



Հարգելի՛ ընթերցող.

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ROYAL IMAGERY
IN
MEDIEVAL GEORGIA

ANTONY EASTMOND

ROYAL IMAGERY
IN
MEDIEVAL GEORGIA

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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for my parents

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Photograph Sources

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Georgian

ა	a	ბ	b	გ	g	დ	d
ე	e	ვ	v	ზ	z	თ	t
ი	i	კ	k	ლ	l	მ	m
ნ	n	ო	o	პ	p'	ჭ	ǰ [zh]
რ	r	ს	s	ტ	t'	ყ	q'
ფ	p	კ	k	ღ	ǧ [gh]	ყ	q'
შ	š [sh]	ჩ	č [ch]	ც	c [ts]	ძ	dz
წ	c' [ts]	ჭ	ǰ [ch]	ხ	x [kh]	ჯ	j
ჰ	h						

Archaic letters:

ჳ	ey	ა	y	ჴ	wi	ჶ	x
ჵ	ho						

The system of transliteration used for Georgian is adapted from that used in the *Revue des Études Géorgiennes et Caucasiennes*. The transliteration of Russian is designed to keep the spelling of Georgian names and the pronunciation of letters as close as possible to the system used for Georgian. Despite this, many inconsistencies in the spelling of names remain because so many different transliteration systems have been adopted in the past across Europe (for example, Cincadze is also spelled Tsintsadze or Zinzadze). Where possible, these variants have been pointed out in the Bibliography.

A B B R E V I A T I O N S

- | | |
|--|---|
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Aladašvili, <i>Živopisnaia škola Svaneti</i></p> <p>Alibegašvili, <i>Svetskii portret</i></p> <p>Allen, <i>History</i></p> <p>Alpago-Novello, <i>Art and Architecture</i></p> <p>Amiranšvili, <i>Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva</i></p> <p>BK
BMGS</p> <p>Brosset, <i>Histoire de la Géorgie</i></p> <p>BSOAS</p> <p>ByzForsch
ByzSlav</p> | <p><i>Ars Georgica</i>
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and African Studies</i>
<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
<i>Byzantinoslavica</i></p> |
|--|---|

- BZ
CahArch
Calo' Mariani, *L'arte georgiana*
- CSCO
- Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*
- Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*
- DOP
Ieni, *Primo simposio*
- JÖB
- JWAG
JWCI
- KC
- KC'K
- KIC'
- KISK'
- Lit'Xel*
- Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*
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- OrChr *Oriens Christianus*
- Pätsch, *Das Leben* G. Pätsch, trans., *Das Leben Kartlis: Eine Chronik aus Georgien, 300–1200*, Leipzig, 1985
- PG *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1857–66
- REArm *Revue des Études Arméniens*
- REB *Revue des Études Byzantines*
- REGC *Revue des Études Géorgiennes et Caucasiennes*
- REI *Revue des Études Islamiques*
- SabXel *Sabč'ota Xelovneba* (Soviet art)
- Salia, *History* K. Salia, *History of the Georgian Nation*, Paris, 1980
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| TM | <i>Travaux et Mémoires</i> |
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| <i>IV^e Symposium</i> | Offprints from <i>IV^e Symposium international sur l'art géorgien</i> , Tbilisi, 1983 |

