘i.*



Diocletian (*Fig. 2.144*) paired with the destruction of idols, and further continues on the south slope of the arch with five Sebastian martyrs executed under Diocletian: Eustratios, Auxentios, Eugenios, Mardarios, and Orestes.³⁴⁹ While the martyrdom on the wheel and beheading appear in the northwest section, of interest are several unusual iconographic solutions to the episode of the wheel. Instead of the wheel rotating with the ropes, here it is operated by a diagonal axel. In addition, instead of the traditional two henchmen, there are three (*Fig. 2.145*).³⁵⁰ Apart from the cycle, St. George is shown thrice with different iconographies, practically dominating the entire space of Gelat'i (*Fig. 2.146*).

2.145 Martyrdom on the wheel (1578–83). Church of St. George of Gelat'i.



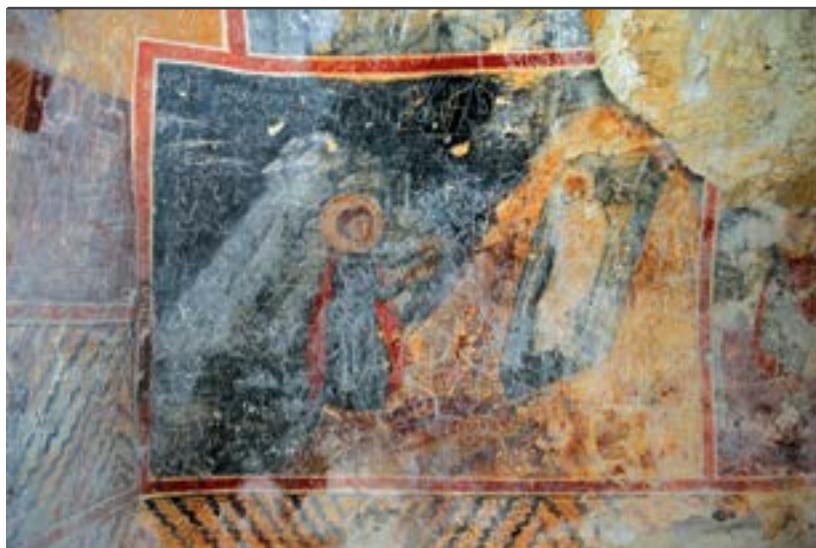
2.146 *Triumphal image of St. George (1578–83). Church of St. George of Gelati.*



2.12.4. C‘AIŠI

The cycle of St. George in the church of the Mother of God of C‘aiši is practically unknown to scholarship.³⁵¹ Yet, this seventeenth-century decoration showcases twelve scenes from the martyr’s *Life*. The entire upper gallery is dedicated to St. George, with one exception: the east wall, which shows Christ.

The cycle is spread across two registers. The opening scene is the distribution of alms, depicted on the south wall of the vault. Next comes what can be identified as the saint’s presentation to Diocletian.³⁵² The entire program of C‘aiši includes several martyrdom scenes: piercing by the spear, placing of the stone, martyrdom on the wheel, the lime pit, laceration of the body, St. George in prison, and the beheading (Fig. 2.147). It also in-



2.147 Resurrection of the dead (seventeenth century). Church of the Dormition of C‘aiši, upper gallery.

cludes his miracles, e.g., the resurrection and destruction of the idols. Particularly important is the scene of the trial by poison (St. George is shown at the moment of drinking the poison, which, to the best of my knowledge, cannot be found elsewhere in Georgia (Fig. 2.148). This episode is, however, reflected in Georgian hymnography: a hymn attributed to a certain John describes St. George’s trial by poison (NCM H-2336, 190v–191r).³⁵³ In the Byzantine commonwealth, Mark-Wiener identifies only one such scene in monumental art (the fourteenth-century decoration of Staro-Nagoričane).³⁵⁴ He also identifies a similar scene

in manuscript illuminations (Bib.Naz. I.II. 17, fol. 131 r.).³⁵⁵ It becomes relatively popular in post-Byzantine art.³⁵⁶

On the west wall is an image less characteristic of Georgian art—enthroned St. George (*Fig. 2.149*).³⁵⁷ The warrior is depicted at the moment of unsheathing his sword. The armor-clad warrior saint is holding a bow and arrow, while his helmet and a shield are placed next to him. George's arm is raised, conveying a forceful movement, which adds monumental expressiveness to the image. The portrait depicts a triumphant image of the great martyr saint as the culmination of the entire cycle. In its totality,



2.148 Martyrdom of St. George with poison (seventeenth century).
Church of the Dormition of C‘aiši, upper gallery.



2.149 Enthroned St. George (seventeenth century).
Church of the Dormition of C‘aiši, upper gallery.

it can be understood as a quintessential embodiment of the warrior saint's triumphal image common to medieval Georgian art. Evidently, the iconographic peculiarity of this image (the motif of unsheathing the sword) is inspired by the famed icon of Ilori discussed above, especially since the commissioner of the icon of Ilori was the bishop of C‘aiši.

2.13. CONCLUSION

The importance of St. George in Georgian culture is so great that in a number of churches dedicated to other saints, the scenes from the *Martyrdom of St. George* appear alongside the scenes from the life of the church's patron saint. For example, in the decoration of the church St. Nicholas in Qincvisi, along with the scenes from the life of Nicholas, as well as in the church of the Savior in Zenobani, one can observe St. George's martyrdom in the lime pit.³⁵⁸ Another example is the church of the Savior of Cvirmi, in Upper Svaneti, where two scenes appear from the martyrdom of St. George: his martyrdom on the wheel and his flagellation. St. George is particularly outstanding in Ert‘acminda, where the hagiographic scenes from the life of Eustathios Plakidas are accompanied by the image of St. George's *Life*, etc.

In the decoration of the Church of Transfiguration in Tsalenjikha, St. George's importance is highlighted by an enormous image of the warrior saint on the north wall of the church. Hans Belting correctly compares this grand and dynamic image to a vision and discusses its outstanding importance. The warrior saint is slaying a dragon, as it was usual in the era; however, it is the thematic variation of this traditional schema that warrants attention (*Fig. 2.150*).³⁵⁹ The dragon attacks St. George from behind, with the saint killing the dragon with an elegant yet commanding movement. The dramatism of the battle is further highlighted by the tail of the dragon that envelops the horse's legs.

The study of Georgian iconography of St. George reveals a wealth of original variations of St. George's imagery, as he is revered as Georgia's national or patron saint. I would like to conclude this chapter with a well-known legend among Georgians: it is said that St. George's body was cut into 363 pieces and distributed among St. George's churches throughout every region of Geor-

gia. Vakhushti Bagrationi supports this narrative, noting that on every hill and mountain in Georgia, there is a church dedicated to St. George, and that every day is celebrated as his feast day.

This tradition is visually represented in the above-mentioned monumental image of St. George in the church of Tselenjikha, where above the triumphant St. George, personified images of the days of the week can be observed. This motif reinforces the notion of St. George as the “ruler of the seas and the lands,” as described by Dat’una K’variani. The tradition is echoed in the numerous names attributed to St. George across his many shrines, including Ilori, Ip’ari, Seti, K’asvet’i, Lomisi, Sağolaşeni, Svip’i, Bočorma, Alaverdi, T’et’rigiorgi, Šavnabada, Nağvarevi, and others, thus geographically covering entire Georgia.³⁶⁰

Moreover, it is essential to revisit the significance of the national feast of St. George for the Georgian people: the wheel on which St. George was martyred has been reimagined as a symbol of the annual cycle, leading to the belief that his 363 relics were distributed across Georgia. This idea translates into the portrayal of Georgia as St. George’s mystical body (Asmat Okropiridze), encompassing the entirety of the country through his relics, imagery, and cult.

2.150 St. George slaying the dragon, personification of the weekdays (1384–1396). Church of the Savior of Tselenjikha.



1 Abuladze, 1971, 11.

2 Badamo, 2023, 5.

3 Thomson, 1996, 84.

4 See Chachkhunashvili, 2016, 16. For the Bodbe church, see Chubinashvili, 1959a, 86.

5 Abuladze, 1971, 7–51. For archeological evidence, see Schmerling, Barnaveli, 1963, 156–167; Makharadze, Berikashvili, 2012, 3–7; Gagoshidze, 2012, 100–102.

6 I would like to thank Dali Chitunashvili for this information.

7 For a detailed account, see Peradze, 1995, 71–74; Tvaradze, 2004, 139. See, also, Gelashvili, Mgaloblishvili, Paichadze, 1993, 296–297.

8 Tvaradze, 2004, 139.

9 Tvaradze, 2004, 141. The same claim is reported by numerous other travelers to the Holy Land.

10 Tvaradze, 2004, 171.

11 Silagadze, Japaridze, 1999, 19.

12 Barnaveli, 1953, 14.

13 Tvaradze, 2004, 142.

14 Vaxušti Batonišvili, 1997, 39–40. While in Greek *Georgios* means “farmer” or “earth worker,” in medieval Georgian writing and hymnography, the term has also acquired religious nuance, and George’s name was interpreted as “God’s or spiritual worker.” For examples in hagiography and hymnography, see Kvirkashvili, 1970, 62–65, 303–312.

15 For the origin and development of the cult of St. George, see CSLA.E06147 (N. Kälviäinen).

16 Scherbakov, 2019, 175.

17 White, 2013, 22.

18 *Ibid.*, 23.

19 *Ibid.*, 23. See also CSLA.E06147 (N. Kälviäinen).

20 Abuladze, 1971, 11.

21 Gagoshidze, 2003, 43.

22 Tarchnischvili, 1960, 61; Kekelidze, 1912, 142.

23 Shanidze, 1986, 123.

24 Javakishvili, 1979, 93.

25 Kvirkashvili, 1970, 32.

26 Gvakharia, 1978, 305.

27 Machabeli, 1998, 33–34; Gagoshidze, 1999, 70; Gagoshidze, 2000, 26.

28 Privalova, 1977, 64.

29 Gagoshidze, 2000, 27.

30 Dadiani, 2008, 318.

31 *Ibid.*, 318–319.

32 Grotowski, 2010, 82. For the genesis of this image, see, Kuehn, 2011, 102–110.

33 Gagoshidze, 2000, 26.

34 Gagoshidze, 1964, 35.

35 Javakhishvili, 1979, 88–99; As observed by Liana Kvirkashvili, when in the original Greek hymns St. George is compared to the sun, the Georgian translations compare him both to the sun and the moon. For example, in the Georgian translation of Theophanos Grapto, the megalomartyr is compared to both the sun and the moon. Kvirkashvili, 1970, 278–280. For a connection between astral deities and St. George, see Bardavelidze, 1957, 1–36.

36 Abakelia, 1991, 23.

37 Gagoshidze, 1964, 39–40.

38 Makalatia, 1938, 19–40; Gagoshidze, 1964, 42.

39 Gagoshidze, 1964, 37–43. For pre-Christian iconography of warrior saints in Georgia, see Barnaveli, 1979, 36–40.

40 *Ibid.*, 38–39.

41 Gagoshidze, 1964, 42–43.

42 For Martvili reliefs, see Aladashvili, 1977, 52. Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 18–20.

43 Dadiani, 2007, 56.

44 For this identification, see Dadiani, 2007, 56–57. Nino Iamanidze identifies them as St. George and Theodore. Iamanidze, 2016, 86–87.

45 Aladashvili, 1977, 49–56. Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 18–19.

46 See Nikoloz Aleksidze's chapter. Vagner, 1977, 4; for bibliography, see Iamanidze, 2016, 82–83; The tenth-century date is preferred by Shalva Amiranashvili. Amiranashvili, 1971, 176; see also Elizbarashvili, 2006, 4; Tsurtsumia, 2013, 147.

47 The dragon-slaying St. George still appears, albeit sporadically, until the fourteenth century, becoming dominant only in the post-Byzantine era. The image of St. George slaying Diocletian remains popular in contemporary ecclesiastical art.

48 Chubinashvili explains the stylistic difference between these icons by their different dates. Chubinashvili, 1959, 366.

49 Burchuladze, 2016, 144.

50 The vanquishing of an equestrian foe appears in the composition of St. Demetrios of Thessalonike, where the warrior saint slays the Bulgar king Kalloyan. The theme became popular in the thirteenth century with iconographic variations. In a much earlier, ninth-century manuscript illumination, St. Merkourios slays Julian the Apostate. The wounded emperor is depicted as falling off the horse (MS Or. 6801, fl. 1v). See Badamo, 2019, 172.

51 Chubinashvili, 1959, 324–325.

52 *Ibid.*, 358.

53 *Ibid.*, 373.

54 E.g., the tenth-century facade relief of Alt'amar; the paired icon of St. Theodore and George from Mt Sinai; the relief from Amaseia at the Benaki Museum (eleventh–twelfth century), and so on. Curiously, this iconographic schema has not spread to neighboring Cappadocia. The only exception is perhaps the Church of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in Sahinefendi, where the warrior St. Theodore slays a human-faced dragon. See Jolivet-Levy, 2001, 346–347. For other examples, see the decorative program of the Monastery of St. Anthony, where there are several iconographic variations of a human-slaying warrior saint. See Badamo, 2019, fig. 3, 8, 10.

55 Walter, 2003, 120. For the reflection of this episode in Coptic literature, see Badamo, 2023, 145.

56 For the genesis of the human-slaying warrior, see Walter, 2003, 15–22; Grotowski, 2010, 77–79.

57 Chubinashvili, 2002, 129. Chubinashvili dates the Ušguli chalice to the sixth century. The same dating is shared by Kitty Machabeli. E. Leeming suggests the eighth or ninth century as the date of its creation and argues that it is of a Palestinian and not Syrian origin. Leeming, 2018, 71.

58 Walter, 1991, 33–42.

59 For the symbolic interpretation of the entry into Jerusalem, see Schiller, 1972, 18–22.

60 For the icon, see Chubinashvili, 1959, 335, fig. 453. Chubinashvili dates this icon to the thirteenth century.

61 Grotowski, 2010, 78.

62 Chubinashvili, 1959, 335, fig. 453. Chubinashvili dates the icon to the thirteenth century. For a description, see Takaishvili, 1937, 394.

63 Bochoridze, 1994, 243.

64 Eusebius, 1994, 121–122.

65 Demand, Engemann, 2007, 422, fig. III.13.1.

66 Kvirkashvili, 1970, 287.

67 *Ibid.*, 286–288.

68 Chubinashvili, 1959, 325, 325–326, 358. See also, Dadiani, 2008, 333.

69 Manova, 1977, 192; Walter, 2003, 89.

70 De Giorgio, 2016, 65.

71 Iamanidze, 2016, 184.

72 Stylistically, the relief can be dated to the end of the tenth and beginning of the eleventh centuries. The date belongs to T. Khundadze, whom I would like to thank for the suggestion.

73 For providing this largely unknown example, I would like to thank Father Pavle Burdjanadze and Zura Mantskava

74 The inscription was read by Dali Chitunashvili and Ketevan Asatiani. Such a solution is unknown to us. The only parallel is perhaps the decoration of Tabakini, where instead of Diocletian, St. George's foe is identified as certain "Lambrioz."

75 Rapp, 2010, 187–188; Maguire, 1988, 88–103.

76 For the art of comparison, see Rapp, 2010, 175–197; 1988, 88–103.

77 Kobiashvili, 2008, 171.

78 Kaukhchishvili, 2008, 558.

79 Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, 280.

80 I would also like to thank the priest of the church of C'uc'xvat'i, Father Pavle for guiding us in the church as well as sharing the local traditions with us.

81 For the date of the chancel screen of Urt'xva and its reconstruction, see Iamanidze, 1998, 7–10, 91.

82 Schmerling, 1962, 150.

83 Putsko, 1977, 4–5.

84 *Ibid.*, 4.

85 For the illustration, see Harbison, 1998, (Psalter Southampton F.71, v).

86 Iamanidze, 1998, 45. In a later work, Iamanidze identifies the figure as King David of Israel. Iamanidze, 2010, 214–219.

87 Rapp, 2010, 182.

88 For comparison in art, see Maguire, 1988, 88–103.

89 Nikolaishvili, 2019, 54–57; Aleksidze, 2024, 112–129.

90 Abuladze, 1963, 262.

91 Kaukhchishvili, 1955, 373–374.

92 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, 1967, 204, 205.

93 Khachidze, 1987, 342.

94 *šesxmay mt'avarmoncamisa giorgisi ... romeli t'k'ua basili*, ed. Gabidzashvili, 1991, 224.

95 Gagoshidze, 2007, 9–17. The fragments of the chancel of Alaverdi include Asomt'avruli inscriptions that are paleographically identical to the inscriptions on the gate of Sveti'xoveli and the chancel of Šio-Mgvime. Both inscriptions mention Katholikos Melk'isedek. Based on this observation, Giorgi

Gagoshidze suggests that Melk'isedek was involved in the creation of the Alaverdi chancel.

- 96 Iamanidze, 1998, 91.
- 97 Kaukhchishvili, 1955, 175.
- 98 For this image, see Khundadze, 2007, 52–53; Skhirtladze, 2009, 285–286.
- 99 For an image of Alexander the Great, see Walker, 2012, 81–83; 93–97.
- 100 For the interpretation of this image, see Gedevanishvili, 2018, 143–168.
- 101 Aleksidze, 2019, 231–232.
- 102 Gordeziani, 1993, 15.
- 103 For paired warrior saints, see Chubinashvili, 1959, 356–357.
- 104 Chakvetadze, 2021, fn. 45.
- 105 Pancaroğlu, 2004, 153–154.
- 106 De Giorgio, 2016, 59.
- 107 Dolakidze, Chitunashvili, 2017, 298. For details, see Scherbakov, 2016, 458.
- 108 Dolakidze, Chitunashvili, 2017, 298. For this feast day of the warrior saints, see White, 2013, 77. In the Synaxarion of Constantinople, the feast is marked on 21 July.
- 109 Chelidze, 2013, 39–41.
- 110 For this parallelism, I would like to thank Asmat Okropiridze.
- 111 Sheviakova, 1983, 20–23.
- 112 Ekaterina Privalova demonstrates that such an image has no parallel in Georgian art. Privalova, 1979, 151.
- 113 For example, in the mosaic of the Archiepiscopal Chapel of Ravenna (400s), standing Christ is treading on the beasts (a lion and a snake). See De Giorgio, 2016, fig. 5.
- 114 Skhirtladze, 2008, 178.
- 115 Bochoridze, 1994, 202.
- 116 St. George wields a sword here. The depiction of the sword on the relief of Ilori must be a reference to its literary source. “The holy one swiftly unsheathed his sword,” see *ucqebay sakwrvelebat'at'ws*, ed. Gabidzashvili, 1991, 82.
- 117 See Bochoridze, 1994, 249.
- 118 Korkhmazian et al., 1984, fig. 31.
- 119 Dadiani, 2015, 44.
- 120 For the composite images, see Pancaroğlu, 2004, 158; Badamo, 2023, 36–37.
- 121 For the shrine of Ilori, see Bubulashvili, 2007, 265–266; Chardin, 1975, 196; Lamberti, 1938, 158.
- 122 Bubulashvili, 2007, 264–265, for the ritual, see Abakelia, 1991, 17–21.
- 123 See Skhirtladze, 2020, 45.
- 124 I would like to thank Ketevan Asatiani for providing these images.
- 125 Chubinashvili, 2020, 130. It is for this reason that Chubinashvili doubts the identification of the laying figure with the Theotokos in the scene of the Nativity. For other examples, see Grigoryan, 2023, 122–123.
- 126 Machabeli, 2008, 116.
- 127 Lazarev, 1953, 204.
- 128 For the icon of Bočorma, see Chubinashvili, 1959, 429–444. The icon allegedly housed St. George's arm. “Alaverdi,” *sakart'velos sasuliero maxarebeli* 1, January (1865); *Iveria* 13 (1883). It is also pointed out that the icon's feast was celebrated on November 10.
- 129 Grotowski, 2010, 232, fn. 404.
- 130 Burchuladze, 2016, 141.
- 131 For the royal imagery, see Kldiashvili, 1989, 125.

132 Ibid., 126.

133 Gedevanishvili, 2022a, 1510–1513.

134 Cheynet, 2015, 145, il. 10. I would like to thank Irma Matiashvili for providing these references. Interestingly, in 1182, Andronikos Komnenos wore an attire made of “Iberian fabric” on his coronation. Gabashvili, 2013, 61.

135 For a study of the icon, see Didebulidze, 2015, 16–33.

136 Didebulidze, 2015, 16.

137 Ibid., 21.

138 For the murals of Bet’ania, see Privalova, 1983, 1–21; for the royal panel in Bet’ania, see Alibegashvili, 1979, 20–23.

139 Eastmond, 1998, 163–165.

140 Privalova, 1983, 1–21; Makarova, 2017, 31.

141 Kaukhchishvili, 1959, 7–8.

142 Kondakov, Bakradze, 1890, 41. The link of this ring with Giorgi III is not universally shared in scholarship. For different opinion, Jaja, 2012, 260–267.

143 Takaishvili, 1937, 100.

144 Chichinadze, 2011, 98–99.

145 For the icon of Saqdari, see Chichinadze, 2011, 98–99.

146 Sakvarelidze, Alibegashvili, 1980, 12.

147 Sakvarelidze, 1987, 98.

148 For details, see Sakvarelidze, 127–129.

149 Ibid. 128

150 Ibid., 127.

151 For the discussion regarding dating, see Burchuladze, 2016, 155.

152 Tumanishvili, 2014, 152–154.

153 Chubinashvili, 1950, 95–118.

154 The current image of the Archangel was added to the cross in the twentieth century. Chubinashvili, 1959, 453.

155 Christopher Walter reports that there are five cycles in the Cappadocian decoration. One is dated to the tenth century and the rest to the eleventh. Walter, 2003, 131. An exception is the vast cycle of St. George in the Church of St. Sophia of Kyiv (eleventh century), which shows scenes that are not typical for the epoch. Nikitenko, 2008, 192–193.

156 Mark-Weiner, 1977, 137.

157 Chubinashvili, 1950, 99–100.

158 Mark-Weiner, 1977, 138.

159 Lortkipanidze, 2004, 155.

160 Mark-Weiner, 1977, 145–147.

161 Ibid., 146–147.

162 Chubinashvili, 1959, 459.

163 See Kvirkashvili, 1970, 299.

164 Kvirkashvili, 1970, 229–301.

165 Ibid., 301.

166 For the text, see *ibid.*, 300.

167 Kvirkashvili, 1970, 298.

168 Chubinashvili, 1959, 460.

169 Ibid., 460.

170 Mark-Weiner, 1977, 130.

171 Chubinashvili, 1959, 463

172 Mark-Weiner, 1977, 109. For the cycles, see Walter, 2003, 130–131.

173 Mark-Weiner, 1977, 116–119.

174 Chubinashvili, 1959, 463–464.

175 Mark-Weiner, 1977, 213.

176 Ibid., 214.

177 There exists, however, another version of Glykerios' execution, where he is said to have been cut up into pieces.

178 For the cult of the bull, see Abakelia, 1997, 17–20.

179 For the distribution of scenes on pre-altar crosses, see Sakvarelidze, 1997, 175.

180 For the iconography of Barakoni, see Sakvarelidze, 1987, 59–63.

181 See Maguire, 1988, 88–103.

182 Sakvarelidze, 1987, 40.

183 Ibid., 45.

184 Ibid., 43–45.

185 Ibid., 45.

186 Ibid., 41.

187 Ibid., 42. For details, see Burchuladze, 2021–2023, 347–349.

188 Khosroshvili, 2021, 400–401. I would like to thank Tamar Khosroshvili for sharing the photos of the Lomisi treasury.

189 I would like to thank Ketevan Asatiani for showing me this cross. I would like to thank His Holiness Bishop Vakhtang (Liparteliani) for the permission to publish this image.

190 Other instances of cross-haloed saints can also be identified. For more samples, see Cutler, 1987, 152–153.

191 Gambashidze, 2010, 156–157.

192 Kekelidze, 1912, 142. The feast of May 6 (St. George's beheading) is not marked in the Georgian Lectionary; Tarchnischvili, 1960, 61. Oddly, the feast of November 10 is not included in the Calendar Icon of Ioane T'oxabi of Mt. Sinai. Skirtladze, 2023, fig. 9.

193 Evidently, the cult of St. George was central for the monks of Tao and Klarjeti, since, according to the *Life of Grigol*, two monasteries were dedicated to the warrior saints. This particular reverence for St. George transpires throughout the entire narrative.

194 Privalova, 1977, 122.

195 Scherbakov, 2016, 415.

196 Ibid., 428.

197 Ibid.

198 Dolakidze, Chitunashvili, 2017, 164.

199 I would like to thank Asmat Okropiridze for sharing her thoughts with me.

200 This symbolic allusion appears also in the *Martyrdom of St. George*, where, just before his martyrdom, George compares the wheel to the Cross. For the text, see *camebay cmidisa giorgisi*, ed. Gabidzashvili, 1991, 52–53.

201 Gvakharia, 1978, 297–298.

202 A similar solution is found on one of the icons kept in the treasury of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt Sinai. There, however, these two episodes are incorporated into the general cycle and, compared to Gorisjvari, are less accentuated.

203 This scene can be seen in the decoration of Varžia (1184–6).

204 Cf. Gvakharia, Amiranashvili, 1978, 301.

205 See Kvirikashvili, 1970, 195.

206 Gvakharia, Amiranashvili, 1978, 295.

207 Ibid., 298. *Life of Gregory of Xanc't'a* accentuates the dynamic opposition between the “divided body” and the “indivisibility of faith” of the martyr.

208 Mark-Weiner, 1977, 148.

209 Ibid.

210 See Machabeli, 1991, 92–93.

211 The visual association of the wheel with a rose also appears in the iconography of the *Martyrdom of St. Catherine*, yet in the Georgian samples of the illustrations of St. George's martyrdom they are particularly stylized.

212 Gaprindashvili, 2024, 384.

213 E.g., Lamberti, 2020, 254; Chardin, 1975, 197.

214 Chardin, 1975, 195–197. Admittedly, Chardin is skeptical toward the miracle of the bull.

215 Bubulashvili, 2007, 265, fn. 77.

216 Sakvarelidze, 1987, 98.

217 For the tradition, see Makalatia, 1930, 166–176.

218 For the images of lions and their symbolic interpretation in Georgian facade decoration, see Kvachatadze, 2007, 78–84.

219 Gigineishvili, Giunashvili, 1979, 175–176.

220 Takaishvili explains that the maker of the banner, the priest of the church of Seti, Grigol Kopasdze, has designed the lion and the top of the cross where he depicted the patron saint of each valley to mark their unity: St. George of Seti, St. Jonas of Latali, and the Archangel of Uğri. Takaishvili, 1937, 274.

221 For the cycles of St. George in Georgian monumental art, see Privalova, 1977, 62–141; Chakvetadze, 2021, 120–121, fn. 48.

222 For Hadiši murals, see Volskaia, 1969, 53–58

223 Although Christopher Walter argues that this scene is typical of Eastern Christian art, its popularity in Georgia is still outstanding. Significantly, however, this composition is unknown to Cappadocian art.

224 For the cult of St. George during the Crusades, see Dehoux, 2015, 105–106. This theme appears in several instances in proto-Renaissance and Renaissance art.

225 Walter, 2003, 140–142.

226 Lazarev, 1953, 205. Fn. 7.

227 For the literary versions of the miracles, see Gabidzashvili, 1991, 42–254

228 Tuite, 2022, 2.

229 Lazarev, 1953, 205. fn. 7.

230 Privalova, 1977, 77.

231 Ibid., 78.

232 Iosebidze, 1989, 55.

233 E.g., the twopartite scenes can be seen in the decoration of the Church of St. George of Vani and the Miracle of Lassia on the Icon of Ubisa, and others. Such compositions became especially typical in post-Byzantine imagery.

234 Okropiridze, 2016, 211.

235 For the edition, see *ucqebay sakwrvelebat'at'ws*, ed. Gabidzashvili, 1991, 77.

236 Ristenko, 1909, 459–460.

237 Kvirkashvili, 1970, 211.

238 Kirpichnikov, 1879, 270. Sometimes she is called Alexandra. See Kvirkashvili, 1970, 211.

239 Privalova, 1977, 71, fn. 46.

240 Iosebidze, 1989, 52. schema 21, 1–2.

241 Kaukhchishvili, 1951, 109.

242 Kajaia, 2018, 204.

243 For the symbolism of the horse's tail, see Sprutta, 2015, 39.

244 For Lassia as a celestial city, see Badamo, 2023, 85.

245 I would like to thank Marina Kenia for providing this suggestion.

246 At least two different chronological layers can be identified in the church of Saqdari. For proposed datings, see Bagrationi, Gagoshidze, Khuskivadze et al., 1998, 239.

247 For the iconography of the Palm Sunday, see Schiller, 1972, 18–19.

248 Kavtarria, 2007, 228–307.

249 Eastmond, 1998, 120–121; See also Aleksidze, 2024, 188–222.

250 Interestingly, in some reports by European pilgrims, Georgia is referred to as the “land of the feminine.” Peradze, 1995, 72.

251 Mamaiašvili, 1991, 49.

252 Abakelia, 2017, 105.

253 For interpretation of this episode see Tuite, 2022, 8–11; Aleksidze, 2024, 155–160.

254 Svimeon Dekanozi, *k'ebay sadgeris cm. giorgisi*, ed. Gabidzashvili, 1991, 300.

255 For the iconography of the scene, see Privalova, 1977, 91–108; Grotowski, 2003.

256 Kvirkashvili, 1970, 91.

257 For the literary version of the episode, see *ucqebay sakwrvelebat'at'ws*, ed. Gabidzashvili, 1991, 93–124

258 Privalova, 1977, 91.

259 Ibid., 95–96. According to this version, the liberated boy was a priest's son and the saint returned him directly to the church.

260 Ibid., 94.

261 Grotowski, 2003, 15.

262 Privalova, 1977, 98–99.

263 Grotowski, 2003, 27, fn. 140.

264 Surguladze, 1983, 4

265 For the edition of the text, see Abuserisže Tbeli, *sascaulni cm. giorgisni*, ed. Gabidzashvili, 1991, 262.

266 Ibid., 260–262.

267 Skhirtladze, 2020, 301.

268 Ibid., 298.

269 The story of the deliverance of the youth is also reflected in Vazha-Pshavela's poetry, where it is adapted to contemporary reality and made into a Pshav story. The poem narrates the return by T'et'ri Giorgi (White Giorgi) of a youth abducted by the Dagestani raiders to his widowed mother. This poem testifies to the living tradition of St. George as a liberator and helper of hostages.

270 For this decoration, see Chikhladze, 2001, 108–112.

271 Ibid., 109.

272 Kaukhchishvili, 1955, 341.

273 Thomson, 1996, 333.

274 Tvaradze, 2004, 137–139.

275 For the cycles of the George in medieval Georgian art, see Privalova, 1977, 133–141.

276 For the iconography of the coronation of the warrior saints, see Grotowski, 2010, 292–293.

277 For the date and iconographic program of Mzecveri church, see Kavlelishvili, 1981, 68–70.

278 Chakvetadze, 2021, 23

279 Volskaia, 1969, 54.

280 Okropiridze, 1997, 22–23.

281 *Ibid.*, 5.

282 Notably, the miracle of Lassia can be found in the decoration of Georgian tombstones. Aronishidze, 2022, 291.

283 Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, 1983, 77–101.

284 I would like to thank Asmat Okropiridze for this observation.

285 Goguadze, 2014, 167.

286 Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Volskaia, 1983, 94.

287 *Ibid.*, 94–95.

288 Privalova, 1979, 154.

289 Privalova, 1977, 94.

290 *Ibid.*, 111. See also Mark-Weiner, 1977.

291 This scene is particularly popular in Russian art, both textually and iconographically. However, offers a different narrative. According to this version, the Saracen was so impressed by the miracle that he converted to Christianity. After this, he was condemned to death. This scene is often represented in two compositions. For details, see Privalova, 1977, 112. Note 18.

292 See Grotowski, 2010, 372, note 271.

293 See Skhirtladze, 2008, 42–45.

294 For example, see Giunashvili, 1972, 63–66. For the reflection of this issue in visual art, see Gedevanishvili, 2023, 45–79.

295 There are two layers of painting in K'uraši. For details, see Kitovani, 2018, 86–107.

296 *Ibid.*, 97–99.

297 Chakvetadze, 2021, 111–146. The drawings of the Cedisi church decoration are executed by Neli Chakvetadze. I thank her for sharing this material.

298 *Ibid.*, 115., fn. 32.

299 *Ibid.*, 124.

300 Lortkipanidze, 2004, 152.

301 For the iconography of this scene, see Chakvetadze, 2021, 115, fn.32.

302 *Ibid.*, 115.

303 *Ibid.*, 125.

304 Chakvetadze, 2021, 127–128

305 *Ibid.*, 134.

306 *Ibid.*, 123–124.

307 *Ibid.*, 117–123.

308 Privalova, 1977, 21.

309 *Ibid.*, 69.

310 *Ibid.*, 85.

311 *Ibid.*, 84.

312 *Ibid.*, 84.

313 *Ibid.*, 85.

314 *Ibid.*, 42.

315 *Ibid.*, 49.

316 *Ibid.*, 37.

317 *Ibid.*, 104.

318 *Ibid.*, 120

319 For the Ubisa icon, see Burchuladze, 2006, 171. See, also, Burchuladze, 200, 71–82.

320 Burchuladze, 2006, 170.

321 Kvirkashvili, 1970, 309–310.

322 Skhirtladze, 2020, 316.

323 For the text, see Gaprindashvili, 2024, 386.

324 Burchuladze, 2006, 179. Privalova, however, dates the icon to the fourteenth century. Privalova, 1977, 139.

325 Burchuladze, 2006, 180.

326 *Ibid.*, 180.

327 See Papamastorakis, 2007, 33–53. For St. George’s vita icon, see Peers, 2004.

328 Burchuladze, 2006, 161.

329 *Ibid.*, 178.

330 *Ibid.*, 173.

331 *Ibid.*, 178.

332 In Kyiv, one can see the scene of the “confession of faith by St. George in front of Magnetius” and on the south arch, the scene of the conversion of pagan Anatoly and Protoleon. Nikitenko, 2008, 192.

333 Two different dates have been proposed of the Ubisa murals: I. Lortkipanidze dates the decoration to the second half of the fourteenth century. Lortkipanidze, 2004, 153. Nana Burchuladze dates them to the beginning of the fourteenth century. Burchuladze, 2006, 159.

334 Lortkipanidze, 2004, 152.

335 *Ibid.*, 152.

336 *Ibid.*, 153.

337 Gedevanishvili, 2020, 88–98.

338 Lortkipanidze, 2004, 156.

339 For the decorations of the chapel of Ubisa, see Kopadze, 2016, 129–130. Privalova dates the image to a later period—the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. Privalova, 1977, 139.

340 Kvirikashvili, 1970, 152.

341 Ward-Perkins, 2022, 491–511.

342 Kvirikashvili, 1970, 264.

343 Abakelia, 1991, 22–23.

344 This scene of St. George is not a part of the cycle and was added later.

345 Mamaiaishvili, 1991, 22.

346 *Ibid.*, 22, 46.

347 *Ibid.*, 47. The name Lombioz appears also in the *Life of St. Marina*. It is unknown as to why the painter of Tabakini decided to refer to this name.

348 Chikhladze, 1996, 44.

349 *Ibid.*, 45

350 *Ibid.*, 94.

351 Privalova mentions it in her study of the decoration of P’avnisi. Privalova, 1977, 141. However, the painting is unknown to her. She refers to the cycle of St. George through D. Gordeev’s report. Tinatin Kaukhchishvili who specifically addresses Greek inscriptions in C’aiši, equally neglects the painting. See Kaukhchishvili, 1999, 112. The cycle is placed in a very high upper gallery, which can be accessed by a steep wooden ladder. For this reason, many visitors to C’aiši miss this area. The scenes from the life of St. George are mentioned in Chakvetadze, 2021, 120, fn., 48, 67

352 Kaukhchishvili, 1999, 112.

353 Kvirikashvili, 1970, 212. According to the *Martyrdom of St. George*, on the emperor’s order, Athanasius the magus prepared poison to kill George. Yet, having consumed the poison, St. George remained unharmed, which resulted in the magus’ conversion to Christianity and his becoming a martyr. For the iconography of the scene, see Mark-Weiner, 1977, 182–184.

354 Ibid., 182

355 Ibid., 184.

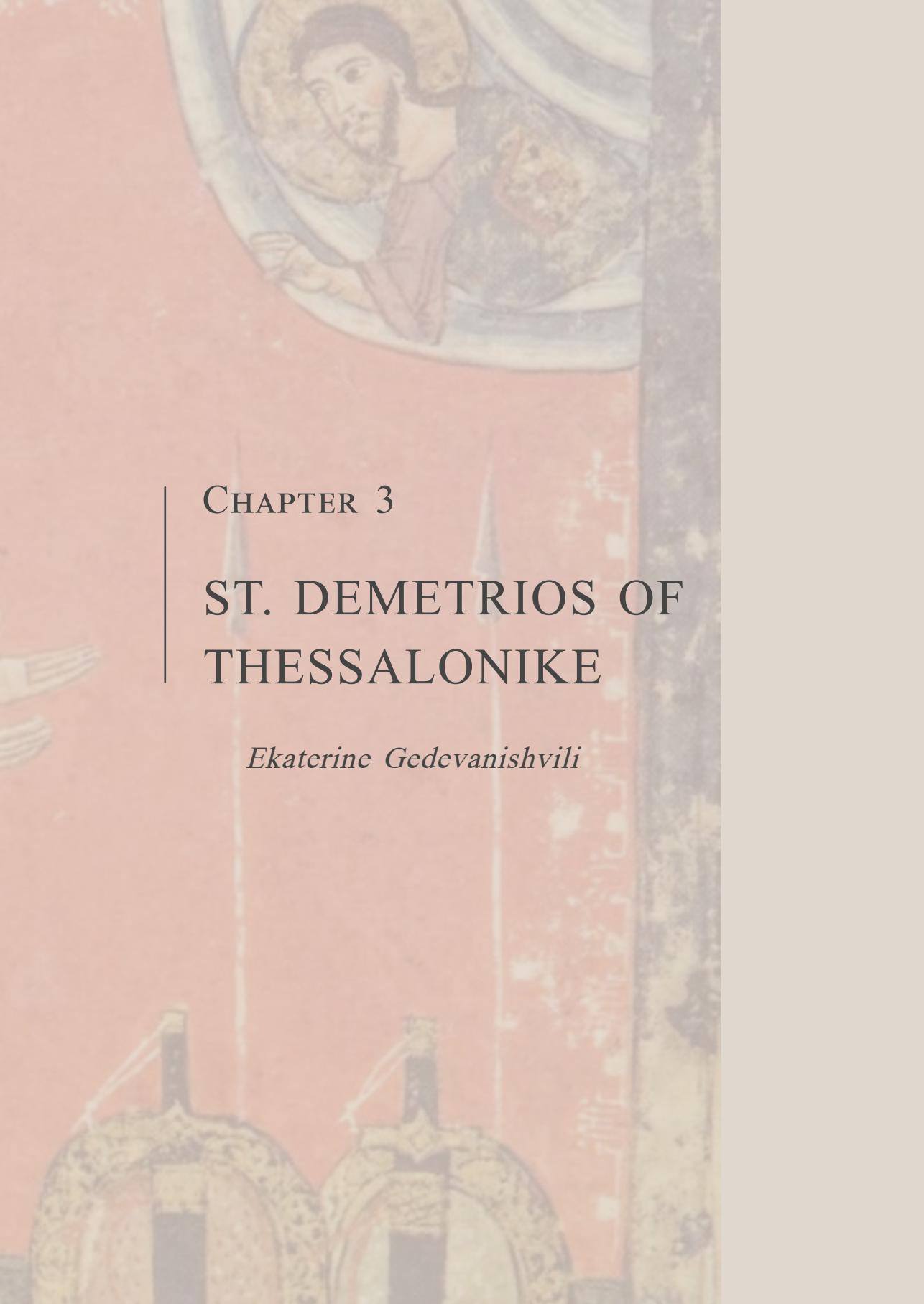
356 Ibid., 182.

357 Such an image can be found in the decoration of Gorisjvari.

358 Privalova, 1977, 138. Mariam Didebulidze argues that there were also other scenes of St. George in Qincevisi.

359 Belting, 2021, 29.

360 Eastmond, 2023, 165–172.



CHAPTER 3

ST. DEMETRIOS OF THESSALONIKE

Ekaterine Gedevanishvili

3.1. INTRODUCTION: THE CULT OF ST. DEMETRIOS AND ITS EARLIEST ATTESTATION IN GEORGIA

The cult of warrior saints received its final shape in Byzantium by the tenth century, during which the Macedonian dynasty (867–1056) introduced the concept of individual and dynastic patronage by soldier saints. This era also saw the imperial cult of St. Demetrios of Thessalonike gain prominence, largely through the efforts of Emperor Leo VI (886–912).¹ However, interest in the acquisition of St. Demetrios' relics can be traced back to Emperors Justinian (527–65) and Maurice (582–602), indicating that the saint's cult had transcended its local environment in Thessalonike at an early date.² Evidence of this early dissemination is found in the sixth-century church of St. Demetrios in Nikopolis (Epirus), as well as in his depictions at San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna and Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome.³ Prior to the period of Iconoclasm, Demetrios' cult primarily emphasized aspects of his martyrdom, while his military identity became more pronounced in the tenth century.⁴

Over time, St. Demetrios emerged as the patron saint of the imperial family and was revered as the chief bearer of victory and healing. His miraculous grave in the Basilica of Thessalonike was believed to possess apotropaic and healing powers, which became vital elements of his cult.⁵ Since the eleventh century, soldiers preparing for battle have used myron from Demetrios' grave as a token of divine support and protection, further enhancing his cult's significance.⁶

It remains uncertain whether St. Demetrios' cult was celebrated in late antique Iberia/Kartli, although he appears to have been well known in the region. The name Demetre was in use among secular and ecclesiastical figures in fifth-century Iberia, e.g., Demetre, the duke of Kakheti and Vakhtang Gorgasali's ally (fifth century), as well as later Demetre, brother of Step'anos I, the *erismt'avar* of Kartli (sixth-seventh centuries) and the builder of the Church of the Jvari (Holy Cross,

c.586/87–604) in Mtskheta. Another notable figure was Katholikos Demetre I (673–8). This name also appears among the rulers of western Georgia.⁷

However, the cult of Demetrios does not emerge in liturgical sources until later and is absent in early liturgical documents such as the *Liturgy of St. James* (seventh–eighth centuries), the *Lectionary of Jerusalem* (seventh century), and the *Oldest Iadgari* (seventh–tenth centuries).⁸ Demetrios is first mentioned in Mik‘ael Modrekili’s *Iadgari* and the Calendar of Ioane Zosime (tenth centuries), and subsequently in the Minor Synaxarion of Euthymios Hagiorites (eleventh century).⁹ In these instances, only brief references to the feast of St. Demetrios are made.¹⁰ However, in the *Great Synaxarion* of George Hagiorites (1040s), a substantial text is dedicated to the feast of St. Demetrios on October 26. Additionally, October 25 is marked as the feast of St. Nestor, Demetrios’ companion, which includes a shorter text honoring him. St. Demetrios is prominently featured in the *Menaion* of George Hagiorites (eleventh century), where thirty-one hymns are composed in his honor.¹¹

Maia Machavariani suggests that the cult of St. Demetrios was introduced into Georgia by Euthymios Hagiorites, who translated, adapted, and compiled various narratives related to the Thessalonian saint into a cohesive cycle. Machavariani and earlier Korneli Kekelidze attribute the systematic translation of soldier saint-related texts to the establishment of a powerful and militaristic Bagratid monarchy in the tenth century.¹² The development of St. Demetrios’ cult also reflects the intricate process of Byzantinization within Georgian culture, guided by the Georgian monastery on Mt. Athos and its learned hegoumenoi. Euthymios Hagiorites expanded the miraculous narratives associated with Demetrios, particularly emphasizing the miracle of myrrh-gushing, and incorporated these stories into his accounts of Demetrios’ martyrdom along with his encomia and miracle collections.¹³ This miracle began to appear in Greek sources in the tenth century and formed the foundation of Demetrios’ universal cult. The myrrh-gushing was seen as a definitive sign of Demetrios’ relics being present in Thessalonike and was perceived as a compensation of sorts for the immobile nature of his relics. Therefore, the emphasis on this aspect of St. Demetrios’ cult in Euthymios’ writings represents one of the earliest indications of the saint’s universal significance.

3.2. EARLIEST IMAGES OF DEMETRIOS IN GEORGIA: TENTH TO ELEVENTH CENTURIES

3.2.1. MARTVILI ENAMEL CROSS AND NIKORCMINDA IVORY

The earliest visual representations of St. Demetrios in Georgia date to the tenth century. One notable example is the tenth-century pendant cross from Martvili (Samegrelo) (Fig. 3.1), where

3.1 Martvili Cross (tenth century). Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.





Demetrios stands as the only soldier saint. Other figures include the Mother of God, St. Nicholas, and John Chrysostom. In this representation, St. Demetrios is illustrated not as a soldier but as a martyr, featuring in half-figure with a cross in hand and adhering to traditional iconographic attributes: a young, beardless man with short hair.¹⁴ This image from Martvili represents one of the earliest enamel depictions of St. Demetrios, alongside the ninth-century Fieschi Morgan Staurotheke and the tenth-century enamel eulogia, housed at the treasury of Halberstadt Cathedral in Germany.¹⁵ Leila Khuskivadze posits that the enamel incorporated into the cross is a product of local Georgian artistry.¹⁶

Another early representation is the ivory triptych from Nikorcminda (Racha) (Fig. 3.2), which Giorgi Chubinashvili dates to the tenth or early eleventh centuries, recognizing it as a rare specimen of Georgian art crafted from ivory.¹⁷ The Georgian origin of the triptych is argued by Adolph Goldschmidt and Kurt Weitzmann, as well as later by Nana Burchuladze.¹⁸ The central scene depicts the Dormition and is flanked by four soldier saints on the triptych's wings. Although they lack identifying captions, the warriors can be inferred to be Sts. George, Theodore, Demetrios, and possibly Prokopios, based on their iconographic features.¹⁹ St. Demetrios is likely situated on the right wing of the triptych. Unlike other contemporary ivory triptychs featuring St. Demetrios, such as the Harbaville or those in the Palazzo Venezia and

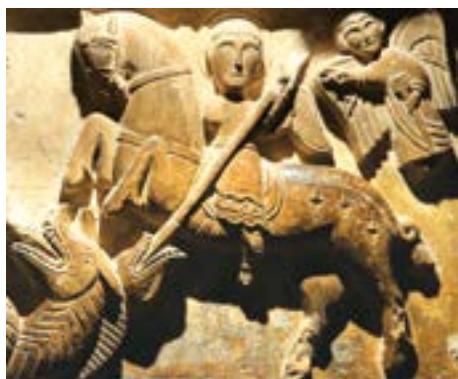
3.2 *Dormition of the Theotokos, saints. Ivory triptych from the Church of St. Nicholas of Nikorcminda (tenth–eleventh century).*
Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.

Vatican Museum,²⁰ the Racha triptych portrays him clad in military attire and armor, holding a spear in one hand and a shield in the other, with a sheath hanging at his back (the exception is the ivory triptych of St. Petersburg, where St. Demetrios, similarly to the triptych of Racha, is clad in military attire).²¹

In Georgian art, St. Demetrios is depicted both as a martyr saint and a warrior saint.²² The imagery of St. Demetrios as a martyr became especially prominent in Georgia during the post-Byzantine era, often interpreted as a response to the challenging political climate stemming from Persian and Ottoman invasions and annexations.²³

3.2.2. THE MARTVILI FACADE AND IŠXANI MURALS

St. Demetrios is most likely depicted among a pair of warrior saints battling a two-headed dragon on the west facade of the church of Martvili (probably tenth century, Samegrelo) (Fig. 3.3).²⁴ The bearded rider is identified as St. Theodore, while the younger, beardless figure is believed to represent St. Demetrios.²⁵ Although this identification remains a topic of debate, the image in the dome of Išxani (first half of the eleventh century) in historic southern Georgia (modern Turkey) is clearly identified through an inscription (Fig. 3.4).²⁶ Alongside St. Demetrios, Ekvtime Takaishvili identifies Sts. Orentios, Theodore, Prokopios,



3.3 St. Demetrios (?)
(probably tenth century).
Church of the Dormition of
Martvili.



3.4 St. Demetrios (first half of the eleventh century). Išxani cathedral, source: David Winfield photo archive, the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation.

and Sergios. Both the setting and the manner of their depiction in Išxani are somewhat unconventional: the busts of the saints are integrated into the soffits of the dome windows. Instead of traditional round halos, their halos are beam-like in design. The halos are inscribed within a vibrant green trapezoidal light, enhancing the beam-like effect. The light radiates from the exterior to the interior and is perceived as a beam illuminating the space from outside. This distinctive interpretation likely alludes to the symbolic transfiguration of saints into beams of light, a theme that frequently appears in hymnographic (e.g., the Hymn of St. Sophia of Edessa) and hagiographic literature.²⁷

3.3. DEMETRIOS’ ROYAL PATRONAGE (ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH CENTURIES)

Compared to St. George, the images of Demetrios are rare in Georgia; nevertheless, his distinctive cult as a patron of the royal family is evident.²⁸ Since the eleventh century, with an increase in Demetrios’ popularity in Byzantium, his representations began to multiply in Georgia as well.²⁹ During the second half of the tenth century and particularly in the eleventh century, hagiographies, hymnographies, and homilies dedicated to St. Demetrios began to proliferate in Georgian translations. This period marks the time when the saint became increasingly recognized as the protector of the Georgian people.³⁰ In the twelfth-century *Synodikon* from Mt. Athos (*Synodikon* 167), St. Demetrios is referred to as the patron saint of the Georgians. The hegumen of the Georgian monastery on Mt. Athos, Paul, lists Demetrios among the protectors of “the Georgian people,” alongside the Mother of God, the Georgian holy fathers, John the Evangelist, and St. George.³¹ Based on these references, Temo Jojua suggests that this tradition may have originated in the Iveron Monastery on Mt. Athos.³²

This tradition is also reflected in visual art, where St. Demetrios appears increasingly alongside St. George and St. Theodore. Notably, Georgian goldsmithery is particularly rich in depictions of St. Demetrios, whose image can be found in the deco-



3.5 St. Demetrios, *Seti*
icon of St. George
(eleventh century). Church
of St. George of *Seti*.

rative frames of numerous icons and pre-altar crosses (*Fig. 3.5*). Simultaneously, several churches were also dedicated to him during this time.³³

In twelfth-century Georgia, the cult of St. Demetrios experienced significant expansion. This growth can be attributed to the universality that his cult achieved within the Byzantine tradition, as well as his central role in imperial patronage.³⁴ The first Bagratid ruler named Demetrios was Demetre I (1125–56), son of David IV the Builder (1089–1125). This connection is noteworthy, as St. Demetrios had been associated with imperial power since the time of Leo VI,³⁵ and then Basil II (976–1025), but particularly since the Komnenoi, especially Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118), a contemporary of David the Builder. Alexios considered this warrior saint not only his personal protector but of his entire dynasty, being the first emperor to mint coins with Demetrios' depictions—a significant turning point in the history of this Thessalonian saint.³⁶ This link was further solidified under Manuel I Komnenos (1143–80), who acquired several important relics associated with his patron saint.³⁷

Thus, it is unsurprising that by the twelfth century, St. Demetrios had also emerged as a patron saint of the Georgian royal dynasty, with his cult serving as yet another testament to the political and symbolic parallels between Alexios I and David the Builder.³⁸ The choice of Demetre as a dynastic name in David's family may indeed be a reflection of these connections.³⁹

3.3.1. THE CHURCH OF THE ARCHANGELS OF IP‘RARI (1096)

A significant monument to the cult of Demetrios is the Church of the Archangels of Ip‘rari (Upper Svaneti).⁴⁰ As noted in an inscription, the murals were painted by “king’s artist T‘evdore” in 1096. In the murals executed during the reign of King David IV the Builder the Thessalonian saint is depicted with considerable



3.6 *Ip'rari* altar screen (1096). *Church of the Archangels of Ip'rari.*

grandeur (Fig. 3.6): he occupies the chancel screen and is clad in a chiton and himation, holding a cross in one hand while raising the other in prayer. Interestingly, he is represented as a young man with a mustache. This portrayal is not particularly unusual, as similar depictions exist in both Byzantine and Georgian art.⁴¹ Maia Machavariani suggests that this depiction of Demetrios may be grounded in a literary parallel; in the metaphrastic version of his martyrdom account, he is described as a mature man: “he had abandoned youth and reached maturity.”⁴² His distinguished military career further implies that he was no longer youthful: “he was illustrious among the aristocracy and *antipatrikios* of the land.” Notably, in the Painter’s Manual of Dionysios of Fourni (ob. c.1750), he is again described as a young warrior with a mustache, reflecting this same tradition.⁴³

Demetrios’ presence on the chancel screen underscores his importance. Such exceptional prominence can be attributed to the historical context in which the painting was created. The murals were painted when David the Builder’s son and heir, the future Demetre I, was just three years old.⁴⁴ St. Demetrios appears on another chancel screen somewhat later, during the reign of Dem-

etre I, in the Church of St. George at Nakip‘ari (1130) in Upper Svaneti. This church is clearly inspired by the decorative program of Ip‘rari (*Fig. 3.7*) showing a special connection between St. Demetrios and his namesake Demetre.

3.7 St. Demetrios (1130).
Nakip‘ari altar screen.
Church of St. George of
Nakip‘ari.



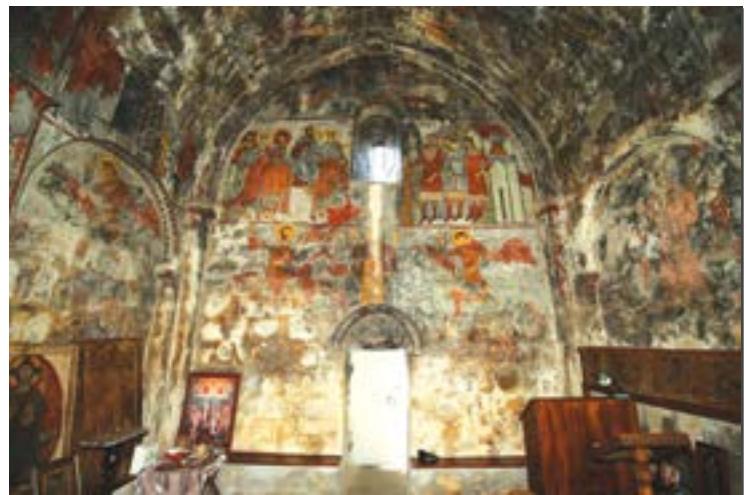
3.3.2. THE CHURCH OF THE SAVIOR OF LATALI (1140)

More famously, St. Demetrios is depicted as the royal patron saint in the Church of the Savior in Latali (Mac‘xvariši), Upper Svaneti (*Fig. 3.8*), by artist Mik‘ael Maqlakeli (1140).⁴⁵ In this decoration, the warrior saint is positioned opposite the portrait of King Demetre I, which, as noted by Antony Eastmond, establishes a “visual and verbal axis” between the two namesakes, highlighting a shared virtue between the saint and the king (*Fig. 3.9*).⁴⁶

Somewhat unusually, in Mac‘xvariši, St. Demetrios is depicted as a mounted figure slaying an anthropomorphic being. Generally, this type of imagery associated with Demetrios is identified with the slaying of the Bulgar king Kaloyan, a narrative that emerges only later, in the thirteenth century.⁴⁷ This atypically early depiction of Demetrios slaying a human could be explained by literary sources, as Euthymios Hagiorites’ compositions include several original miracles attributed to Demetrios, wherein he is



3.8 *St. Demetrios slaying a man* (1140). *Church of the Savior of Latali*, “Mac‘xvariši.”



3.9 *Church of the Savior of Latali (Mac‘xvariši). Interior, west wall* (1140).

portrayed as a punisher of the infidels (e.g., King “K‘aganoz” (Khagan) of Avaria or Mauros).⁴⁸ Furthermore, this iconographic type (warrior saint slaying a man) enhances the triumphant significance of the king’s patron saint and its political context. Such an image of Demetrios is likely inspired by the well-established depiction of St. George defeating Diocletian and thus carries similar historical and symbolic connotations.

While the symbolic association between St. Demetrios and King Demetre is relatively explicit in Mac‘xvariši, in another church in highland Svaneti—the Church of Svip‘i in the P‘ari community—this association is more subtle and can be revealed through detailed iconographic analysis. This unique and highly unusual iconographic program in the Svip‘i church represents a distinctive example of royal patronage by St. Demetrios of Thessalonike.

3.3.3. THE CHURCH OF SVIP‘I IN P‘ARI (TWELFTH CENTURY)

The twelfth-century decoration of the east facade of the Church of St. George of Svip‘i depicts the Hospitality of Abraham (*Fig. 3.10*), and as such, it is the first image that the visitor who



3.10 *Hospitality of Abraham, warrior saints (first half of the twelfth century), facade painting, Church of St. George of Svip'i.*

climbs the top of the mountain observes.⁴⁹ The monumental image of the Old Testament “Trinity” is placed on the gable of the east facade, whereas beneath it, on the main surface, there are three warrior saints.

Svip'i depicts a traditional version of the Hospitality of Abraham (Gen. 18:1–15), with three angels seated at the table. The central angel is singled out by the dark brown attire (while the clothing of the other angels is of a lighter color), with upraised and crossed wings, and the cross nimbus, signifying a Christological interpretation of this Old Testament Epiphany.⁵⁰ The vessels of the wine, bread, and a huge image of a calf as the symbol of the Passover offering take up almost half of the table, thus emphasizing the Eucharistic context of this scriptural passage.⁵¹ Abraham and Sarah are placed at both ends of the table as they raise their hands, holding bread and a wine vessel, as if displaying the liturgical offerings. The location of the scene on the facade of the sanctuary, in turn, reinforces the Eucharistic context of the image.

In the Svip'i program, the warriors are presented with no bordering line separating them from the upper part of the composition. The rhythmical structure of the representation of the

warriors presented in the lower row corresponds to the isocephalic image of the Trinity, leading to the compositional integrity of the facade's decoration.⁵² Natela Aladashvili and Aneli Volskaia point to the fact that the warriors are considerably larger than the Trinity, a feature that is explained by the outstanding cult of the warriors in the mountainous region of Svaneti.⁵³

The warriors are identified in the poorly preserved inscriptions. Among them, St. Demetrios of Thessalonike, whose name is still readable, occupies a dominant place (Fig. 3.11).⁵⁴ He is depicted frontally in the center of the group and is flanked by two mounted warrior saints, St. George and St. Theodore. The heraldic image of the equestrian figures is especially refined; they are shown in solemn march, as if approaching the central figure of St. Demetrios. St. Theodore slices the massive, twisted figure of the dragon, badly damaged today, while St. George kills the emperor Diocletian, whose image is almost lost and can only be reconstructed by the remnant of the shield behind the legs of the horse.

The centrality of the large figure of St. Demetrios, with the upraised sword in his hand and a huge circular shield behind him, is further emphasized by compositional devices: he is depicted directly above the visual axis of the only window of the facade and below the central figure of the Trinity. Such a prominence of St. Demetrios in the murals of a church dedicated to St. George is unusual, especially in Svaneti, where the cult of St. George was a central part of worship.

At first glance, the iconographic program of the Svip'i facade can be explained by the popular Georgian tradition of heraldic images of saints. Following the schema, Demetrios is placed between St. George and St. Theodore. Yet, this distribution may also be explained by the peculiarity of the cult of St. Demetrios. Alongside his military qualities, St. Demetrios the Myrobletes was considered a teacher of the faith, an intercessor, and a miracle worker. Demetrios' martyrdom account ascribes him a special talent for preaching: he was arrested by the emperor for preaching



3.11 *Hospitality of Abraham, warrior saints (first half of the twelfth century), facade painting, schema. Church of St. George of Svip'i.*



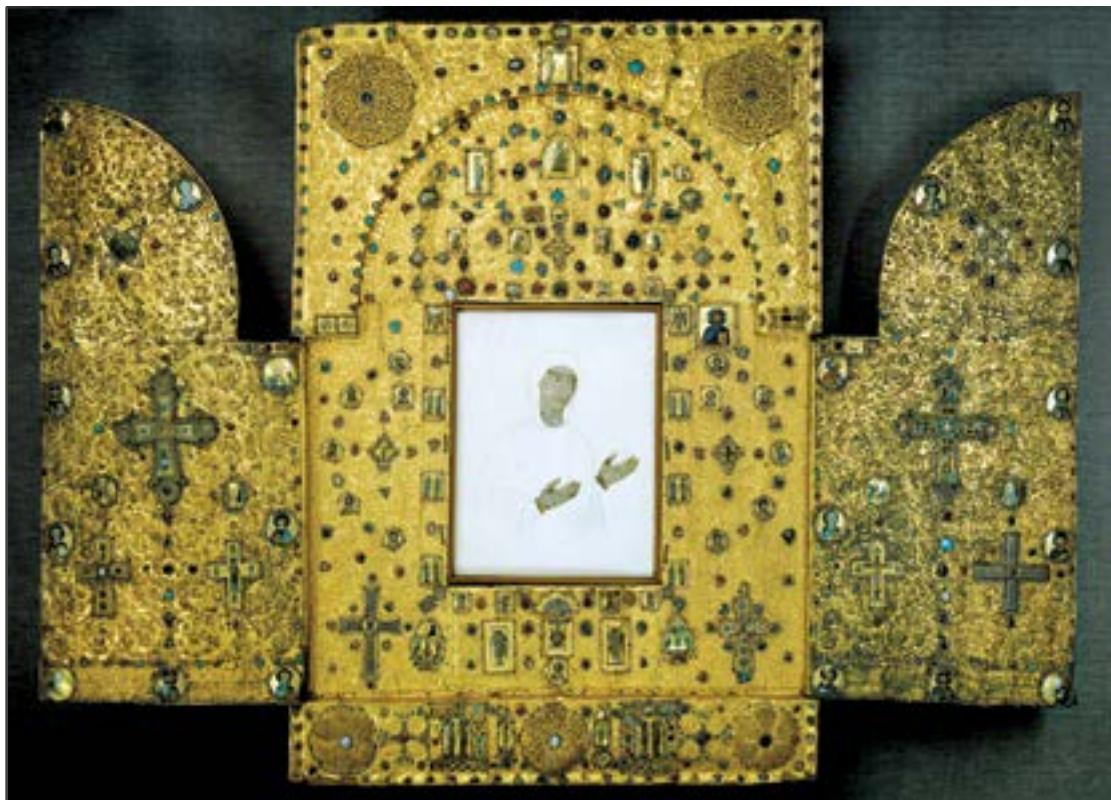
3.12 *Svip'i icon of St. George (twelfth, thirteenth–fourteenth century?). Church of St. George of Svip'i.*

the Christian faith and was defined as a “preacher of the Gospel and of the mystery of the Trinity, not only among the Hellenes and the citizens of Thessalonike but also among those who have not heard his name.”⁵⁵ This aspect of his deeds is emphasized in George Hagiorites’ *Great Synaxarion*, where St. Demetrios is portrayed as “a preacher of the true faith of Christianity.”⁵⁶

Yet, this can only partially explain the unusual image of the Svip’i facade. Arguably, its iconographic solution can also be interpreted in light of the historical realities of the time and may contain more complex symbolic and political meanings. It is likely that the donor of the Svip’i’s decorative program was King Demetre I himself, or, as it was common in medieval Georgia, some other prominent courtier or highly-ranked ecclesiastical figure. Such was the case, for example, of the church of Qincvisi and the rock-cut monastery of Varžia, where the decorative programs sponsored by non-royal donors clearly reflect royal preoccupations. It is not uncommon in medieval Georgian art for the authority and power of the king to be promoted not by the royal members themselves but by their hierarchs and ecclesiastical figures.⁵⁷

The high quality of the painting and the time of its production support this theory. The Svip’i facade painting is characterized as “solemnly monumental and classically harmonized” and is linked with other samples of Georgian wall paintings of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁵⁸ On the basis of stylistic and iconographic analysis, Natela Aladashvili and Aneli Volskaia date its completion to the twelfth century, which is in agreement with our suggestion.⁵⁹ Considering the fact that there are at least three monuments belonging to “king’s artist T’evdore” that served the promotion of the royal power in this highland region, the decoration of Svip’i can also be considered as a part of a monarch’s political project of promoting his authority in this region. In such a case, St. Demetrios appears as the king’s visual representative.

Another indirect evidence of royal or elite patronage of Svip’i is the metalwork icon of the patron of the church (*Fig. 3.12*). Measuring 146 × 84 cm, the silver-gilded icon of “St. George of Svip’i” is the most precious object, outstanding both in terms of size and quality, in the rich treasury of this church. The icon’s frame shows a striking iconographic similarity with one of the most revered icons of Georgia, the Xaxuli icon of the Mother of God (*Fig. 3.13*), whose elaborate frame was crafted on the or-



3.13 *Xaxuli triptych*
(twelfth century).
Georgian National
Museum. Courtesy
of the Giorgi
Chubinashvili National
Research Centre
for Georgian Art
History and Heritage
Preservation, Sergo
Kobuladze Monuments
Photo Recording
Laboratory.

der of King David the Builder and his son Demetre. The floral decoration of the palladium of Georgia, with its interlacing of foliated circles and rhythmical inclusions of the semi-spherical rosettes, triggers an immediate association with the adornment of the Svip'i icon.⁶⁰ The similarity between the two icons was already pointed out by Ekvtime Takaishvili,⁶¹ while Rusudan Kenia characterizes the Svip'i icon as the closest stylistic and iconographic parallel to the Xaxuli icon, even suggesting that the icon of Svip'i was an imitation of the palladium of the Georgian kingdom.⁶² The central part of the icon, with the vast image of the patron saint, however, clearly belongs to a later period, dated by Ekvtime Takaishvili to the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth centuries.⁶³ The inscription below the image identifies a local man by the name of Ivane At'ariani, who, in my opinion, is not the original donor of the icon but its renovator.⁶⁴

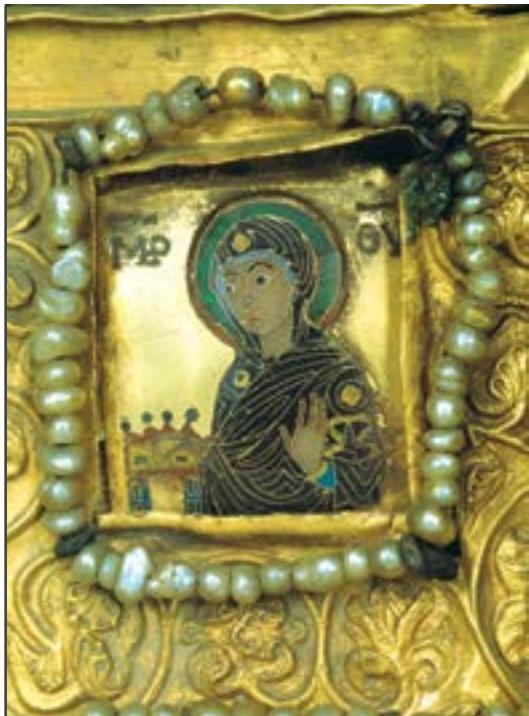
Arguably, the decorative similarity between the icon of Svip'i and the palladium of Georgia provides further substantiation to these historical connections and royal patronage. Especially since the meaning conveyed by the image of St. Demetrios in the dec-



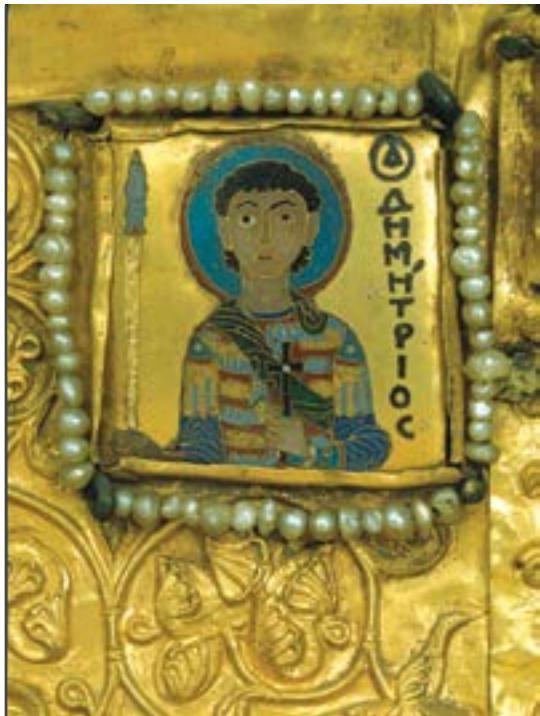
oration of Svip'i is reflected in the image of Demetrios inserted into the Xaxuli triptych.

Moreover, I would suggest that the prominent place of St. Demetrios in the facade decoration of Svip'i echoes the importance of St. Demetrios' figure in the overall decoration of the Xaxuli triptych. Several enamel images of St. Demetrios have been incorporated into the Xaxuli icon. One of the most significant images of the saint is placed in the upper part of the decoration and forms part of the central image of the Deesis. St. Demetrios is displayed next to St. John the Baptist as if comprising part of the Deesis (Fig. 3.14). The centrality of Demetrios is highlighted by a row of pearls surrounding it, thereby seemingly demonstrating intimate ties between St. Demetrios and his namesake king.⁶⁵ Equally important is his depiction in the lower zone of the icon, where the Mother of God and Archangel Michael are holding crowns and handing them over to enthroned Christ (Fig. 3.15). This imagery is usually considered a symbol of charismatic kingship.⁶⁶ Leila Khuskivadze points out that this image is accompanied by two enamel images of warrior saints: St. George and St. Demetrios (Fig. 3.16). In the placement of Demetrios next to the Mother of God, she sees the donor monarch's particular devotion to the Mother of God. The same composition is usually interpreted as the image recalling the ritual of the offering by the emperors of their crowns (or their replicas) to the church of the capital.⁶⁷ Some of the following political messages can be read in the decoration of the palladium of the Georgian kingdom, which was designed to act as the main icon of the katholikon of the Mother of God of Gelat'i founded by David and his son Demetre I: in a scene that conveys the god-ordained monarchy, St. Demetrios is paired with St. George, which acts as an iconographic model of sorts of the two saints whom

3.14 *Deesis, Sts. Demetrios and Prokopios (eleventh century). Xaxuli triptych (twelfth century). Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.*



3.15 *The Mother of God presenting the crown to Christ (eleventh century), detail. Xaxuli triptych (twelfth century). Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.*



3.16 *St. Demetrios (eleventh century). Xaxuli triptych (twelfth century). Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.*

monk Pavle of Mt Athos identifies as the protectors of Georgian people; in another instance, St. Demetrios is part of the Deesis, which presents him as the protector and aid of King Demetre.

Arguably, the iconographic solution of the Xaxuli icon that shows St. Demetrios as King Demetre's patron saint and mediator before Christ and the Theotokos can be contextually related to the Svip'i murals, where St. Demetrios is mediating before the Old Testament Trinity. Probably not coincidentally, the decorative program of the Svip'i icon also conveys a combined scene of the warrior saints and the Deesis, where St. Demetrios is particularly highlighted (Fig. 3.17).

Arguably, the unique subject matter of the facade—the Old Testament Trinity and the warrior saints as an integral part of the scene—can also be explained by the influence of a specific text, namely the homilies dedicated to St. Demetrios, composed

by one of the most prominent Byzantine scholar-emperors, Leo the Wise (867–912).

As noted above, St. Demetrios took on a new role in the imperial court of the Macedonian dynasty. Emperor Leo VI, like his father Basil I (867–86), cultivated the patronage of a number of holy figures.⁶⁸ He showed a keen interest also in St. Demetrios. This special attraction to the saint may well have been related to his ideas about the divine protection of the Byzantine army. But there was also a very personal attitude toward this military saint. The life of Theophano, Leo's first wife, attests to the special intervention and protection of this warrior saint in Leo's complicated story of becoming emperor. In fact, Leo was the first ruler to transfer the patronage of St. Demetrios from Thessalonike to the capital of the empire. He sponsored the construction of a palace church in his honor and wrote the homilies dedicated to the Saint.⁶⁹ Significantly, Leo was probably the first author who was not a citizen of Thessalonike to write a work of this nature in Demetrios' honor.⁷⁰

The earliest and longest of Leo's homilies on St. Demetrios is the seventeenth homily, an encomium based on the long version of the *Martyrdom of Demetrios*.⁷¹ Constantine Porphyrogennetos testifies that it was read on October 26, on the feast of Demetrios.⁷² On the whole, the homily follows the plot of its source, describing the martyrdom of St. Demetrios in detail with several added embellishments, such as the Old Testament story of the epiphany to Abraham. The episode revolves around two focal themes of the life of the Old Testament Patriarch: the promised land and posterity, focusing on the idea of the “New Israel” coming out of the Abrahamic faith and his righteous heirs.⁷³

Leo's homily draws a symbolic parallel with the Old Testament patriarch, comparing St. Demetrios to Abraham, whose exile is taken as a metaphor for the ascetic life of the holy martyr. The search for the new land in Abraham's story is compared to the denial of the earthly pleasures in the martyr's life as the way



3.17 St. Demetrios, Svipti icon of St. George (twelfth century). Church of St. George of Svipti.

of destroying the “earthen vessels” to gain the “prepared place” in the “father’s house:”

... Abraham heard the voice of God, and God said to him to leave his father’s house and become a refugee for the future inheritance... but not only did he [St. Demetrios] abandon his house and relatives, but [he also] sacrificed his whole life and his own flesh and soul to God’s love.” After Abraham listened to God’s words, he was not satisfied and asked God: “What will you give me, seeing I am childless?” The martyr favors being kept away, being separated to be rewarded by the marks of the Lord.⁷⁴

The homily also touches on the theme of the promised children, drawing parallels between the progeny of Abraham and the Martyr to be chosen for martyrdom in God’s name. St. Demetrios is called to be a follower of the patriarchs in his virtues: “[Having] inherited glory joining the angels, whose citizenship he imitates, with joy he was received by the patriarchs in heaven, whose footsteps he followed.”⁷⁵

The theme of the progenies of Abraham and the idea of the “chosen nation” that derived from Abraham are further developed in the homily, in the episode narrating the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. The homily movingly describes the willing sacrifice of the beloved son of Abraham (Gen. 22:2–8). The readiness of Isaac for sacrifice is compared to Demetrios’ eagerness to receive the crown of martyrdom:

Isaac is the prefiguration of Christ
Who willingly offered himself to the Father
Saying nothing and showing his readiness for death.
And he [St. Demetrios] accepted his death and sacrificed
himself to God
and had chosen death instead of honour.⁷⁶

The story of the “sons of Abraham” is further reflected in Jacob’s history. The homily describes Jacob’s vision, interpreting the ladder of the vision as the bridge joining heaven and earth, in accordance with the Patristic tradition. The ladder is juxtaposed with the blood of the martyr, who does not need to see the symbols and prefiguration anymore since Christ has been incarnated to elevate mankind to the “true, deep, and secret visions.”

Georgian liturgical texts offer evidence attesting to the awareness of Leo's homily in Georgia. The mid-eleventh-century *Synaxarion* of St. George Hagiorites, where the feast day of St. Demetrios is celebrated on October 26, the author evokes the liturgical texts by various authors, among whom he cites Leo. The recently discovered Georgian hagiographical collection housed at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg (MS M-21) includes several texts dedicated to St. Demetrios of Thessalonike, among which the Georgian translation of Leo's *Encomium* merits consideration. It appears here under the authorship of the "Greek Emperor Leo" and is dated to no later than the eleventh century.⁷⁷ The Georgian version of the emperor's *encomium* shows some differences from the original. Nevertheless, the passages addressing the theme of Abraham follow, in general, the original Greek text, highlighting the comparison of the warrior saint with Abraham and his progenies.

The incorporation of the story of Abraham into Leo's homily is not coincidental, since the Old Testament was the principal source of political rhetoric of the Macedonians.⁷⁸ Byzantine rulership was regularly cast in Old Testament terms, emphasizing the position of the emperor as the head of the "chosen people" (*periousios laos*). The relationship between Christian kingship and the Old Testament kings was set from the very beginning of the Empire's history; however, the Macedonians played a crucial role in promoting the Old Testament's political and religious metaphor. The most important motivation behind these references to the biblical concept of royal imagery was to convey the idea of "New Israel" as embodied by the Roman Empire. After Iconoclasm and following the Triumph of Orthodoxy (843), the concept of "Elect Nation" became one of the most important tools in the re-establishment of Constantinople's authority as the leader of the Christian world.⁷⁹

This was a part of a project in which the Macedonian emperors portrayed themselves as God-sent righteous kings and rulers of "New Israel," having coined the concept of empire grounded in the biblical national paradigm.⁸⁰ The covenant between God and Abraham is understood in Patristic literature as the blessing of the "New Israel." According to Paul's epistles, this biblical episode contains the promise of the messianic kingdom of the heavenly Jerusalem, where the descendants of Abraham and Isaac will reside (Gal. 4:23–31).

These ideas were directly reflected in the homilies of the emperor, where Leo's view of his role as the spiritual leader of the Empire is evident. Theodora Antonopoulou observes that "the epilogues of the hymns always call for God's protection for the chosen emperor and his people and ... that the emperor conceives himself as responsible for the people's spiritual guidance."⁸¹ Thus, the inclusion of the Old Testament patriarch in Leo's homily echoes, in turn, the policy of the Macedonian dynasty. The short narration recalling Abraham's story is well suited to the notion of the Byzantines being "God's flock and the house of Jacob."⁸²

Therefore, the incorporation of St. Demetrios in the scene of the Hospitality of Abraham may be a reflection of the symbolic connection between the Old Testament patriarch and the martyr, as accentuated in the above-quoted homily. In addition, the Eucharistic meaning that the Hospitality of Abraham conveys resonates with the theme of the meeting of St. Demetrios and the Old Testament Patriarch in heaven. This celestial feast where Demetrios and Abraham convene is mentioned in Leo's other hymns.

Homily 18 is much shorter than 17 and different in its content, focusing mostly on the theme of the heavenly feast, where the blessed are hosted. Emperor Leo invites the listener to join the feast with St. Demetrios: "Nothing gives joy as a joy of the feast of eternity; nothing can be compared to the sweetness gained from it. Let us rejoice together and celebrate the day when the martyr entered paradise and was awarded the wreath."⁸³

The Svip'i scene appears to reflect the very nature of these texts, drawing a symbolic parallel between St. Demetrios and the Old Testament patriarch and echoing the subject of the heavenly meal symbolically conveyed by the Old Testament scene, as if visually summarizing Leo's homilies. The inclusion of two more warriors (St. George and St. Theodore) can be easily explained by the outstanding centrality of the cult of these warrior saints across the Georgian Kingdom and particularly in Svaneti. They are all perceived to be co-participants of the epiphany, turning the Old Testament Trinity into the image of the "heavenly feast," which is presented here as a generalized, symbolic image of the feast of joy where the blessed will be "fed to eternity," as described in Scripture.⁸⁴

As was stated above, Antony Eastmond has argued that King Demetre's power was closely associated with his namesake saint,

who enjoyed a devoted cult in Svaneti. The veneration of the saint was used to promote the authority of the king. If indeed this unique facade decoration served the purpose of promoting the royal power through the patron saint of the king, the episode of Abraham's life becomes part of the nation-building project that endowed the rulers of the Georgian kingdom with sacred features and legitimacy. The Old Testament "Trinity" evokes and illustrates the episode of the epiphany in the plains of Mamre, containing the blessing of the righteous Abraham as a father of the "great and mighty nation," which may symbolically allude to the king's figure replaced here by his namesake Saint. The unusual image of the patron saint of the king placed just beneath the figure of the central angel of the Old Testament Trinity can be perceived as the "hermeneutic" image conveying this very context: the divine descent and sanction of the Georgian royal house associating with the blessing of Abraham given by God (Gen. 17: 6–7; 18:18).

Abraham's covenant has seemingly become a visual part of the biblical ancestry of the Georgian monarchs. Sumbat Davit'isže's *Life and Tales of the Bagratids*, composed at the royal court in the 1030s, provides textual support for this concept. In a long genealogy from Adam until Solomon, it links the provenance of the Georgian royal family with King Solomon. According to Sumbat, the seven sons of Solomon fled Palestine; three stayed in Armenia, while the remaining four of them arrived in Kartli. One of them, named Guaram, was elected as the *erist'avi* (prince) of Kartli, becoming the "father of the Bagrationi family," thereby transferring the kingship of Israel to the land of Kartli.⁸⁵

Therefore, the covenant given to Abraham can be reimagined as the blessing of the Georgian king, where St. Demetrios standing directly under the cross-haloed angel can be interpreted as the patron of King Demetre. In addition, it also incorporated the idea of the "chosen nation" articulated through God's blessing of Abraham.⁸⁶

What attracts special attention in the Svip'i mural is Abraham's clothing (*Fig. 3.18*). Instead of the traditional attire of the Old Testament patriarch, he is portrayed in the traditional costume of Georgian kings and nobles, widely attested in medieval Georgian wall paintings.⁸⁷ The attire further emphasizes these historical allusions, as if visually presenting the Old Testament patriarch as an ancestor of the Georgian royal house.

3.18 Abraham (first half of the twelfth century), facade painting. Church of St. George of Svip'i.



The iconography of St. Demetrios also deserves attention. As pointed out above, he is depicted with a raised sword in his hand, which is common in many Byzantine images of Demetrios. Paul Magdalino suggests that this particular iconography served as the inspiration for the representation of the emperor on the coins of Isaakios Komnenos (1057–1059).⁸⁸ The choice of this particular iconographic version seems to echo this tradition.

The promotion of the monarch's power in this part of the

country through his patron saint was part of a political strategy. Svaneti was the highest continuously inhabited area in the Caucasus; It served as a major communication artery with the north-Caucasian regions and as an important foothold for the spread of the Georgian monarchy's influence beyond the Caucasus. Thus, the dissemination and promotion of the central power in this strategically crucial region of Georgia gained special political and strategic significance.

The Svip'i facade decoration, however, was not only a demonstration of royal power to the local inhabitants. The message was much broader and more complex. The examples linked to royal patronage in Svaneti also aimed at showing the 'new' status of the united Georgian kingdom in the *oikoumenē*. King David's successful wars against the Seljuks resulted in the establishment of the Georgian kingdom as a dominant player in the Caucasus. His victory over the Muslim coalition commanded by Ilghazi turned Georgia into one of the most powerful kingdoms in the Near East. This political scale and newly created Caucasian polity emboldened the ruling dynasty, leading the Georgian nation to declare itself as one of the leading peoples among the "chosen nations" of the Christian commonwealth.⁸⁹ The Svip'i church decoration was a part of this declaration in Georgia's strategic region: the unusual combination of the images of the warriors and that of the Hospitality of Abraham echoes the content of the Homily of Leo the Wise, demonstrating the aspirations of the Bagrationi ruling house and presenting them as the continuers of the biblical story in the era of the "New Israel."

3.3.4. THE CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE OF BOČORMA

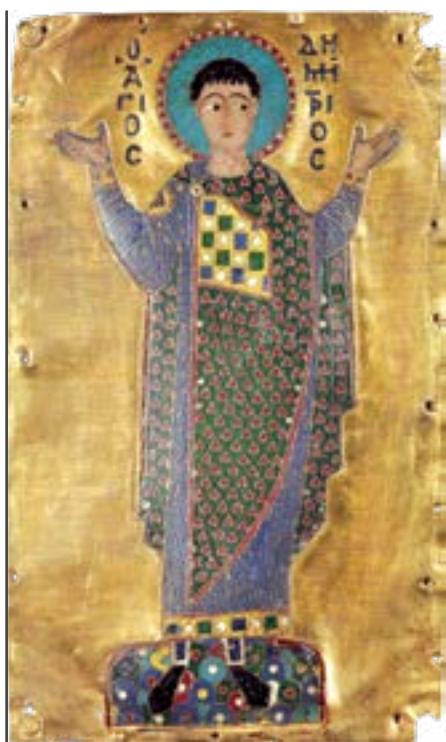
3.19 St. Demetrios
(c.1130). Church
of St. George of
Bočorma.

The theme of royal patronage associated with St. Demetrios is prominently featured also in the decoration of the Church of St. George in Bočorma (c.1130, Kakheti). St. Demetrios is depicted above the portraits of David the Builder, the Emperor Constantine, and Empress Helena (Fig. 3.19).⁹⁰ The warrior saint is positioned on the pilaster of the bema, where his centrality is underscored by both his



size and strategic location. Unfortunately, the identificatory inscription is no longer legible; however, the iconographic characteristics unequivocally point to St. Demetrios, especially since he is dressed in a vivid emerald cloak, a hallmark of his representations.⁹¹ The warrior raises a sword with his right hand, echoing Demetrios' depiction in Svip'i. The royal context of his portrayal in Bočorma is further emphasized by the presence of the images of Constantine and Helena, reinforcing the saint's association with royal patronage.

3.3.5. THE GOSPEL OF VARŽIA



3.20 St. Demetrios (eleventh century).
© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum.
Photo: Arne Psille.

Another notable example of St. Demetrios' royal patronage is the cover of the Gospel of Varžia (NCM Q-899). This cover, which has since been looted and destroyed, originally featured two enamel plaques with Demetrios and the Mother of God, flanked by two angels.⁹² Demetrios' image, arguably dated to the first half of the eleventh century and regarded as a masterpiece of Byzantine enamel art, is housed in the State Museum of Berlin (Fig. 3.20).⁹³ The second decorative composition of the Gospel, which depicted the enthroned Mother of God with the angels, is considered a prime example of twelfth-century Georgian enamel craftsmanship (Fig. 3.21).⁹⁴ The opulent decoration of the Gospel, featuring gold and enamel, along with its exceptional artistic quality, suggests that it was commissioned by the royal family.⁹⁵ Moreover, scholars have argued that it was Queen Tamar's gift to the Varžia Monastery.⁹⁶

Additionally, on the murals of the Church of Dormition of Varžia—similarly to those in Mac'xvariši—there is a direct correlation between the royal portrait and the image of St. Demetrios. Facing the royal portrait of the Bagrationi family, featuring Giorgi III and his daughter Tamar, are distinctive images of the coronation of warrior saints—Sts. George, Theodore, Demetrios, and Prokopios. Antony Eastmond highlights the inscriptions associated with the kings: Giorgi III is identified as “the king of kings, son of King Deme-



3.21 *Gelati Treasury with the image of Varžia Gospel*.
Dimitri Ermakov's photo collection. Courtesy of the National Archives of Georgia, Central Historical Archive.

3.22 *Royal panel: King Giorgi III, Queen Tamar, and Laša-Giorgi with St. George and St. Demetrios (middle of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries)*.
Church of Bet'ania. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.

tre,” a designation that Eastmond interprets as an effort to assert the legitimacy of Georgi III’s reign, particularly in light of the complex and contentious circumstances surrounding his coronation.⁹⁷ The connection between King Giorgi III and St. Demetrios is even more pronounced in the royal imagery of Bet’ania, where the dynastic portrait of the Bagrationis is flanked by the warrior saints—George and Demetrios (Fig. 3.22). Clearly, the decoration of the Varžia Gospel carried a similar significance, reinforcing King Giorgi III’s identity as the son of Demetre and thereby legitimizing Tamar’s lineage.



3.4. ST. DEMETRIOS' CYCLE: THE CHAPEL OF DODORK‘A

In 2015, a chapel was unearthed in the Dodork‘a monastery of the Davit‘gareja complex, with the cycle of Demetrios of Thessalonike, which is why in the scholarly literature the chapel is known as St. Demetrios’ Chapel. The discovery changed, or perhaps clarified, the history of the cult of Demetrios of Thessalonike in Georgia. Shortly after the find, Marine Bulia published a study suggesting the identification of the scenes and the approximate date of the painting.⁹⁸ Later, she dedicated a monographic study to this subject.⁹⁹

The Dodork‘a cycle is one of the earliest, if not the earliest, preserved depictions of the life of the Thessalonian saint in monumental painting.¹⁰⁰ In any case, today it is identified as the earliest surviving monumental cycle of the great martyr.¹⁰¹ Outside monumental painting, the earliest scenes of Demetrios’ life are attested in the miniature painting of the “Theodore Psalter” (MS 19352, British Library) (1066).¹⁰² The reliquary of St. Demetrios of Vatopedi has preserved a sculptural cycle of the twelfth century.¹⁰³ His cycle became especially popular in monumental painting from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries and later in the Palaiologan and post-Byzantine eras.¹⁰⁴ Thus, apart from several unique iconographic features, the hagiographic cycle of

3.23 St. Demetrios’ chapel,
view to the east. Monastery
of the Mother of God of
Dodork‘a in Davit‘gareja.



Davit‘gareja is important also from the chronological point of view.

The Davit‘gareja chapel of St. Demetrios is entirely covered by wall paintings. Panagia Platytera, which is considered a symbol of the Incarnation, is shown in the sanctuary. The small conch represents a laconic version of the program: instead of the traditional row of bishops, there are only two Church Fathers (*Fig. 3.23*). On top of the altar is the Annunciation, the only Christological scene in this space. Bulia explains the choice of the Platytera type of the Theotokos, which was less popular in Georgia, as well as the topography of the Annunciation, by the influence of Byzantine art.¹⁰⁵ The selection of the Mother of God as the theme for the conch is based on the Thessalonian tradition of closely associating the Theotokos and St. Demetrios. The direct expression of this connection was the double name of the Thessalonian basilica, which carried the names of both the Mother of God and St. Demetrios.¹⁰⁶ The link between these two cults was expressed by two icons in the ciborium: those of the Mother of God and Demetrios. Liturgical practice also reflected this unity.¹⁰⁷ Robin Cormack suggests that St. Demetrios’ extensive popularity can indeed be partly explained by his association with the cult of the Mother of God.¹⁰⁸ Evidently, this also explains why the hymns of Euthymios Hagiorites dedicated to St. Demetrios are intertwined with the theme of the Mother of God.¹⁰⁹

The *Life* of the patron of the church consists of six episodes divided into four scenes. The painting covers the walls in one register (*Fig. 3.24*). Along with the hagiographic cycle, traditional images of the warrior saints are also visible: immediately next to the altar, St. George and Theodore appear as the guardians of the altar’s space (*Fig. 3.25*), while on the opposite side, standing alone on the north wall, we can observe St. Demetrios (*Fig. 3.26*). The latter is distinguished by his size. Probably, the row on the south wall was filled with images of other soldier saints as well.¹¹⁰ The entire area of the vault is occupied by the impressive image of the Elevation of the Cross by the angels, a traditional subject of medieval Georgian art, and especially the art of Davit‘gareja (*Fig. 3.27*). The composition is accompanied by the figures of the four evangelists inscribed in a circle.

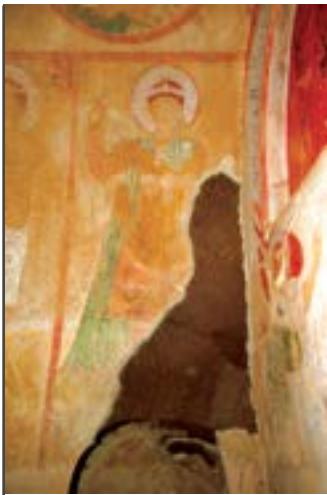
The first thing that catches the eye is the chapel’s unusual iconographic program, where only one Christological scene is present, while the rest of the scenes are dedicated to the life



3.24 St. Demetrios' chapel, general view. Monastery of the Mother of God of Dodork'a in Davit'gareja.



3.25 St. George and St. Theodore (twelfth century?). St. Demetrios' chapel. Monastery of the Mother of God of Dodork'a in Davit'gareja.



3.26 St. Demetrios (twelfth century?). St. Demetrios' chapel. Monastery of the Mother of God of Dodork'a in Davit'gareja.



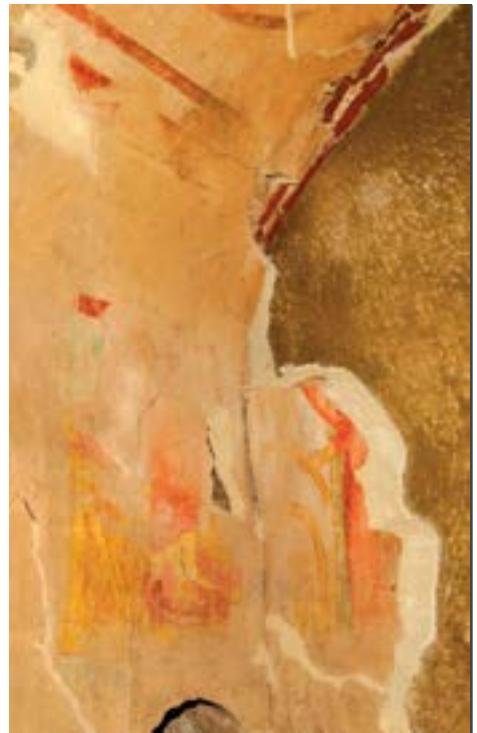
3.27 Ascension of the cross (twelfth century?). St. Demetrios chapel. Monastery of the Mother of God of Dodork'a in Davit'gareja.

of the chapel's patron, St. Demetrios.¹¹¹ Usually, in monumental paintings, St. Demetrios or other patrons of the church (e.g., Sts. George, John the Baptist, Kyrikos and Ioulitta, etc.) are depicted together with Christological scenes. Here, however, the theme of the warrior saint is dominant. As we saw in the chapter on St. George, there are several examples in Georgian art of

highlighting the patron saint in such a way.¹¹² Along with the existing tradition, this choice was possibly also inspired by the decoration of the main shrine of Demetrios—the Basilica of Thessalonike, which has neither Old Testament nor Gospel-themed cycles, otherwise so characteristic of early Christian decorations. The main focus of decoration is on the votive images of Demetrios, which, in the case of Dodork‘a, is replaced by the cycle of his life.

The cycle of Demetrios’ life begins in the corner of the south wall and unfolds in a clockwise direction. The first scene in the west corner of the wall, St. Demetrios standing in front of the emperor, is divided between two walls. In one corner, a heavily damaged figure of the enthroned emperor can be observed, whereas in the other corner, to the west, stands St. Demetrios (Fig. 3.28). The saint holds a belt in his hand, a symbolic attribute of earthly glory, which symbolizes the martyr’s rejection of earthly life. Nearby, a shield is visible.¹¹³ The representation of the warrior without his battle armor seems to point to the abandonment of military honor. Maia Machavariani has observed that this episode is also highlighted in Euthymios Hagiorites’ translation of the *Martyrdom*, where, at the culminating moment of their standoff, the martyr throws his belt before the emperor.¹¹⁴ Due to its particular interest in the episode with the belt, which is absent in the Greek texts, Dodor‘ka may be considered a visual representation of Euthymios’ text.

The next scene shows St. Demetrios in the cell which occupies the central area of the west wall. It is highlighted by the architectural structure reflected in the composition—the graceful baldachin on the columns and the clear red spot presented as a background (Fig. 3.29). It depicts the saint in the cell and includes the episode of his crowning as a martyr. The scene also incorporates the first miracle performed by Demetrios—the miraculous killing of the scorpion by crossing.¹¹⁵ The martyr is represented in the center, directing his left hand toward the angel and extending his right toward the huge scorpion in the corner. Due to its scale, place of depiction and compositional features,



3.28 St. Demetrios throwing the girdle at the emperor (twelfth century?). St. Demetrios chapel. Monastery of the Mother of God of Dodork‘a in Davit‘gareja.



3.29 *St. Demetrios in prison, the coronation of St. Demetrios, the miracle of the scorpion* (twelfth century?).
St. Demetrios chapel. Monastery of the Mother of God of Dodork'a in Davit'gareja.

this scene is perceived as the key episode of the cycle, and in this, it remains faithful to Euthymios' text: the huge size of the scorpion and the heat of the therms are particularly emphasized in the Georgian version.

The next scene depicts St. Nestor visiting Demetrios in the cell (Fig. 3.30). This composition is arranged to correspond to the first scene of the cycle (St. Demetrios before the emperor). Correspondingly, Demetrios is placed on the west wall, while St. Nestor appears on the north wall. It is followed without any dividing register by Nestor's defeat of the gladiator, where, against the background of a large building, the gladiator lies on the ground.

In the life cycle of Demetrios, the episodes of the blessing of Nestor and his victory occupy a prominent place. The same episodes are also highlighted in the abovementioned Theodore Psalter.¹¹⁶ The Psalter includes three scenes: Demetrios praying in front of the icon of Christ, Nestor engaging the gladiator, and the emperor learning of gladiator Laios's defeat.¹¹⁷ In general, the episode of Nestor's blessing is understood as an example of Demetrios' power to intercede and protect, an aspect also emphasized in the *Martyrdom*.¹¹⁸ It is noteworthy that in Byzantine literature,



3.30 *Blessing of St. Nestor by St. Demetrios, St. Nestor's victory, (twelfth century?). St. Demetrios chapel. Monastery of the Mother of God of Dodork'a in Davit'gareja.*

Nestor is compared to the Biblical king David, who won over Goliath with God's intervention. Evidently, the prominence of Nestor's theme encapsulates this idea, and the story of his victory becomes a certain sub-cycle expressing the idea of triumph.¹¹⁹

Demetrios' cycle on the Vatopedi Reliquary (1150s) begins with the same scene. Jaš Elsner compares the reliquary to a "hagiographical icon" of the Great Martyr.¹²⁰ St. Nestor's theme is particularly highlighted, together with the episode of his arrival in the cell, his victory, and his martyrdom. Most likely, there should have been a portrait image of Nestor in Davit'gareja, which increased St. Nestor's role in the overall content of the cycle.

The tradition of including Nestor together with Demetrios, in accordance with the Byzantine tradition, has also been established in Georgia (e.g., Tselenjikha, Nakuraleši paintings) (Fig. 3.31). In the decoration of the twelfth-century church of St. George of Ikvi, the coupled portraits of St. Demetrios and St. Nestor are especially accentuated (Fig. 3.32). In Ikvi, the first register of the south transept is devoted to the warrior saints. These two warrior saints are superior in size to all the others. Along with their size, their bright colors are also striking. Both of them wear red halos, which seems to be an iconographic representation of Demetrios' torture by fire, while the rest of the warriors have golden-yellow nimbs.¹²¹ This meaning, as we saw above, is conveyed also



3.31 *Warrior saints (1384–1396). Church of the Savior of Tselenjikha.*



3.32 *St. Demetrios and St. Nestor (middle of the twelfth century). Church of St. George of Ikvi.*

in the color of the painting of the Davit‘gareja chapel, where Demetrios’ martyrdom in the therms unfolds against a bright red background.

In Dodork‘a, the scene of Demetrios’ execution, which is distinguished by a number of features, deserves special attention. According to the Byzantine tradition, St. Demetrios was executed with a spear; however, in Dodork‘a the scene is expanded with the episode of the dismemberment of his body (Fig. 3.33). This insertion must be a reflection of Euthymios Hagiorites’ redaction of Demetrios’ martyrdom. The Georgian version includes the episode of cutting up the saint in pieces: “Then they began ... to cut up the body parts of the holy one; mercilessly, they cut off his arms and legs, and then they killed him with a spear, and thus he died.”¹²² According to St. Euthymios’ version, the frightened em-

3.33 *Martyrdom of St. Demetrios* (twelfth century?). St. Demetrios' chapel. Dodork'a monastery of the Theotokos.



peror prefers to kill the saint in his cell instead of publicly punishing him.¹²³ This local version of Demetrios' death also appears in later Georgian writing: for example, in the translation of the eleventh-century encomium of Pseudo-Gregory, as well as Leo's homily, the original of which describes the traditional version of Demetrios spearing but knows nothing of his cutting.¹²⁴ The same version is known from George Hagiorites' *Great Synaxarium*, which is dependent on Euthymios Hagiorites in several crucial ways.¹²⁵ Euthymios Hagiorites explains the meaning of this episode: the cutting of the limbs was intended as an antithetical symbol of victory over death and the brilliance of the soul.¹²⁶ Maia Machavariani suggests that this motif must have originated in some lost Greek source.¹²⁷ This local version of Demetrios' death finds a symbolic parallel in St. George's national feast: George's martyrdom on the wheel and the cutting of his limbs. Arguably, this obvious parallelism has determined the popularity in Georgia of this particular version of Demetrios' death.

The episode, which is different in terms of plot, differs also in iconography.¹²⁸ Demetrios is shown standing, with his hands and feet cut off. His body, wrapped in linen, provides direct association with the figure of the crucified Savior, an allusion often

emphasized in the hymns dedicated to the great martyr.¹²⁹ In the scene, the dismembered body parts and the chlamys are intentionally accentuated. In fact, the chlamys is painted separately and highlighted by its color. The importance of the cloak is also accentuated in Euthymios' text, which narrates its subsequent history and describes its miraculous powers, reminding the reader of the cloak of Prophet Elijah (2 Kings 2:8): the miracle of the dividing of the river and the crossing of the river with the cloak:

ხოლო ეპარხოზმან აღიღო სამოსელი წმიდისა მის შე-
ღებილი სისხლითა და ნახევარი თავის სახვეველისა მი-
სისა, და შექმნა ჭურჭელი ვერცხლისა და შთადვა მას
შინა და წარვიდა იგი, გზასა თვისსა. ხოლო ვიდოდა რა
მიეხალა მდინარესა დანუბსა და იქმნა ზამთარი დიდი,
ვიდრედა არცაღათუ ნავითა შესაძლებელ იყო განსვლად
მდინარისა მის. და მწუხარე იყო ეპარხოზი, რამეთუ ვერ
წარვიდოდა გზასა თვისსა. და იხილა ყოვლად დიდებუ-
ლი მოწამე ძილსა შინა წმიდა დემეტრე, რომელი ეც-
ყოდა მას: ყოველივე ურწმუნოება და მწუხარება განაგ-
დე შენგან და აღიღე, რომელი-ეგე შენ თანა გაქუს და
განვლე შეუთრგულებლად მდინარე ესე. აღიღო ხელითა
თვისითა ჭურჭელი იგი რომელსა შინა იყო სამოსელი
წმიდისა მოწამისა და განვლო უვნებლად მდინარე იგი
და ესრე წარვიდა სერმონს.¹³⁰

Then the eparchos took the chlamys of the holy one painted with blood and half of his shroud. And he made a silver vessel and placed the relics in it and left. And he reached the River Danube and since it was the middle of winter, it was impossible to cross the river even by boat. Eparchos was saddened, as he could not continue his journey. When he fell asleep, he saw the glorious martyr Demetrios, who said to him: abandon your lack of faith and sadness, take what is in your possession, and walk the river without second thought. So he took the silver vessel where the saint's cloak was kept and he crossed the river safely and reached Sermon.

Marine Bulia argues that such an accentuation of the chlamys in the murals of Davit‘gareja suggests that the chapel was conceived and served as a monumental reliquary designed for this relic and was not a mere illustration of the text.¹³¹ Bulia supports

this view by pointing to the sanctuary's highly unusual architectural structure, which is unparalleled in Davit'gareja or in Georgian or Byzantine architecture in general.¹³²

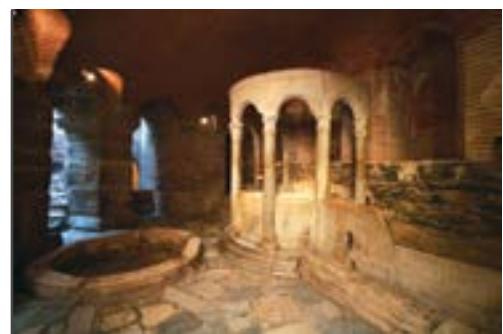
What makes the sanctuary of Davit'gareja unusual is the flat niche over the conch. It is larger than the rock-cut apse and is fully covered in red paint. In the upper section the niche has a beautiful inscription executed in red: "The holiness of your house, Lord, the length of the day," which is not uncommon in altar apses of Georgian churches (see Č'vabiani, Bočorma and others).¹³³

According to Marine Bulia, this type of altar was intentionally created for this chapel and was "intended to hold some precious relic, probably a part of the chlamys."¹³⁴ According to her reconstruction, Demetrios' supposed relic must have been placed in the niche above the altar.¹³⁵ The intense red color of the niche is explained by the researcher as a symbol of martyrdom or an imitation of a precious silk fabric that, in Byzantine tradition, covered the relics.¹³⁶ She identifies this unusual structure of the apse of Dodork'a with the famous ciborium of St. Demetrios of Thessalonike, and considers it to be an architectural allusion to his abode.¹³⁷

In the Basilica of Thessalonike, next to the ciborium (*Fig. 3.34*), which is considered the center of St. Demetrios' cult, the crypt under the altar deserves special attention. Locals still believe it to be the place of the saint's martyrdom in the thermae, a tradition that preserves a centuries-old memory (*Fig. 3.35*). Indeed, the veneration of the patron saint of the city and the spread of the cult originated from this place.¹³⁸ The importance of the crypt is also evidenced by the fact that in the ninth century it was in the crypt, on the site of Demetrios' martyrdom,



3.34 Ciborium. Basilica of St. Demetrios in Thessalonike.



3.35 Crypt. Basilica of St. Demetrios in Thessalonike.

where a new canopy-like shrine was built.¹³⁹ Its importance has increased even further since the “myrrhgushing” miracle.¹⁴⁰ Helena Bogdanović and Robin Cormack talk about the expansion of the cult of Demetrios and the existence of two main installations in the Basilica of Thessalonike since Iconoclasm.¹⁴¹ Arguably, the Davit‘gareja chapel reflects this trend. The peculiarity of the decoration of the altar apse is a topographical allusion to the crypt; the arched form, which is so particularly highlighted in this small space, expresses this symbolic connection. This is also supported by the intense, fiery red color extensively used in the niche, covering the entire space. The wall is painted with large patches, giving the impression of a raging fire and evoking the furnace of martyrdom. Thus, the chapel of Dodork‘a serves as a certain architectural narrative of Demetrios’ martyrdom. Euthymios Hagiorites is particularly focused on the description of the martyr’s cell, describing it much more vividly than the Greek original: “The vault of the cell where the blessed one was thrown was unbearable due to the raging fire.”¹⁴² On the west wall, the scene of Demetrios’ martyrdom in the thermae is expressed in a similar intense red color. These two “spatial-symbolic” foci of the cycle point to two major sacred places of the shrine: they depict the place of the passion of Demetrios, combining the “two centers” of the Thessalonian shrine—the crypt and the ciborium. The scene of the martyrdom is especially telling: it represents Demetrios’ martyrdom in the thermae, but shows rather the ciborium of the Basilica of Thessalonike than the architectural setting of the thermae. Such a solution was likely determined by the “multi-dimensional” reliquaries of St. Demetrios, which were designed for the myron of St. Demetrios’ basilica. Andre Grabar has discussed the multistructural features of these reliquaries.¹⁴³ Some of the most notable examples are a group of reliquaries from Herbelstatt, a small reliquary-pendant kept in Dumbarton Oaks, and the reliquary of the British Museum that belonged to the martyred Georgian queen Ketevan (1560–1624) (Fig. 3.36).¹⁴⁴ Their architectural form covered and, at the same time, conveyed the holy figure of the martyr buried in the grave. The complex architectural face of reliquaries encapsulated, in Jaš Elsner’s words, a “virtual pilgrimage” and essentially made the observer and bearer of the relic a virtual pilgrim to the shrine of Thessalonike.¹⁴⁵ In these reliquaries, the focus of Demetrios’ cult is the ciborium, which, over time, became a visible manifestation of



3.36 St. Demetrios. Enclopium of St. Demetrios (twelfth–thirteenth century). British Museum. © British Museum Images.

the invisible relics.¹⁴⁶ However, the micro-architectural models of the reliquary do not express merely the symbolism of the ciborium. Their mimetic function (symbolic pilgrimage) includes the extended entourage of the sacred space of the Basilica. Together with the modeling of a specific ciborium, they implied a wider architectural-spatial allusion.¹⁴⁷ To put it in Cormack's words, they allude to two channels providing access to the Saint—the silver ciborium and the crypt—where the clergy was able to supply a great basin of oil.¹⁴⁸ The two loci are reflected in the structure of the reliquary—the sarcophagus and the ciborium—and the inscriptions, which point to the myron and blood.¹⁴⁹

The Davit'gareja chapel also expresses the integrity of the sacred space with its decoration and architectural features. The east wall symbolically refers to the locus of martyrdom and marks the place of the Savior's bloodless sacrifice—the altar.¹⁵⁰ While the central scene on the west wall illustrates the martyrdom and glorification of St. Demetrios. But St. Demetrios is presented not in the vaulted structure of the thermal baths but rather in the ciborium—a delicate lattice-curved canopy with elegant columns alluding to the saint's "dwelling" and pointing to the shape of *proskynetaria*. Along with illustrating a specific martyrdom scene, it also acts as an illustration of the saint's divine coronation, where the ciborium acquires the meaning of the heavenly cover. These double topographical allusions implied in the painting of the Davit'gareja chapel echo the spatial-architectural multi-planarity of Demetrios' *Locus Sanctus* as well as reliquaries connected to this great martyr.¹⁵¹

Bulia stresses the fact that the monasteries of Davit'gareja were under royal patronage, and such accentuation of St. Demetrios of Thessalonike can indeed be seen as an influence of Byzantine imperial art: "In the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, the possession of the relic of the patron saint of the Imperial House and its support for the country, which was at the zenith of the Bagrationi family's rule, would be a kind of prestige—a statement of military power and might."¹⁵² Bulia also notes that the cycle, with its artistic quality and precious pigments used in it (lapis lazuli, gold), indicates the importance of the project.¹⁵³ However, she does not specify the identity of the possible donor and, as mentioned above, names the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth century as the time of creation of the painting.¹⁵⁴

Among more than twenty inscriptions or graffiti found in the chapel, the most important one in terms of location (the central area of the front of the altar wall) as well as size are the inscriptions of *P'arxadavle C'xadas-že* or *C'xuedas-že* dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹⁵⁵ “Christ, have mercy, and protect those who celebrate here and me, the dirt of the kings, *P'arxadavle C'xadas-že* (or *C'xuedas-že*) and whoever prays for my absolution, may God absolve them, amen.” It is on the basis of these inscriptions that Temo Jojua determines the chapel’s function and suggests that it may be the royal family’s private chapel.¹⁵⁶ Considering the historical realities and the chronology of the painting, he suggests two possible members of the royal family: Demetre I and Prince Demetre/Demna (son of King David V (1155/6–57), however, he prefers Demetre I.¹⁵⁷ Jojua suggests that the Dodork‘a church must have been founded during the life of the king or shortly after his death, in 1150–60 and that the chapel was painted in the same decade.¹⁵⁸

The Mravalmt‘a cave monasteries of Davit‘gareja, which were in the possession of the Kingdom of Kakheti-Hereti, became part of the united Georgian monarchy in the twelfth century.¹⁵⁹ From then on, until the fifteenth century, the Mravalmt‘a monasteries remained under royal patronage.¹⁶⁰ Chubinashvili considers the beginning of the twelfth century as the era of renovation and revival of Davit‘gareja, which from then on was carried out under the patronage of the kings of the united Georgia.¹⁶¹ The royal patronage of Mravalmt‘a is supported by the unprecedentedly extensive portrait gallery of the Bagrationi house in the Davit‘gareja monastery of Nat‘lismc‘emeli (John the Baptist) (Fig. 3.37).¹⁶² This special royal interest in Davit‘gareja, along with the spiritual significance of these shrines (the founder of the Davit‘gareja monastery was St. David of Gareja (early sixth century), one of the “thirteen Syrian fathers”), is largely explained by its strategic location.¹⁶³

Zaza Skhirtladze suggests that King Demetre I must have been tonsured as a monk at Davit‘gareja, which is claimed by somewhat later (sixteenth and seventeenth-century) sources.¹⁶⁴ This information is not, however, corroborated by contemporaneous sources, apart from the *Chronicler of Laša-Giorgi*, who reports that Demetre had indeed become a monk but does not specify the monastery, noting only that he became a monk before dying at an old age.¹⁶⁵ Katholikos Antony I (1720–88) claims to

have seen an image of King Demetre guised in a monk's attire among Davit'gareja's wall paintings. However, he was most likely referring to the murals of the above-mentioned decoration of Nat'lismc'emeli, where in the dynastic portrait of the Bagrationis, Demetre, son of David, is presented in monastic attire, and the inscription identifies him as "King of Kings."¹⁶⁶ Andrey Muravyov identifies Demetre I or Demetre II as the probable founder of the annex in the Nat'lismc'emeli monastery dedicated to St. Demetrios of Thessalonike.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, although there is no strictly contemporary evidence for Demetre's ordination as a monk in Davit'gareja monastery, this tradition must not lack



3.37 Royal panel (early thirteenth century).
Nat'lismc'emeli Monastery of Davit'gareja.

credibility, especially in such a continuously inhabited and lively monastery as the Mravalmt‘a hermitages.¹⁶⁸ Most likely, traces of Demetre I appear in the above-discussed Dodork‘a monastery. Temo Jojua’s study of the chapel and his analyses of the inscriptions also support this theory.

A stylistic analysis of the decoration of Dodork‘a may yield a more precise dating: With the clear, tectonic character of the painting, the scale of the figures, and overall monumentality, the painting of Davit‘gareja is similar to the decoration of the Gelat‘i narthex of the first half of the twelfth century, lacking, however, the harmony and sophistication of the latter. Unfortunately, the modeling of the faces and drapery is badly damaged. In such a case, the compositional structure of the painting and the character of the decorative system can tell us more about the date.¹⁶⁹

The level of the lower register framing the painting is quite high (it is about 180 centimeters above ground level). The line marking the register is maintained at the same height everywhere, which is characteristic of Georgian monuments until the first half of the twelfth century. Bulia rightly points out the different principles of the distribution of compositions in the decorative system, for example, the difference between the compositions of the frontal figures dominating the south wall and the narrative cycle on the rest of the walls, which, to some extent, breaks the symmetrical character of the overall artistic program. Moreover, a single narrative line is clearly expressed in the cycle, which further accentuates the difference in the compositional arrangement.¹⁷⁰ But while the tectonics of ‘independent scene-composition’ arrangement characteristic of the eleventh century are no longer present in the Davit‘gareja cycle, neither can we observe the unity of space and narration typical of the thirteenth century, which Mariam Didebulidze defines as “antiphonal unity.”¹⁷¹

In terms of compositional distribution, the artist is inclined toward structuring: the “triptych-like” (Bulia) division of the west wall, a large building in the scene of the gladiator’s defeat leaning upon the register, which acts as a kind of cesium in the narrative cycle, etc. Thus, the scenes have a more consistent, “pushing,” and dynamic character, which implies a synthesis of classical and new, so-called “dynamic style” and is more characteristic of the monuments of the first half and middle of the twelfth century. In terms of the distribution of the artistic program, the church of Ikvi acts as the closest parallel to Dodork‘a, where similar inconsis-

ency in the distribution of painting between the transepts clearly transpires (for example, the cycle of St. George of the north transept and the row of the warrior saints of the south transept). The character of the overall artistic program in Ikvi, however, is even more dynamic and asymmetrical. The levels of painting are also mismatched in the transepts. In terms of the distribution of scenes, even more dynamic is the mid-twelfth-century church of St. George of Kalaubani, where large-scale scenes coexist with smaller icon-like images on the walls, thus creating the impression of breaking the integrity of the wall.¹⁷²

The treatment of the bordering register appears as a stylistic signature. Here, too, the artist from Gareja displays moderation. For example, the halo of St. Demetrios who is depicted in the cell, seamlessly touches the border of the composition. The figure of the executioner is rendered with similar care; his leg slightly extends beyond the vertical line of the register, etc. Notably, none of the figures are truncated by the register line in any of the scenes. They are freely distributed in the space of the composition and only in rare cases are they leaning upon or are close to the register line (for example, the scene of St. Nestor's arrival in the cell and the figure of St. Demetrios). Figures that transgress the register line—a hallmark of spatial thinking—became particularly prevalent in Georgian wall painting from the 1150s onward, with even greater frequency emerging in the early twelfth century. For example, if T‘evdore, the “king’s artist,” clearly avoids this stylistic feature in Ip‘rari (1096), he uses it several times in Nakiп‘ari (1130). This kind of compositional solution is common in Mac‘xvariši (1140) and Ikvi paintings (c.1150), among others.

For an artist steeped in the classical tradition of the eleventh century, compositions folded from one wall to another, which the artist of Davit‘gareja uses twice (St. Demetrios before the emperor and blessing of Nestor), are unexpected. Such neglect of the wall became more common in the thirteenth century.¹⁷³ However, it can also be found in earlier paintings: for example in Boč‘orma (c.1130), where the figure of Longinus the Centurion is folded on the pilaster. In our case, however, the figures arranged on the edges of the west wall are placed in such a way that instead of breaking the symmetry, they center on the scene of the martyrdom, creating a symmetrical tripartite scene of the west wall.

Giorgi Chubinashvili’s chronological analysis of the color palette within the Davit‘gareja artistic school offers valuable in-

sights.¹⁷⁴ The Dodork‘a painting is predominantly composed of warm tones, primarily influenced by the abundant use of golden and bright yellow hues typical of Davit‘gareja’s style, which manifests in the depiction of nimbs, garments, the ground, buildings, and other elements. Additionally, red and reddish-brown pigments are extensively utilized, with large, striking spots appearing in the painting of the niche, the background of the ciborium, and the clothing details, significantly shaping the overall warm color palette of Dodork‘a.

In later periods, there is a noticeable shift toward cooler colors, as seen in the thirteenth-century churches of Nat‘limc‘emeli, Bert‘ubani, and the Church of the Annunciation at Udabno Monastery. Here too, St. Demetrios’ chapel exhibits a more conservative approach. This contrast becomes especially pronounced when compared to the early thirteenth-century paintings at the nearby Nat‘lismc‘emeli monastery, where bright azure predominates entire painting.

The coloring in Demetrios’ chapel is restrained, if we can say so, to match the arrangement of the compositions. It is built on a tectonic rhythm of wide spots, which is based on the artistic effect of a “laconic” color. The sporadic intensive accents of *lapis lazuli* and emerald color introduce the dotted character accents characteristic of the twelfth century into the overall embroidery of the painting. The attire of the angels in the Exaltation of the Cross (Fig. 3.27) is very characteristic—showcasing the alternation of red and emerald garments on paired figures with striking accents of the same dotted character.

The rhythmic nature of the painting in Davit‘gareja mirrors that of monuments from early and mid-twelfth centuries seen in the works from Bočorma, Ikvi, and the north transept of Bet‘ania. This unique rhythm is manifested in the way color and narrative structures develop within the compositions.

Furthermore, the calm and clear outlines, along with the laconic quality of the painting, echo the strict tectonics of movement and gesture, imparting an impression of the simple monumentality characteristic of the twelfth century. The geometric representation of clothing—dresses with straight or, in some instances, triangular outlines—bears resemblance to the paintings of Ikvi and Mac‘xvariši. However, the latter is notably rougher compared to the more calligraphic style of Davit‘gareja, with lines that lack the fluidity evident in the late twelfth-century

works (e.g., P‘avnisi) and, particularly, the monuments from the thirteenth century.

Characteristically, wide and free backgrounds also appear, which Gaiane Alibegashvili calls “pauses” and identifies as one of the principles of composition of the age (eleventh–twelfth centuries).¹⁷⁵ With this compositional arrangement, the Davit‘gareja cycle echoes scenes of Demetrios from the Vatopedi Monastery (1150s) (*Fig. 3.38*). But in the latter, compared to our painting, the pauses are mixed with extensive inscriptions and, therefore, the sense of compositional freedom characteristic of our monument is lost.

The depictions of architecture are also indicators of the era. In the Dodork‘a chapel, these images can even be called monumental. A large, geometrical entourage follows the principles of the so-called “representational-planar” style characteristic of the twelfth century with its plain and compositional meaning (compare, for example, with the illustrations of the Georgian Pentakostarion (*Zatiki*) (NCM A-734).¹⁷⁶ The image of the mountain is of the same nature, which differs from the dynamic, wave-like mountains of P‘avnisi (1180s) by its plain features.

Considering these artistic features, the painting can be dated to the twelfth century, its first half or middle years, especially since the historical evidence also supports this dating. According to Chubinashvili, Dodork‘a, together with the Lavra and the Monastery of John the Baptist, is among the monasteries founded by St. David Garejeli himself or his immediate disciples.¹⁷⁷ Thus, these two ancient sepulchral branches (Lavra was a burial place of St. David, while Dodork‘a was a burial place of St. Dodo, St. David’s disciple) are outstanding among the monasteries of Mravalmt‘a in this respect as well. Chubinashvili also notes that the Dodork‘a monastery currently includes the widest range of caves and identifies the eleventh–thirteenth centuries as one of the most important stages of the reconstruction and extension of the Dodork‘a monastery, as well as of other branches of the monastery.¹⁷⁸ The chapel of St. Demetrios of Thessalonike should belong to this prominent period. Based on the above, it is not



3.38 Reliquary of St. Demetrios (twelfth century). Vatopedi Monastery of Mt. Athos.
Courtesy of Vatopedi Monastery.

unreasonable to suggest that Demetre I, one of Georgia's most powerful monarchs, was the donor of the Davit'gareja chapel, especially since the symbolic connection between Demetre I and his patron saint is confirmed in other monuments. The Davit'gareja chapel is arguably the principal monument conveying this royal patronage.

In the Christian world, symbolic models of the Basilica of Thessalonike started to appear in the Middle Byzantine period. It became especially popular in the Slavic world, where, according to Dimitri Obolensky, translating the Basilica of Thessalonike from the second city of the empire became a form of *translatio imperii*.¹⁷⁹ The city of Vyshgorod, for example, is often referred to as "the second Thessalonike" in the eleventh- and twelfth-century sources, while Sts. Boris and Gleb, whose graves were housed there, are compared to St. Demetrios of Thessalonike. Such copies became even more popular in the twelfth century, as evidenced by the shrines in Vladimir or Trnovo that were created as copies of the sacred space of the basilica.¹⁸⁰

Apart from the political-historical context of this practice as discussed by Obolensky, the specificity of Demetrios' shrine must also be considered.¹⁸¹ Although several Byzantine saints were known for their myrrh-gushing miracles, Demetrios' case was unique in that the oil he emitted was either mixed with or thought of as equivalent to his blood.¹⁸² The presence of blood gave the substance a far more explicit relationship to the saint's body and implied that the body was alive.¹⁸³ This is reflected in the iconography of numerous reliquaries, where, according to Grabar, the principal idea of the embellishment of the relic-container objects was the victory over death, conveyed primarily in the juxtaposition of the glorified image of the warrior saint with orans pose and its juxtaposition with Demetrios' actual buried body.¹⁸⁴ This symbolism was also carried by the sacred loci of the Basilica of Thessalonike, as well as its replicas. Like the tomb of Christ, they frame active presence in physical absence.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, the form and symbolism of the ciborium/crypt shrines of St. Demetrios can be related to the canopy-like shrine of the Tomb of Christ in Jerusalem.¹⁸⁶ Thus, the chapel built for the salvation of the soul of a member of the royal family also carried the symbolism of Jerusalem's Church of the Resurrection, which also dialogized with the symbolic concept of Davit'gareja's Mravalmt'a Monastery's symbolic idea of Jerusalem.¹⁸⁷

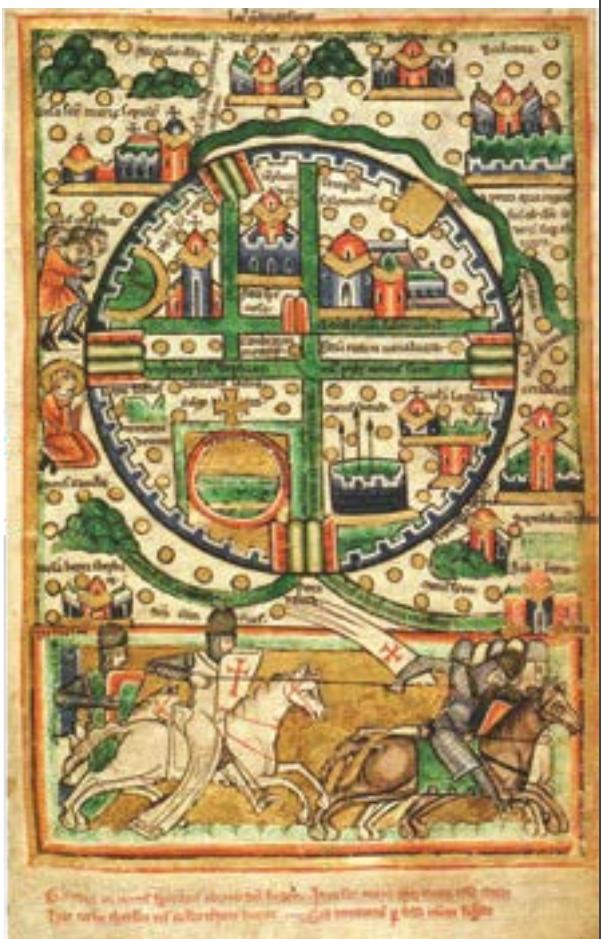
3.5. PAIRING OF ST. GEORGE AND ST. DEMETRIOS

Since the twelfth century, a tradition of pairing St. George and Demetrios has been established in Byzantine as well as Western European art.¹⁸⁸ One of the most narrative examples is the twelfth-century map of Jerusalem, which, according to Heather Badamo, together with the earthly Jerusalem, conveys the imagery of heavenly Jerusalem (*Fig. 3.39*).¹⁸⁹ Two warrior saints, St. George and Demetrios, appear to be combating the Saracens, which, along with the historical battle, also carries the meaning of a cosmic, apocalyptic battle.¹⁹⁰

Unsurprisingly, the rise in the importance of St. Demetrios in twelfth-century Georgia was accompanied by notable changes in the iconography of warrior saints. Demetrios increasingly became associated with St. George, with the two figures either paired directly or creating a sense of connection through their significance and compositional relationships. A particularly intriguing example of twelfth-century art is found in the decoration of the Church of St. George in Cetisi, discussed in the chapter on St. George. As noted earlier, based on the identification of the donor, Neli Chakvetadze dates the painting to the 1180s.¹⁹¹

The inclusion and emphasis on St. Demetrios within the life cycle of St. George underscores the prominence of his cult. Demetrios is depicted on the west wall and is integrated into the scene of the Annunciation without any dividing line (*Fig. 3.40*). Thus, Demetrios is perceived as an integral part of the Christological scene of the Annunciation. The significance of the warrior within the overall program is further

3.39 Map of Jerusalem with the images of Sts. George and Demetrios (1200). Picture book of St. Bertin. Source: Badamo, 2023.



highlighted by the scale of his figure. The prominent depiction of St. Demetrios in this relatively small church was clearly intended to correspond with the now severely damaged standing figure of St. George on the south wall.

If we consider Qut'lu Arslan, a high-ranking official at the court of Giorgi III, as the donor of the church—as suggested by Neli Chakvetadze—the emphasis on St. Demetrios of Thessalonike can be viewed as a reflection of the extraordinary veneration for both Demetrios and George by the royal house.¹⁹²

The inclusion of St. Demetrios in the scene of the Annunciation not only reflects the traditional association between the cult of St. Demetrios and the Mother of God but also conveys the symbolic connection between the Feast of the Annunciation, established in Thessalonike, and the so-called “Sowing Feast” on October 26, Demetrios’ feast day. According to Robin Cormack, this connection is grounded in the symbolism of the annual agricultural calendar.¹⁹³

In the decoration of the Church of St. George in Kalaubani (near Mtskheta) (c.1150) (*Fig. 3.41*), St. Demetrios is prominently featured alongside the traditional depictions of St. George and St. Theodore. Notably, he is paired with St. George in the scene depicting the destruction of idols, which is the only representation of St. George’s life included in the Kalaubani murals.¹⁹⁴ Both warriors stand next to each other with their right hands raised. Their rhythmic movement and identical silhouettes



3.40 St. Demetrios and the Annunciation (c.1180). Schema. Church of St. George of Cedisi.



3.41 Destruction of the idols by St. George, St. Demetrios (c.1150), schema. Church of St. George of Kalaubani.

present the narrative image of St. George and separately standing St. Demetrios as a cohesive pair.

The pairing of St. George and St. Demetrios can be observed in several monuments, with the following examples being particularly outstanding:

- a) The above-mentioned royal portrait of Bet'ania, where St. George and Demetrios appear as the protectors of the royal family. Their location highlights the “national” status of these two warriors as articulated in the Athonite sources.
- b) The thirteenth-century repoussé cross of Ušguli (*Fig. 3.42*).
- c) The decoration of the Xaxuli icon, where both saints are included in the scene where the Theotokos and Archangel Michael bestow crowns to Christ.
- d) The reliquary of the famed cross of Queen Tamar, which features the medallions of Sts. George and Demetrios, alongside an enamel image of the Mother of God (*Fig. 3.43*).¹⁹⁵
- e) In the painting of the somewhat later Church of the Annunciation of Davit'gareja (late thirteenth century), where the figures of St. George and Demetrios can be seen next to the royal donor's portrait, identified as Demetre II (*Fig. 3.44*).
- f) The so-called chapel of David-Narin of Gelat'i (chapel of Apostle Andrew, late thirteenth century), where the pair is depicted alongside the royal portrait of David-Narin (*Fig. 3.45*).



3.42 *St. George slaying the dragon, Sts. George and Demetrios, pre-altar cross (probably thirteenth century). Ushguli Ethnographic Museum.*

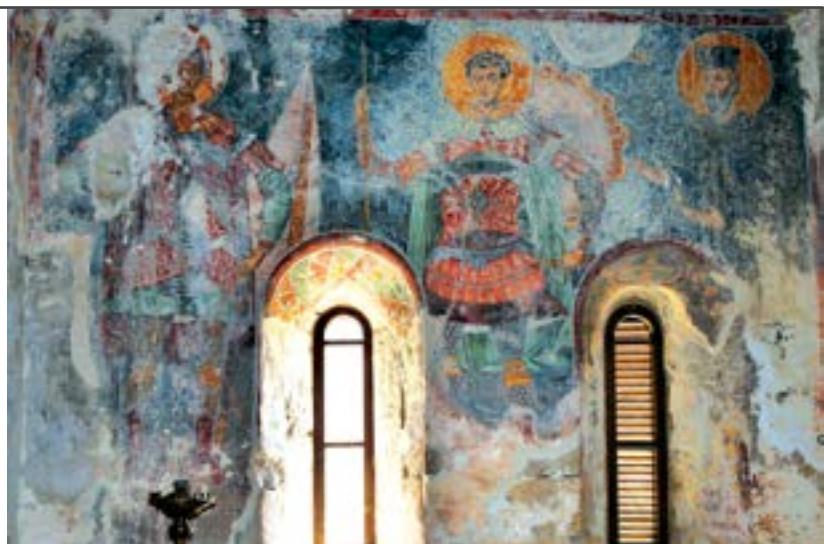


3.43 *Diptych case of Queen Tamar's Cross (twelfth, thirteenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century). Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.*

3.44 St. George and St. Demetrios (late thirteenth century), so-called church of the Annunciation, Davit'gareja. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory



3.45 St. George, St. Demetrios and King David Narin (late thirteenth century). Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God of Gelat'i.



- g) This couple is especially prominent in the adornment of the narthex of the katholikon of Gelat'i (probably fourteenth century) (Fig. 3.46).
- h) The fourteenth-century painting of Lašdğveri (Upper Svaneti), which features St. George on the north wall, while opposite him, instead of the usual Theodore (who is moved to the western section of the south wall), appears St. Demetrios (Fig. 3.47).
- i) The tendency to pair two of the most significant warrior saints, as said above, transpires in the iconographic program of the icon of St. George of Ubisa (for details, see St. George's chapter).
- j) They appear as a pair also in the Ubisa murals. Large figures of Sts. George and Demetrios are placed on the eastern part of the south wall, adjacent to the altar apse (Fig. 3.48). St. Demetrios is portrayed as a martyr, con-



3.46 *Enthroned Theotokos with child and Archangels, St. Demetrios and St. George (fourteenth, sixteenth century?). Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God of Gelat'i, narthex.*



3.47 St. Demetrios and St. Theodore (fourteenth century). Church of the Archangels of Lašdžveri





3.49 *Gelat'i Triptych* (sixteenth–eighteenth century). Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.



3.50 *Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God of Gelati*, interior, general view of the south transept (sixteenth century). Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory

trasting with St. George, who is depicted in full military attire and armor. This reflects the enduring stability of this iconographic type in Georgia and possibly even echoes the martyrdom of the namesake of the warrior saint—the Georgian king, Demetre II (1259–89) for his faith and country.

k) The two saints are also paired on the sixteenth-century triptych of Gelat'i (*Fig. 3.49*) and in the murals of south transept of Gelat'i (*Fig. 3.50*), as well as the northwest chapel.¹⁹⁶

3.51 Sts. George and Demetrios vanquishing the devil (probably fifteenth century). Jruči Psalter, NCM H-1665.



3.6. TRIUMPHANT ST. DEMETRIOS

Since the thirteenth century, triumphant images of Demetrios slaying a human being have appeared more frequently. As pointed out above, the decoration of Mac‘xvariši (1140) preserved the earliest example of this type. There exist, however, other versions of Demetrios’ triumphal images in Georgia. For example, in the illustration of the Jruči Codex, St. Demetrios, paired with St. George, is trampling the devil (*Fig. 3.51*).¹⁹⁷ Such images are mainly found in miniature paintings and convey a broader theme of victory over evil.¹⁹⁸

Medieval Georgian art features several iconographic variations of the human-slaying Demetrios.¹⁹⁹ Notable scenes include the slaying of King Kaloyan (*Fig. 3.52*), which combines the event with the heavenly blessing of Christ or an angel, or with the rescue of Bishop Cyprian. (*Fig. 3.53*).²⁰⁰

Among these examples, from the iconographic point of view, the decoration of the Church of the Mother of God of Khobi (seventeenth century) is outstanding. Uncharacteristically, St. Demetrios is shown on the wall of the altar bema (*Fig. 3.54*). While



3.52 St. Demetrios slaying King Kalojan and the coronation of St. Demetrios (1749). Šemok‘medi Gulani NCM Q-103a, 155r.



3.53 St. Demetrios slaying Kalojan and St. Demetrios rescuing bishop Cyprian (1674). NCM H-1452.



3.54 St. Demetrios slaying King Kaloyan (seventeenth century). Church of the Mother of God of Xobi.

Demetrios slaying a human being is traditionally represented on horseback, here he is standing. It is also significant that he wears a beard.

Another non-traditional triumphal scene featuring Demetrios is found in the seventeenth-century decoration of Ananuri (Fig. 3.55). In this depiction, the warrior is shown on horseback, armed and engaged in a triumphal march alongside other warrior saints, with the first figure likely representing St. George. The panel of the warrior saints is on the north wall, next to the sanctuary. The triumphal march of the mounted warriors is juxtaposed



3.55 St. Demetrios (seventeenth century). Church of the Mother of God of Ananuri.

with the enormous image of the Last Judgement on the south wall, transforming the images of the soldiers into apocalyptic, celestial warriors. This effect is further enhanced by the elevated position at which the warriors of Ananuri are depicted, which is notably high for the period.

In the Church of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste of Nok‘alak‘evi (seventeenth century) (Fig. 3.56), Demetrios embodies a profoundly eschatological and triumphal significance. He is the only



3.56 St. Demetrios (seventeenth century). Church of the Forty Martyrs of No'kalak'evi.

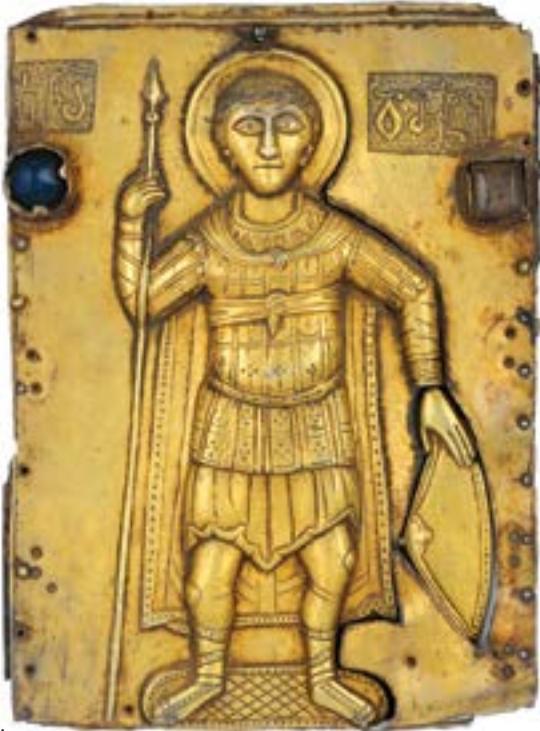
warrior saint to be shown on the west wall among Christological scenes. As a rule, Demetrios is placed among other warrior saints, whereas here he appears separately. He holds a spear in one hand and a bow in another. The Pentecost and the Harrowing of Hell above elevate his massive image to that of an apocalyptic warrior. Notably, Demetrios is depicted with a bow, which is unusual for his iconography. Evidently, the choice of the weapon was determined by the accentuation of his apocalyptic significance. In the Book of Revelation, the bow symbolizes the spread of the gospel as wielded by the apocalyptic horsemen (St. Andrew of Caesarea).²⁰¹



3.57 Icon of St. Demetrios (thirteenth century). Ushguli Ethnographic Museum.

3.7. THE LAHILI ICON OF ST. DEMETRIOS

It has been observed that Byzantine icons of St. Demetrios are relatively rare.²⁰² Georgian art provides several noteworthy icons featuring St. Demetrios. Some of the notable examples are the icons of Ušguli (thirteenth century) (Fig. 3.57),²⁰³ the icons housed in the Kutaisi Museum (sixteenth or seventeenth century) (Fig. 3.58) (13 × 18), or the icon of Lahili (Latali community, Upper Svaneti (thirteenth century).



3.58 Icon of St. Demetrios (sixteenth–seventeenth century).
Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum.



3.59 Icon of St. Demetrios (thirteenth century).
Church of St. George of Lahili.



3.60 Human face
(late antique period),
chalcedony, spolium
of the Lahili icon of
St. Demetrios. Svaneti
Museum of History and
Ethnography.

In the nineteenth century, Platon Ioseliani, during his study of the church of Ert‘acminda, documented a now-lost icon of Demetrios, which, according to the inscription, had been commissioned by King Demetre II.²⁰⁴

Among the surviving icons of St. Demetrios, particularly outstanding is the icon of Lahili, still owned by the church of Lahili (Upper Svaneti) (Fig. 3.59). The integrity of the Lahili icon has been compromised: The icon itself (28 × 19), 28 by 19 cm, featuring the standing warrior saint, remains in the church, while the head—an antique sculptural representation crafted from chalcedony—is housed in the Svaneti Museum of Ethnography in Mestia (Fig. 3.60).²⁰⁵ (See the introductory chapter about a similar icon of St. George).

Giorgi Chubinashvili refers to the Lahili icon in his study of Georgian metalwork, however, only in passing, without explicitly specifying the date of its creation. Although he places it among the samples of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²⁰⁶ Whereas Takaishvili dates the icon of Lahili to the fourteenth century.²⁰⁷

The stylistic features of the image and excessive decorative tendencies that transpire in the icon suggest that it was likely created in the thirteenth century.²⁰⁸

The originality of this icon rests in its combined character: a *spolium* from the pre-Christian era is recycled as the head of the saint.²⁰⁹ Analogies of the icon of Lahili, where the sculptural head is placed instead of an image of the face, are quite rare.²¹⁰ It is also important to note that the icon was clearly designed to house this head. The plane space intended for the face, with two dimples on it, testifies to this.

The tradition of using ancient glyptic and sculptural *spolia* in Christian liturgical objects was common in medieval art.²¹¹ The usage of spolia instead of heads and faces of holy images was a familiar practice in Byzantium but was much more widely spread in the medieval West and became particularly trendy during the Ottonian dynasty.²¹² The most famous example is the eleventh-century cross now housed in the Kolumba Museum in Cologne, where the figure of the crucified Christ is decorated with a woman's head carved from *lapis lazuli* (Fig. 3.61). Yet another example is the eleventh-century Basel cross, which has a woman's sculptural face inserted in the center.²¹³ Other, although somewhat different, examples, are the famous Sainte-Foy Reliquary, where the sculptural reliquary of the saint's body is from the Middle Ages, while the face is an antique mask,²¹⁴ or the so-called golden image of David housed at the Basel Historical Museum (Fig. 3.62), etc. Antique heads lacking bodies also appear in the decoration of reliquaries and Gospel covers.²¹⁵

The description of Byzantine liturgical objects with antique gemmata produced by Cyril and Maria Mango suggests that, unlike the Latin West, this tradition had little foothold in the art of the Christian East.²¹⁶ This makes the icon of Lahili even more unique, especially since its Georgian identificatory inscription and the peculiarity of the engraving testify to the icon's Georgian origin.²¹⁷

The conceptual origin of this type of collage is to be found in the legacy of Constantine the Great, who decorated the antique reliefs of the triumphal arch of Constantine with his own images.²¹⁸ But, unlike the icon of Lahili, the story scenes are used as *spolia*, and the head of Constantine was inserted instead of the heads of previous emperors.²¹⁹

The practice of Christianizing ancient sculptural heads in

3.61 Crucifixion with the lapis lazuli head (1049).

So-called Herimann Cross. Kolumba Museum, Cologne. Source: Fricke, 2015.



3.62 Golden image of David (fourteenth century). Basel Historical Museum. Source: Fricke, 2015.

the early Christian period expresses the triumph of the Christian faith. A notable example is the renowned sculptural heads from Ephesus, where crosses were carved onto the foreheads in the Christian period, a practice commonly understood as “stigmatization” of the pagan elements with the victorious symbol of the cross.²²⁰ Over time, however, this tradition waned in significance. Instead of being engraved with crosses, spolia were incorporated into the Christian imagery, which implied their Christianization. This synthesis of Christian and pagan art is referred to as *Interpretatio Christiana*, a term that describes the contextual reinterpretation of objects and monuments from antiquity.²²¹

The central concept of the Lahili icon and similar artifacts revolves around the “historicity” of Christianity, as conveyed through the use of spolia. Elsner refers to the alteration of the emperor’s portrait images on the Triumphal Arch of Constantine as the “modernization” of spolia, describing it as “time compression,” where the past merges with the present.²²²

The symbolic and aesthetic foundations of the use of precious stones as spolia are multifaceted. For example, one of the aspects of the Greek-Roman or Arabic tradition of the use of glypto-

graphic objects is healing or magic, since the gemmae were considered to have the power of healing or averting evil eye.²²³ The choice of chalcedonite for the head in the Lahili icon may expand the symbolic meaning of the spolia.²²⁴ Chalcedonite is distinguished in the “hierarchy” of precious stones, and together with other stones, it was identified as the foundation of the heavenly Jerusalem in the *Book of Revelation*.²²⁵ Epiphanios of Cyprus identifies it the stone of the second row of the precious stones of the high priest’s robe—along with sapphire and jasper.²²⁶ In exegesis, the lightness and structural solidity of the stone are symbols of divine nature.²²⁷ Consequently, in Patristic literature, precious stones are often referred to as symbols of the apostles and saints. The combined nature of the Lahili icon seemingly reflects the attributes of saints as described by Epiphanios; Radiant face, according to Epiphanios, is a sign of holiness. He compares the face of Moses descending from Mt. Sinai to the brilliance of the sun, recalls the radiant faces of the Prophet Elijah and Stephen the First-Martyr and so on.²²⁸ Thus, the chalcedonite can be seen here as an “iconographic” or, better to say, materialized symbol of purity. Its radiance and transparency essentially act as a halo and as an iconographical symbol of Demetrios’ holiness. In its effect and symbolism, it seemingly reflects or prefigures the visual aesthetics of Hesychasm in the fourteenth century. The light green color of chalcedonite dialogizes with the treatment of the eyes in somewhat later, fourteenth-century, portraits in Tsalenjikha, where some saints have bright turquoise eyes that seemingly imitate precious stones in their brightness and act as visual expressions of the divine light in the epoch of Gregory Palamas (*Fig. 3.63*).²²⁹ It is important to note that the Lahili icon, crafted from silver, is richly gilded; the embossed portions are enveloped in a substantial layer of gold. This striking intensity of “imperishable gold,” combined with the use of niello and the contrasting materials, enhances the power and expressiveness of the image even further.²³⁰

Unfortunately, the icon of Lahili does not have a donor’s inscription. Therefore, it is difficult to claim anything specific about its history. However, since icons of this type were mostly common in Western Europe, it is conceivable that this Georgian icon was inspired by European art. In the thirteenth century, when the icon was presumably created, Georgia’s ties with Western Europe gained particular momentum. Georgian monarchs actively engaged



3.63 St. Prokopios (1384–96). Church of the Savior of Tsalenjikha.

in correspondence with European monarchs and popes, participated in joint military campaigns, and welcomed numerous European missionaries, all of which significantly contributed to a cultural exchange with Western Europe.²³¹ Thus, the unusual solution of this icon can be interpreted in a wider cultural context.

3.8. RELIQUARIES OF ST. DEMETRIOS

Various direct and indirect sources point to the existence of the relics of St. Demetrios in medieval Georgia. For example, a relic of St. Demetrios is identified in the reliquary icon of Svetlic‘xoveli in Mtskheta.²³²

Traditionally, it was believed that a nineteenth-century reliquary from Gelati (now housed in the church of Bagrati in Kutaisi), which contained relics of Sts. George and Theodore, also purportedly housed the skull of St. Demetrios. Given that Demetrios' body is considered indivisible and has not been known to produce relics, this claim appeared questionable. Upon examining the reliquary, I found that the skull, framed by silver-gilded bands and adorned with the saint's portrait, bore an inscription identifying it as belonging to St. Mamas, not St. Demetrios, as we had initially suspected.

The most well-known reliquary of St. Demetrios, however, which also attests to its royal belonging, is the twelfth or thirteenth-century enkolpion of Byzantine (probably from Thessalonike) origin belonging to Georgian Queen Ketevan.²³³ The enkolpion, which is currently preserved at the British Museum, allegedly housed the relics of the True Cross, St. Demetrios, and the holy blood of Queen Ketevan herself added later after the martyrdom of the Georgian queen (Fig. 3.64). On the reliquary, St. George and Demetrios were paired. Currently, on the cover of the back of the reliquary, only St. George's enamel image has survived. Its counterpart must have been an image of St. Demetrios. Whereas inside the reliquary, appears St. Demetrios laying in the sarcophagus. This reliquary was allegedly worn by the queen at the time of her execution. Originally, this reliquary contained S. Demetrios' blood mixed with myrrh, as evidenced by its Greek inscription: "...anointed with your blood and myrrh..."²³⁴

Unfortunately, we do not know when

3.64 *St. George Encolpium of St. Demetrios (twelfth–thirteenth century). British Museum. ©The British Museum images.*



the queen's enkolpion ended up in Georgia, although it can be said with certainty that at least in the thirteenth century, some kind of relic of Demetrios existed in Georgia. This is evidenced by a reliquary triptych preserved in the Niko Berdzenishvili Museum of Kutaisi (Fig. 3.65). The triptych is registered as a sixteenth-century item and is exhibited together with other items of the same century. Its central piece, however, undoubtedly belongs to the thirteenth century and, as suggested by two intercessory inscriptions addressed to St. Demetrios, housed a relic of the Thessalonian saint (Fig. 3.66).²³⁵ One inscription is on the edge while the other is distributed on the external side of the triptych.²³⁶ Both inscriptions are in *Asomt'avruli* (Fig. 3.67). Most likely, the round opening of the triptych used to house a relic of St. Demetrios, perhaps myrrh, which was widespread in Christendom. It



3.65 Relic-container triptych (thirteenth, fourteenth century). Kutaisi Niko Berdzenishvili State Historical Museum.



3.66 Donor's inscription, reliquary triptych (thirteenth century). Kutaisi Niko Berdzenishvili State Historical Museum.

cannot be a mere coincidence that the diameter of the opening of the Kutaisi triptych is very close to the dimensions of the enkolpion of Queen Ketevan. The opening of the triptych is 3.75 cm., almost 3.8 cm., while the diameter of the enkolpion is 3.7 cm.²³⁷ Considering that the stalk of the British enkolpion was added later, we can cautiously suggest a connection between these two items, with the opening representing the enkolpion's nesting place. The chronology of these items supports such reconstruction. The Kutaisi triptych was a valuable item, as suggested by its decoration, which shows a direct similarity with the famous *staurotheke* of the cross of Queen Tamar (Fig. 3.68). The two items resonate with each other through the style and ornamental repertoire. At this stage, it is important to emphasize that the Kutaisi triptych attests to the possession of a relic of St. Demetrios at least as early as the thirteenth century.



3.67 Relic-container triptych (thirteenth, fourteenth century). Kutaisi Niko Berdzenishvili State Historical Museum.



3.68 Diptych case of Queen Tamar's cross (twelfth, thirteenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries). Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.

3.9. CONCLUSION

I would like to end the chapter dedicated to St. Demetrios with one final example of his outstanding cult in medieval Georgia. The so-called “Kaianuri” royal flag of Imereti, which Temo Jojua reconstructs as a red flag with an embroidered image of St. Demetrios on it.²³⁸ In Jojua’s opinion, the formation of the iconography of the said flag must be dated to Imereti’s secession from the united Georgian monarchy and the formation of the independent Kingdom of Imereti. The selection of Demetrios’ image for the flag of the newly formed kingdom must be understood as a contrast, especially since for centuries, the iconography of Georgian flags has been dominated by a triumphant image of George.²³⁹ This choice of St. Demetrios can be understood as a similar reception of the political context of Demetrios’ cult, namely as an expression of the legitimate inheritance of the Bagratid dynasty and, in particular, its Imeretian branch. This claim is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the history of the renovation and reconstruction of the Gelat’i Monastery, the royal mausoleum of the Bagrationi family. Thus, the choice of Demetrios on the banner is a continuation of the centuries-old tradition of the royal patronage of this great martyr saint in Georgia.

1 White, 2013, 65; Magdalino, 1990, 198–201.

2 Skedros, 1999, 86–87; Bakirtis, 2012, 133.

3 Walter, 2003, 78.

4 *Ibid.*, 79. He was venerated as a martyr rather than as a warrior saint until the end of the ninth century.

5 Russell, 2010, 95; Bakirtis, 2012, 133.

6 For the practice, see Taronas, 2023, 172; Walter, 2003, 84.

7 Jojua, 2023, 108–109.

8 The history of the cult of St. Demetrios and its reflection in Georgian writing was studied in detail by Maia Machavariani. See Machavariani, 2006; Machavariani, 2024 (manuscript), 8–9, 53–54, 140. Maia Machavariani correctly suggests that the reference to an “earthquake” next to Demetrios in the Lectionary of Jerusalem is a later addition. For a different view, see Bulia, 2023, 7, fn. 1.

9 Machavariani, 2024, 11.

10 *Ibid.*, 11.

11 *Ibid.*, 11–12.

12 Machavariani, 2024, 197.

13 *Ibid.*, 2024, 14–15.

14 For this image, see Khuskivadze, 1981, 66; Khuskivadze, 1984, 29; also, Tsitsishvili, 2023, 136, note 4.

15 Evans, Wixom, 1997, 108, 161.

16 Khuskivadze, 1981, 66; Khuskivadze, 1984, 29.

17 Chubinashvili, 1970, 235; Burchuladze, 2021–2023, 83–85.

18 Burchuladze, 2021–2023, 83–85.

19 *Ibid.*, 84.

20 Walter, 2003, 90. For details, see Eastmond, 2015.

21 For examples, see Eastmond, 2015, 71–114.

22 For examples in Georgian art, see Tsitsishvili, 2023, 142–150. Notably, in Byzantine art, this mixed imagery retained popularity also in the late period; see, for example, Nelson, 2007, 6–7.

23 Tsitsishvili, 2023, 162.

24 Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 18–20. The authors date the Martvili reliefs to the seventh century.

25 *Ibid.*, 19, note 78.

26 Virsaladze, 2007a, 238; Takaishvili, 1952, 35., fig. 28–29.

27 McVey, 1983, 95.

28 Curiously, the cult of St. Demetrios is almost nonexistent in neighboring Armenia. I would like to thank for this information, Zaroui Pogossian and Gohar Grigoryan.

29 For the eleventh-century samples, see Tsitsishvili, 2023, 141–147.

30 See Jojua, 2023, 107.

31 *Ibid.*, 102–103.

32 *Ibid.*, 108, 103–104.

33 See Jojua, 2023, 107–108. Jojua points to one of the churches built during Bagrat IV as the earliest surviving evidence. Currently, it is impossible to identify the church, and its existence is evidenced by a stone with the donor’s inscription, which has been reused for a bridge on the River Ktsia.

34 For the cult of Demetrios and his royal patronage in Rus, see Obolensky, 1974, 14–17; White, 2013, 167–199. For his cult in the Serbian royal family, see Preradović, Milanović, 2016, 114–116.

35 Magdalino, 1990, 198–201.

36 Grotowski, 2010, 115; Russell, 2010, 21; Badamo, 2023, 56. For coins with military saints, see White, 2013, 118,

37 White, 2013, 192–193.

38 On these symbolic interactions, see Nikolaishvili, 2019, 136–150.

39 The appearance of the name Dimitry in Rus is also explained by the increased ties with Byzantium. See White, 2013, 174; Obolensky, 1974, 14–17.

40 For the murals of the Ip’rari altar screen, see Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Volskaia, 1983, 34–35; For the church decoration, see *ibid.*, 33–55.

41 Tsitsishvili, 2023, 146–147.

42 I would like to thank Maia Machavariani for this suggestion.

43 Dionysius of Fourni, 1974, 56. Chubinashvili identifies a bearded Demetrios also in the decoration of the pre-alter cross of Kharagauli (early eleventh century).

44 In the decorative program of Ip’rari, there are other historical allusions as well, such as the vision of Joshua, son of Nun, which is usually connected with David the Builder. Gedevanishvili, 2023, 121–138.

45 For Mac’xvariši painting, see Virsaladze, 2007, 145–224.

46 Eastmond, 1998, 84–85.

47 For an interpretation of the Mac’xvariši image, see Tsitsishvili, 2023, 169.

48 Machavariani, 2006, 107–109.

49 For an extensive study of the facade decoration of Svip’i, see Gedevanishvili, 2024, 72–103. Several chronological layers of decoration (tenth, twelfth, and fourteenth century) can be identified in the church. For the layers of the Svip’i paintings, see Kenia, Aladashvili, 2010, 93–94. For Georgian facade decoration, see Cheishvili, Buchukuri, 1983, 1–20; Aladashvili and Volskaia, 1987, 94–120; Chichinadze, 2014, 69–94.

50 For the iconography of the Trinity, see Peers, 2001, 36–41.

51 It is for this reason that the depiction of the Old Testament Trinity usually appears near the scene of the Holy Communion. For the topography of this scene, see Shervashidze, 1980, 83–84, 90–92.

52 A similar theme appears elsewhere, in the decoration of the Cross of Kac’xi (eleventh century). Here, however, the composition’s distribution is different. The depictions of the Trinity and the warrior saints are arranged vertically and lack the compositional unity of Svip’i. Chubinashvili, 1959, 481.

53 Aladashvili, Volskaia, 1987, 96–100. For an interpretation, see Tsitsishvili, 2023, 156–159. Here the apocalyptic significance of the warrior saints is underlined.

54 In the copies of the decoration made in the 1990s by M. Buchukuri, the inscriptions are still well legible.

55 Goguadze, 2014, 333.

56 Dolakidze, Chitunahsvili, 2017, 53.

57 For this tradition, see Eastmond, 1998, 103–104; Skhirtladze, 2000, 64–84.

58 Aladashvili, Volskaia, 1987, 101–102.

59 *Ibid.*, 101.

60 Compared to the icon of Xaxuli, however, it is less elegant and more schematic.

61 Takaishvili, 1937, 422–423.

62 Kenia, 1972, 95.

63 Takaishvili, 1937, 422–423.

64 Cf. Kenia, Aladashvili, 2010, 94. The chronological difference between the icon and the frame is not discussed in scholarship. Based on At’ariani’s inscription, Anthony Eastmond dates the icon to the second half of the 1200s. Eastmond, 2023, 169. M. Akhalashvili dates the icon of Svip’i to the twelfth–thirteenth century. His dating is based on paleographic analysis. See Akhalashvili, 1987, 40–41.

65 Khuskivadze, 2007, 26, 29–30.

66 *Ibid.*, 29.

67 *Ibid.*, 30.

68 For example, for the patronage of St. Elijah, see Magdalino, 1988, 193–196.

69 White, 2013, 67–68.

70 For the cult of St. Demetrios, see White, 2013, 66–72.

71 Antonopoulou, 1997, 132–136; for a longer version, see CSLA.E01344 (E. Rizos).

72 Constantine Porphyrogennetos, 2012, 123. White, 2013, 69.

73 Antonopoulou, 2008, 243–257; Antonopoulou, 1997, 132–136.

74 Antonopoulou, 2008, 243–262. The translation from the Greek belongs to Viktoria Jugheli.

75 Antonopoulou, 2008, 253–254. For the interpretation of the homilies, see Antonopoulou, 1997, 132–136.

76 Catalogue of Georgian ecclesiastical manuscripts from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Science, Manuscript of Leo's homily (409r).

77 Khoperia, Tseradze, 2016, 125–126. I would like to thank the authors for sharing with us the text of the unpublished homilies.

78 On this, see Oosterhout, 2010, 248–249; Magdalino, 1988, 193; Magdalino, 1987, 51–64.

79 Eshel, 2018, 193.

80 For the symbolism in the Old Testament, see Magdalino, 1987, 51–64.

81 Antonopoulou, 1997, 42–43.

82 Eshel, 2018, 194.

83 Antonopoulou, 2008, 259–262

84 In the above-mentioned eleventh-century cross of Kac'xi, the depiction of the Old Testament Trinity and the soldier saints is intended as an image of the saints in heaven.

85 Kaukhchishvili, 1955, 372–374.

86 The theme of the blessing of Abraham also transpires in *The History and Eulogy of Monarchs*. In the episode of Queen Tamar's coronation, where King Giorgi III declared the queen to be his co-ruler, "... he blessed her like Abraham blessed Isaac, Isaac blessed Jacob, and Jacob blessed Joseph; and the blessing, like the Sun in the cloudless sky, passed its ray from our ancestors to the good, gentle and quiet posterity that came from the seed of David." The symbolic comparison of Queen Tamar with Abraham appears once again, in the second episode of the coronation of Tamar, which took place after her father's death. Kaukhchishvili, 1959, 22, 25–30.

87 Aladashvili, Volskaia, 1987, 102.

88 Magdalino, 1991, 159.

89 For the ideology of David's age, see Nikolaishvili, 2019, 93–162; for the concept, see Tvaradze, 2004, 42–43.

90 For the identification of the monarch's portrait, see Okropiridze, 1990, 150–152.

91 St. Demetrios is predominantly shown in green attire, and more rarely in red, as, for example, in Mac'xvariši, where he imitates St. George shown on the opposite side.

92 For the decoration of the Varžia Gospel, see Piatnitski, 2020, 24–48; Khuskivadze, 2022, 76–95; Simonishvili, 2017, 280–312.

93 Evans, Wixom, 1997, 160–161.

94 Khuskivadze, 2022, 84.

95 Simonishvili, 2017, 313–314.

96 Khuskivadze, 2022, 84.

97 Eastmond, 1998, 107.

98 Bulia, 2015, 57–72; Bulia, 2020, 79–100.

99 Bulia, 2023a, 29–101.

100 Bauer suggests that the mosaic on the north wall of the Basilica of Thessalonike shows an episode from Demetrios' life—his reception in heaven. Bauer, 2013, 197.

Dimitri Obolensky has also argued for the existence of the scene from Demetrios' life in the Basilica. Obolensky, 1974, 14. For the most recent study of this question, see Taronas, 2023, 155. The author insists that there were neither Old and New Testament scenes nor the cycle of St. Demetrios depicted there.

- 101 Bulia, 2023a, 46.
- 102 Walter, 2003, 85.
- 103 See Elsner, 2015
- 104 Bulia, 2023a, 56–57, 68, 83.
- 105 Ibid., 41.
- 106 For this link, see Cormack, 1989, 550–551; Obolensky, 1974, 9.
- 107 Russell, 2010, 99. On October 26, on the feast of Demetrios, the procession began from the church of the Mother of God.
- 108 Cormack, 1989, 550–551.
- 109 I would like to thank Maia Machavariani for this suggestion.
- 110 The space between the standing figures and the first scene of the cycle is sufficiently large. The only door of the chapel was cut in-between the two scenes. Arguably, formerly half figures of other saints were depicted here. For soldier saints associated with St. Demetrios, see Bakirtzis, 2012, 149–150.
- 111 Bulia, 2020, 86, note 27.
- 112 In this respect, Cedisi, discussed above, can serve as an immediate parallel to the chapel of St. Demetrios. The church of St. George of Hadiši follows the same decorative principle.
- 113 The belt, as an attribute of earthly glory, also appears in the *Martyrdom of Artemios*, where St. Artemios stands before the emperor "naked and beltless," signifying his abandonment of earthly privilege. Goguadze, 2014, 219. In the *Martyrdom of Merkourios*, the soldier saint refuses to perform an offering in front of the emperor by stripping himself from the belt and the military uniform.
- 114 Machavariani, 2006, 208.
- 115 Bulia, 2023a, 49–50.
- 116 Walter, 2003, 85.
- 117 Ibid., 85–87.
- 118 This episode is usually accentuated in the life cycle of Demetrios. For example, in the facade relief decoration of the St. Demetrios of Kyiv (1060s), it is the only scene from the cycle of the great martyr. See Chubinashvili, 1959, 357.
- 119 In the cycle of the thirteenth-century Church of Demetrios of Mystra, these scenes equal those of St. Demetrios in their prominence. Walter, 2003, 86.
- 120 Elsner, 2015, 29
- 121 For a different interpretation of the red nimbus in the decoration of Ikvi, see Tsitsishvili, 2023, 160.
- 122 Goguadze, 2014, 350.
- 123 Machavariani, 2006, 207.
- 124 Machavariani, 2024, 7,10.
- 125 Dolakidze, Chitunashvili, 2017, 53.
- 126 Goguadze, 2014, 350: "ეს არს დღე სიხარულისა და მხიარულებისა ჩემისა უშვაულისო ჭრიდით ასოთა ჩემთა, რამეთუ უფროისად განაბრწყინვებო სულსა ჩემსა."
- 127 Machavariani, 20024, 18.
- 128 Bulia, 2023a, 46–47. For the iconography of St. Demetrios' martyrdom, see Kyriakoudis, 2006, 203–213.
- 129 Bulia, 2023a, 47. For symbolic parallels between Demetrios and Christ, see Russell, 2010, 87–91.
- 130 Goguadze, 2014, 352.
- 131 Bulia, 2023a, 70–72.
- 132 Ibid., 74.

133 Chikhladze, 1996, 26.

134 Bulia, 2023a, 74–75

135 *Ibid.*, 83.

136 *Ibid.*, 82–83

137 *Ibid.*, 85.

138 Bogdanović, 2017, 207. The author notes that the original place of the martyrdom and miracles, which was the first and major locus sanctus, was later transferred from the crypt under the transept to the shrine in the main nave of the church. For details, see Bogdanović, 2017, 207–209; see also, Cormack, 1989, 548. For a relationship between these two cult sites, see Bogdanović, 2017, 207–209.

139 Bogdanović, 2017, 208–209. Bogdanović notes that it was believed that the crypt housed St. Demetrios' relics and that it was his burial place.

140 Cormack, 1989, 550.

141 Bogdanović also discusses a third installation, which must have been created by the Ottomans in 1430. Bogdanović, 2017, 210.

142 The accentuation of this episode in the Georgian text is particularly highlighted by Maia Machavariani. Machavariani, 2006, 210.

143 Grabar, 1950, 3–28. Elsner, 2015, 13–40.

144 For the bibliography, see Taronas, 2023, 173. For a lesser-known reliquary of St. Demetrios from Aragon, see Dodds, Reilly, Williams, 1993, 257–258.

145 Elsner, 2015, 20–26.

146 Machavariani, 2006, 15.

147 Elsner, 2015, 25–31.

148 Cormack, 1989, 550. For the extended cult space in the Thessalonian Basilica, see Skedros, 1999, 91–93. Skedros identifies the ciborium as the “home of the saint” within the larger home of his church.

149 Cormack, 1989, 550.

150 I would like to thank Archimandrite Kyrion (Oniani) of Gareja Monastery for pointing to this parallel.

151 For virtual pilgrimage, see Elsner, 2015, 20–26.

152 Bulia, 2020, 96.

153 Bulia, 2023a, 30.

154 *Ibid.*, 101.

155 Jojua, 2023, 112–126.

156 *Ibid.*, 115–117.

157 *Ibid.*, 118.

158 *Ibid.*, 120.

159 Skhirtladze, 2000, 50.

160 *Ibid.*, 70.

161 Chubinashvili, 1948, 17, 43–44.

162 For the royal portrait of the Bagrationi family, see Eastmond, 1998, 124–124. Temo Jojua points to the possible existence of the portraits of Giorgi III and Queen Tamar in K’olagiri Monastery. Jojua, 2020, 79.

163 Skhirtladze, 2000, 50–54.

164 Skhirtladze, 1987, 103. See, e.g., the Gareja Gulani, where Demetre is mentioned by the name of Daniel.

165 Curiously, Armenian sources from the 1100s and the 1200s do not mention Demetre's acceptance of monastic vows.

166 Skhirtladze, 1987, 103. Neli Chakvetadze’s most recent research suggests that a portrait of King Demetre I as a monk is to be found in the church of the Dormition of Ateni. The suggestion was presented in a paper delivered on 09.02.2024 at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

167 Muraviov, 1848, 64.

168 Enriko Gabidzashvili suggests that Demetre I was tonsured at Gelat'i.
169 For stylistic analysis, see Bulia, 2023a, 56–109.
170 *Ibid.*, 62–66.
171 For stylistic features of the age, see Didebulidze, 2006.
172 Privalova, 1979, 137–158.
173 Bulia, 2023a, 65.
174 Chubinashvili, 1948, 76.
175 Alibegashvili, 1973, 95.
176 *Ibid.*, 90.
177 Chubinashvili, 1948, 76., 4, 44.
178 *Ibid.*, 44.
179 Obolensky, 1974, 17–19
180 *Ibid.*, 16–17; Bulia, 2023, 80–81.
181 Obolensky, 1974, 17.
182 Taronas, 2023, 172. See, also, note 107.
183 *Ibid.*, 172.
184 Grabar, 1950, 8–15.
185 Bogdanović, 2017, 215
186 *Ibid.*,
187 Bulia, 2023a, 89–90.
188 See Nelson, 2007, 7–9; Kousouros, 2000, 36–37.
189 Badamo, 2023, 61–63.
190 *Ibid.*, 63.
191 Chakvetadze, 2021, 134.
192 *Ibid.*, 130–133.
193 Cormack, 1989, 551.
194 Privalova, 1979, 147.
195 Burchuladze, Gagoshidze, Gogoladze, 2023, 68.
196 Khuskivadze, Tumanishvili, 2007, 171, 284.
197 Tsitsishvili, 2023, 170–171.
198 Walter, 2000, 60
199 Tsitsishvili, 2023, 165–166.
200 *Ibid.*, 166.
201 Mamasakhlisi, Chelidze, 2005, 482–483.
202 Walter, 2003, 82.
203 Kenia, Silogava, 1986, 70–71.
204 Ioseliani, 1973, 75.
205 In 1965, Chubinashvili believed that the head of the icon had been lost. For a description of the lost objects from the Svaneti treasury, see Chubinashvili, 1965; for the Lahili icon, see *ibid.*, 15. The head of the icon was rediscovered in the summer of 2021 by Nikoloz Aleksidze, Tsitsino Guledani, Nutsa Batiashvili, and Magda Gogoladze.
206 Chubinashvili, 1959, 261.
207 Takaishvili, 1937, 363.
208 The paper was presented at the Giorgi Chubinashvili Center on 3.03.2023. I would like to thank Leila Khuskivadze for her consultations regarding this icon.
209 Takaishvili, 1937, 363.
210 I would like to thank Antony Eastmond for providing me with the parallels of the Lahili icon and for directing me to relevant publications.
211 For recent publications on spolia, see Jevtić, Nilsson, 2021. For the tradition of using spolia in liturgical objects, see Fricke, B., 2015, 241–254; Kinney, 2009, 117–125; Kinney, 2011, 97–120; Westermann-Angerhausen, 2015, 173–193.

212 Keller, 1987, 262.

213 *Ibid.*, 261–262

214 For the *Sainte-Foy* Reliquary, see Fricke, 2015

215 For this practice, see Snijder, 1932, 4–53; Keller, 1987, 261–262; Zwierlein-Diehl, 1997, 63–83.

216 Mango and Mango, 1993, 58.

217 A conceptual parallel of the icon of Lahili is perhaps the golden icon of St. Demetrios in the Guelph Treasure (14.9 × 14.0 cm.). In this instance, however, the face and hands of the saints were created using an enamel technique, rather than being crafted from antique spolia (currently most of the enamel is lost). Buckton, 1998, 277–286.

218 Elsner, 2000, 158.

219 *Ibid.*, 158–159.

220 Hjort, 1993, 107. See also Maguire, 1994, 97–120.

221 For the concept and its literary etymology, see Kinney, 2009, 117–125.

222 Elsner, 2000, 163. For the tradition of spolia in architecture, see Bergmeier, 2021, 76–97; Deichmann, 1975. For the same tradition in Georgian art, see Tumanishvili, Natsvlishvili, Khoshtaria, 2012, 227–228; Machabeli, 2008, 24; Gagoshidze, 1999, 63–65.

223 Kinney, 2009, 121. Epiphanios of Cyprus, for example, along with the description of the symbolic meaning of precious stones, also discusses their healing properties. A number of Byzantine treatises are devoted to this issue, among others, by Michael Psellos.

224 Chalcedonite is often used in the decorations of gospel covers, e.g., in the center of the famous *Codex Lebuinus* (1200s), is a chalcedonite head of Bacchus. See Snijder, 1932, 7–8. For the usage of various materials, see Benton, 2009, 124–125.

225 On the symbolism of stones, see Kessler, 2004, 19–42. See also Alibegashvili, 1999.

226 Gigineishvili, Giunashvili, 1979, 128.

227 Magruder, 2014, 115; Kinney, 2011, 116. The usage of Lapis Lazuli in the famous Hermann-Ida cross is usually explained as a material expression of eternal divinity. Kinney, 2011, 102.

228 Gigineishvili, Giunashvili, 1979, 43–144.

229 For the murals of *Tsalenjikha*, see Lortkipanidze, Janjalia, 2011, figs. 77, 61, 93. The same aesthetic is reflected in the treatment of the garment. I would like to thank Asmat Okropiridze for this parallel.

230 On the contrast of material, see Kessler, 2004, 29.

231 Tamarashvili, 1902, 5–27.

232 Bulia, 2023a, 179–180.

233 For the description of the *enkolpion*, see Evans, Wixom, 1997, 167–168

234 Skhirtladze, 2016, 61.

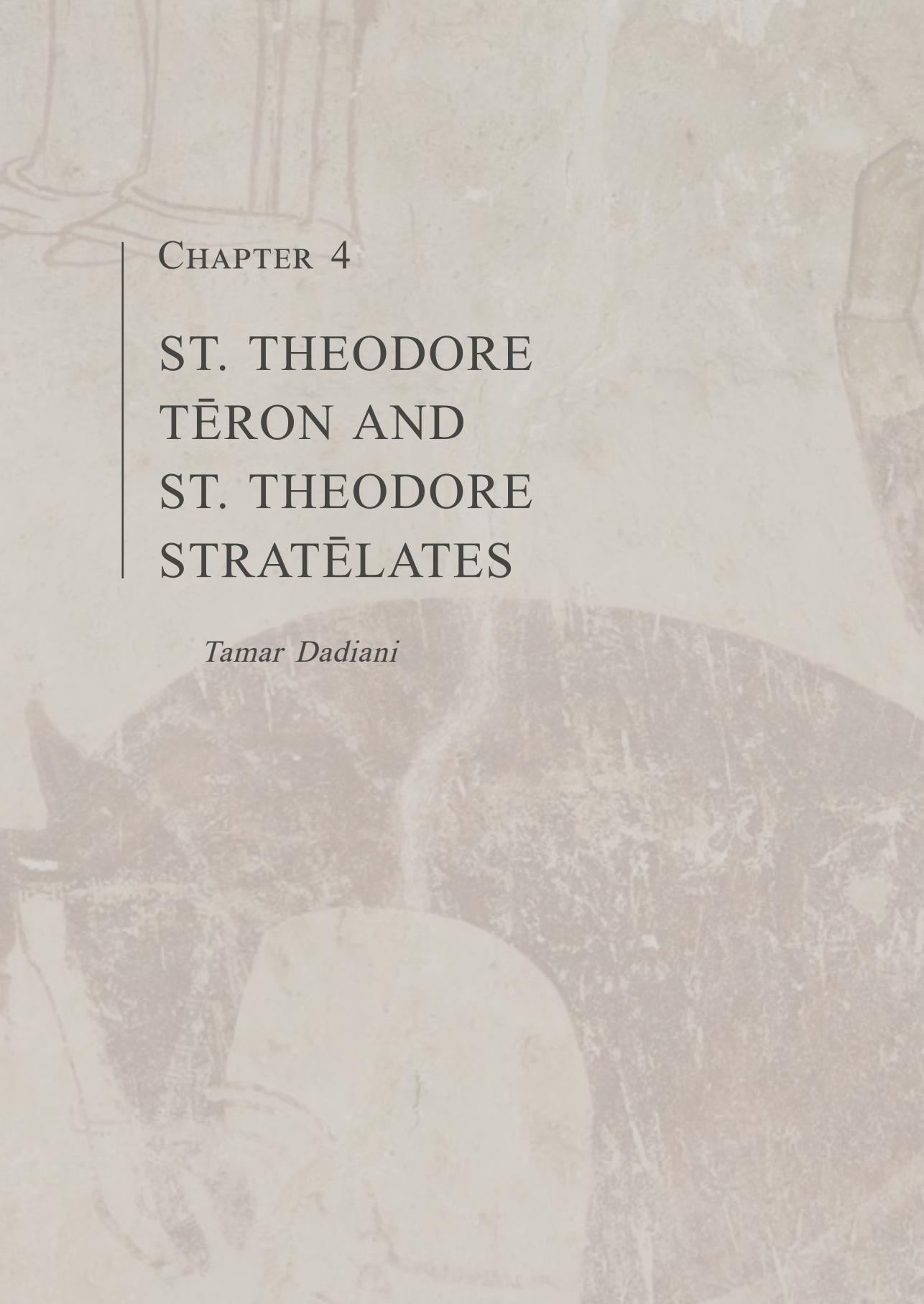
235 I would like to thank Davit Sulaberidze, who provided invaluable assistance in the research of the said item. I would also like to thank Giorgi Gagoshidze, Nana Burchuladze, and Ketevan Asatiani for their help in analyzing the inscriptions. The inscription reveals the name of the owner of the object: a certain Nikoloz.

236 Giorgi Gagoshidze dates one inscription to the thirteenth century and another to a later period, probably to the fourteenth century.

237 I would like to thank Antony Eastmond for sharing his opinion concerning this object. Eastmond observed that the opening of the *Kutaisi* reliquary was reduced over time, which is evidenced by the pressed ornament in its depth, which does not fit the triptych and is clearly a later addition. The gems are also from a later period.

238 Jojua, 2014, 66.

239 *Ibid.*, 70.



CHAPTER 4

ST. THEODORE TÉRON AND ST. THEODORE STRATÉLATES

Tamar Dadiani

4.1. EARLIEST IMAGES OF ST. THEODEORES AND THEIR ICONOGRAPHIC FEATURES IN GEORGIA (SIXTH–NINTH CENTURY)

St. Gregory of Nyssa recounts a story of an image of St. Theodore, which was once seated in the sanctuary of this warrior saint. Gregory's laconic exposé narrates scenes from the martyr's trial, martyrdom, and death.¹ In surviving early Christian art, however, Theodore's hagiographic cycle is conspicuously absent,² surfacing only much later, (for example, the Greek icon from C'ixisjvari preserved in Georgia (1878) (*Fig. 4.1*), which, alongside a depiction of the battle with the dragon, illustrates four scenes from his *Life*.

The iconography of St. Theodore Tēron (the Recruit) was formed sufficiently early with clearly identifiable attributes.³ He is referred to as "Christ's warrior" and a "newly recruited soldier" in St. Gregory of Nyssa's homily, and, as noted by Piotr Grotowski: "In case of St. Theodore, we can speak of the first full adaptation of a mounted warrior saint."⁴

In the earliest versions of the *Martyrdom of Theodore*, he slays the dragon with a spear (e.g., *The Martyrdom of Theodore Tēron*, BHG 1761 (sixth century),⁵ which was reflected in the iconography of the saint. Therefore, Theodore is without exception depicted fighting and slaying the dragon and, like St. George, is known as the "Dragonslayer."⁶

In Syria-Palestine, Asia Minor, and Caucasia, as well as in Italy, where Theodore's cult flourished, we mostly encounter Theodore's isolated icon-like depictions portraying the saint in combat with the dragon.⁷ A similar tendency is attested in Georgia, which points to the fact that the cycles from Theodore's life, on the one hand, and brief scenes of the slaying of the dragon (human or demon) appeared and developed independently from each other and existed side by side. This archetypal compositional formula is rooted deep in antiquity⁸ and appears in Christian art early on, particularly in the iconography of emperors and saints.⁹ There-

4.1 *Vita icon of St. Theodore* (1878).
Church of St. Theodore of C'ixijvari.



fore, evidently, the imagery of Theodore vanquishing the dragon is independent from his cycle, despite his identification as the dragon-slayer in the earliest versions of the *Martyrdom*.¹⁰

The theme of dragon-slaying warriors is a prevalent motif in early Christian art, with both St. George and St. Theodore frequently depicted in this fashion. Thus, we may deduce that among the two representations—laconic and narrative—only the former attained significant development. Particularly in Georgian art, Theodore often appears alongside St. George, reminiscent of the monumental art of Cappadocia.

Some of the earliest representations of St. Theodore slaying the dragon are the terracotta plates from North Africa (Tunisia, Sousse Archaeological Museum, fifth century)¹¹ and Macedonia (Viničko Kale, Museum of Macedonia, Skopje, sixth-seventh centuries).¹² In both cases, the saint's features are rendered generically, with only the beard serving as a distinctive iconographic characteristic. Among the multitude of Sinaitic icons, however (St. Catherine's Monastery, sixth century),¹³ various images of standing Theodore already exhibit classical features, such as an ascetic demeanor, pronounced eyes, thick hair, and an elongated pointed beard. Typologically similar are the images of Theodore in the church of Kosmas and Damianos in Rome (526–30)¹⁴ or the mosaic of St. Demetrios in Thessalonike (sixth century),¹⁵ as well as the famous icon of Mt. Sinai, where the warrior saints, St. George and St. Theodore, flank the Mother of God (St. Catherine's Monastery, sixth century).¹⁶ Notably, in these latter samples, Theodore is depicted in civilian attire, while in medieval Georgian art, he is consistently portrayed in full military armor.

From the eighth century onward, another figure, St. Theodore Stratēlates, has emerged alongside Tēron in both hagiography and visual art, often leading to confusion in identification.¹⁷ Typically, the two are distinguished by the shape of their beards (split or single) or by hairstyle; however, these iconographic markers are not always reliable.¹⁸

The iconographic distinction between the two Theodoses presents a challenge also in Georgian art. In the artistic productions of the tenth to twelfth centuries, the saint is often depicted without specific identification or is simply referred to as St. Theodore. Typically, his beard is united, with only rare instances—such as the relief from the church of Mravalžali in Racha (tenth-eleventh centuries)—showing a split beard.¹⁹ A more pronounced differentiation between Stratēlates and Tēron appears sporadically after the thirteenth century (see, e.g. the Triptych of Seti, Upper Svaneti, Svaneti Museum of Ethnography, which will be discussed below).²⁰

Although individual features of St. Theodore Stratēlates can be identified in Georgian art of the twelfth century, the saint is still predominantly identified simply as Theodore. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that in medieval Georgia, a synthetic image of St. Theodore was dominant.

Medieval Georgian hagiography was familiar with martyrdom

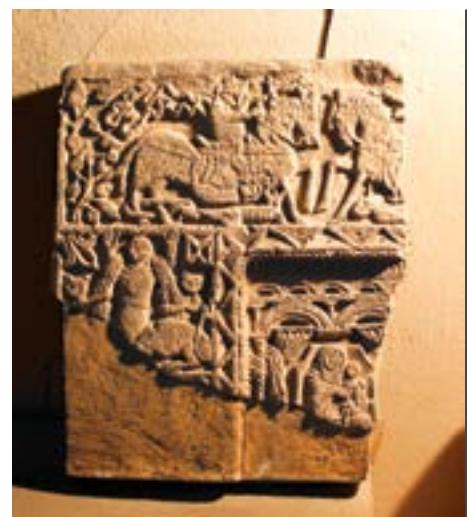


4.2 *Warrior saints, Ascension of Christ (seventh or tenth century). Church of the Dormition of Martvili.*

accounts of both Theodores and, as suggested by liturgical evidence, was able to distinguish between the two. Therefore, arguably, the unification of the two Theodores into a single figure was a conscious choice. This can be explained by the relatively early and more conservative nature of the cult and iconography of Theodore Tēron in Georgian tradition. St. Theodore Tēron was central in liturgical tradition as well, which may be explained by the famous miracle performed by the saint: On the Emperor Julian's order, on the first day of Lent, the ruler of Constantinople had to sprinkle the blood of the offerings to the idols on sold groceries. St. Theodore appeared to Archbishop Eudoxios and warned him that Christians were supposed to eat only honey-wheat. To commemorate this miracle, every Saturday of the first week of Lent, St. Theodore's feast was celebrated and honey-wheat was blessed in his honor.²¹

The earliest representations of St. Theodore in Georgia appear on stone reliefs. Despite the fact that these images lack identificatory inscriptions, iconographic idiosyncrasies point to the saint's identity. For example, the dragon-slaying warrior on the frieze of Martvili must be Theodore (Samegrelo, seventh or tenth century)²² (Fig. 4.2) as well as one of the two soldier saints on the chancel screen of Cebelda (Apkhazeti, Georgian National Museum, seventh or eighth century) (Fig. 4.3).²³

On the Cebelda chancel, the saints' faces have been erased, whereas in Martvili, the saint's features are generic and lack the details that are present, e.g., in contemporaneous Byzantine or Sinaitic samples. Therefore, we can only speculate regarding the identity of the figure depicted. A human-slaying St. George



4.3 *Theotokos with Christ and Heraldic image of Sts. George and Theodore (seventh–eighth century). Cebelda altar screen. Georgian National Museum.*



4.4 *Saints (ninth century). Gveldesi altar screen, detail. Georgian National Museum.*

is depicted here separately, whereas in the heraldic composition, the bearded and beardless riders slay a shared dragon. Considering the fact that the figures' faces on the Martvili reliefs are practically identical, we can judge based solely on one detail: the beard, which arguably points to St. Theodore.

The pair of warrior saints depicted on the chancel of Cebelda exemplifies traditional Georgian heraldic representations. One saint is portrayed slaying a human, while the other pierces a dragon. This widely recognized motif, consistent throughout medieval Georgia, allows us to identify the second rider as St. Theodore.²⁴

Another notable feature in Cebelda is the placement of the warrior saints above the image of the Mother of God, positioned in the upper zone of the slab. A similar arrangement can be observed in sixth- and seventh-century stone stelai, such as the fragments of the Brdažori stone cross,²⁵ the Xožorna stone cross, and the larger stele of Brdažori,²⁶ as well as in monumental art from the early eleventh century, including works from Ip'xi and Ac'i.²⁷ At first glance, their elevated position suggests a distinct apotropaic function. This iconographic tradition may also be linked to religious texts, where the saints are referred to as the tenth host of angels.

A standing figure of St. Theodore can be found on the chancel screen of Gveldesi (Shida Kartli, Georgian National Museum, ninth century) (Fig. 4.4).²⁸ This represents another iconographic formula that became customary for warrior saints in the early Middle Ages. Unfortunately, the chancel screen has survived only in fragments, rendering its complete program illegible. An unidentified figure, holding a spear, adorns one of the columns. This depiction is generic and characteristic of the period. The dragon's tail, prostrate before the saint, connects to his hand, as if he were grasping it, suggesting that the dragon has been vanquished. The identification of this captionless saint is facilitated by his distinctive beard, further supported by additional evidence from the same era, such as the eighth-century seals featuring warrior saints that likely depict St. Theodore (Fogg Collection, No. 178, Istanbul Museum, No. 101);²⁹ similarly, seals from the Zakos collection (No 1287 – sixth century; No 1288 – seventh-eighth centuries), where the figures are slaying a dragon.³⁰

Another early image of St. Theodore, found on the enamel medallion (ninth century) of the Xaxuli Triptych, depicts the saint holding a cross.³¹

4.2. DEPICTIONS OF ST. THEODORE ON TENTH-CENTURY STONE RELIEFS AND REPOUSSÉ ICONS

By the tenth century, heraldic compositions featuring soldier saints had become well established in Georgia. Notable examples of this stonework include the images found in the churches of Vale (Samtskhe, tenth century)³² (Fig. 4.5), Joisubani (Racha, Oni Ethnographic Museum, tenth century)³³ (Fig. 4.6), and an altar table from Iqalt‘o (Kakheti, Telavi Museum of History, tenth-elev-

4.5 St. George and St. Theodore (tenth century). Church of the Mother of God of Vale.





4.6 St. Theodore (tenth century). Joisubani. Detail of the window decoration. Museum of Local Lore in Oni.

enth centuries) (Fig. 4.7).³⁴ The latter two depictions also include identifying inscriptions. Unfortunately, the heads of the figures from Vale and Iqalt'o are damaged, resulting in the loss of essential iconographic details; however, the overall schema, which became standardized from the tenth to the eleventh centuries, remains clear.³⁵

In contrast, the reliefs at Joisubani are significantly better preserved. The warrior saints are depicted on either side of the window. St. Theodore's face is generic and stylized, characteristic of the era. This tendency toward the simplification of facial features is also evident in repoussé icons. His elongated oval beard is distinctly recognizable. The upper portion of his head is damaged, but the outer part of his hairstyle suggests that short, straight hair with parallel cuts was conventionally represented. The warrior saint wears a sword at his waist—an optional detail that was not always depicted (for example, St. George in Joisubani only holds a spear). Given that these warrior saints were considered soldiers of Christ, their weapons carried deeper semantic significance.³⁶ The sword symbolized imperial power and served as a metaphor for divine justice,³⁷ often being compared to God's word (as discussed in Nikoloz Aleksidze's chapter).³⁸ In Joisubani, both St. George and St. Theodore are integrated into the broader composition of the Last Judgment, and their attributes contribute to the overarching eschatological theme, emphasizing the victory of good over evil.

Much like Byzantium, tenth-century Georgia produced a rich array of images depicting warrior saints, particularly in metal-work. The concept of spiritual swords, which gained popularity

4.7 Entry into Jerusalem, Sts. George and Theodore (early eleventh century). Iqalt'o altar table. Telavi Historical Museum.



in Byzantine iconophile literature during the period of Iconoclasm, may have further influenced the development of canonical iconography for warrior saints, emphasizing their roles in historic battles against heresies.³⁹

In conclusion, early evidence suggests that the representations of St. Theodore in eighth- and ninth-century Georgian stonework tend to be largely captionless, generic, and lacking distinct individual characteristics. The faces often conform to the broader stylistic conventions of the reliefs. Among the examples from the tenth century, which are predominantly in poor condition, the reliefs from Joisubani reflect a similar generic typology.

Metalwork, however, presents a somewhat different perspective, with the earliest depictions of St. Theodore dating to the tenth century. These images have survived in much better condition, and the features of the saints are more discernible. In contrast to reliefs, greater compositional variety is evident, with images arranged differently based on their designated locations (such as icons, triptych wings, and arms of crosses).

One of the earliest samples is the Xirxonisi icon with images of warrior saints depicted on top of each other (Racha, Georgian National Museum, tenth century).⁴⁰ These figures are captionless, and their faces are generic and typical, with iconographic features not clearly distinguished. Notably, the rough and unrefined contours of one figure's chin, along with the slain dragon beneath him, suggest that this figure represents St. Theodore (Fig. 4.8). A broad array of tenth-century samples showcases the fully developed iconography of St. Theodore, with distinct details such as thick, mostly curly hair and a pointed beard clearly visible.

The pre-altar crosses from Saqdari (Lower Svaneti, tenth century) are of particular interest due to their unique representations.⁴¹ One cross features multiple images of St. George, while another is entirely devoted to St. Theodore, who is depicted twice. Typically, medieval Georgian art combines St. George and St. Theodore within a single composition. Inscriptions identify the saints as Theodore, leading to the temptation to identify



4.8 St. Theodore,
Xirxonisi icon (tenth–
eleventh century).
Georgian National
Museum.

the two figures as Tēron and Stratēlates. However, the duplication of St. George on the first Saqdari cross suggests that Theodore Tēron (or his unified image) is shown twice, underscoring St. Theodore's significance in medieval Georgian devotion.

Tenth-century metalwork has preserved some other intriguing samples of standing St. Theodore, e.g., the icon of Mravalžali (Racha),⁴² as well as the triptychs of Č'ukuli and Č'ixariši (Svaneti) (see St. George's chapter) (*Figs. 1.9; 1.10*).⁴³ On the triptychs, St. George and St. Theodore are depicted on both wings, flanking the Theotokos. These iconographic schemata do not include a battle with the dragon and thus substantially differ from the formula of the chancel screen of Gveldesi, which depicts an independent version of the *Life of Theodore* – the scene of the vanquishing of the dragon. The primary message is not just the fight against paganism, relevant in early Christianity, but also the church's strength and its protection from heresy.

Among the most narrative examples of the expansion of the apotropaic function of the warrior saints are the famous Byzantine ivory triptychs with their multiple depictions: the Borradaile Triptych (London, British Museum, tenth century), the Hermitage Triptych (St. Petersburg, tenth century), and the Harbaville Triptych (Paris, Louvre, tenth century).⁴⁴ These became popular in the tenth century, reflecting the military aristocracy's rise in Byzantium, a development mirrored in Georgia's centralized monarchy and emerging military elites.⁴⁵

In tenth-century metalwork icons, celestial armies usually consist of two main warrior saints. On the icons of Mravalžali, Č'ukuli, and Č'ixariši, we can observe St. Theodore holding a spear and a shield, with a sword hanging from his waist, thereby conveying classical iconography. The facial features are also canonical: short hair is composed of a series of curls, and the beard is noticeably pointed, which exhibits close parallels with the roughly contemporaneous mosaics of Hosios Loukas (early eleventh century).⁴⁶ Theodore's upwardly curled mustache, which occurs only in samples from Racha and Svaneti, may, however, be a local variation, reflecting contemporary fashion. On the icons of Mravalžali, Č'ukuli, and Č'ixariši, we can also observe a shield, which is equally traditional for a standing figure of a warrior saint. In addition to functioning as a literal attribute of a warrior, the “shield of faith” also symbolizes protection of the Church and of Christians.⁴⁷

4.3. DEPICTIONS OF ST. THEODORE ON ELEVENTH-THIRTEENTH-CENTURY RELIEFS AND LITURGICAL ITEMS

The fundamental iconographic features of St. Theodore depicted in metalwork icons are also prevalent in later examples from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Thus, while the dragon-slaying warrior saint—whether portrayed on horseback or standing—symbolizes a decisive battle against evil, a standing warrior saint without a dragon is interpreted as an invincible protector of Christianity and the Church.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, panels depicting warrior saints traditionally adorned the surfaces of pre-altar crosses. For instance, on the cross of Saqdari, the same figure is repeated multiple times. In contrast, during the later period, we observe a grouping of warrior saints, often including both Theodore and George. An example of this is the cross of Labsqalid from Upper Svaneti (eleventh century).⁴⁸ An interesting iconographic version of the warrior saints can be observed on the decorative program of the cross of Kac'xi (Racha, Georgian National Museum, early eleventh century) (Fig. 4.9),⁴⁹ which represents three saints: George, Theodore, and Demetrios. In this composition, each saint wields distinctive weapons, highlighting their individual iconographic traits. On the cross of Kac'xi, St. Theodore is holding a spear and a sword. The iconography of the saint is canonical, characterized by curly hair and an elongated triangular



4.9 *St. Theodore, Pre-altar cross of Kac'xi (eleventh century). Georgian National Museum.*



4.10 *Warrior saints (thirteenth–fourteenth century). Pre-altar cross of Svip'i, detail. Church of St. George of Svip'i.*

beard, setting him apart from other figures. This classical tradition, which originates in the images of Mravalžali, Č‘ukuli, and Č‘ixariši, remained unchanged in the eleventh century and later. Only rare exceptions can be identified that will be discussed below.

A large group of celestial warriors is depicted on the pre-altar cross of Svip'i in P‘ari community (Upper Svaneti, thirteenth or fourteenth century)⁵⁰ (Fig. 4.10). St. Theodore is once again represented with classical features, with a wave-like thick hair and triangular beard. In the row of warrior saints standing along the vertical arm of the cross, Theodore stands third, placed after St. George and St. Demetrios.

In eleventh-century stonework, two iconographic schemata are dominant: riding and standing warrior saints. Standing Theodore and George appear on the east facade of the church of Mravalžali (early eleventh centuries) (Fig. 4.11), where warrior saints appear under the Crucifixion, on both sides of the window. St. Theodore tramples the dragon with his feet and slays it with his spear. In this, the composition seems to exhibit archaic features revealing similarities with early Christian art, e.g., the terracotta plate of Vinnitsa, where standing St. George and St. Christopher slay a dragon with their spears (Vinnitsa Kale, Museum of Macedonia, Skopje, sixth or seventh century),⁵¹ or the relief of the Gveldesi chancel screen in Georgia. St. Theodore holds his hands in an orans position (including the one grasping on the spear), which adds to the composition an intercessory significance. Thus, together with an apotropaic function, the image also represents the martyrdom aspect. Notably, the dragon’s neck is bound with a belt—similar to one observed in the relief of the Xaxuli church of the Theotokos (Tao-Klarjeti, tenth century), depicting a battle between a lion and a snake.⁵² This imagery represents the struggle against chthonic forces and the restraint of evil. The action appears frozen in time, and, in addition to the traditional protective symbolism of the soldier saints, it conveys the symbolism of immortality and salvation of the soul. The theme of vanquishing evil, as expressed in the Crucifixion, serves as a symbolic counterpart to the passion and defeat of evil illustrated in the imagery of the warrior saint.

The relief of Mravalžali features a distinctive iconography of St. Theodore. His straight hair cascades down to his shoulders, rendered in a simple manner without elaborate detailing.

The saint is characterized by a split beard, a feature often associated with Theodore Stratēlates.⁵³ However, as previously noted, the shape of the beard alone does not provide a definitive means of identification.

Until approximately the twelfth century, both Theodore Tēron and Stratēlates were typically depicted with a single pointed beard. A notable example is the illustration of Theodore Stratēlates in the Menologion of Basil (Vatican Library, late tenth century).⁵⁴ A similarly pointed beard is displayed by two St. Theodoses standing beside one another in the Harbaville Triptych (tenth century). Yet another example can be found in the mosaic of the inner narthex of the Nea Mone's Katholikon (Chios, 1049),⁵⁵ on the Steatite Icon from the Vatican Museum (eleventh century),⁵⁶ and on a Byzantine icon housed in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (eleventh or twelfth century).⁵⁷

In contrast, at Hosios Loukas, both Tēron (as seen in the lunette of the diakonikon of the Katholikon) and Stratēlates depicted in the decoration of the northwestern chapel of the Katholikon, (first half of the eleventh century)⁵⁸ are represented with split beards. This variation illustrates that these iconographic features were not yet fully developed during the tenth and eleventh centuries, making them less reliable for identifying the saint depicted in Mravalzali. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that this representation combines elements of both Theodore Tēron and Theodore Stratēlates, resulting in a hybrid image of the two saints.

Some excellent examples of the iconography of Theodore can be found on the facades of the church of Nikorcminda (1010–14)⁵⁹ (Figs. 4.12; 4.13; Fig. 1.68), that show two scenes depicting a pair of riding saints: the riding figures on the gable of the east facade flanking the composition of the Transfiguration, and another pair of the warrior saints represented on the tympanum of the west portal, flanking the standing figure of Christ. The theme of the Savior is dominant in the monumental decoration of Nikorcminda, and aligns with typical representations of Christ's



4.11 Sts. Theodore and George (early eleventh century). Church of St. George of Mravalzali.



4.12 St. Theodore (1010–4). Church of St. Nicholas of Nikorcminda.



4.13 Sts. George and Theodore with Christ (1010–4). Church of St. Nicholas of Nikorcminda.

might and glory.⁶⁰ The warrior saints combatting the forces of darkness occupy a prominent place in this ensemble.

St. Theodore on the west tympanum exhibits markedly portrait-like features. However, the accompanying inscription, as usual, identifies him as Theodore without any further disambiguation. An ascetic face, long beard, and hair curled in circles can be observed. By then, the iconography of St. Theodore was standardized (if we discard some minor nuances, such as the shape of the beard). These minor distinctions between the Theodoses, which can already be observed in Hosios Loukas or Nea Mone, become more prominent and accentuated over time. As a rule, Theodore Tēron was established as young and short-haired, whereas Theodore Stratēlates was a somewhat older soldier, with his curly hair falling behind his ears, like in Nikorcminda. Thus, from the point of view of iconography, the features of the image of Nikorcminda belong to Theodore Stratēlates (the artist may have had his portrait as a model). As was noted above, the inscription does not specify the saint's identity, therefore, we can interpret it as a hybrid image.

The styles of the lower and upper registers of Nikorcminda dramatically differ from each other. This has also affected the iconography of St. Theodore. In the scene on the gable of the east facade, all figures have a similar decorative hairstyle, where St. Theodore can be identified by his long, pointy beard. The warrior saints flank the central composition of the Transfiguration in the uppermost celestial register, similarly to some of the stelai decorations and the chancel of Cebelda. Transfiguration,

as the prefiguration of the Second Coming and the expression of Christ's glory, is connected to the scene of the Second Coming of the south facade. St. Theodore stands next to the Transfiguration also in the church of the Annunciation of Udabno Monastery (Davit'gareja, c.1290),⁶¹ where he is placed separately from other warrior saints.

Transfiguration is an announcement of Christ's divine nature, which is also interpreted as the symbol of the deification of "new Adam." In addition, according to John Chrysostom, the mystery of the Transfiguration also encapsulates the idea of the foundation of the church and the glorification of the Trinity, since the building of the tents symbolized the foundation of the apostolic church.⁶² Therefore, in this context, the warrior saints act as protectors of the earthly church. Whereas Theodore, the vanquisher of evil and the protector of fasting, bears an additional meaning, since in his troparion he is called the bread baked at Christ's feast.⁶³

Of interest is the structural similarity of the scene on the east wall of Nikorcminda with the principle of distribution on tenth-century Byzantine triptychs (Harbaville, Hermitage, etc.), which serves the accentuation of the warrior saints. From this perspective, an ivory triptych with warrior saints on its wings from the treasury of Nikorcminda is noteworthy (Georgian National Museum, tenth or early eleventh century) (Fig. 4.14).⁶⁴ Theodore's features, with slightly curly hair and long beard, reveal direct parallels with the above-mentioned Byzantine triptychs. Therefore, I believe that the artists of Nikorcminda created the composition with a classical Byzantine schema in mind. It is noteworthy that the warrior of Nikorcminda's ivory triptych is dressed in military attire with a weapon in his hand.

Several excellent representations of St. Theodore have been preserved on Svanetian metalwork and painted icons of the thirteenth century.⁶⁵ One of them depicts standing St. Theodore (Fig. 4.15), whereas on the other he is coupled with St. George (Fig. 4.16). This second icon also has a smaller image of



4.14 *Warrior saints, detail of the triptych from the treasury of the Church of St. Nicholas of Nikorcminda (early eleventh century).*
Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.



4.15 Icon of St. Theodore from Latali (thirteenth century). Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography.



4.16 Icon of Sts. George and Theodore from Latali (thirteenth century). Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography.

St. Demetrios placed on the bottom rim of the frame. The iconography of St. Theodore differs on the icons. The separate figure has a slightly heavy and wide face as well as short hair. On the second icon, the saint's hair is longer, creating a hat-like round hairstyle, which suggests that he is Theodore Stratēlates. This feature is, however, the only hint of him being Stratēlates, as otherwise the warrior is fairly young and the beard is short and united. A tendency to merge the features of the two Theodoros is observable, which has eventually ended in a generic image of Theodore (especially since the iconography of both Theodoros has been by then fully formed). The names of the saints on the icons of Latali lack disambiguation; however, it is also obvious that the artists are familiar with the iconographic traditions of both Theodoros. A good example is the Seti triptych of the same period, where Theodore Tēron and Stratēlates are depicted with traditional Byzantine iconography.

The faces of the saints on the triptych of Seti (Fig. 4.17)



4.17 *Seti triptych* (thirteenth century).

Svaneti Museum
of History and
Ethnography.

are clearly differentiated and reflect contemporaneous Byzantine images, such as the murals of the katholikon of the church of St. Panteleimon of Gorno Nerezi (North Macedonia, twelfth century),⁶⁶ Agioi Anargyroi (Kastoria, 1180),⁶⁷ and the Protaton (Mt. Athos, thirteenth century).⁶⁸ In this period, Theodore Tēron was represented in a traditional manner, wearing short hair and a single pointy beard, whereas Stratēlates' beard was split, with his hair being somewhat longer (Gorno Nerezi). In the iconography of Agioi Anargyroi, Theodore Stratēlates is represented with traditional iconography, whereas Theodore Tēron has a wide beard with three endings. A similar tradition of depicting a slightly split beard can be observed in the triptych of Seti. The hairstyle of the saints also differs: Theodore Stratēlates wears hat-like curls, whereas Tēron's hair is shorter. Both are identified with inscriptions, where they are merely called Theodore.

Theodore's three-ended beard is attested on yet another icon from Svaneti (Upper Svaneti, Ip'ari, Svaneti Museum of Ethnography).⁶⁹ (Fig. 4.18) In addition, the saint wears a diadem. In the iconographic tradition of St. Theodore, such diadems appear in Syrian and Byzantine samples, for example in the wall painting

4.18 *Icon of St. Theodore*
from *Ip’ari* (thirteenth
century). Svaneti
Museum of History and
Ethnography.



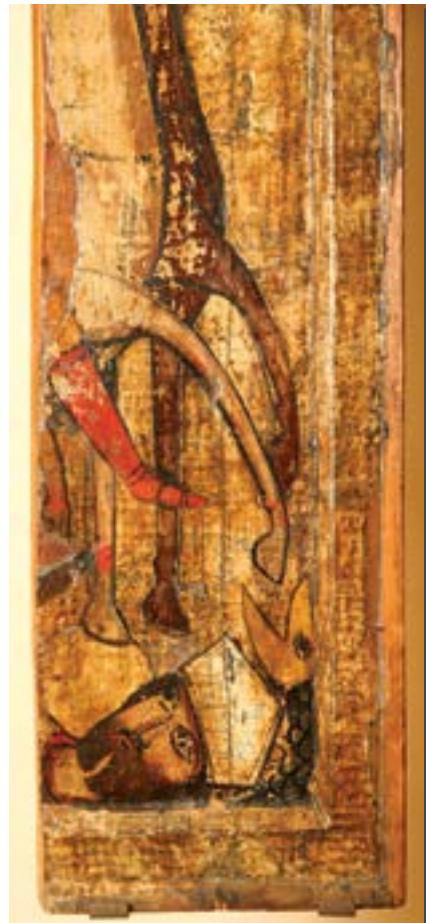
of the church of St. Sergios (Qara, 1200–66)⁷⁰ and on an icon from Sinai (St. Catherine’s Monastery, thirteenth century) where St. George and St. Theodore are depicted next to each other.⁷¹

Notably, the composition of riding warrior saints standing next to each other that are common in thirteenth-century Byzantine art appears on two icons preserved in the Svaneti Museum (Upper Svaneti, Ip’ari, thirteenth century).⁷² (*Fig. 4.19*) Unfortunately, only a small fragment of the icon has survived—a narrow strip of white and red fragments of horses. Theodore and George are slaying a crown-bearing figure and a dragon; thus, the traditional heraldic composition is transformed on the icon of Ip’ari into a synthetic iconographic formula.

Therefore, icon painting provides samples of iconographic schemata that are otherwise relatively rare in Georgia but are common in Greek and Eastern Christian art. An example is the Icon of Nakip‘ari (eleventh or twelfth century), where the two standing warrior saints face each other (see St. George’s chapter. *Fig. 2.42*).⁷³ The earliest parallel can be found on the lead seal of the Hermitage (St. Petersburg, the Hermitage, eleventh or twelfth century),⁷⁴ John’s Seal with the figures of St. George and Theodore (Washington D.C., Dumbarton Oaks, late twelfth century),⁷⁵ the frescoes of the church of Tigran Honenc‘ in Ani (1225),⁷⁶ an icon with two Theodoses (Beroea, Byzantine Museum of Veria, thirteenth or fourteenth century),⁷⁷ wall paintings depicting two St. Theodoses in Serbia (Žiča, Church of the Apostles Peter and Paul, fourteenth or fifteenth century)⁷⁸ and Greece (Kastoria, church of St. George, 1368–85).⁷⁹ Interestingly, the artist of Nakip‘ari chose images of St. George and St. Theodore, instead of two Theodoses. This also points to a fixed liturgical and iconographic tradition, where Theodore and George are conceptualized together and preferred over a unified generic image of two Theodoses.

4.4. ST. THEODORE IN TENTH- TO FOURTEENTH-CENTURY WALL PAINTINGS

In Georgian murals, compositions of warrior saints begin to appear in the ninth century. Naturally, in wall paintings, the iconographic connotations of the warrior saints have changed. In stone reliefs, the warriors carried a strictly apotropaic function and were placed close to entrances, windows or key scenes. They had protective functions also in the decorations of pre-altar crosses. In the case of artistic ensembles, however, the warrior saints



4.19 *Ip‘ari icon of St. George and St. Theodore (thirteenth century).* Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography.

were inscribed in vast multidimensional spaces and were deeply intertwined with the church's iconographic conception.

Earliest images of St. Theodore in wall paintings are found in Davit'gareja (Sabereebi complex, ninth–tenth centuries),⁸⁰ and in Svaneti: Žibiani, (tenth century), Ac'i (early eleventh century), Ip'xi (early eleventh century).⁸¹ Unfortunately, most of these early compositions are damaged and fragmentary. Nevertheless, the surviving fragments still showcase an important feature characteristic of St. Theodore—his red horse. Colorful horses are common in Christian iconography and encapsulate religious symbolism as well as convey episodes from the life of Theodore.

The color red is associated with fire and is usually interpreted as a representation of the Second Coming.⁸² The horse was an important symbol in ancient Georgia, which probably also determined the popularity of warrior saints. The theme of horse and deer has a rich folk tradition in Georgia. Its earliest representations are found on bronze buckles (third–second millennium B.C.E)⁸³ and late antique silver plates (third century C.E.).⁸⁴ Notably, on the buckles, the horses have deer antlers, which, according to Niko Marr, must point to an interchangeable totemic and agricultural meaning of horse and deer.⁸⁵ Apart from the horse's solar functions, the horse also had a chthonic meaning—it was closely tied with funeral rituals and acted as a carrier of sorts to the other world. Horses were also used to create heroic images of dead ancestors; for example, Thracian and Celtic warriors were buried together with their horses. As sacrificial animals, they served their owners in the journeys into the underworld and represented the dead who had been transformed into horses. Among the Indo-European people, the horse was considered an animal

4.20 St. George and St. Theodore (eleventh–twelfth century), facade painting. Church of St. George of Hadisi.



that represented the cycle of death, resurrection, and immortality. Considering this wider context, the red horse can be interpreted eschatologically. Among other things, most likely it also reflected St. Theodore's death by fire.⁸⁶

Due to the fragmentary nature of early evidence, a clearer understanding of the iconography of St. Theodore is possible only through the evidence of the later part of the eleventh century and even later. Once again, two iconographic motifs are dominant: Theodore seated on horseback and standing. In the latter case, the saint is usually standing next to St. George or is inscribed in a vast row of celestial warriors.

Interestingly, in Svanetian art, which has impressive and idiosyncratic ways of depicting St. Theodore, Theodore on horseback is more common; e.g., the church of St. George in Hadiši (early twelfth century),⁸⁷ (*Fig. 4.20*) the church of the Archangel of Ip'rari (1096),⁸⁸ (*Fig. 4.21*) Sts. Kyrikos and Ioulitta of Lagurka (1112),⁸⁹ (*Fig. 4.22*) St. George of Nakip'ari (1130),⁹⁰ (*Fig. 4.23*) the church of the Savior of Latali (Mac'xvariši) (1140).⁹¹ (*Fig. 4.24*)

In the church of St. George of Hadiši, theme of the warrior saints is dominant, and the pair of riders is depicted on the north facade. Here, the traditional heraldic composition is neglected and both saints face the same direction. The dynamic movement of the figures (a feature of other Svanetian murals too) creates an allusion with hunting scenes.⁹² However, the prostrate Diocletian and the defeated dragon clearly point to the identity of the riders. Theodore is depicted behind St. George and follows him. The face is poorly preserved, and only part of the nimbus can be seen. The horse is, by tradition, dark red (a stable and univocal iconographic feature in Georgian art). St. Theodore appears in the interior decoration as well; he is represented alongside St. George on the west wall in a scene of the coronation of the warrior saints by Christ. St. Theodore's face is damaged; however, thick and curly hair and a split beard, characteristic of Theodore Stratēlates, can still be identified (see St. George's chapter, *Fig. 2.104*). The identificatory inscription is missing. The saint holds a spear in one hand and a sword in another.

Theodore features prominently on the murals of Ip'rari, Lagurka and Nakip'ari belonging to "the king's artist" T'evdore.⁹³ All three samples provide an expressive but also classical imagery of St. Theodore.



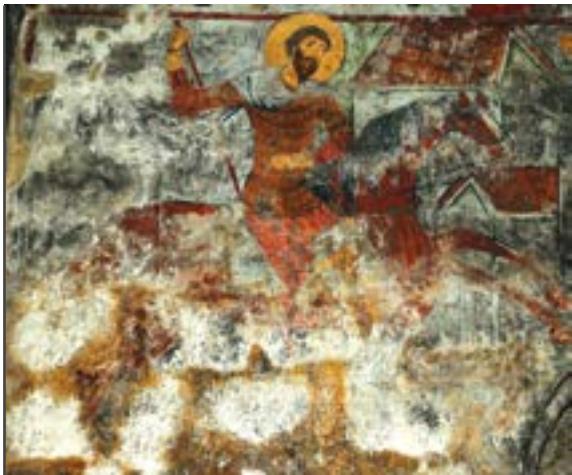
4.21 St. Theodore (1096). Church of the Archangels of Ip'rari.



4.22 St. Theodore (1112). Church of Sts. Kyrikos and Ioulitta ("Lagurka").



4.23 St. Theodore (1130). Nakip'ari church of St. George.



4.24 St. Theodore (1140). Church of the Savior of Latali (Mac'xvariši).

In Ip'rari, the images of the warrior saints appear independently, with entire walls dedicated to individual warrior saints. St. Theodore, riding a red horse and slaying a dragon, is depicted on the south wall. The figures of the warrior saints are an integral component of the iconographic program of the church and are in dialogue with the rest of the scenes. The southern part is entirely dedicated to the Lord's incarnation; next to St. Theodore, we can see the images of the Mother of God with the infant and St. Anne, identified as the mother of the Theotokos, whereas above them is an extended scene of the Nativity. The Mother of God is of a Nikopoia type, who was usually considered as the protectress of the imperial army,⁹⁴ and whose icon often

led the armies.⁹⁵ Byzantine writing provides some direct associations between the Theotokos, as the protectress of soldiers, and St. Theodore: Leo the Deacon reports that during the wars with the Bulgars, the Theotokos dispatched St. Theodore as an aid of the Byzantine emperor John Tzimiskes (969–76).⁹⁶

In Lagurka and Nakip‘ari, the pairs of the warrior saints appear on the north wall. In Lagurka, the warriors face opposite directions, which contradicts the principle of heraldic compositions and fills the small space of the church with dynamism and movement. In other churches, the artist has depicted St. Theodore under the Baptism, which can be connected with the idea of the revelation of the Trinity in the Gospels conveyed in the relief of Nikorcminda.⁹⁷ Therefore, in Lagurka, like in Nikorcminda and the church of the Annunciation of Davit‘gareja, the martyrdom and sacrifice of St. Theodore are narratively articulated.

The murals of the “king’s artist T‘evdore” provide a curious interpretation of St. Theodore’s iconography. On the one hand, the saint’s features are traditional, yet the face is enriched with additional emotional depth and in the typical Komnenian face, one can identify Svanetian features. St. Theodore is depicted in three fourths. The face is elongated and ascetic, the nose is pronounced and the eyes are large and dark. The inscription identifies him merely as Theodore; however, the curly hair falling behind the ears, the split beard, and his middle age are typical of Theodore Stratēlates. It is difficult to say whether the artist specifically intended to depict Stratēlates or if, by manipulating familiar iconographic features, they sought to convey a composite image of Theodore. It is certain, however, that for the twelfth-century observer, any further explanations regarding the identity of the figure were unnecessary.

Beyond the expressive and ascetic face of St. Theodore, the artist T‘evdore has deliberately emphasized the red horse. Its dynamic movement, vibrant color, prominent ears, and tightly closed eyes create a visual dialogue with the saint’s features, embodying the martyrs’ resilience and steadfastness.

In the Church of the Savior in Latali, we find a pair of warrior saints depicted by Mik‘ael Maqlakeli (Upper Svaneti, 1140). Above these warriors is an image representing the Entry into Jerusalem. In the lower register, large representations of the warrior saints serve as ‘pillars’ for this pivotal Gospel episode. The iconography of St. Theodore adheres to the tradition established by the “king’s artist T‘evdore.” The face of the saint upon the red horse is both sol-



4.25 *Hospitality of Abraham and warrior saints (first half of the twelfth century). Church of St. George of Svip'i.*

emn and ascetic, while his iconographic attributes—similar to those of Ip‘rari, Lagurka, and Nakip‘ari—identify him as Theodore Stratēlates.

The depiction of St. Theodore as sacramental bread offered to the Holy Trinity, also featured in his troparion, frequently appears in artistic compositions. An exemplary case is the decoration of the facade of the church of Svip‘i in the P‘ari community (Upper Svaneti, twelfth century), where Sts. George, Demetrios, and Theodore are portrayed beneath the scene of Abraham’s Hospitality (Fig. 4.25).⁹⁸ A parallel can be drawn with the eleventh-century cross of Kac‘xi, previously mentioned, which illustrates the three warrior saints alongside a depiction of the Trinity. The donor’s eschatological inscription reads:

„ქ. სამმზედ, სამმნათად, სამთავად | ერთარსებად აბრაშამის
ზე გუეცნობ, | სამებაო და ღმრთად მოსავთა შენთა | ღმერთ
ჰყოფ მრჩობლ კერძო ვინანი მე რაც | რაჭისა ერისთავი ძი-
თურთ წიადთა ღირს მყავ | აბ რაპამის თანა“⁹⁹

Christ Trinity, you appear to us as three suns, three celestial bodies and three heads through Abraham, and you deify those who have faith in you; make me Rati, the eristavi of Rača, with my sons, worthy of the house of Abraham.

A notable synthesis of St. Theodore on horseback and the heavenly army can be observed in the Church of Saqdari (Lower Svaneti, thirteenth to fourteenth centuries) (Fig. 4.26).¹⁰⁰ In this composition, St. Theodore occupies a prominent position above half-figures of war-



4.26 Sts. Theodore, Merkourios, and Prokopios (thirteenth–fourteenth century). Church of St. George of Saqdari.

rior saints placed beneath him. This compositional choice emphasizes the centrality of St. Theodore, following St. George, in Svaneti's iconographic tradition. A striking example of this is the tenth-century pre-altar cross of Saqdari, where Theodore is depicted twice. Although the face of Theodore is damaged, the distinctive split beard—characteristic of his iconography—remains visible.

Notably, the saint's movement is directed opposite to his gaze, a compositional choice more traditionally associated with St. George (as seen in repoussé icons from Beč‘o, Lemsia, and Murqmeri, Upper Svaneti, twelfth to thirteenth centuries).¹⁰¹ This dynamic portrayal effectively conveys the energetic and forceful motion of the somewhat heavy figures (the horse and its rider), contrasting sharply with the aggressive attack of the dragon.

Among the somewhat later examples from the fourteenth century, the image of St. Theodore in the decoration of the Church of

4.27 St. Theodore
(fourteenth century).
Church of the Archangels
of Lašdğveri.



the Archangels in Lašdgveri (Lenjeri Community, Upper Svaneti) is particularly significant, reflecting an inclination toward earlier styles (Fig. 4.27). Here, Theodore's static and schematic presentation embodies artistic and iconographic traditions from previous centuries. His classical straight features, split beard, and flowing hair are fully depicted, while the alignment of the upper body in the opposite direction of the legs clearly echoes the art of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Equally intriguing is the fourteenth or fifteenth-century wall painting in Kaiše, Upper Svaneti (Fig. 4.28).¹⁰² Here, St. Theodore on horseback is depicted on the south wall beneath the composition of the Pentecost.¹⁰³ The saint gallops toward the altar apse, which traditionally features the Deesis, while his head and gaze are directed westward toward the Mother of God. This iconographic context reinforces the idea of the Mother of God being the celestial protector of the holy army, echoing the accounts of Leo the Deacon.¹⁰⁴

An analysis of monuments from the tenth to fourteenth centuries reveals that during this period, images of St. Theodore were often composite. In most instances, the inscriptions do not clarify which Theodore is represented, and depictions of both Theodores together are rare, with the Seti triptych being a notable exception. In twelfth-century Georgia, the portrait tradition for Theodore Stratēlates—characterized by elongated hair and a split beard—became more prevalent, likely influenced by specific prototypes.



4.28 St. Theodore (fourteenth–fifteenth century). Church of the Archangels of Kaiše.

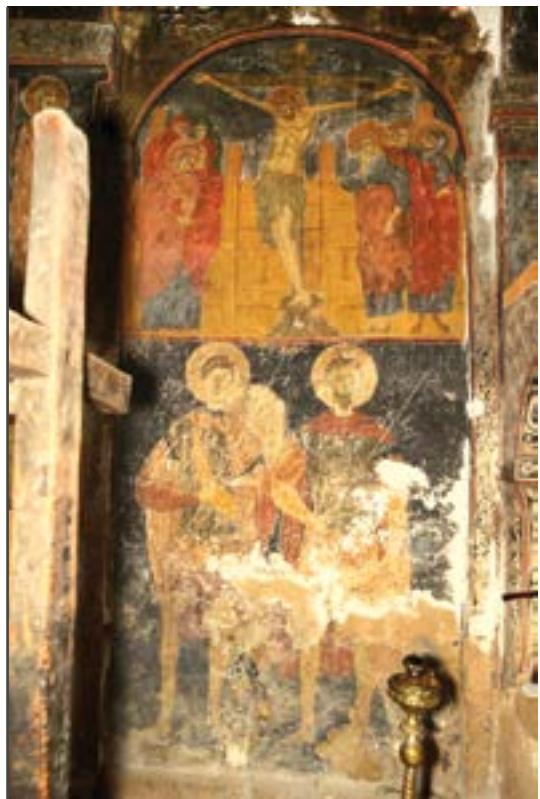
However, the Seti triptych indicates that the two Theodoses were indeed differentiated. This suggests that the composite imagery may have been part of a deliberate iconographic program devised by the artists.

4.5. ST. THEODORE IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MONUMENTAL ART

The situation underwent significant transformation in the sixteenth century, as both Theodore Tēron and Theodore Stratēlates began to be depicted almost exclusively side by side, a distinction clearly indicated by inscriptions. In the decoration of the



4.29 St. Theodore Tēron and St. Artemios (sixteenth century). Church of the Archangels of Latali.



4.30 St. Theodore Stratēlates and St. Demetrios (sixteenth century). Church of the Archangels of Latali.

Church of the Archangels in Latali (Upper Svaneti, sixteenth century), the two saints are portrayed separately on the eastern sections of the south and north walls (*Figs. 4.29; 4.30*).¹⁰⁵ Notably, their iconography diverges from tradition, featuring straight hair and pointed, unified beards, rendering them almost indistinguishable, identifiable only by their captions.

A different approach can be seen in the decoration of the church of Nativity of the Theotokos in Gelat'i (sixteenth century), which can be called the apotheosis of the two Theodoses (*Fig. 4.31*).¹⁰⁶ The grandeur and opulence of their attire and weaponry are particularly striking. Positioned in the upper register between the windows, the tall, upright, and monumental figures of the saints command attention. Below them, the Entry into Jerusalem is depicted, while the scene of Pentecost unfolds above, traditionally linking warrior saints to these significant events. The intricately detailed armaments—Stratēlates brandishing a spear and shield and Tēron wielding a sword and sheath—alongside their imposing vertical forms, emphasize their military prowess. Their distinct facial features further differentiate them: Stratēlates is characterized by thick, rounded hair, while Tēron



4.31 *St. Theodore Tēron and St. Theodore Stratēlates* (sixteenth century). *Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God of Gelat'i*.
Courtesy of the Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Sergo Kobuladze Monuments Photo Recording Laboratory.

wear shorter, more classical hair, both complemented by elongated, solemn faces. In Gelat'i, the dominant imagery of these warrior saints embodies both military strength and the spirit of martyrdom, alluding to the historical and political significance of this monument.¹⁰⁷ Notably, St. Theodore Tēron and Stratēlates are also featured in the iconographic program of Gelat'i's sanctuary.

The sixteenth-century representations in Gelat'i, akin to those in the Church of the Archangels in Latali, are remarkable for their iconographic evolution. While they adhere to traditional forms, these works also encapsulate new meanings. The pale faces of Latali, with their deeply set eyes, stand in stark contrast to the heroic visages portrayed in Gelat'i. It can be argued that the codified portraits of earlier periods have evolved into a broader emotional spectrum; the once-unperturbed depictions of martyrs have transformed into expressions of inner vitality.¹⁰⁸

In the Church of the Archangels at Gremi and Nekresi (Kakheti, sixteenth century), St. Theodore is depicted in a post-Byz-

4.32 *Warrior saints (sixteenth century). Church of the Archangels of Gremi.*



antine style, complemented by both Georgian and Greek inscriptions.¹⁰⁹ Unlike other contemporary works, these pieces exhibit a strong adherence to canonicity. In both churches, the panel of warrior saints is featured on the south wall alongside a composition depicting the donors. In Nekresi, St. Theodore is portrayed above a niche, cut off at the waist, visually enhancing his presence. As per tradition, the inscription does not specify which Theodore is depicted; however, his distinct features—rounded, curly hair and the characteristic spiral-shaped beard—suggest that this is likely Theodore Stratēlates. This iconographic type aligns with traditional examples found in the Protaton on Mt. Athos and the Church of St. Nicholas in Cyprus (fourteenth century);¹¹⁰ yet, it also exhibits the emotional and mystical aura characteristic of the time. The saint gazes softly and calmly, often interpreted as a visual allusion to Christ.

Regrettably, St. Theodore's depiction in Gremi (*Fig. 4.32*) is poorly visible. Only the arrangement of his hair and beard evokes traditional iconography—circular hair and a split beard. Uncharacteristically for Georgian art, the warriors are dressed in secular civilian garments instead of the expected armor. St. Theodore's attire is damaged, particularly in the lower portion, but it is likely that he once wore a secular garment. In one hand, the saint holds a cross, while the other is raised to his chest in a gesture of prayer. This variation resonates with common themes in Greek art, as exemplified by the figures of Theodore Tēron and Stratēlates in the Ypapantis Monastery in Meteora (fourteenth century).¹¹¹

4.6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the iconography of St. Theodore, which had been formed quite early, was represented in Georgia in a classical manner. Since the earliest attested images, he was shown in military attire as a warrior saint. From the tenth century until the late Middle Ages, Georgian artists faithfully adhered to Byzantine models. Icons, relief compositions, and frescoes from the tenth to thirteenth centuries reveal striking parallels with Hosios Loukas, Nea Mone, Athos, and St. Catherine's Monastery. Nevertheless, local distinctive characteristics are also evident.

The dragon-slaying St. Theodore frequently appears alongside St. George in Georgian art. This liturgical and artistic convention may explain why St. Theodore's face did not gain widespread popularity in Georgia, despite his iconography being well known among Georgian artists. In earlier images, the features of Theodore Tēron are prominently emphasized, while later depictions (post-eleventh century) exhibit a more synthesized iconographic approach. In monuments from the eleventh and twelfth centuries—such as the reliefs of Nikorcminda, Ip'rari, Lagurka, and Svan paintings—characteristics of Theodore Stratēlates become increasingly pronounced. However, inscriptions continue to refer to him simply as Theodore. Some compositions, like the triptych of Seti, represent both Theodores together; yet, these instances are exceptions and largely reflect imitations of Greek models rather than a prevailing trend.

St. Theodore has a long and rich history in Georgia. Independent images of Theodore appear on such early monuments as the Gveldesi chancel screen (ninth century) and Saqdari Cross (tenth century). Georgian fine art ensembles point to Theodore's exceptional place within iconographic programs, where his image is often emphasized, either through size or contextual placement, where he served not only as the protector of Christian faith and sacraments but also reminded the faithful of ideas of offering and salvation.

- 1 Walter, 2003, 45, 55.
- 2 Walter argues that a unique exception is the burning of St. Theodore in the Menologion of Basil (tenth century), see *ibid.*, 65.
- 3 Walter, 2003, 55, 64.
- 4 Grotowski, 2010, 60–61, 79.
- 5 Haldon, 2016, 84.
- 6 In the context of Gveldesi composition, it may be of interest to recall a much later parallel. The episode of St. Theodore's battle with the dragon is represented on the Mravalzali relief and one Byzantine cloisonné plate (St. Petersburg, the Hermitage, twelfth century), For the Hermitage plate, see Grotowski, 2010, fig. 47.
- 7 Walter, 2003, 50; St. Theodore's cult was also spread in Egypt among the Copts. Winstedt, 1910.
- 8 Maguire, 1996, 107; Walter, 2003, 9–38, fig. 12–18.
- 9 Jolivet-Lévy, 2001, 345; Grotowski, 2010, 78, fig. 2–4.
- 10 Walter, 2003, 51.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 79.
- 12 Walter, 2003, 51–53, fig. 25; Grotowski, 2010, 79, fig. 7(a); Dimitrova, 2016, 11, 24.
- 13 Weitzmann, 1976, fig. B.13; Grotowski, 2010, fig. 12.
- 14 Thunø, 2015, fig. IV–V.
- 15 Maguire, 1996, 42, fig. 37; Weitzmann, 1976, fig. 6.
- 16 *Ibid.*, fig. 4, B. 3.
- 17 Walter, 1999, 185–189; Walter, 2003, 59–64.
- 18 Walter, 2003, 60.
- 19 Takaishvili, 1963, 56; Skhirtladze, 1982, 40–47; Dadiani, 2015, 43–46; Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, 196, fig. 459–460.
- 20 Chichinadze, 1996, 67, fig. 3; Pantskhava, Lortkipanidze, Pataridze, et al., 2020, 114–115, fig. 50.
- 21 Kochlamazashvili, 2013, 307–326.
- 22 There is a disagreement concerning the dating of the reliefs. Chubinashvili, Aladashvili and Khundadze dated the reliefs to the seventh century: Chubinashvili, 1948a, 181; Aladashvili, 1977, 49; fig. 56; Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, 18–19, fig. 52. A tenth-century date is preferred by Amiranashvili. Amiranashvili, 1971, 175–176; Khrushkova, 1980, 59; Thierry, 1999, 240; Both the seventh and tenth centuries are accepted by Iamanidze: Iamanidzé, 2016, 82–90; Nikoloz Aleksidze and Ekaterine Gedevanishvili date the reliefs to the tenth century.
- 23 In two articles dedicated to the chancel, D. Aynalov first proposed a 7th–8th century date and later preferred sixth–seventh centuries: Aynalov, 1895, 233–243; Aynalov, 1900, 202–203; Giorgi Chubinashvili also dated the reliefs to the 6th–7th centuries: Chubinashvili, 1936, 208–209. Renée Schmerling proposed a seventh- or eight-century date: Shmerling, 1962, 16–25; L. Khrushkova initially supported an eighth- to ninth-century dating and later proposed tenth century: Khrushkova, 1980, 43–85, fig. XXV–3, XXX; Khrushkova, 2008, 577–587; Natela Aladashvili believes that the monument is of the “transitional age,” i.e., from the eighth or ninth centuries. Aladashvili, 2005, 51–52; Ninth century has been suggested by Iamanidze: Iamanidzé, 2010, 115–129; Iamanidzé, 2014, 108; Iamanidzé, 2016, 92. In a monograph dedicated specifically to medieval Georgian sculpture, the chancel is dated to the seventh or seventh and eighth centuries: Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, 230, fig. 490.

24 Without doubt, in the Middle Ages, the imagery of Sts. George and Theodore was closely tied to each other. Another example, apart from the Georgian samples, is found in Cappadocian art. Thierry, 2002, 155, n. 59, 196, n. 74; Jolivet-Lévy, 2001, 343–346; Walter, 1999, 181–183; other examples are the icons from St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt Sinai, where the two saints are paired in a single composition. (See the above-mentioned sixth-century icon, also the eighth-century icon of riding Theodore and George. Weitzmann, 1976, fig. XCVII, B.43, B.44; for the tradition of depicting George and Theodore together, see St. George’s chapter in the present volume.)

25 Javakhishvili, 1998, 33–34; Dadiani, 2008, 317–321, fig. 1; Iamanidzé, 2014, 98–99, fig. 1.

26 Chubinashvili, 1972, 8; Javakhishvili, 1998, 33; Dadiani, 2010, 74–96; Iamanidzé, 2014, 99, fig. 3.

27 Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Volskaia, 1983, 16.

28 Schmerling suggests that the Gveldesi chancel represents St. George; Nana Iamanidze argues, however, that it is St. Theodore. See Schmerling, 1962, 69–76; Iamanidzé, 2014, 101.

29 Laurent, 1963, 662; Walter, 2003, 51.

30 Walter, 2003, 51, fig. 23.

31 Khuskivadze, 1984, 22.

32 Mepisashvili, 1950, 47–48, fig. 16; Aladashvili, 1977, 100, 104–105, fig. 94; Iamanidzé, 2016, 111–121; Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 118–119, fig. 309.

33 Bochoridze, 1935, 326–388, fig. 6; Bochoridze, 1994, 228–231; Aladashvili, 1978, 68–76; Gedevanishvili, Vacheishvili, Khundadze, Khuskivadze, 2008, 19–21, 168–169; Iamanidzé, 2016, 94–111; Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 116–117, fig. 270, 274–275.

34 Schmerling, 1979, 121–134, fig. 60; Iamanidzé, 2010, 101, fig. 58, 59.

35 On stone reliefs, the compositions of warrior saints were usually placed with architectural details in mind. The most common place was the entrance tympanum, which it heralded the crossing from the earthly realm into the celestial realm and reflected Christ’s words: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:9). Therefore, the representation of the warrior saints as protectors above the entrances was particularly symbolic.

36 Walter, 2003, 31.

37 Grotowski, 2010, 365–366.

38 Ibid., 122.

39 The concept of the spiritual sword, based on the example of David and Goliath, is discussed in Evangelatou, 2002, 74–75.

40 Chubinashvili, 1959, 337, fig. 35.

41 Ibid., 338, 341, fig. 39–41.

42 Ibid., 406–409, fig. 36–37.

43 Chubinashvili, 1959, 409–412, fig. 45–47; Machabeli, 2008a, 66–70.

44 Grotowski, 2010, fig. 19–21.

45 Ibid., 122.

46 Chatzidakis, 1999, 53, fig. 48–49.

47 Grotowski, 2010, 252–253.

48 Chubinashvili, 1959, 521–522, fig. 358.

49 Ibid., 477–489.

50 Ibid., 524–525, tab. 473.

51 Walter, 2003, 215; See, also, Gedevanishvili’s chapter.

52 Andghuladze, Devdariani, Silogava, 2010, 25.

53 Walter, 2003, 60.

54 *Ibid.*, fig. 48.

55 Grotowski, 2010, fig. 44.

56 *Ibid.*, fig. 34.

57 *Ibid.*, fig. 39.

58 *Ibid.*, fig. 25 (c).

59 Aladashvili, 1957, 27–29; Aladashvili, 1977, 146–193; Aladashvili, 1996, 11; Dadiani, 2019, 101–102.

60 Aladashvili, 1957, 27.

61 Bulia, Volskaia, Tumanishvili, 2008, 113.

62 For homilies on the Transfiguration, see Mgaloblishvili, 1991, 388–406.

63 See Khachidze, 2022, 312.

64 Chubinashvili, 1970, 334.

65 Pantskhava, Lortkipanidze, Pataridze, et al., 2014, 113, fig. 48, 49.

66 Kazhdan, Maguire, 1991, fig. 5.

67 *Ibid.*, fig. 14.

68 Foss, Magdalino, 1977, 108, fig. 133–134.

69 Pantskhava, Lortkipanidze, Pataridze, et al., 2014, 133, fig. 72.

70 Immerzeel, 2014, 56, fig. 1.

71 Folda, 2005, 139, tab. 74.

72 Pantskhava, Lortkipanidze, Pataridze, et al., 2014, 128, fig. 66.

73 Mariam Didebulidze prefers a late eleventh-century date: Didebulidze, 2015, 16–33, fig. 1–3. For a twelfth-century date, see Alibegashvili, Sakvarelidze, 1980, 99, fig. 10; Alibegashvili, Volskaia, Waitzman, Chatsidakis, Babic, Alpatov, 1981–1982, 90, 112; Alibegashvili, 1982, 46–47; see, also, the present book, Gedevanishvili's chapter.

74 Trifonova, 2010, 54, fig. 1.

75 Drpić, 2012, 668, fig. 8.

76 Didebulidze, 2015, 19, fig. 4.

77 Drpić, 2012, 685, fig. 13.

78 *Ibid.*, 687, fig. 14.

79 *Ibid.*, 689, fig. 15.

80 Volskaia, 1983, 3–5; Scheviakova, 1983, fig. 28, 42.

81 Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Volskaia, 1983, 16.

82 Okropiridze, 1989, 156–167.

83 Pantskhava, Gabashvili, 2006, fig. 2, 3.

84 Machabeli, 1976, 84–86.

85 Pantskhava, Gabashvili, 2006, 8.

86 Walter, 2003, 45.

87 Kenia, 2010, 46, 47.

88 Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Volskaia, 1966, 8–31; Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Volskaia, 1983, 33–55, tab. 27; Kenia, 1991, 203–220; Qenia, 2003, 147–169; Kenia, 2010, 63.

89 Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Volskaia, 1983, 56–77, fig. 48; Kenia, 2010, 77.

90 Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Volskaia, 1983, 77–101, fig. 60; Kenia, 2010, 91–93.

91 Virsaladze, 2007, 169–231; Kenia, Aladashvili, 2010, 2000, 85; Kenia, 2010, 110, 112.

92 For example, in the church of St. George of Svip'i (Svaneti, P'ari, 900s) the warrior saints represented on the north wall face not the altar, but toward the west, which violates the traditional formula and points to an additional com-

positional dynamic. See Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Volskaia, 1983, 18.

93 Ibid., 30–32.

94 Kondakov, 1914, 126.

95 Psellus, 1966, 69–70.

96 Leo the Deacon, 2015, 196–197.

97 John Chrysostom's homily on the Nativity. See Shanidze, 1959, 82.

98 Kenia, 2010, 134, 135. For the decoration of the Svip'i facade, see the chapter on St. Demetrios.

99 The inscription is quoted from Chubinashvili, 1959, 480.

100 For a different dating, see Kenia, 2015, 68, fn. 1. See also Bagrationi, Gagoshidze, Khuskivadze et al., 1998, 239.

101 Chubinashvili, 1959, 439–441.

102 Kenia, Aladashvili, 2010, 94–95; Kenia, 2003, 384–394.

103 According to the holy fathers, the Pentecost reflects the idea of baptism. See, e.g., Shanidze, 1959, 186 for the Sinai Homiliary.

104 Marina Kenia discusses the outstanding place of the Mother of God in Svanetian art. Kenia, 2019, 176–205.

105 Kenia, 2010, 259, 268; For the iconography of St. George in the Church of the Savior, see the chapter on St. George.

106 Tumanishvili, Khuskivadze, Mikeladze, Janjalia, 2007, fig. 31.

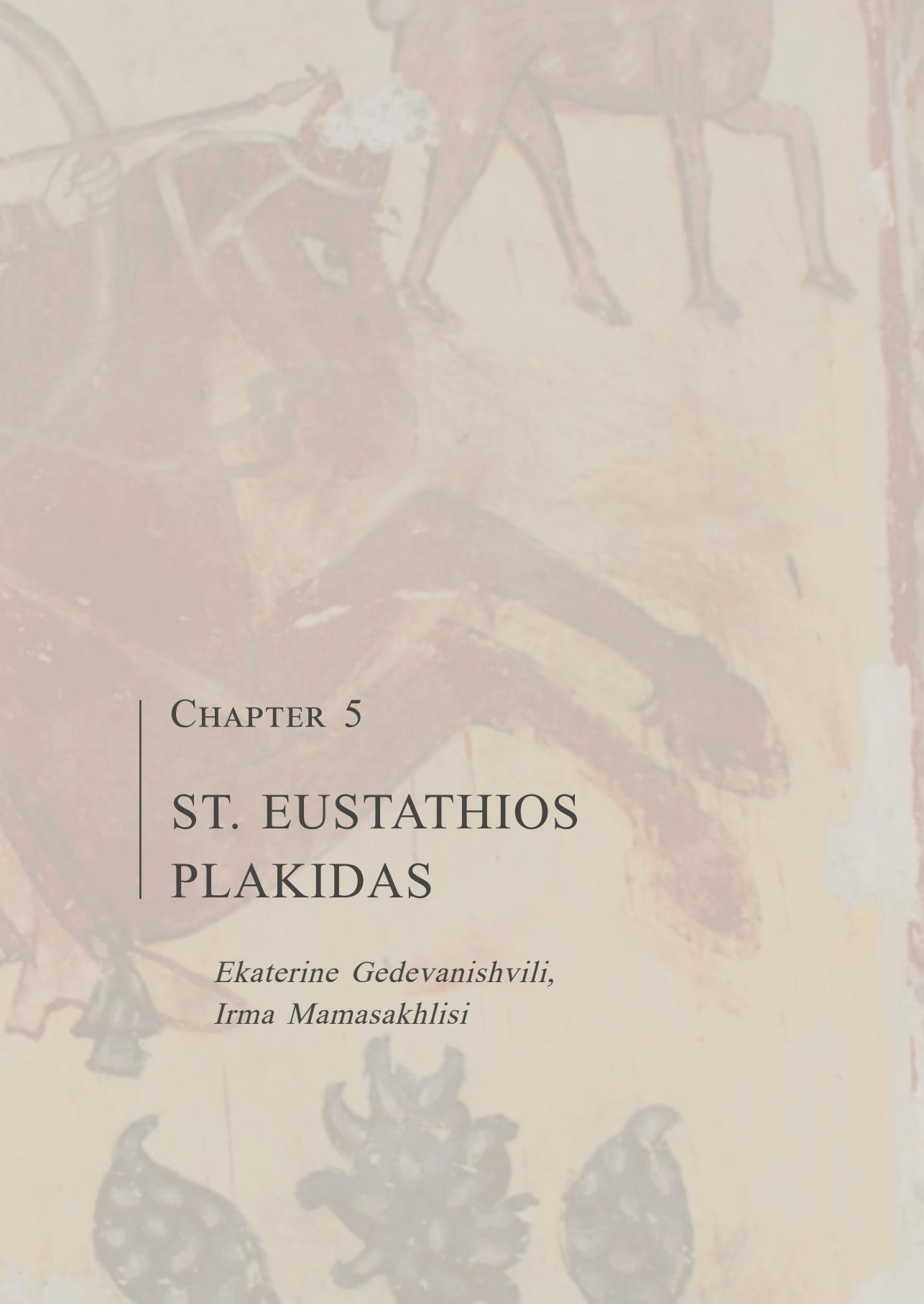
107 The church of the Mother of God of Gelat'i was decorated from anew under King Bagrat III of Imereti, when a new episcopal see was founded there. See Tkeshelashvili, 2007, 72–73; Gaprindashvili, 2014 (manuscript), 31–42.

108 A similar tendency can be observed, for example, in the depictions of the warrior saints on the south column of Ananuri. Particularly impressive are the lyric faces of the martyrs secluded in their inner world, with heavy eyelashes and abstracted gazes. See Kvachadze, Janjalia, 2012, 99–111.

109 For Kakhetian decorations, see Vachnadze, 1973, 41–49; Vachnadze, 2006/2007, 123–137.

110 Stylianou, 1985, 73, fig. 29.

111 Walter, 2003, fig. 30.



CHAPTER 5

ST. EUSTATHIOS PLAKIDAS

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Irma Mamasakhli*

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The cult of St. Eustathios holds a significant place in the history of the Church and the cult of saints. According to his martyrdom account, Eustathios, originally named Plakidas, served as a commander in the imperial army during the reigns of Trajan (98–117) and Hadrian (117–138). One day, while out hunting, Christ appeared to him within the antlers of a stag, which prompted Eustathios to convert to Christianity. Following his conversion, Eustathios faced numerous trials and tribulations: he lost all his wealth, his family, and his homeland; however, he endured these hardships with remarkable steadfastness. Ultimately, God restored all that he had lost. In the year 118, Eustathios met a martyr's death alongside his wife, Theopista, and his sons, Agapios and Theopistos, in a copper furnace.¹

The cult of Eustathios began to spread in early Christianity, originating in the Christian East before making its way to the West. Some scholars draw parallels between his conversion and that of Prokopios of Jerusalem,² while others liken it to that of St. Merkourios.³ Nicole Thierry suggests that the martyrdom of Prokopios may have been inspired by the more popular account of Eustathios' martyrdom.⁴ Another tradition associates him with the Biblical Job.⁵

The early history of Eustathios' cult is somewhat ambiguous. Due to a lack of historical references or relics associated with him, Christopher Walter argues that while Prokopios may have been a historical figure despite the multiple rewritings and fictionalizations of his *Passio*, the historicity of Eustathios' story remains debatable.⁶ Nevertheless, his cult has experienced considerable growth and over time has reached universality.

The earliest account of the martyrdom of Eustathios and his two sons, Agapios and Theopistos, as well as his wife, Theopista, was written in Coptic in the fourth century.⁷ This account not only narrates their passion and the subsequent history of their relics but also details the construction of a church in their honor, where the family was systematically commemorated. In the sixth or seventh century, this martyrdom account was translated into Greek,⁸ although there remains some debate regarding whether the Greek⁹ or Latin version is earlier.¹⁰

Eustathios' image appears relatively early in Christian art

during the sixth and seventh centuries, typically depicting him as a middle-aged bearded man. In rare instances, he is represented as a young, beardless warrior, usually at the moment of his conversion. The iconography of Eustathios originates not from portraits but rather from the narrative of his conversion.

In western Christianity, Eustathios was perceived as a protector of rangers and hunters. In a part of western Christendom, the patron of hunters was St. Hubert of Lutich, an eight-century saint, whose image, according to some scholars, must have been inspired by Eustathios.¹¹ Arguably, the author of the *Life of Hubert* must have used the vision of Eustathios as his model.¹² According to a fifteenth-century account, on Good Friday, this saint saw a vision of the crucifix inside a stag's antlers, which called upon him to take the Lord's path.¹³ In Latin Christianity, St. Eustathios is missing both from the *Martyrologium Hieronimianum* and the *Depositio Martyrum Ecclesiae Romanae* (fourth century). The legend of Eustathios' encounter with a stag first appears in the seventh century in the mountains of Tivoli, where later a church of Santa Maria della Mentrella was built.¹⁴ In the eighth century, Eustathios was known in Rome, and his story was later incorporated in the *Legenda Aurea* (c.1275).¹⁵

5.2. LOCAL FOUNDATIONS OF EUSTATHIOS' CULT

The exceptional popularity of St. Eustathios in Georgia is corroborated by multiple written evidences of his cult.¹⁶ There also existed a particularly strong visual tradition of St. Eustathios in Georgia. The most common scenes are those of Eustathios' vision and his conversion. Nicole Thierry observes that Eustathios' vision is much less widely attested in Byzantium, the Balkans and Rus. By contrast, it is exceptionally popular in the Greek provinces of Asia Minor, the South Caucasus, Cappadocia, and Georgia.¹⁷ The iconography of Eustathios mostly consists of two elements: the equestrian hunter and a stag with antlers.¹⁸ Inside the stag's antlers, a cross, the Crucified Christ or Christ's half-figure can be observed. Thierry argues that it can be claimed with confidence that Cappadocia was the birthplace of the visual image-

ry of Eustathios' vision.¹⁹ The images of his vision became even more prominent due to its polemical valence and were evoked as a visual substantiation for the veneration of icons during Iconoclasm.²⁰

The development of various iconographic interpretations of this scene may have been influenced by themes of royal hunting, particularly through the pictorial traditions of sacred hunting found in Persian art as well as by Indian narratives.²¹ Hunting scenes carry symbolic weight, evoking concepts of courage, power, and the warrior spirit.²² In both Islamic and Byzantine cultures, such scenes often represented military triumph and conveyed important political messages.²³ Additionally, the hunting scene is endowed with Christian symbolism; for example, hymnography compares the Savior to a hunter, a conqueror of wild beasts and evil. In this context, the hunter serves as a significant metaphor for the Christian spirit and sanctity.²⁴

The stag in this scene is equally symbolic and has a long iconographic history. Depictions of deer and stags are also prevalent in pre-Christian artifacts, including bronze buckles, belts, and Kolkhetian axes and clasps.²⁵ Often, deer and stag appear on either side of the Tree of Life. In Georgian folklore, these two animals are considered supernatural entities. The size of their antlers and horns is particularly accentuated and described in numerous ways.²⁶ The practice of offering their horns at highland shrines in Georgia may be rooted in this characteristic symbolism.

In early Christian art, deer were often referenced as an illustration of Psalm 41:1, a hymn traditionally sung by catechumens on Easter Eve. The deer symbolized a person preparing to receive baptism and represented a Christian who draws from the life-giving source.²⁷

Consequently, the symbolic richness of this narrative and the variety of its interpretations in visual art significantly contributed to its popularity. According to Mariam Didebulidze, the prominent cult of St. Eustathios in Georgia likely has historical foundations.²⁸ The popularity of Eustathios' vision may be a reflection of the history of the Christianization of Kartli, particularly the story of King Mirian's conversion during a hunting expedition on Mt. T'xot'i, thematically resonating with the hunting narrative of St. Eustathios.²⁹

This symbolic connection likely accounts for the numerous hunting scenes found in Georgian facade decoration. Georgian ar-

chitectural adornment preserves various iconographic interpretations of this theme, such as the decoration of the facade at Oški (963–73) (Fig. 5.1),³⁰ the fragmented relief at Tqoba-Erdi (eleventh century) (Figs. 5.2; 5.3),³¹ the relief from the Red Church of Tabacquri (tenth century) (Fig. 5.4),³² and the decoration of St. George's Church in Zirbit'i (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries) (Fig. 5.5), among others. While we cannot definitively identify these images as scenes from St. Eustathios' hunting narrative, they evoke associations with the themes and iconography related to this story, as well as with the hunting exploits of King Mirian described in the context of Kartli's conversion.

The symbolic connection between St. Eustathios and King Mirian can also be highlighted from another perspective. In the history of Kartli's conversion, significant emphasis is placed on the episodes of the elevation of the cross and the appearance of the celestial cross, which are foundational to the particular veneration of the cross in Georgia.³³ The depiction of the crucified Savior on the cross, as well as the cross itself in Eustathios' vision, is regarded as an expression of the glorification of the cross



5.1 Hunting scene (963–973).
Church of St. John the
Baptist of Oški.



5.2 Archer
(eleventh century).
Tqoba-Erdi.



5.3 Deer (?).
(eleventh century).
Tqoba-Erdi.



5.4 Hunting scene (tenth century).
Tabacquri "Red" Church.



5.5 Hunter and the cross (thirteenth–fourteenth
century). Church of St. George of Zirbit'i.

and can be seen as a distinctive manifestation of the cross's veneration in Georgia.

Nicole Thierry points to yet another nuance that may explain the popularity of Eustathios in Georgia: the parallelism between the conversion of Eustathios and the miracle of the deer found in the *Life of David Garejeli*. Thierry suggests that these two scenes are intentionally paired in Ateni Sioni.³⁴

5.6 *The vision of St. Eustathios (sixth–seventh century). Stele from the Monastery of John the Baptist (Nat'lismc'emeli) in Davit'gareja. Georgian National Museum.*



5.3. EUSTATHIOS' EARLIEST IMAGES IN GEORGIA

The earliest image of Eustathios in Georgia is found on the stele of the Monastery of John the Baptist (Nat'lismc'emeli) in the Davit'gareja desert (sixth–seventh centuries) (Fig. 5.6), where the figurative depiction of Eustathios' is the central theme.³⁵ Manuela Studer-Karlen has recently suggested that the scene of the Nat'lismc'emeli stela with the vision of St. Eustathios might be stimulated by the martyrdom of St. Eustathios of Mtskheta, a well-known martyr in Georgian hagiography who was of Persian origin and lived in the sixth century.³⁶

The composition is arranged vertically in two registers. In the lower register, on the ground level is St. Eustathios, whereas in the upper register, Christ's half figure can be seen inside the stag's antlers. Kitty Machabeli explains the disproportional representation of the horse and the rider (small horse and larger rider) by the influence of Sasanian art.³⁷ Individual details of the attire, such as the wide and pointy head garment and narrow trousers tucked in the boots and the decoration of the belt, also seem to have Sasanian influence. Of interest is the figure of the stag with an astral sign, which is reminiscent of pre-Christian buckles.³⁸

An important semantic and artistic component of the stone-cross is the following inscription: ეს ჯური მე მა[რთუეც] აღვმართე სალოცელად წემდა და ცოლისა ა დაშვილთა თ[ქ]ს. “I Ma[rt'uec’], erected this cross, for prayers for myself, my wife, and my children.”³⁹

According to the inscription, the cross with the towering image of St. Eustathios was erected for the sake of the family members, a practice attested also in later monuments. This may have been determined by the nature of Eustathios' story, since he was martyred together with his family.

The plate of the chancel of Cebelda (seventh–eighth centuries) (Fig. 5.7) reveals many notable features.⁴⁰ In the lower register of the plate is mounted Eustathios, shooting an arrow at a stag, while in the stag's antlers is an image of Christ. Alexander Saltykov suggests that this depiction, alongside typical Christian imagery, also encompasses Iranian themes, specifically the representations of an eagle and a dog, which may allude to the traditional motif of royal hunting.⁴¹ Eustathios is attired in the cloak of a Sasanian aristocrat and wears a similar head garment. The saint's horse is depicted as large and richly adorned. The theme of a mounted archer is relatively uncommon in Greek and Roman traditions and is borrowed from Persian iconography, where it symbolizes sacred and charismatic kingship.⁴²

Additional scenes on the Cebelda chancel, alongside Eustathios' vision, are also noteworthy. The central plate features the Crucifixion and depicts the myrrhbearers at Christ's tomb, with Eustathios engaged in a hunt and praying for the souls of the deceased beneath those images.⁴³ To the right are Abraham's offering and baptism; to the left are depicted Peter's repentance and St. Peter's crucifixion.

The liturgical scene adjacent to the vision of Eustathios captures attention. This scene is not separated from the composition of Eustathios and is perceived in conjunction with the latter, perhaps as an intentional thematic unification of the two. One figure is shown with arms raised in a posture of prayer, adorned with a cross on his head, while another figure holds candles. A jar and plate containing sacraments are also present. Researchers propose that this scene represents a service for the soul of a deceased individual.⁴⁴ Thierry posits that the chancel was commissioned to commemorate a deceased family member of the donor, which she supports by the fact that in neighboring Cappadocia, St. Eustathios' image often carried a memorial function.



5.7 *Scenes from the Old and New Testaments, the vision of St. Eustathios, liturgical scene (seventh–eighth century). Cebelda altar screen. Georgian National Museum.*

The narrative continues on the second plate of the Cebelda chancel with a heraldic depiction of warrior saints. The symbolism of salvation and Christian triumph is enhanced here by the image of the Prophet Daniel in the den of lions.

5.4. RELIEF IMAGES OF ST. EUSTATHIOS ON CHURCH FAÇADES

Due to the nature of medieval Georgian church architecture, which is characterized by rich relief decoration, it has become common to place Eustathios' hunt on the facades; however, it is not always immediately clear whether the image shows specifically Eustathios' hunt or a generic hunting scene popular in the medieval Caucasian region.

A dynamic hunting scene adorns the west facade of the Ateni Sioni church (seventh century) (Fig. 5.8). The rider is depicted in energetic motion, aiming an arrow at a group of stags, while the static figures of the stags move peacefully, creating a striking



5.8 St. Eustathios' hunt (seventh century), facade. Church of the Dormition of Ateni (Sioni).

contrast. Two primary interpretations have emerged regarding the content and meaning of this scene. Natela Aladashvili contends that it is secular rather than religious, with its schematic details—including attire and headwear—reflecting Sasanian motifs. Chubinashvili similarly suggests that the scene simply illustrates a hunting scene characteristic of Sasanian art.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Andrey Muraviev argues that the depiction represents the hunt and vision of Eustathios,⁴⁶ a view later supported by Mari-

am Didebulidze. Didebulidze highlights the broken antlers of the stag facing the hunter, suggesting that they may have originally represented a cross.⁴⁷

The main road to the Ateni church approaches the west facade; therefore, the hunter, perhaps Eustathios, appears to be greeting the pilgrims. The image is placed next to the two reliefs with Old Testament themes (Samson wrestling the lion and the miracle of Habakkuk).⁴⁸ The hunting scene unfolds on four stones and thus constitutes the axis of the entire west facade. The importance of the scene is seemingly highlighted by the red color of the stone, which accentuates the theophanic nature of the composition. In addition, if we are indeed dealing with Eustathios' hunt, the fiery color could also point to Eustathios' martyr's death in a cooper furnace.

The Martvili church (*Fig. 5.9*) features two friezes on its west and east facades.⁴⁹ On the east facade, Eustathios' hunt (likely from the tenth century) is depicted, with the saint set within a decorative frieze. The stag's antlers most likely show Christ. Instead of a bow and arrow, St. Eustathios wields a long spear, a choice explained by Nicole Thierry as indicative of the strengthening Georgian-Byzantine relations during this period.⁵⁰ Notably, a winged dog precedes the deer, reflecting imagery commonly found in Sasanian art.



5.9 St. Eustathios' vision
(tenth century?), facade.
Church of the Dormition
of Martvili.

One of the most distinctive renditions of St. Eustathios in Georgian art appears on the east facade of the church at Nekip'ari (Upper Svaneti, tenth century) (*Fig. 5.10*). The facade is divided into three arches, each featuring a relief of an animal. The central arch showcases a stag with branching antlers, while a ram occupies the right arch and a lion the left. Alongside the sculptures, the facade also includes paintings; within the branch-



5.10 *St. Eustathios' vision (tenth century), facade. Church of St. George of Nakip'ari.*

ing antlers, the artist inscribed “Christ Emmanuel.” A idiosyncratic feature of Nakip’ari is its laconic character; unlike the traditional iconography, it omits St. Eustathios, which somewhat alters the scene’s overall impact, turning its observer into a participant in the miracle.

The sculptural and mural decoration of the facade was created contemporaneously with the church’s construction and is believed to date to the tenth century.⁵¹ It has also been noted that thematically, it dialogizes with the first layer of the interior decoration, where on the top of the architrave, the artist has depicted a bow and an arrow in dark red paint against the white background.⁵² Natela Aladashvili and Aneli Volskaia suggest that this depiction is a reflection of the cult of the hunter and the warrior, whose roots can be found in Svan folk beliefs and practices.⁵³

The church of St. Eustathios in Ert’acminda is located in Shida Kartli and was the center of sorts of the cult of Eustathios in Georgia (Fig. 5.11). The construction of the church of St. Eustathios probably began in the early thirteenth century.⁵⁴ The centrality of Ert’acminda for the cult of Eustathios was determined



5.11 Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda (first half of the thirteenth century).

by the existence of the relic of Eustathios in this church. Platon Ioseliani has offered an etymology of Ert'acminda suggesting that it derives from Eustathios (*Evsta + cminda*) which later was transformed into *Ert'acminda*, and also became the name of the neighboring village. This remains, however, purely folk etymology.⁵⁵

St. Eustathios, the patron of the church, is the central theme of the entire decorative program. The relief image of Eustathios



5.12 St. Eustathios' vision (first half of the thirteenth century), detail of the facade decoration. Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.

is repeated three times. One relief is contemporaneous with the construction of the church and is placed on the framing of the left niche of the east facade (Fig. 5.12).⁵⁶ The other two are from a later period.⁵⁷ The relief contemporary to the construction of the church is fairly small and framed as an icon. As we saw above, placing the vision of Eustathios on the east facade has a long tradition and appears as one of the characteristic traditions of Georgian art. The second relief of Eustathios' hunt is placed on the south facade,

in the left corner of the paired window (Fig. 5.13). This later addition has survived only fragmentarily.

In 2012, during the restoration works carried out in Ert'acminda, a large relief tile was revealed after the removal of the old plaster of the interior. It adorns the surface of the pendentive of the dome (Fig. 5.14). The figure standing frontally on the relief slab is holding a long-pointed cross in his right hand and has his left hand placed on the hip. A fragment of an animal can be identified next to the figure. An animal should represent a stag. Evidently, this is an original version of St. Eustathios'

5.13 St. Eustathios' vision (late middle ages), detail of the facade decoration. Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.





5.14 Vision of St. Eustathios (late middle ages). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert‘acminda.

hunt, where he is depicted not on horseback but standing. Such images appear also later. Eustathios’ placement in the dome of the church reflects his centrality within the church as its patron, making the church of Ert‘acminda a monumental reliquary of the saint.

5.5. FAÇADE PAINTINGS OF EUSTATHIOS’ VISION

The vision of St. Eustathios can also be found in various facade paintings, such as those on the Church of the Archangels in Ip‘ari (twelfth century).⁵⁸ The area below the cornice on the south facade was entirely occupied by a composition of the Deesis, badly damaged today. St. Eustathios was depicted beneath this composition, although damage has rendered the details illegible. According to Aladashvili and Volskaia’s description, it showed Eustathios’ hunt. Eustathios’ dynamic figure sharply contrasted with the rhythmic, icon-like image of the Deesis above.

The joint depiction of the Deesis and the vision of St. Eustathios is significant, as it conveys a commemorative function that can be traced back to the chancel screen of Cebelda, reflecting his memorial context in Cappadocia. Thus, the representation

of St. Eustathios is directly linked to themes of the Second Coming and divine assistance.

It is likely not coincidental that on the facade of Ip‘ari, the scene of the Deesis is presented in an icon-like manner, enhancing the significance of this representation. As previously mentioned, the vision of St. Eustathios gained particular momentum during Iconoclasm, especially in Cappadocia. John Damascene cited it as an apologetic argument against the iconoclasts, a sentiment reflected in the visual tradition.⁵⁹ Consequently, the unity of this icon-like depiction of the Deesis and St. Eustathios’ theophanic vision likely conveys these theological connotations.

Two samples of Svanetian art provide curious interpretations of the vision of Eustathios. These are the facades of the churches of Lagami (fourteenth century) and Lašdgveri (fourteenth–fifteenth century) in Upper Svaneti.⁶⁰ The depiction of Eustathios’ vision dominates the east facade of the church of Lagami (Fig. 5.15), while the north facade features the temptation of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, which is fairly unique for Georgian facade decorations.⁶¹ The decoration of the south facade is damaged. Some scholars suggest that, similarly to the facade of Lašdgveri, it may have originally depicted heraldic images of warrior saints. Eustathios’ hunt is also significantly damaged; however, a painted copy has survived (Fig. 5.16). The depiction of St. Eustathios’ vision



5.15 St. Eustathios’ vision (fourteenth century), schema of the facade painting. Church of the Savior of Lagami.



5.16 St. Eustathios’ vision (fourteenth century), copy of the facade painting. Church of the Savior of Lagami.

on the east facade continues an established tradition in Georgia. This tradition appears to be primarily influenced by the content of the scene itself—the placement of the theophanic vision and conversion scene on the sacred wall of the altar can be interpreted within a sacred geography associated with the sun and the coming of the Lord, thereby emphasizing the importance of the East. The tradition of placing St. Eustathios on the wall of the sanctuary is usually explained by the idea of salvation encapsulated in the vision.⁶² This idea is vividly expressed in the decoration of Lağami, where salvation is contrasted with the expulsion of Adam and Eve.

The Lağami composition is dynamic, capturing the hunter at the moment of aiming his arrow. The figure of the stag contributes to this sense of movement, as it turns toward the hunter and appears to engage in a dialogue with him, suggested by its open mouth. Another focal point of the composition is Christ, who blesses St. Eustathios with his right hand.

All four facades of the church of the Archangels of Lašdğveri are decorated. The east facade features a heavily damaged depiction of Eustathios' hunt (Fig. 5.17), while the west facade showcases the Deesis. The scene of Lašdğveri is iconographically very close to the image of Lağami. The only difference is the addition of the Tree of Paradise in Lašdğveri. The south facade displays the Warrior saints and the north facade depicts two scenes from the Georgian epic *Amirandarejaniani*. At first glance, the iconographic program may seem unusual, as it combines canonical scenes of ecclesiastical art with illustrations from a secular epic. The inclusion of scenes from *Amirandarejaniani* illustrates that in medieval Georgian literary and religious imagination, epic warriors were modeled after the archetype of the warrior saints, and perhaps also vice versa.

St. Eustathios and the warrior saints are shown alongside the Deesis, which promotes warrior saints as mediators and intercessors with Christ. A similar approach is observed on the east fa-

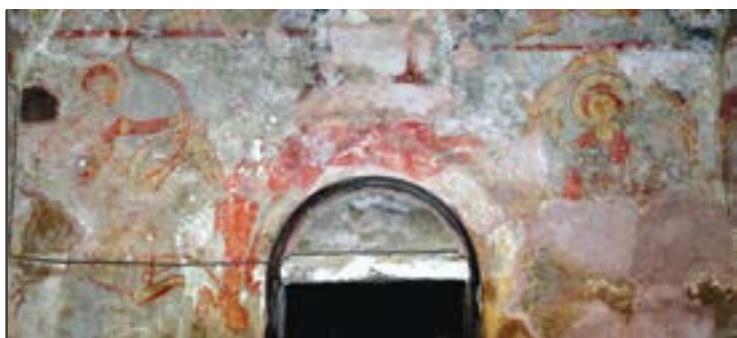


5.17 St. Eustathios' vision (fourteenth–fifteenth century), schema of the facade painting. Church of the Archangels of Lašdğveri.

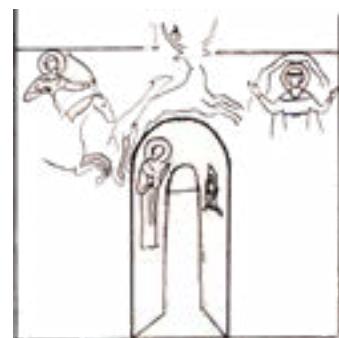
cade of the Church of the Mother of God in Onanauri (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries), where, despite damage, a hunter riding a crimson horse can be identified, holding a spear, alongside the outline of a stag running in front of him, wounded in the neck.⁶³ On both sides of the composition, two figures can be barely discerned; however, their identification is impossible.

5.6. ST. EUSTATHIOS' VISION IN CHURCH DECORATIONS

Eustathios' vision is depicted in the interiors of numerous churches, with one of the earliest surviving examples found in the Church of Zenobani (early thirteenth century), where the composition occupies the lower register of the west wall (*Figs. 5.18; 5.19*).⁶⁴ Here, the stag is positioned above the west entrance in such a way that its leap mirrors the semicircular arch of the door. The animal's head and antlers extend beyond the boundary of the register, with Christ's semifigure nestled within the antlers. This scene is impressive for both its scale and dynamism. Mariam Didebulidze highlights the stag's significance, noting its theophanic function.⁶⁵ The depiction of Eustathios' vision on the west wall appears to engage in a dialogue with the acheiropoieton icon of Christ located directly across from it in the altar apse. The mandylion is positioned above the altar, directly oppo-



5.18 St. Eustathios' vision (early thirteenth century). Church of the Savior of Zenobani.



5.19 St. Eustathios' vision (early thirteenth century), schema. Church of the Savior of Zenobani.

site the hunting scene, underscoring the theological importance of the Holy Face of Christ in relation to Eustathios' vision, particularly during Iconoclasm.⁶⁶

The imagery of Eustathios' vision is also present in Ingusheti (North Caucasus), specifically in the decorations of the Xozita Church of the Mother of God (late twelfth to early thirteenth century)⁶⁷ and Nuzal (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries).⁶⁸ The Xozita Church of Mary has been entirely destroyed, leaving only descriptions of its decorations. In this church, the vision occupied the upper western section of the south wall and, as was common, was divided into two parts by a window. On the left was St. Eustathios, and on the right, the galloping stag.

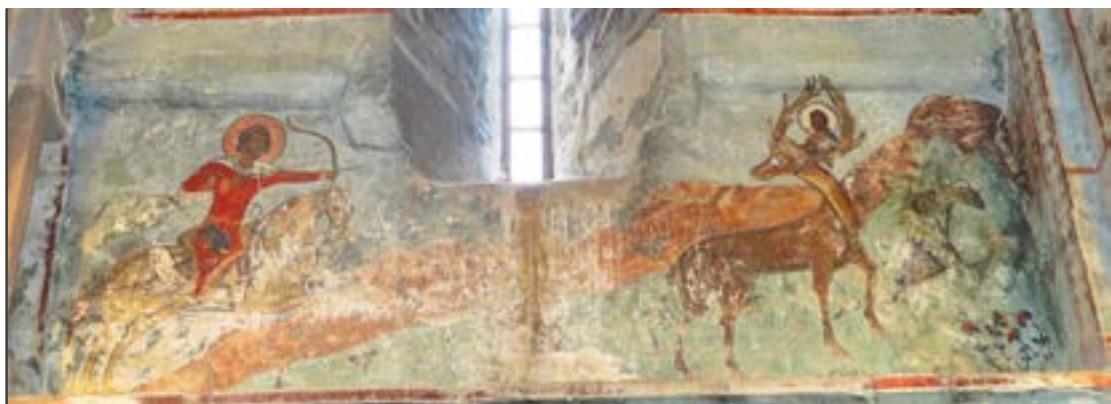
In the decorative program of Nuzal (*Fig. 5.20*), two warriors are depicted on the slopes of the north and south vaults. The southern section is dedicated to St. George slaying the dragon, while the northern section features Eustathios' vision, where the warrior aims an arrow at two stags. Both the horse and the saint's cape are rendered in vibrant red, emphasizing their theophanic and eschatological significance. The composition is presented in a dramatic manner, enhanced by the dynamism of the horse and the tension in the warrior's arm and bow. Currently, the stag's antlers reveal nothing inside, lacking symbols such as a cross, the Crucifixion, or Christ. However, based on the com-



5.20 *St. Eustathios' vision* (thirteenth–fourteenth century). *Church of Nuzal*.

position, it is highly plausible that the scene depicts Eustathios' hunt. Aneli Volskaia notes that both warriors are portrayed in a celestial register, akin to several examples from Svaneti.⁶⁹

Eustathios' hunt, depicted in the decoration of the Church of St. Sabas of Sap'ara (first half of the fourteenth century), is particularly impressive (*Fig. 5.21*).⁷⁰ The saint's vision spans the entire middle register of the west wall, situated between the scenes of the Last Judgment and the healing. This vision, located in the second register, is divided by a window into two distinct parts. On the left, St. Eustathios rides a horse, while on the right, a



5.21 *St. Eustathios' vision (first half of the fourteenth century). Church of St. Saba of Sap'ara.*

stag bears the bust image of Christ within its antlers. The warrior is portrayed in dynamic motion, charging toward the stag with his bow and arrow drawn. The vertical window creates a visual gap, resembling a column descending from the upper register, allowing light to filter through and illuminate the scene. This interplay of light imbues the image with a radiant quality, inviting the viewers to engage with this miracle. It is not uncommon for windows and natural light to play a role in the depiction of Eustathios' conversion, becoming integral components of the iconography (similar solutions can also be observed in the scenes depicting the resurrection of Lazarus). Furthermore, the composition of the vision in Sap'ara is contextually linked to the two adjacent scenes in the upper and lower areas (*Fig. 5.22*): the healing of the possessed is portrayed above, while the grand scene of the Last Judgment occupies the lower register.

Eustathios' vision retained its relevance in the later Middle Ages, as evidenced by numerous surviving monuments. The artist of the church of St. George of Ilemi, Giorgi Jokhtaberidze (late



5.22 *Last judgment, the vision of St. Eustathios and the healing miracle (first half of the fourteenth century). Church of St. Saba of Sap'ara.*

fifteenth – early sixteenth century), has allocated a special place to the vision of Eustathios (*Figs. 5.23; 5.24*).⁷¹ Despite damage, the iconographic features typical of this composition are clearly discernible: The contour of a dynamic figure of the rider of the bright red leaping horse and the saint's cape.



5.23 St. Eustathios' vision (fifteenth–sixteenth century). Church of St. George of Ilemi.



5.24 St. Eustathios' vision (fifteenth–sixteenth century), schema. Church of St. George of Ilemi.

5.25 St. Eustathios' vision (sixteenth century). Church of the Savior of K'oret'i.



In the decoration of the church of K'oret'i (sixteenth century) (Fig. 5.25), the lower registers of the south and north walls are entirely dedicated to the warrior saints and the donors.⁷² Eustathios' vision and massive figures of St. George and St. Theodore mounted on horseback appear on the north wall. The theme of the soldier saints is amplified by the martyrdom of George on the wheel in the first register of the south wall and the frontal depiction of St. Demetrios under it. Eustathios faces three stags. In the antlers of the middle stag is visible a bright white cross. St. Eustathios is aiming a long, double-edged arrow at them.

Eustathios' vision also appears in the decoration of the church of Č'ukuli (seventeenth century) (Fig. 5.26). Here, inside the stag's antlers is shown the Crucifixion.

In the decorative program of the Church of the Mother of God of Korc'xeli (seventeenth century) (Fig. 5.27) the theme of the warrior saints is prominent. The west wall shows frontal images of four warrior saints: George, Demetrios, Theodore Tēron, and Theodore Stratēlates. In the same register, in the adjacent northwestern corner, is Eustathios' vision. Despite damage, it is still possible to identify the scene. Similarly to some other examples, St. Eustathios is mounted on a bright red horse, and a stag in front of him is discernible. The upper part of the stag's head is damaged, yet the animal's torso and head are still clearly



5.26 St. Eustathios' vision (seventeenth century). Church of the Archangels of Č'ukuli.



5.27 St. Eustathios' vision (seventeenth century). Church of the Mother of God of Korc'xeli.

visible. Instead of showing the moment of shooting the arrow, here St. Eustathios is depicted gesticulating in a sign of awe. The long spear in his hand signals disarmament. A similar iconographic version is attested on icons kept in the Niko Berdzenishvili Historical Museum of Kutaisi (see below).



5.28 *St. Eustathios*
(c. 1150). *Church of*
St. George of Ikvi.



5.29 *St. Demetrios,*
St. Eustathios, St. Prokopios
(late thirteenth century).
Church of St. Stephen of
Vač'ežori.



5.30 *St. Eustathios*
(fourteenth, sixteenth
century). *Church of*
the Transfiguration of
Zarzma.



5.31 *St. Eustathios, Archangel*
Michael (sixteenth century). *Church*
of the Archangels of Jumat'i.



5.32 *St. Eustathios*
(1578–83). *Church of*
St. George of Gelati.



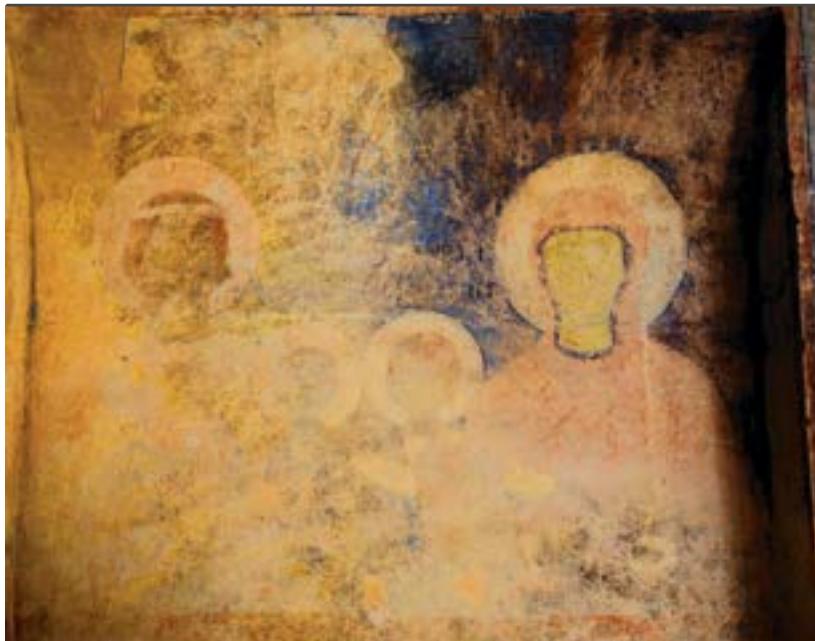
5.33 *St. Eustathios*
(1687–8). *The Living*
Pillar of Svetitskhoveli.

In the decorative programs of Georgian churches, St. Eustathios' separately standing figures are also common. He is usually placed among other soldier saints, e.g., the decoration of Ikvi (c.1150) (*Fig. 5.28*), Church of St. Stephen of Vač'ežor (late thirteenth century) (*Fig. 5.29*),⁷³ Zarzma (fourteenth, sixteenth centuries) (*Fig. 5.30*), Jumat'i (sixteenth century) (*Fig. 5.31*),⁷⁴ the church of the Nativity of the Mother of God of Gelat'i, of the church of St. George of Gelat'i (*Fig. 5.32*) or the decoration of the Living Pillar in Svetic'xoveli (1687–88) (*Fig. 5.33*)⁷⁵ and others.

5.7. IMAGES OF EUSTATHIOS AND HIS FAMILY

Apart from Eustathios' vision, it was also common to depict Eustathios and his family. Usually, Eustathios' family is presented as part of the program of the Last Judgement.⁷⁶ In this respect, three examples are particularly noteworthy: Ateni Sioni (c.1070), Qinc'visi (c.1205) (*Fig. 5.34*) and Timot'esubani (1120s).

In Ateni and Timot'esubani, Eustathios' family is inserted im-



5.34 St. Eustathios' family (c.1205) Church of St. Nicholas of Qincvisi.

mediately into the Last Judgement. In Ateni, in the Last Judgement scenes, distributed on the west transept, Eustathios' family occupies a prominent place among the righteous ones next to St. Peter.⁷⁷ They were placed in front of the trees of Paradise together with the Babylonian youths, Prophet Elijah, Patriarch Enoch, and John the Theologian.⁷⁸ The family is seemingly interacting with Elijah, who was raised in a fiery chariot; John, the witness of the Apocalypse; and Enoch, who never saw death.⁷⁹ The purifying fire in which the family was thrown is thus placed among the scenes of eschatological significance.

A similar meaning is conveyed by the image of Eustathios' family placed in the composition of the Last Judgement (1220s) in the west transept of Timot'esubani.⁸⁰ In the tympanum of the door appears Christ Pantokrator, while the arch of the door is adorned by the cross inscribed in a medallion. Eustathios' sons, Agapios and Theopistos, are presented on the slope of the arch, whereas in the north intertransept are Eustathios and his wife, Theopista (Fig. 5.35).⁸¹

5.35 *Glorification of the cross, Christ Pantokrator and St. Eustathios' sons – Agapios and Theopistos (c.1220). Church of the Dormition of Timot'esubani.*



The representation of Eustathios' family is particularly striking in the church of St. Nicholas of Qincvisi (c.1205), where they are placed in the lower register of the west wall, in a niche-like space.⁸² Arguably, this was done intentionally to convey the effect of a copper furnace—the architectural setting of the scene became a part of the narration of their passion.

Eustathios' family also appears in the decoration of the church of Sasxori (1704)⁸³ in a medallion next to the figures of St. George and Demetrios (*Fig. 5.36*).⁸⁴

5.36 *St. Eustathios' family (1704). Church of the Archangels of Sasxori.*

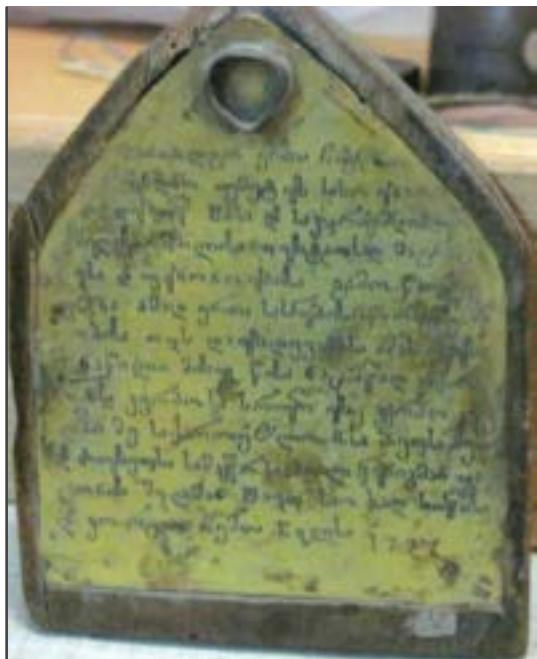


5.8. THE CHURCH OF EUSTATHIOS IN ERT‘ACMINDA AND ST. EUSTATHIOS’ RELICS

As pointed out above, the Church of St. Eustathios in Ert‘acminda located in Shida Kartli, is the center of the cult of Eustathios in Georgia. The church was famed due to its possession of St. Eustathios’ miracle-working right hand and a thumb.⁸⁵ Local traditions, as well as church chronicles, report numerous miracles and stories of people being brought there for healing.⁸⁶

The church of Ert‘acminda is the subject of numerous oral traditions. One such story, for example, claims that when Iran’s Shah Abbas I (1571–1629) invaded Kartli, he ordered the destruction of the church. The Shah was, however, miraculously blinded when St. Eustathios appeared to him in his dream and convinced him to abandon his plan. The next day, the Shah offered a sword encrusted with precious stones to the church and begged for forgiveness.⁸⁷

It is not known how, when, or in what way these relics ended up in Georgia. The earliest report of St. Eustathios’ miracle-working right arm is preserved in the seventeenth-century sources, which narrate the visit of Patriarch Makarios of Antioch to Georgia. The patriarch visited Georgia with his son Paul of Aleppo twice—in 1664–6 and again in 1669. According to Paul of Aleppo’s description, in Ert‘acminda, on September 20, on the



5.37 Silver reliquary from Ert‘acminda (1797). Georgian National Museum.

feast of St. Eustathios, the relic of Eustathios was placed on a deer and solemnly brought out of the church as a reenactment of sorts of Eustathios’ vision.⁸⁸ Paul of Aleppo also relates that St. Eustathios’ right arms once killed 60,000 Turks and Tatars, after which no invader dared to approach this place.⁸⁹

Platon Ioseliani reports that, in 1795, due to the illness of Princess Tekla, at the request of King Erekle II (1744–98), the katholikos transferred the relics of Eustathios to Tbilisi. During the sack of Tbilisi by the Persians, among the treasures of the palace church, these holy relics of Eustathios were also lost. They were later bought by the king’s sister, Anna, and returned to Ert‘acminda.⁹⁰ According to

Takaishvili’s description, St. Eustathios’ reliquary was made of silver and had an inscription in *Mxedruli*:

დიდებულო მთავარ მოწამეო ევსტათი, შემოგწირე მე,
ცოდვილმა დედაგაცმან ანნამ იმერთა დედოფალმან პა-
გიოსანი და წმიდა მკლავი შენი სულისა ჩემისა საოხად
მხილველთა შენდობა ბძანეთ ჩემთვის.⁹¹

Glorious martyr Eustathios, I, the sinful woman queen Anna of Imereti, have dedicated to you your blessed and holy arm, for the sake of my sinful soul’s salvation; whoever comes to see it, remember me.

Platon Ioseliani witnessed how piously the relics were treated in the Ert‘acminda church.⁹² He notes that the gold-plated silver frame of the piece was decorated with oriental stones donated by Shah Abbas and Nadir Shah. This relic was kept in the church of Ert‘acminda until 1920–1930.

In the ciborium created to the south of the church, Platon Ioseliani also mentions a chain associated with St. Eustathios. According to Ioseliani, the chain symbolically represented the captivity of St. Eustathios, and a certain tradition of carrying it in Ert‘acminda had been established.⁹³ He discusses the significance of stag’s antlers inside the church—highlighting their pres-

ence on the roof and emphasizing their practical use in the items in Ert'acminda, such as chandeliers, candlesticks, chests, and more. He notes that this tradition was connected to the vision of St. Eustathios.⁹⁴

Of interest is a silver-gilded board kept at the Shalva Amiranashvili State Museum of Fine Arts. It is placed in a wooden plaque (Inventory No. 751, *Fig. 5.37*). In the upper right corner of the plaque was a cavity that included Eustathios' relic. The donor's inscription reports that the reliquary was donated in 1797 to the church of Ert'acminda by Prince David Batonishvili (Bagrationi), son of George XII (1798–1800), the last king of Georgia.⁹⁵

5.9. ST. EUSTATHIOS' CYCLE IN ERT'ACMINDA

St. Eustathios' cycle is shown on the north transept of the interior of Ert'acminda. The wall painting also covers part of the south transept. The life cycle of Eustathios depicted in Ert'acminda is the only surviving evidence from monumental art. The painting is accompanied by two extensive donor's inscriptions above the en-

5.38 Donor's inscription above the Prothesis (1654). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.



trances of the pastophoria (Fig. 5.38). In 2010, we had an opportunity to read the donor's inscriptions. An eight-line inscription above the entrance to the right pastophorion informs us:

„†.ագօգք, զ(մշրտ)ա, մշցատ-մշցյ ձ(ա)գ|[թ]անօ ՌաՏԳ(ա)
թ դատ(ան)ամշցեգրյ թ(ա)տօ, | գեգօց(ա)լո ձ(ա)ցր(ա)
նօ թ(ա)ր(օա)թ; թ(ա)տ պամտա, ն(յ)ծոտա| դա Շեթ(յ)ցնո-
տա դ(մրտ)օս(ա)տա, թ(յա)եցօտա թ(մօդ)օսա ցըսց(ա)տց-
սոտա, | ծրմ(ա)նց(ծօ)տա ձ(ա)ցր(ա)նօս ոռրամիսոտա, թ(յյ)
ն, կարց(ա)րցտյլման | ոռնատամ դա ոյսյ, դաշակացանցուտ
ս(ա)ցդ(ա)րօ յըյ չ(յ)լո|ոտա օՅ(ռյսա) լց(յ)թ(օ)ս չ(յա)
ռօս մռնասցրօս մլ(յ)ցըլմռն(աֆռնօ)սա | մըլցուուս(օ)-
տա ս(յ)լուսա թ(յյ)նօսա սայսրագ դա ց(ա)ցըատ[ա] | թ(յյ)
նոտա Շըսանգոնձլագ; զոնցամոյմտե(ցօ)ն(յ)տ Շենցոթ - - - |
յ(առռնօ) յ(ան)սա գմթ“.⁹⁶

God, give glory to the king and lord [*patroni*] Rostom and his wife, queen and lord [*patroni*] Mariam. In their days, with God's will and aid and the intercession of St. Eustathios, on the order of Lord Ioram, we Kargaret'eli Ionat'am and Iese, commissioned the painting of this church to the hieromonk of the Monastery of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, Meletios, for the sake of our soul and for the remittance of our sins. Whoever comes and worships, may remember us. 1654.

5.39 Donor's inscription above the diaconicon (1654). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.



Hieromonk Meletios was the abbot of the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem in 1654–75. The inscription above another entrance of the pastophorion once again mentions the donors. The donor is commemorated together with his family members, which was an established tradition in Georgia:

“წ(მიდაო) ეგსტათი, ღ(უა)წლ მრ(ა)ვ(ა)ლო და შვილ წილ
უძლეველ(ო) მ(ეო)ხ: ექმენ ორსავე შინა ც(ხორე) ბ(ა)-
თა პატრონსა იორამს და თანამეცხედრეს თანამეცხედ-
რეს მათსა პატრონსა თამარს და ძეთა და ასულთა მათთა
ამინ.”⁹⁷

St. Eustathios, of many deeds and seven times invincible, intercede on behalf of patron Ioram and his wife, patron T‘amar and their sons and daughters. Amen (*Fig. 5.39*).

The individual named Ioram, mentioned in the supplication directed to St. Eustathios, is evidently the same person and was a member of the Tarkhan-Mouravi house. According to Platon Ioseliani, from 1609 onwards, the Church of Ert‘acminda became a sepulcher for this family. Paata, the son of Giorgi Saakadze, who was executed by Shah Abbas I (1571–1629), was buried here. Consequently, the vision of St. Eustathios is depicted on the family emblem of the Tarkhan-Mouravi clan (*Fig. 5.40*).

From the description of the holy objects of Ert‘acminda, we learn that King Demetre II (1259–89) donated an icon of the life of St. Eustathios to the church. This icon is currently lost, but according to the description, it was created in 1279.⁹⁸ This indicates that the monumental cycle of St. Eustathios’ life of Ert‘acminda had an established tradition in Georgia.

Today, we cannot definitively say whether Ert‘acminda was originally painted. The scale of the church and the rich decoration of the facades suggest a high social status of its founders, making it likely

5.40 The coat of arms of the House of Tarkhan-Mouravi (nineteenth century). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert‘acminda.



that the painting was commissioned by them. Ina Gomelauri discusses the losses of wall paintings during the later repairs of the church.⁹⁹ Platon Ioseliani also refers to a fully painted church.¹⁰⁰ According to Giorgi Khorguashvili's description, one must imagine a completely painted church—alongside the life of St. Eustathios, there were also depictions of the Savior, the Mother of God, and other saints.¹⁰¹ His account notes the presence of other scenes as well, but due to the visit of the Russian Emperor to Georgia, the church was “repaired,” which at that point meant whitewashing of the wall paintings with lime. However, today, no early layers of painting are identifiable in the church's interior.

According to Platon Ioseliani's description, the following scenes were depicted:

1. St. Eustathios' encounter with a stag, with a large cross appearing between the stag's antlers, showing the crucified Christ.
2. St. Eustathios receiving the teachings of Christ from the Bishop of Rome in front of a Christian church.
3. The loss of Eustathios' wife Theopista and his sons.
4. The miraculous finding of the children after a great temptation.
5. The handing over of St. Eustathios and his family members to be torn apart by beasts by order of the Emperor Hadrian, and their miraculous deliverance.
6. A new punishment of burning them in a heated copper furnace, where, like the youths thrown into the Chaldean furnace, to the astonishment of the pagans, their bodies remained whole and unharmed.¹⁰²

The paintings are distributed on both sides of the altar apse—on the northeast is the vision of St. Eustathios, while the southeast depicts the so-called double miracle of St. George, representing the deliverance of the virgin and the youth. The main accents of the iconographic program of Ert'acminda are indeed centered around these two compositions. Each scene depicted on the walls adjacent to the altar apse corresponds in size to both scenes represented on the adjacent walls. Thus, these two triumphal-theophanic scenes become the main artistic emphasis of this concise cycle.

Particularly impressive is the depiction of the crucified Savior inscribed between the antlers of a white stag against a rocky background (*Fig. 5.41*), which stands out with its size and is the



dominant element of the entire decoration. The branched antlers of the stag create the impression of a flourished cross. Traditionally, this scene of the vision is placed as the opening composition of the cycle. Notably, it is depicted above the door to the Prothesis, which also underscores the theme of the Savior's sacrifice in this topographical context.

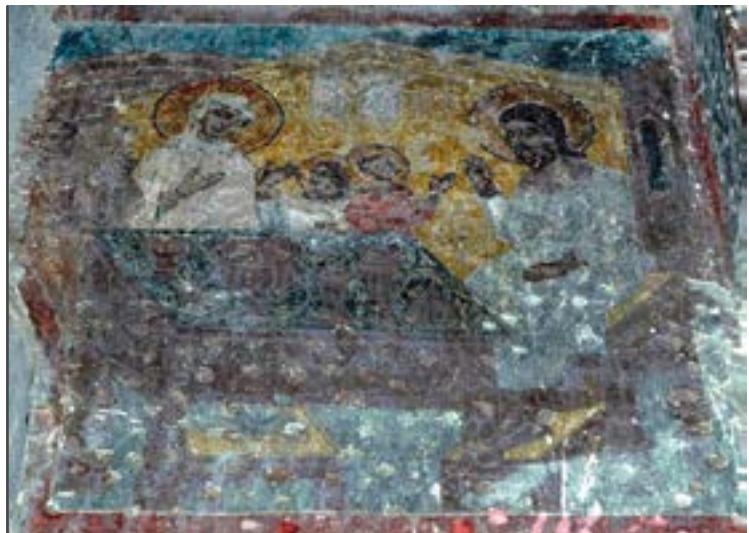
The cycle continues on the eastern section of the north wall, featuring three scenes from the life of St. Eustathios (Fig. 5.42). The first scene shows St. Eustathios recounting the vision to his wife (Fig. 5.43). This scene is represented during a family

5.41 *The vision of St. Eustathios (1654). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.*

meal. The second scene, the baptism of St. Eustathios' family (Fig. 5.44), is less commonly found in Eastern Christian art and is more common in Western European art.¹⁰³ The third, heavily damaged, scene depicts St. Eustathios' family (Fig. 5.45). The concluding scene of the cycle of St. Eustathios' life is positioned between the door leading to the prothesis and a corner of the al-



5.42 *The cycle of St. Eustathios' life (1654), general view of the north transept. Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.*



5.43 *St. Eustathios tells the family about the vision (1654). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.*



5.44 *The Baptism of St. Eustathios' family (1654). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.*



5.45 *St. Eustathios' family (1654). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.*



5.46 *The martyrdom of St. Eustathios' family in the copper furnace (1654). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.*

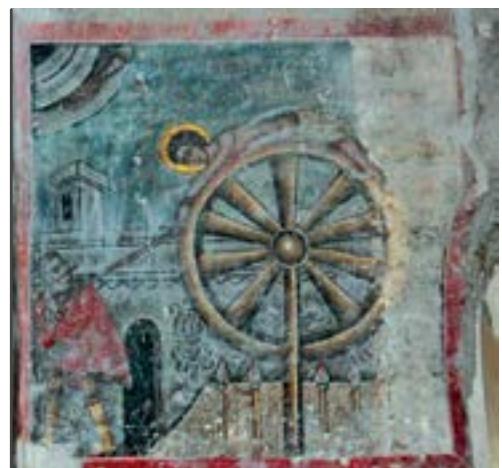
tar space, showing the martyrdom of the family (*Fig. 5.46*). The inscription placed above indicates fragmentarily: “The martyrdom of St. Eustathios’ children.” It is somewhat surprising that among the existing scenes, the episode of the family being handed over to beasts, as mentioned by Platon Ioseliani, is not present.

A distinctive feature of the Ert‘acminda cycle is its expansive character, wherein the scenes from St. Eustathios’ life relate symbolically to episodes from the life of St. George and scenes of the Second Coming. These two sections of the painting are conceived as a cohesive program. The depicted paintings on the eastern portion of the south wall adjacent to the altar are perceived as a continuation of the artistic narrative of St. Eustathios, featuring episodes from the life of St. George.

As stated above, the cycle of St. George is represented by two most popular scenes in Georgia: the miracle of St. George’s deliverance of the princess and the youth (*Fig. 5.47*) and the scene of the martyrdom on the wheel (*Fig. 5.48*). Uniquely, alongside these scenes, there is a concise and symbolically allegorical representation of the death of the righteous and the sinner (*Fig. 5.49*). This section of the painting likely corresponds thematically to the cycle of St. Eustathios depicted on the north wall of the church and reflects the eschatological significance of St. Eustathios’ image (e.g., Timot‘esubani, Ateni). In Ert‘acminda paired images of St. Eustathios and St. George are present



5.47 St. George liberating the princess and the youth (1654). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert‘acminda.



5.48 Martyrdom of St. George on the wheel (1654). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert‘acminda

5.49 *Scenes from the Last Judgment and St. George's Life* (1654), south transept, general view. Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda.



(Fig. 5.50). The two predominantly stand together in the general ranks of the warrior saints (e.g., Ikvi, Tsalenjikha, Gelat'i), whereas such paired representations are relatively rare. In the Church of Ert'acminda, this compositional choice is influenced by

5.50 *Sts. George and Eustathios (1654). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda*



the exceptional cult of St. George, who was regarded as a national saint, as well as by St. Eustathios' patronage of the church—effectively equated with the patron saint of Georgia. This section of the painting is accompanied by bilingual Georgian and Arabic inscriptions. The Arabic inscriptions are no longer legible. It is likely that the Georgian-Arabic inscriptions were also associated with the cycle of St. Eustathios.

The monumental paintings spread inside the spacious church predominantly emphasize the themes of St. Eustathios and St. George. Nowadays, against the backdrop of bare walls, the

massive painted images displayed as monumental “icons” are further highlighted by the expressive resonance of the golden leaf extensively used in their halos. Evidently, the decoration of Ert‘acminda adheres to the principle of partial painting in late medieval Georgian art, attested also, for example, in the churches of Ananuri, Svetic‘xoveli, and Samt‘avro.

The church of Zedajvari, located about a kilometer from Ert‘acminda, is linked to St. Eustathios’ shrine and serves as a reference to the apparition of the cross. Its name, *Zedajvari* (upper cross), is also telling. According to the legend of the church, during the Lesgin raids aimed at plundering the church of Ert‘acminda, darkness fell upon the attackers, preventing them from finding their way back. After praying to St. Eustathios, they were saved. This miracle was commemorated by the construction of *Zedajvari*.¹⁰⁴

5.10. ST. EUSTATHIOS ON LITURGICAL ITEMS

5.10.1. ICONS

Georgian art has preserved numerous icons of St. Eustathios. Part of them belongs to the church of Ert‘acminda, whereas others are preserved in the treasury of the National Museum of Georgia.

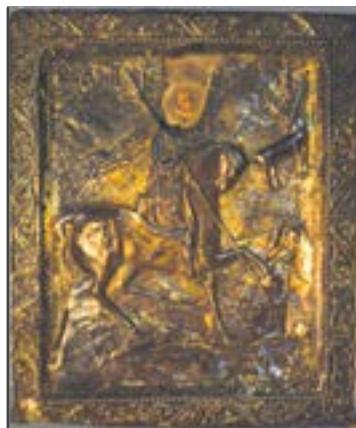
1. A silver gilded metal plate (33 × 15 cm) (Inventory No. 747, *Fig. 5.51*) (probably fifteenth–sixteenth century) depicts the vision of St. Eustathios. This plate was part of the icon of St. Eustathios. The artist divided the composition into two parts: in the lower area, St. Eustathios is depicted mounted on a horse, while in the upper, celestial area, there is a deer. The angles of movement of the horse and deer define the expressiveness of the scene. Here, St. Eustathios is portrayed not as a hunter but as a suppliant. Both of his raised hands express glorification in response to the vision of the Lord.
2. A chased icon featuring the vision of St. Eustathios (34 × 28.7 cm) (No 748), (1719) (*Fig. 5.52*). The scene is tra-

ditional: a vision shown against a landscape. The face of St. Eustathios is painted. The icon is accompanied by an explanatory inscription in Asomt'avruli: "St. E[v]stathios." The icon is surrounded by a floral ornamental border. In the lower area, there is the donor's inscription: „თქ ცოდ- ვილმან დეკანოზმან [პავლე] მოვაჭედინე და შემოგწი- რე წმინდას ევსტატის ერთაწმინდას შენდობით მომისხე- ნეთ | ე[რისგ]ეს აქეთ ჩდით ქვს უზ“ (I, a sinner, Deacon [Paul], commissioned this and offered it to St. Eustathios of Ert'acminda, please remember me with your prayers).¹⁰⁵

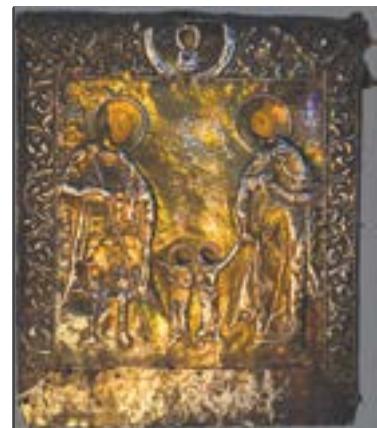
3. A silver-gilded icon depicting St. Eustathios and his family (27 × 23 cm) (1747) (Inventory No. 749, *Fig. 5.53*).¹⁰⁶ The saint is shown with his wife Theopista and their sons. The center of the composition features the images of the children, with the figures of the parents on either side. The faces appear to have been painted. The composition is framed by lush foliage, and in the upper area, a round medallion shows the Savior in half-figure, blessing the holy family with both hands. The lower part of the icon contains an inscription in *Mxedruli* mentioning the icon's donor, Dimitri Amilaxvari, and the date of its creation. Notably, the donor requests St. Eustathios family's help at the time of the Second Coming.



5.51 *The vision of St. Eustathios (fifteenth–sixteenth century?). Fragment of a chased icon.* Georgian National Museum.



5.52 *The vision of St. Eustathios, icon, 1719,* Georgian National Museum.



5.53 *St. Eustathios with the family (1747).* Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum.

Several notable painted icons are currently housed in the Niko Berdzenishvili Museum in Kutaisi. The central theme of these works revolves around the narrative of St. Eustathios' conversion.

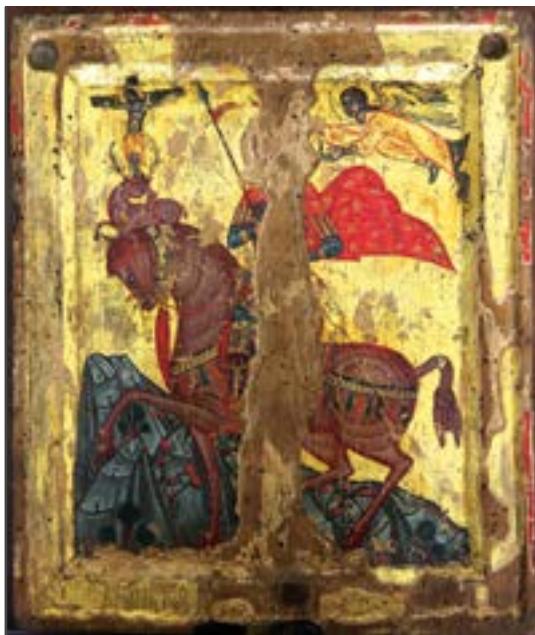
1. An icon of unknown provenance (No. 2722/119, 37 × 30) (*Fig. 5.54*) (probably seventeenth century) shows Eustathios during a hunt; however, the scene depicts not the hunt but Eustathios' prayer. Of interest is the unusual iconographic detail: inside the stag's antlers is neither Christ nor a cross, but the instruments of Christ's passion.
2. An icon from the Church of Barakoni (Racha) (eighteenth – early nineteenth century) (*Fig. 5.55*).¹⁰⁷ The saint is seated on a white horse and is represented as a young, beardless soldier. The horse's forehead and chest are decorated by an anthropomorphic solar sign inscribed in a circle. A similar decoration appears also on an early stone cross—the Nat'lismc'emeli, discussed above. The soldier saint is depicted during a prayer.



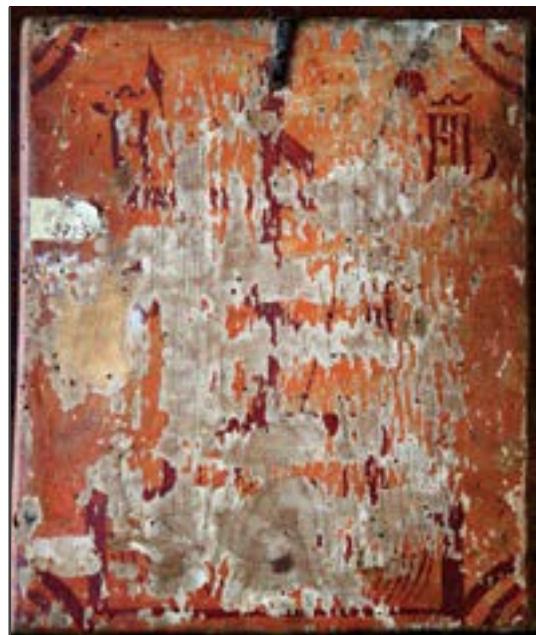
5.54 The vision of St. Eustathios (probably seventeenth century). Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum.



5.55 The icon of the vision of St. Eustathios from Barakoni church (eighteenth–nineteenth century). Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum.



5.56 The vision of St. Eustathios, Samt'isi icon (probably seventeenth century). Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum.



5.57 Glorification of the cross (probably seventeenth century). Back of the Samt'isi icon. Niko Berdzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum.

3. The Icon of St. George of Samt'isi (No. 2732, 120) (probably seventeenth century) (Fig. 5.56).¹⁰⁸ According to Giorgi Bochoridze, on the lower border of the icon is a fragmentary *Asomt'avruli* inscription, and another inscription is on the back of the icon, where currently individual graphemes and a silhouette of a red cross can be identified (Fig. 5.57). The rider of a red horse is not aiming at the stag, and unlike the rest of the icons, is shown during a triumphal procession. The image of the animal in the vision is also uncharacteristic. The stylized antlers are reminiscent of a flowering cross. Behind Eustathios is an angel whose entire body enters the space and touches the saint's halo, supposedly placing a martyr's crown upon Eustathios.
4. Another painted icon of the iconostasis of the Monastery of Mocamet'a (No. 4600, 55 × 33) (Fig. 5.58) (probably eighteenth or early nineteenth century) shows two registers of three saints. In the upper register are desert fathers—St. Anthony, St. Euthymios, and St. Sabas—where-

as on the lower register are three soldier saints: Theodore Tēron, Theodore Stratēlates, and Eustathios. The iconographic type of the warriors is uniform. The icon reflects the long tradition in Eastern Christian iconography of placing the desert fathers together with the warrior saints. Most commonly, it is St. Anthony who appears in this context. In the decoration of the Red Monastery (thirteenth century), St. Anthony is referred to as a “Warrior saint.”¹⁰⁹

5. On the icon belonging to the church of Ert‘acminda (1851) St. Eustathios is shown during a hunt. He is beardless and holds a rifle (*Fig. 5.59*). A similar image of Eustathios appears also on embroidery.¹¹⁰

5.58 *St. Anthony, St. Euthymios, St. Sabas, St. Theodore Tēron, St. Theodore Stratēlates, St. Eustathios (probably eighteenth century). Part of the iconostasis of the Mocamet‘a monastery. Niko Berzenishvili Kutaisi State Historical Museum.*



5.59 *The vision of St. Eustathios (nineteenth century). Church of St. Eustathios of Ert‘acminda.*

5.10.2. EMBROIDERY

Georgian art has preserved several embroidered of St. Eustathios.¹¹¹ Scenes of his vision are particularly popular in this medium, alongside compositions depicting his family. Two examples of embroidery stand out for their artistic merit and richness of ornamentation. One of these is housed in the personal collection

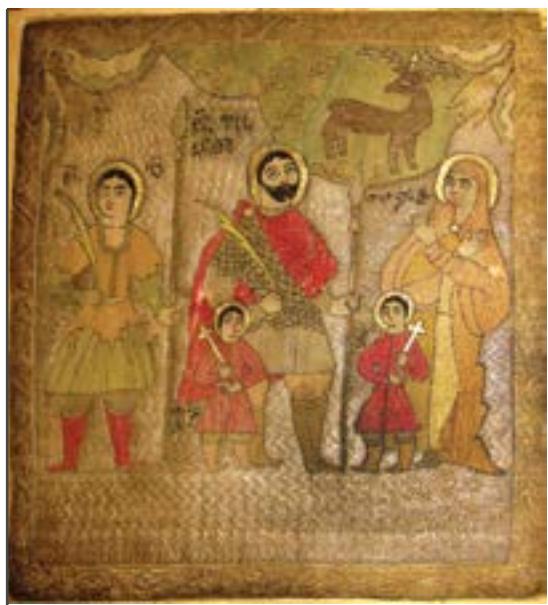
of David Lang in Great Britain (*Fig. 5.60*),¹¹² while the other belongs to the Samt‘avro Convent in Mtskheta (*Fig. 5.61*). It has been suggested that both examples may have been created by Sofia Mukhranbatoni, the daughter of Giorgi XII, the last king of Georgia. Gulnaz Baratashvili and Nana Burchuladze, identify them as icon coverings.¹¹³ On both pieces, St. Eustathios is represented in a mixed iconographic style, i.e., as a warrior and martyr. Both images unite the scenes of his conversion and the martyrdom of his family.

At first glance, there are many similarities between the two. Both compositions depict St. Eustathios along with his family, though there are some iconographic differences. In the piece housed in the UK, St. Eustathios holds a long spear in his left hand and has his right hand resting on a child, while in the Samt‘avro embroidery, he holds a palm branch in his right hand as a symbol of martyrdom. The iconography of the saint’s sons, St. Theophistos and Agapios, is identical in both pieces, as they each hold crosses as symbols of martyrdom. St. Eustathios’ wife, St. Theophista, has her hands crossed over her chest.

Both samples of embroidery include the representation of a



5.60 St. Eustathios with his family, vision of the saint (eighteenth century), embroidery. David Lang’s collection.



5.61 St. George, St. Eustathios with his family, vision of the saint (1794), embroidery. Samt‘avro Monastery, Mtskheta.

5.62 *Christological scenes, various saints, the vision of St. Eustathios, and dragonslayer St. George* (eighteenth century). *Gelat'i sakkos*. Georgian National Museum.



stag standing on a mountain peak with a cross inscribed between its antlers. The piece housed in England is further complemented by a segment of the sky in which the Savior is depicted. A ray emanating from this segment reaches the family of St. Eustathios. In contrast, the Samt'avro embroidery incorporates a frontal depiction of St. George, who is shown with a long spear, adjacent to the image of St. Eustathios' family. It is suggested that the artist may have referred to the fresco schema of St. Eustathios in the Church Ert'acminda, where the themes of these two saints are intertwined.¹¹⁴

In the decoration of a sakkos (eighteenth century) from Gelat'i, Eustathios is yet again paired with St. George. In one corner, the miracle of Lassia is depicted, while opposite it is the miracle of St. Eustathios (Fig. 5.62).

5.10.3. MANUSCRIPT ILLUMINATIONS

In Georgian manuscript illustrations, scenes depicting the life and martyrdom of St. Eustathios are rare and late. This is especially puzzling since, in Armenia, where Eustathios is less prominently featured compared to Georgia, his hunt and vision appear in a thirteenth-century illuminated manuscripts.¹¹⁵ In Georgian illuminated manuscripts too, we mostly encounter Eustathios' conversion scene and more sporadically depictions of St. Eustathios and his family. The martyr is sometimes shown as a warrior and other times as a martyr.

The earliest manuscript with St. Eustathios is a sixteenth-century (*NCM A-442*) church calendar. On 11v, is St. Eustathios



5.63 *The vision of St. Eustathios (nineteenth century). Prayer book called "Manana."* Courtesy of the National Archives of Georgia, Central Historical Archive.

with his family. In the center of the composition, we see two children between their parents. In another manuscript (*NCM H-342* (1661)), St. Eustathios is once again depicted with his family members, but here, saints are accompanied by other warrior saints. Some manuscripts show the scenes of his vision, e.g., *NCM A-1454* (1746) and *NCM H-2076* (1700s). A nineteenth-century prayer book belonging to Ert‘acminda shows a rare iconographic version of St. Eustathios—unlike other representations, the saint is depicted standing instead of sitting on horseback (*Fig. 5.63*).¹¹⁶ This version was most likely inspired by the image of the Ert‘acminda presented on the above-described pendentive.

5.64 The vision of St. Eustathios (1799). Document issued by King George XII to the Tsitsikashvili family. Georgian National Center of Manuscripts.

A particularly narrative representation of St. Eustathios is an illustration of a charter (*NCM Qd 9220*) issued by the last king of Kartli-Kakheti Giorgi XII to the serfs of the Church of St. Eustathios in Tbilisi (1799, May 26) (*Fig. 5.64*). This document too depicts the conversion of St. Eustathios.¹¹⁷



5.11. CONCLUSION

The evidence discussed above indicates that the cult of St. Eustathios had its historical foundation in Georgia. It is likely that the resemblance of his conversion to the story of King Mirian somewhat contributed to the prominence of this saint's cult in Georgia, which, in turn, was supported by the particularly strong cult of the cross. The popularity of this scene was also determined by its unique symbolic significance, since it encompassed the symbolism of theophany, conversion, and martyrdom. Therefore, like St. George, the slayer of Diocletian, it carried the generalized meaning of the victory of Christianity over paganism and evil. The story of Eustathios' martyrdom together with his family has apparently determined his cultic function as the patron of families, which had been originally reflected on the Nat'lismc' emeli stele. The cult of this saint in Georgia was further augmented by the supposed existence of his relics in this country. It is also evident that, along with the exceptional cult of the soldier saints, the relics of Ert'acminda played a crucial role in the spread and establishment of the cult of St. Eustathios in Georgia.

- 1 Goguadze, 2014, 364–387.
- 2 Walter, 2003, 163; Thierry, 1991, 60–66; Jolivet-Lévy, 2001, 335–336.
- 3 For the parallels between the lives of warrior saints, see White, 2013, 14.
- 4 Thierry, 1991, 60–63.
- 5 Didebulize, 1990, 198, see note 2.
- 6 Walter, 2003, 163.
- 7 Budge, 1914, 102–127; 356–380. For the Coptic martyrdom, see, also, CSLA.E05115 (G. Schenke)
- 8 CSLA.E06800 (N. Kälviäinen). Migne, 1862, 376–417; Acta Sanctorum, Sept. VI, 123–135.
- 9 Bousset, 1918, 703–745.
- 10 Meyer, 1916, 745–746.
- 11 Jolivet-Lévy, 2001, 333; Thierry, 1991, 34.
- 12 Jolivet-Lévy, 2001, 333.
- 13 Kirschbaum, 1994, 548.
- 14 Thierry, 1991, 36, ref. 14
- 15 Saenkova, Gerasimenko, 2008, 76.
- 16 For liturgical commemorations and hagiographic dossier of Eustathios, see appendix. Kekelidze, 1912, 142; Tarchnishvili, 1960, 60; Kekelidze, 1957, 272–275; Garitte, 1958, 91, 92, 103; Dolakidze, Chitunashvili, 2017, 23; Jghamaia, Khevsuriani, 2007, 295–302. Migne, 1862, PG, 105, 376–417.
- 17 Thierry, 1977, 126–127.
- 18 Velmans, 1985, 14–49.
- 19 Thierry, 1977, 127. For Cappadocian examples, see Thierry, 1991, 57–60.
- 20 Ibid 65; Thierry, 1977, 126.
- 21 For the symbolism of hunt, see Walker, 2012, 34–36; Peers, 2007, 44–53. For the symbolism of rider-hunters, see Goderdzishvili, 2020.
- 22 Badamo, 2019, 156–163; Thierry, 1991, 90–92.
- 23 See Shalem, 2004. Badamo, 2018, 156–157.
- 24 Khachidze, 340; Kvirikashvili, 1970, 229.
- 25 Gabashvili, 2014; Khidasheli, 1972, 27–52, 58–86; Surguladze, 2003, 21–32; Khidasheli, 1972, 58–86.
- 26 Surguladze, 2003, 23.
- 27 For the symbolic meaning of deer, see Mamasakhli, 2013, 285–289; Kirschbaum, 1994, 286–289.
- 28 Didebulidze, 1990, 203–204.
- 29 Zurab Kiknadze also discussed this parallelism. See Kiknadze, 2009, 53.
- 30 For the reading of the see Mamasakhli, 2018, 108–122.
- 31 Beletski, Kazarian, 2009, 50–91.
- 32 For the interpretation of the scenes see Mamasakhli, 2019, 78–90; Elizbarashvili, 1995, 34. Khundadze, 2004, 57.
- 33 Tumanishvili, 2014, 149–159; Gedevanishvili, 2021, 43–69; Eastmond, 2018, 212–217; Bacci, 2016, 206–225; Skhirtladze, 2008, 104–120; Virsaladze, 2007 a, 225–261; Tumanishvili, 2001, 13–28; Aladashvili, 1969, 7–12; Chubinashvili, 1948a, 79–85.
- 34 Thierry, 1977, 127
- 35 Thierry, 1991, 79–80; Velmans, 1985, 32.
- 36 For details, see Studer-Karlen, 2022, 52–73.
- 37 Machabeli, 1998, 78–86.
- 38 Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, 51.
- 39 Shoshiashvili, 1980, 115.
- 40 Dadiani, Kvachadze, Khundadze, 2017, 230–231; Iamanidze, 2014, 105–

108; Saltykov, 1985, 5–17; Khruskova, 2008, 577–587;
41 Saltykov, 1985, 5–17.

42 Grotowski, 2010, 83. For Sasanian influence, Iamanidze, 2010, 24–25.

43 For a symbolic interpretation of the scene, see Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 230–231.

44 Thierry, 1991, 83–84. Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 231; Iamanidzé, 2010, 24–25. For a memorial context, see Khruskova, 1980, 82, 123.

45 Chubinashvili, 1948a, 176.

46 Muraviov, 1848, 106.

47 Didebulidze, 1990, 200.

48 Both reliefs were executed later in the tenth century and inserted in the wall during the restoration of the church.

49 For the date of the Martvili reliefs with recent bibliography, see Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 19, note 78.

50 Thierry, 1991, 84–85.

51 Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 135; Aladashvili, Volskaia, 1987, 97.

52 Ibid., 96.

53 Ibid., 98.

54 Gomelauri, 1976, 60; see also Beridze, 2014, 48–50.

55 Ioseliani, 1973, 81. rf 1.

56 Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 275–276, fig. 608; Gomelauri, 1976, 52, fig. 21.

57 Dadiani, Kvachatadze, Khundadze, 2017, 276, fig. 613, 614

58 Aladashvili, Volskaia, 1987, 104–106. For the interpretation of the Deesis image in Ip’ari, see also Chichinadze, 2014, 77–79. For the date, see Aladashvili, Volskaia, 1987, 106.

59 Thierry, 1991, 36; Thierry, 1977, 126.

60 For Georgian facade paintings, see Aladashvili, Volskaia, 94–120; Cheishvili, Buchukuri, 1983, 1–20; Chichinadze, 2014, 68–83; Shervashidze, 1955, 8.

61 Aladashvili, Volskaia, 112. Scholars have referred to the sculptural decorations of Alt’amar and Hagia Sophia of Trebizond as notable parallels. Ibid., 112.

62 Aladashvili, Volskaia, 112.

63 Digmelashvili, Kvavadze, 2021, 54–55.

64 For the scene of Zenobani, see Didebulidze, 1990, 192–206; see Velmans, 1985, 26, fig. 12, 13.

65 Didebulidze, 1990, 201.

66 For a recent study with bibliography, see Gedevanishvili, 2022, 45–78; Skhirtladze, 2008, 38–55; Mikeladze, 1991, 216.

67 Arzhantseva, 2011–2012, 7–8; Volskaia, 1997, 42; Volskaia, 1954, 473–478.

68 Chikhladze, 2004, 91–103; Arzhantseva, 2011–2012, 8–9; Volskaia, 1991, 42; Volskaia, 1954, 473–478.

69 Volskaia, 1991, 45. See E. Gedevanishvili’s introductory chapter for this tradition.

70 Khutsisvili, 1988, 64–66.

71 For the decoration of Ilemi, see Khuskivadze, 2003, 135–158.

72 For the decoration of K’oret’i, see ibid., 159–198.

73 Didebulidze, 2016, 57–59; Skhirtladze, 1986, 130–134;

74 Kuprashvili, Kenia, Shioshvili, Demuradze, Janjalia, 1998, 98, 245.

75 Chikladze, 2010, 251.

76 Mamasakhlisi, 2021, 168–185

77 For identification, see Ovchinkov, 1983, 9.

78 Ovchinkov, 1983, 2–5; Vralsadze, 2007, 176.

79 For the issue of “fiery” eschatology in Ateni Sioni, see Ovchinkov, 1983, 9–11,

80 For the iconography of the Last Judgement, see Privalova, 1979. For a general study of the iconography of the Last Judgement, see Bhalla, 2021; Christe, 2000.

81 See also Davidov Temerinski, 2009, 127–134.

82 Based on the inscription, Mariam Didebulidze identifies this group of saints as Eustathios’ family. Didebulidze, 2002, 89.

83 Kaukhchishvili, 1999, 210.

84 Gagoshidze, 1964, 330.

85 Ioseliani, 1973, 77.

86 Bochoridze, 2010, 49–50.

87 Makalatia, 1955, 23–24.

88 Asatiani, 1973, 73–74

89 *Ibid.*

90 Ioseliani, 1973, 77.

91 Takaishvili, 1907, 215; Bochoridze, 2010, 49–50

92 Ioseliani, 1973, 80.

93 *Ibid.* 79–80

94 *Ibid.*

95 Mamasakhli, 2014a, 351–365.

96 Mamasakhli, 2014, 31–40

97 For historical details, see Mamasakhli, 2014a, 31–40

98 Ioseliani, 1973, 83, 75–78.

99 Gomelauri, 1976, 13–14.

100 Ioseliani, 1973, 73–74.

101 Khorguashvili, 2000, 59–60.

102 Ioseliani, 1973, 73–75

103 Mamasakhli, 2019a, 147–158.

104 *Iloseliani*, 1973, 81.

105 The inscription is not readable. The text is cited according to Takaishvili, 1907, 215.

106 According to Takaishvili, this icon was a part of the iconostasis. Takaishvili, 1907, 215.

107 Bochoridze, 1994, 176.

108 *Ibid.*, 192.

109 Badamo, 2019, 157–181.

110 Baratashvili, Burchuladze, 2012, 316–317

111 *Ibid.*

112 Lang, 1964, 612–619.

113 Baratashvili, Burchuladze, 2012, 323.

114 *Ibid.*

115 Thierry, 1991, 94, fig. X.

116 Asatiani, 2016, 119.

117 Kldiashvili, 2011, 136–137.

ADDENDUM

WARRIOR SAINTS IN GEORGIAN LITURGICAL AND HAGIOGRAPHIC TEXTS

*Nikoloz Aleksidze,
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Georgian liturgical texts reflect old Hagiopolite, transitional and Constantinopolitan of saints in general and specifically of the warrior saints. To describe this process, the following liturgical calendars are referenced below:

1. The Lectionary of Jerusalem (Tarchnischvili, 1959, 1960).
2. The Old Iadgari (Metreveli, Chanikevi, Khevsuriani, 1980).
3. “The Calendar of Ioane Zosime” which contains data from several different traditions (Garitte, 1958).
4. The so-called “New Iadgari,” preserved in MSS *O/Sin. georg. 64–65*, *O/Sin. georg. 59* (Jghamaia, Metreveli, Chankiev, Khevsuriani, 1978).
5. The *O/Sin. georg. 14* calendar, which precedes the text of the Iadgari preserved in this manuscript. The calendar reflects the early Constantinopolitan practice and is one of the sources for Ioane Zosime’s calendar (Khevsuriani, 2014, 241–380).
6. The “First” edition of the Georgian *Menaion*. It reflects early Constantinopolitan practice and is preserved in two Jerusalemite manuscripts: *Jer. georg. 42* (February–August) and *Jer. georg. 71* (September–March) (partial publication: Kekelidze, 1965, 5–55).
7. The second edition of the *Menaion*, attributed to George Hagiorites (Gippert, Outtier, Kim, 2022).
8. Minor Synaxarion of Euthymios Hagiorites (Chitunashvili, 2021).
9. Great Synaxarion of George Hagiorites (Dolakidze, Chitunashvili, 2017).

The manuscripts are referenced according to Gabidzashvili, 2004, except for the Athonite manuscripts, whose pagination has been corrected according to Gippert, Outtier, Kim, 2022.

1. ANDREAS STRATĒLATES, MARTYR OF CILICIA UNDER MAXIMIAN

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (August 10); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (July 13); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (August 19); George Hagiorites’ *Menaion* (August 19); Great Synaxarion (July 13, August 19)

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: *NCM A–90* (13th century), 308r–311v.

METAPHRASIC: *Kutaisi–I* (16th century), 489v–497v.

2. ARTEMIOS, MARTYR OF ANTIOCH UNDER JULIAN

CALENDARS:

Calendar of Ioane Zosime (October 19); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (October 20); First Edition of the Menaion (October 20); George Hagiorites' Menaion (October 20); Great Synaxarion (October 20)

EDITIONS:

METAPHRASIC: *NCM A-1053* (12th century), 79r–109r; *Kutaisi-4* (16th century), 485r–510v.

Publication: Goguadze, 2014, 203–234.

3. ATHANASIOS, MARTYR IN KLYZMA UNDER DIOCLETIAN AND MAXIMIAN

CALENDARS:

Calendar of Ioane Zosime (July 18, July 19); New Iadgari (July 18); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (July 18).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: *NCM A-95* (10th century), 477r–482v; *O/Sin. georg. 11* (10th century), 224–231; *O/Sin. georg. 62* (10th century), 94–100; *Oxford, georg. b. 1* (11th century), 267v–273v.

Publication: Kekelidze, 1962, 56–71.

4. CHRISTOPHOROS, MARTYR OF PAMPHILIA

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (June 1, October 2); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (April 18, April 27, June 1); New Iadgari (June 1); First Edition of the Menaion (May 9); George Hagiorites' Menaion (June 1); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (June 1); Minor Synaxarion (May 9); Great Synaxarion (May 9).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC 1: Translated from Greek: *NCM H-535* (11th century), 145r–161r; *O/Sin. georg. 62* (10th century), 38v–48v; *Ivir. georg. 8* (10th century), 322r–332r; *Ivir. georg. 28* (1003), 245r–258v; *Oxford, georg. b. 1* (11th century), 113r–118v.

Publication: Kekelidze, 1962, 186–199; Gaprindashvili, 2024, 456–468.

PRE-METAPHRASIC 2: *NCM H-341* (11th century), 356–392.

Publication: Kekelidze, 1959, 36–49.

5. CORNELIUS THE CENTURION

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (October 29); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (October 31, November 20, December 30); Great Synaxarion (October 20).

EDITIONS:

METAPHRASIC 1: *Kutaisi-4* (16th century), 145r–154r.

Publication: Goguadze, 1986, 188–196.

METAPHRASIC 2: *Ivir. georg. 20* (11th century), 61v–67r. Translator: Theophilos the Hieromonk.

6. DEMETRIOS, MARTYR OF THESSALONIKE

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (October 25), although, as noted by Maia Machavariani, this is likely a later entry; Calendar of Ioane Zosime (October 25, October 26, February 13); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (October 27); First Edition of the Menaion (October 26); George Hagiorites' Menaion (October 26); Great Synaxarion (October 26).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: Translated by Euthymios Hagiorites. The earliest manuscripts include *O/Sin. georg. 71* (13th century), 14r–21r; *O/Sin. georg. 80* (11th century), 122r–147r; *Ivir. georg. 17* (11th century), 126r–137r. Euthymios translated an intermediate edition of the *Martyrdom* and *miracles* that differ from the original and include passages not found in the Greek texts.

METAPHRASIC 1: Translated by Ephrem Mc'ire. The earliest manuscripts are *NCM S-384* (11th–12th century), 477–488; *NCM A-1053* (12th century), 200v–211v; *NCM S-1276* (11th–12th century), 62r–270v; *Jer. georg. 37* (13th–14th centuries), 123–131; *Jer. georg. 38* (13th–14th centuries), 63v–74r; *Jer. georg. 39* (13th–14th centuries), 270v–277v.

Publication: Goguadze, 2014, 344–352.

METAPHRASIC 2: Translated by Theophilos the Hieromonk. *NCM A-1170* (11th–12th centuries), 49v–58v; *NCM H-1760*, *Jer. georg. 38* (13th–14th centuries).

Publication: Goguadze, 2014, 353–363.

ENCOMIUM:

The encomium was traditionally ascribed to Gregory of Nazianzus and translated by David Tbeli. Maia Machavariani's study has, however, shown that it is, in fact, a paraphrase of Gregory of Nazianzus' 24th Homily ("On the Martyr Saint Cyprian"), where the story of St. Cyprian has been replaced with an account of St. Demetrios' martyrdom. The actual author is Euthymios Hagiorites.

MIRACLES:

"Miracles of St. Demetrios" by John of Thessalonike: *Ivir. georg. 17* (11th century), 137v–139v; *O/Sin. georg. 71* (13th century), 21r–46r; *O/Sin. georg. 80* (11th century), 127v–147v; *Kutaisi–4* (1565), 602v–621v; *Ivir. georg. 28* (1003), 88r–118v. Translated by Euthymios Hagiorites The translations of the works associated with St. Demetrios differ from the Greek originals. This is particularly true of the Miracles. This collection is a compilation of the first two cycles of St. Demetrios' miracles after death—by John of Thessalonike (6th–7th centuries) and an anonymous author (7th century)—along with additional miracles not attested in Greek or other sources.

Publication: Goguadze, 2014, 364–391.

7. DIDYMOS THE WARRIOR

CALENDARS:

O/Sin. georg. 14 (May 30); Minor Synaxarion (May 27); Great Synaxarion (September 11)

EDITIONS:

METAPHRASIC: *Kutaisi–7* (13th century), 67–68. Metaphrasis of John Xiphilinos.
Publication: Kekelidze, 1960, 212–225.

8. EUGENIOS, MARTYR OF TREBIZOND

CALENDARS:

Minor Synaxarion (January 20); Great Synaxarion (January 20);

9. EUSIGNIOS, MARTYR OF ANTIOCH UNDER THE EMPEROR JULIAN

CALENDARS:

Calendar of Ioane Zosime (February 5; August 5); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (August 7); First Edition of the Menaion (August 5); George Hagiorites' Menaion (August 5); Great Synaxarion (August 5)

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: *Ivir. georg. 8*, 145v–152v; *Oxford, georg. b. 1*, 353v–359v.
Publication: Gaprindashvili, 2024, 241–248.

METAPHRASIC: *Kutaisi-1* (16th century), 297v–307r.

10. EUSTATHIOS PLAKIDAS

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (November 9); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (September 20, September 24, September 25, September 26, November 9); New Iadgari; First Edition of the Menaion (September 20); George Hagiorites' Menaion (September 20); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (September 20); Great Synaxarion (September 20); Eustathios, along with other warriors (George, Theodore, Dimitri, Prokopios, Nestor, Eustratios), is praised in the *Paraklētikē*, where they are referred to as “celesial bodies” (*Ivir. georg. 45*, 280v): “Let us glorify the beacons among the lights of George and Theodore, Demetrios and Panteleimon, Prokopios, and the worthy Nestor, along with the group of Eustratios and those of Eustathios.”

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC 1: e.g., Early manuscript – *Ivir. georg. 28* (1003), 65r–87v, and others.

PRE-METAPHRASIC 2: *Ivir. georg. 17* (11th century), 103r–115r; *NCM H-2077* (18th century), 294v–299v. The translator is likely Euthymios Hagiorites.

METAPHRASIC 1: *Ivir. georg. 20* (11th century), 138–151; the translator is Theophilos the Hieromonk.

METAPHRASIC 2: Early manuscripts include *Jer. georg. 17* (13th–14th centuries), 7r–13r; *Jer. georg. 18* (13th–14th centuries), 96r–119v; *Jer. georg. 36* (13th–14th centuries), 51r–60v; *Jer. georg. 120* (14th–15th centuries), 51v–62v; *Kutaisi-4* (16th century), 225v–248r.

Publication: Gugnadze, 1986, 364–387.

NOTE: Eustathios' *Martyrdom* shares thematic similarities with the late medieval Georgian epic *Rusudaniani* as well as with Georgian and Apkhaz fairy tales. A particular similarity is evident in one section of *Rusudaniani*, titled “The Story of the King Ibrahim.” (Khakhanov, 1901; Marr, 1895: 221–251; Kekelidze, 1958: 426; Baramidze, 1928: 309–326; Gugadze, 1986: 364–38).

11. EUSTRATIOS, AXENTIOS, EUGENIOS, MARDARIOS, AND ORESTES

CALENDARS:

Calendar of Ioane Zosime (December 13); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (December 13); First Edition of the Menaion (December 13); George Hagiorites' Menaion (December 13); Great Synaxarion (December 13)

EDITIONS:

METAPHRASIC 1: *NCM A-95* (11th century), 538r–558v; *NCM A-128* (12th–13th centuries), 306r–323v; *NCM H-1347*; *Ivir. georg. 2* (12th–13th centuries), 114v–126r; *Ivir. georg. 17* (11th century), 140r–169v, and others.
Partial Publication: Kekelidze, 1962, 136–139.

METAPHRASIC 2: *NCM A-128* (12th century), 306r–323v.

12. GEORGE

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (April 23, September 28, November 10, November 23 – Dedication of the church of St. George); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (February 14, April 23, April 24, April 26, May 1, May 25, July 12, July 13, July 25, September 22, September 28); Saint George's Feast: April 23, April 24, April 26; Dedication of the church of St. George – November 3, November 4, November 10 (George's Fast) and April 7. (The fast commemorating St. George is marked on the same day, November 10, in both Ioane Zosime's calendar and *The Life of Grigol Xanc't'eli*); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (April 23; April 24); The Ancient Iadgari (April 23, November 3). St. George and hymns dedicated to him appear in both the calendrical section and hymnography of Ancient Iadgari, authors by figures from Mar Saba Monastery and Byzantium. Some of these hymns can be dated to the seventh century; First Edition of the Menaion (April 23); Minor Synaxarion (April 23); Great Synaxarion (April 23; November 10). According to George Hagiorites, the Greeks do not celebrate St. George's martyrdom on the wheel on November 10, which is referred to as a Georgian tradition.

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC 1: e.g., *Ivir. Georg. 8* (10th century), 259r–267v; *O/Sin. georg. 62* (10th century), 29r–38v; *Ivir. georg. 28* (1003), 51v–65r. The Greek original is unknown; it may have been translated from Armenian.

Publication: Gabidzashvili, 1991, 42–73; Gaprindashvili, 2024, 372–383.

PRE-METAPHRASIC 2: (Condensed and revised version of the first edition): e.g., *Jer. georg. 37* (13th–14th centuries), 171r–179v; *Jer. georg. 39* (13th–14th centuries), 277v (incomplete); *Oxford, georg. b. 1* (11th century), 87r–99r.

Publication: Gabidzashvili, 1991, 130–159.

PRE-METAPHRASIC 3: *Ivir. georg. 8* (10th century) 348r–351v. (*The Martyrdom of George the Zoravar*), presumably translated from Armenian.

Publication: Gaprindashvili, 2024, 494–499.

METAPHRASIC 1: *NCM A–50* (12th century), 15–28; *Kutaisi–127* (17th–18th centuries), 1r–128r; *Ivir. georg. 79* (AD 990), 98r–128v. Translator: Euthymios Hagiorites.

Publication: Gabidzashvili, 1991, 160–178.

METAPHRASIC 2: *NCM A–186* (17th–18th centuries), 1987–1994; *NCM Q–336* (1874), 91r–98v; *Kutaisi–7* (13th century), 323–343; *Kutaisi–92* (18th century), 142r–155r. Translated by George Hagiorites or a representative of the Petroni school.

Publication: Gabidzashvili, 1991, 178–199.

MIRACLES:

7 MIRACLES: Various manuscripts, earliest being *Oxford, georg. b. 1* (11th century), 99r–112v; *Jer. georg. 2* (14th century), 238–244; *Jer. georg. 37* (13th–14th centuries), 179v–193r.

Publication: Gabidzashvili, 1991, 73–140.

5 MIRACLES: *NCM A–308* (1803), 76r–79v; *NCM Q–767* (1790), 15r–19v.

Publication: Gabidzashvili, 1991, 204–214.

1 MIRACLE: Various manuscripts, earliest *NCM A–674* (10th century), 151–153.

ENCOMIA:

ENCOMIUM 1: *Kutaisi–7* (13th century), 343r–364r. This is a translation by an unknown translator, where Andrew of Crete is named as the author, while Euthymios Hagiorites' translation refers to Basil of Caesarea as the author.

ENCOMIUM 2: *NCM A–1737* (1505–1515), 157–165; *Ivir. georg. 8* (10th century), 267–271.

Publication: Gabidzashvili, 1991, 214–220; Gaprindashvili, 2024, 384–389.

THEODOULA THE PRIEST'S ENCOMIUM: NCM A-1737 (1505–1515), 157–165;

Ivir. georg. 8 (10th century), 267–271.

Publication: Gabidzashvili, 1991, 214–220.

Saint George is praised three times in the *Paraklētikē*. In two of these instances, he is glorified along with other warriors (*Ivir. georg. 45*, 279v, 286r), while in the third, he is the addressed independently (*Ivir. georg. 45*, 281r).

ORIGINAL WORKS:

Abuserisže Tbeli (ob. c.1240), *The Miracles of Saint George*. This work relates the construction of St. George's churches in Achara during the thirteenth century, and draws on folklore. The author is also well-versed in the Georgian translations of the *Martyrdoms*, as evidenced by various episodes and details that are sourced from the *Martyrdom*.

Praise of Saint George by the Dean of the Church of Saint George at Sadgeri, Simeon Šot'asže (16th century).

Hymns by Ioane Minč'xi (tenth century) commisioned and probably dedicated to King Giorgi of Apkhazeti (*O/Sin. georg. 2*, 11th century). St. George is commemorated on November 10.

Ambrosi Nekreseli's (1794–1812) sermon on St. George.

Dat'una K'variani's versified *Life of St. George* (c.1678–80).

The versified account of the miracle of Saint George slaying the dragon (*NCM A-360*; *NCM A-1039*, 19th century).

Publication: The texts listed above have been published in Gabidzashvili, 1991.

13. HIERON AND OTHER MARTYRS OF MELETINE

EDITIONS:

METAPHRASIC: NCM S-384 (11th–12th centuries), 590–597; *Jer. georg. 37* (13th–16th centuries), 167r–171r.

Publication: Akhobadze, 2017, 146–153.

14. JAMES THE MUTILATED, MARTYR OF PERSIA UNDER BAHRAM V

CALENDARS:

Calendar of Ioane Zosime (November 12, November 27, November 28); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (November 27); Minor Synaxarion (November 27); Great Synaxarion (November 27)

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: *NCM A-95* (11th century), 570v–576v; *NCM A-1051* (1825), 95r–102v; *NCM H-972* (16th–17th centuries), 57r–61v.

METAPHRASIC: *NCM A-128* (12th–13th centuries), 244r–251v; *NCM S-382* (12th century), 173v–192v.

Publication: Akhobadze, 2020, 802–812.

15. JOHN STRATIOTES, CONFESSOR UNDER THE EMPEROR JULIAN

CALENDARS:

Calendar of Ioane Zosime (August 4, August 5); Great Synaxarion (June 12, July 30).

EDITIONS:

METAPHRASIC: *Kutaisi-3* (16th century), 742v–744v. The Greek original is unknown.

16. KALLISTRATOS, MARTYR OF ROME

CALENDARS:

Great Synaxarion (September 27).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: *NCM H-341* (11th century), 766–802.

METAPHRASIC 1: *Ivir. georg. 20* (11th century), 98r–105r. Translator: Theophilos the Hieromonk; *O/Sin. georg. 62* (10th century), 48r–49v.

METAPHRASIC 2: *NCM S-384* (11th–12th centuries), 291v–300r; *Kutaisi-4* (1565), 292v–301r.

Publication: Goguadze, 1986, 438–447.

17. LEONTIOS, MARTYR OF TRIPOLI

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (November 14); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (July 18, November 14); New Iadgari (June 18); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (June 18); First Edition of the Menaion (June 17); George Hagiorites' Menaion (June 17); Great Synaxarion (June 18).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: e.g., *NCM A-95* (11th century), 454r–455r; *O/Sin. georg. 11* (10th century), 213v–218v; *O/Sin. georg. 62* (10th century), 48r–49v; *Ivir. georg. 8* (10th century), 334–335; *Oxford, georg. b. 1* (11th century), 180r–181r. The Georgian translation of St. Leontios' martyrdom is an entirely independent and unknown edition. According to Korneli Kekelidze, the Georgian translation preserves the original edition, attributed to a certain Kyros. The Greek text known today was likely expanded later based on the original narrative. Kekelidze argues that the Georgian translation should not be later than the eighth century.

Publication: Kekelidze, 1946, 59–63; Gaprindashvili, 2024, 472–474.

18. LONGINUS THE CENTURION

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (July 17); Ioane Zosime's Calendar (February 11, April 24, July 17, October 15); New Iadgari (September 10); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (October 16); First Edition of the Menaion (October 16); George Hagiorites' Menaion (October 16); Minor Synaxarion (October 16); Great Synaxarion (October 16)

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: *NCM H-341* (11th century), 432–446; *Ivir. georg. 8* (10th century), 271r–275v.

Publication: Kekelidze, 1918, 188–192; Gaprindashvili, 2024, 389–393.

METAPHRASIC: *Kutaisi-4* (16th century), 454r–460r; *NCM S-384* (11th–12th centuries), 402–410; *NCM S-1276* (11th–12th centuries), 117v–124v; *Jer. georg. 37* (13th–16th centuries), 70r–79r. The collection of Georgian translations does not include the work authored by priest Hesychios (†434).

Publication: Goguadze, 2014, 165–172.

19. MERKOURIOS, MARTYR OF CAESAREA OF CAPPADOCIA

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (September 30); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (October 24, November 23, November 24); George Hagiorites' Menaion (November 25); Great Synaxarion (November 25)

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: *NCM A-95* (10th century), 530v–538r; *Ivir. georg.* 28 (1003), 119–133; *O/Sin. georg.* 91 (14th century), 98v–106r.

METAPHRASIC: *NCM A-128* (12th–13th centuries), 208v–220v; *NCM S-382* (12th–13th centuries).

Publication: Akhobadze, 2020, 647–659.

The Paraklētikē praises Merkourios, George, Demetrios, Theodore, Sergios and Bakhhos in a joint hymn (*Ivir. georg.* 45, 286r).

20. MENAS THE EGYPTIAN, MARTYR OF ABU MENA

CALENDARS:

Calendar of Ioane Zosime (May 4, July 10, October 31, November 11, November 12); *O/Sin. georg.* 14 (November 11); George Hagiorites' Menaion (November 11); Great Synaxarion (November 11)

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: *O/Sin. georg.* 11 (11th century), 1r–8r (incomplete).

METAPHRASIC 1: *Ivir. georg.* 36 (11th century), 13v–19v. Translator: Theophilos the Hieromonk.

Publication: Akhobadze, 2020, 285–301.

METAPHRASIC 2: Translated by Ephrem Mc'ire. *NCM A-128* (12th–13th centuries), 60r–66v; *NCM S-384* (11th–12th centuries), 612–635.

Publication: Akhobadze, 2020, 285–301.

21. ORENTIOS AND HIS BROTHERS

CALENDARS:

Great Synaxarion (June 23).

EDITIONS:

METAPHRASIC: *NCM S-417* (13th century), 157v–169v; *Kutaisi-3* (16th century), 227r–241r.

Publication: Kekelidze, 1957, 310–323.

22. POLYEUKTOS, MARTYR OF MELITINE

CALENDARS:

O/Sin. georg. 14 (January 9); George Hagiorites' Menaion (January 9); Great Synaxarion (January 9).

EDITIONS:

METAPHRASTIC: *NCM A-90* (13th century), 223r–228r; *NCM A-188* (13th century), 158v–163r; *O/Sin. georg. 91* (16th century), 170v–176v.

23. PROKOPIOS, MARTYR OF CAESAREA OF PALESTINE

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (June 23, July 8); Ioane Zosime's Calendar (July 8, July 9); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (July 8); First Edition of the Menaion (July 8); George Hagiorites' Menaion (July 8); Minor Synaxarion (July 8); Great Synaxarion (July 8).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASTIC (PROKOPIOS “THE READER”): Early manuscripts: *NCM H-535* (11th century), 175r–177v; *O/Sin. georg. 62* (10th century), 64v–66r; *O/Sin. georg. 11* (10th century), 215v (fragment); *NCM A-199* (12th–13th centuries), 8v–17v.

Publication: Kekelidze, 1946, 108–114; Peeters, 1953, 249–251.

METAPHRASTIC 1 (PROKOPIOS “NEANIA”): Early manuscripts: *Jer. georg. 156* (1040), 101r–105v; *Oxford, georg. b. 1* (11th century), 217r–241r, and others. The translator is likely Euthymios Hagiorites.

METAPHRASTIC 2: *Kutaisi-3* (16th century), 395r–420r. The month and date of the saint's martyrdom recorded in the Georgian translation differ from other versions (July 7, 303).

24. SABAS THE GOTH, MARTYR OF THE DANUBE REGION

CALENDARS:

Ioane Zosime's Calendar (April 15); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (April 15); Minor Synaxarion (April 15); George Hagiorites' Menaion (April 16); Great Synaxarion (April 15).

EDITIONS:

METAPHRASTIC: *Kutaisi-7* (13th century), 218v–226r.

25. SABAS STRATĒLATES, MARTYR OF ROME

CALENDARS:

Minor Synaxarion (April 25, October 29); George Hagiorites' Menaion (April 24); Great Synaxarion (April 25, October 29).

EDITIONS:

METAPHRASTIC: *Kutaisi-7* (13th century), 364r–367r.

26. SERGIOS AND BAKKHOS

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (September 23, October 6, October 7); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (October 6); New Iadgari (October 7); First Edition of the Menaion (October 7); George Hagiorites' Menaion (October 7); Minor Synaxarion (October 7); Great Synaxarion (May 27, October 7).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASTIC: *NCM A-95* (11th century), 502v–512v; *O/Sin. georg. 11* (10th century), 254r–269v. The translation is attributed to Seit‘ (8th century).
Publication: Kekelidze, 1962, 71–93.

METAPHRASTIC: *Kutaisi-4* (1565), 397v–409r; *O/Sin. georg. 91* (14th century), 17v–28r; *Jer. georg. 37* (13th–14th centuries), 51v–60r.
Publication: Goguadze, 2014, 84–98.

27. THEODORE STRATĒLATES

CALENDARS:

Calendar of Ioane Zosime (May 21, June 8, September 25); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (June 8); First Edition of the Menaion (June 8); George Hagiorites' Menaion (June 8); Great Synaxarion (June 8).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASTIC: Early manuscripts include *Oxford, georg. b.1* (11th century), 169–179; *NCM A-1103* (11th century), 244r–255v; *NCM A-199* (12th–13th centuries); *NCM A-388* (12th–13th centuries), 97v–108v. Translated by Euthymios Hagiorites. The name of the author of the *Martyrdom* is not mentioned in the Georgian translation; however, according to the Great Synaxarion, it is

attributed to Abgar, the servant of Theodore. The translation is mentioned in *The Lives of John and Euthymios* and the testament of Euthymios Hagiorites. Euthymios apparent had a text at hand which was closely related to Abgar's work.

Publication: Kavtaria, 1966, 196–218.

METAPHRASIC: *NCM S–417* (12th century), 32r–36v; *Kutaisi–3* (16th century), 78r–84v.

28. THEODORE “TĒRON,” MARTYR OF AMASEIA AND EUCHAITA

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (March 10, June 2, July 2, August 8, the first Saturday of Great Lent); The Ancient Iadgari (first Saturday of Lent, “the readings for St. Theodore are performed on the first Saturday”). In Georgia, there is a tradition of preparing pounded on the first Saturday of Lent as a remembrance of the miracle wherein St. Theodore protected Christians from consuming sacrificial meat. The existence of this tradition in the mentioned era suggests that it likely has a longer history. In the so-called *Čil-etrati Iadgari*, which has Palestinian origins and dates to the 7th–8th centuries, a separate feast for St. Theodore is marked after Cheese-Fare. It cannot be definitively stated which Theodore is implied, but it is more likely that it refers to Theodore Tēron, as it somewhat relates to the preparation period of Lent, like the first Saturday. Theodore Tēron is mentioned on the first Saturday of Lent in George Hagiorites' edition of the Pentakostarion. The authors of the respective hymns are Ioane Minč’xi and John of Damascus; Minor Synaxarion (February 17); Great Synaxarion (September 21, December 1, February 17, the first Saturday of Lent).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC 1: *NCM H–341* (11th century), 551–554; *Ivir. georg. 8* (10th century); 159v–161r; *Ivir. georg. 28* (1003), 19v–27v, and others.

PRE-METAPHRASIC 1 (SECOND PART): *Ivir. georg. 8* (10th century), 161r–166r; *O/Sin. georg. 62* (10th century), 24v–29r; *NCM H–535* (11th century), 121v–126v; *NCM Q–240* (1031), 49v–114r; *NCM H–341* (11th century), 554–559 (the end is missing); *NCM A–1390* (15th century), 36r–50r.

Publication: Gaprindashvili, 2024, 256–263.

METAPHRASIC 1: *Kutaisi–1* (16th century), 59r–63v (short edition).

METAPHRASIC 2: multiple manuscripts, e.g., *Jer. georg. 32* (13th–14th centuries), 52v–59r; *Kutaisi–1* (16th century), 48v–56r; *Kutaisi–30* (18th century), 55v–60r, and others. Likely translated by George Hagiorites from the work of Nikephoros Ouranos.

MIRACLES:

1 MIRACLE: *NCM A-140* (12th–13th centuries), 41r–45v; *NCM A-500* (11th century), 254v–267r; *A-613* (12th–15th centuries), 137v (fragment); *NCM S-4930* (16th–17th centuries), 179v–189v; *Jer. georg. 73* (11th century), 189r–191r; *Ivir. georg. 28* (1003), 27v–34v.

7 MIRACLES: multiple manuscripts, e.g., *NCM Q-762* (13th–14th centuries), 235r–248r; *Kutaisi-30* (18th century), 60r–61r; *Kutaisi-160* (17th–18th centuries), 70v–72r, and others.

12 MIRACLES: *NCM H-341* (11th century), 198–212; *NCM H-1708* (11th century), 39r–57r; *Ivir. georg. 8* (1003), 27–34.

PANEGYRICS:

PANEGYRIC BY GREGORY OF NYSSA: *NCM A-55* (11th–12th centuries), 322r–326v; *NCM A-108* (12th century), 83r–97r; *Kutaisi-8* (16th century), 73v–84v; *Ivir. georg. 14* (14th–16th centuries), 164v–170v.

29. THEODOROS, MARTYR OF PERGE IN PAMPHILIA

CALENDARS:

Minor Synaxarion (September 21); George Hagiorites' Menaion (April 20, April 21); Great Synaxarion (September 21, April 19).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASTIC: translated by Euthymios Hagiorites. *NCM A-1103* (11th century), 279v–285r; *NCM H-1347* (11th–12th century), 447v–453r; *NCM A-128* (12th–13th centuries), 447r–450v; *NCM A-382* (15th century), 83r–86v. The listed MSS provide different dates for the martyrdom of Theodoros: April 21 (*NCM A-1103*), February 17 (*NCM A-128*), and September 21 (*NCM A-382*).

Publication: Gigashvili, 2021, 50–71.

30. VAROS, MARTYR OF EGYPT, BURIED IN PALESTINE

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (May 20); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (June 15, October 24, October 25); New Iadgari (October 25); Great Iadgari (October 26); First Edition of the Menaion (October 19); George Hagiorites' Menaion (October 19); Great Synaxarion (October 19, October 25).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: *NCM H-341* (11th century), 802–824.

METAPHRASIC: *NCM A-1053* (12th century), 69v–79r; *NCM S-1276* (11th–12th centuries), 139v–148v; *Kutaisi-4* (1565), 475v–484v.

Publication: Goguadze, 2014, 192–202.

31. VIKTOR, MARTYR OF DAMASCUS (WITH STEPHANIS)

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (November 11); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (August 8, October 3, November 11); In *O/Sin. georg. 62*, entry 29 states: “On April 18, commemoration of St. Victor, for the reading from the Passion, see October 3”; First Edition of the Menaion (November 11); George Hagiorites’ Menaion (November 11); Great Synaxarion (November 11).

EDITIONS:

PRE-METAPHRASIC 1: *O/Sin. georg. 11* (10th century), 245r–254r; *O/Sin. georg. 62* (11th century), 29r.

Publication: Javakhishvili, 1947, 166–171.

PRE-METAPHRASIC 2: *NCM H-341* (11th century), 343–356.

32. 40 MARTYRS OF SEBASTE

CALENDARS:

Lectionary of Jerusalem (Marc 9; Fourth Saturday of Great Lent; August 25; October 13); Calendar of Ioane Zosime (March 9; October 13); Ancient Iadgari (March 9; Fourth Saturday of Lent); First Edition of the Menaion (March 9); *O/Sin. georg. 14* (March 9); George Hagiorites’ Menaion (March 9); Great Synaxarion (March 9).

Editions:

PRE-METAPHRASIC: Numerous MSS. The oldest: *Ivir. georg. 8* (10th century), 180v–186r; *Ivir. georg. 28* (1003), 34v–43v; *Oxford, georg. 1* (11th century), 5r–12r; *NCM H-1708* (11th century), 58r–74v; *NCM H-2258* (12th–13th century), 111r–115v; *NCM H-2396* (12th century), 72r–74v. Translated from the Armenian.

PUBLICATION: Abuladze, 1975, 123–144; Gaprindashvili, 2024, 282–290.

METAPHRASIC: *NCM A-1485* (1727), 151v–155v; *Kutaisi-2* (16th century), 128v–137v; *NCM A-5* (1556), 167–176; *NCM S-1246* (16th century), 346r–353r; *Kutaisi-18* (18th century), 127v–135v.

ENCOMIA:

Basil of Caesarea's encomium: *O/Sin. georg. 32–57–33* (864), 109v–119v; *NCM A–95* (X), 217v–223r; *Ivir. georg. 8* (10th century), 187v–194v; *Ivir. georg. 32* (49) (981), 210v–219v; *Jer. georg. 14* (1055), 462v–474v; *Oxford, georg. 1* (11th century), 12r–20r; *NCM S–1246* (16th century), 346r–353; *Kutaisi–2* (16th century), 137v–145v. The listed manuscripts contain two different editions.

Publication: Gaprindashvili, 2024, 290–298.

GREGORY OF NYSSA'S ENCOMIUM: *NCM A–55* (11th–12th century), 326v–334r; *NCM A–108* (12th century), 111v–119v; *Ivir. georg. 14* (14th–15th century), 179–182; *Ivir. georg. 49* (11th century), 39v–41r.

GREGORY OF NYSSA'S ENCOMIUM 2: *Ivir. georg. 14* (14th–15th century), 179–182; *Ivir. georg. 49* (11th century), 41r–44r.

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