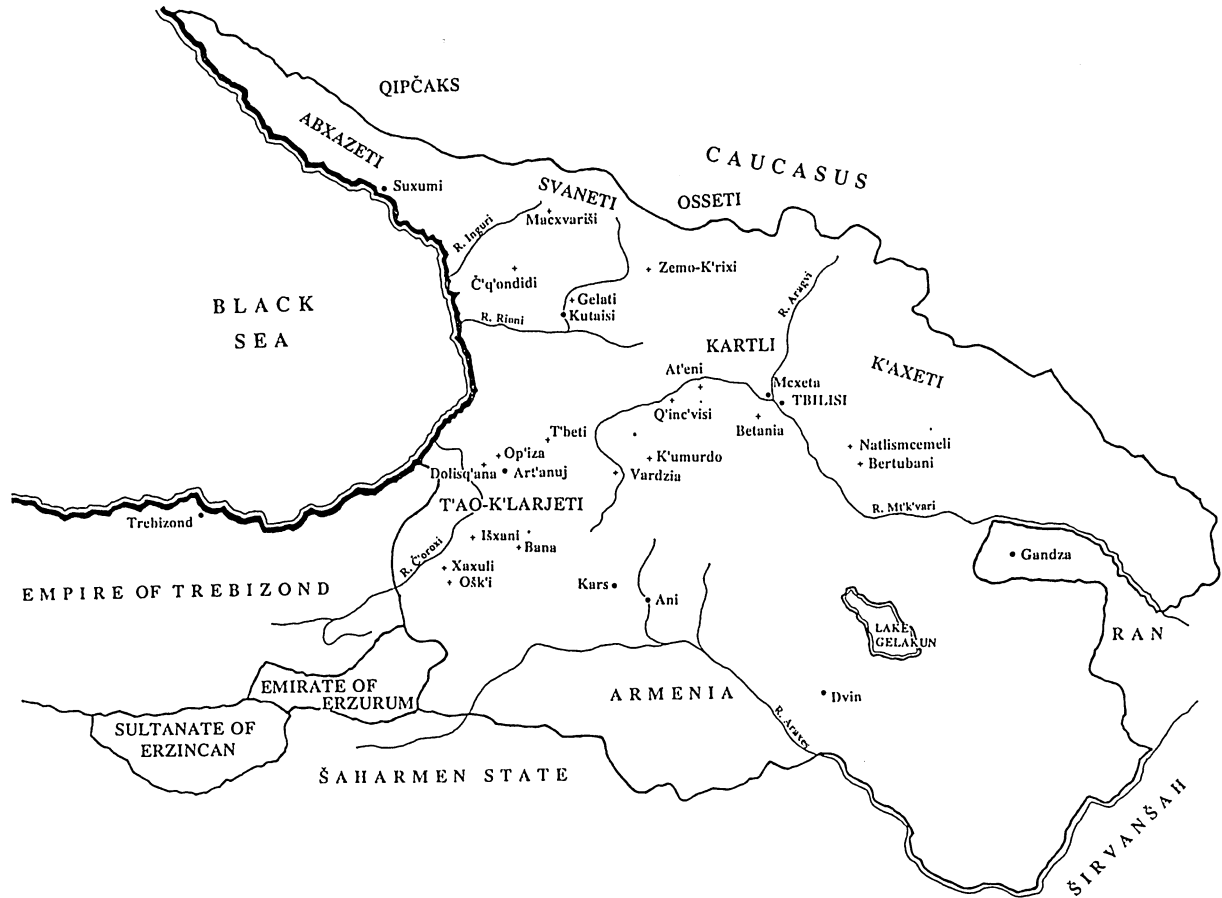
INTRODUCTION

This book examines the ways in which art was used to promote the power and rule of the Bagrat'ioni rulers of Georgia in Caucasia. It covers the period of the rise of the Bagrat'ioni dynasty from rulers of the minor principality of T'ao-K'larjeti in southwest Georgia in the ninth century to the rulers of the major power in eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus at the beginning of the thirteenth century. From this period survive fourteen major monumental images as well as a number of smaller images on coins and icons, which can all be used to determine the ways in which art helped to create and define perceptions of power in the country. This is the first work in English to examine a theme in Georgian art in detail.¹

I am interested in the images of rulers as symbols and ideals, rather than as naturalistic portraits or as accurate portrayals of political realities. The monumental images set up in churches between the tenth and thirteenth centuries provided the public face of the Bagrat'ioni family: they show the ways they wished to be seen by their subjects, and the ways in which they wished their power to be perceived. This is an exercise in the study of imagery. I am not concerned with the realities of power or with the day-to-day execution of authority in Georgia, but rather with the way in which art could be used to promote particular notions of power. This is not, therefore, a positivist attempt to reconstruct the "real" nature of each ruler behind the propagandist façade of his or her image.

My approach is to give the surviving visual evidence far greater weight as important historical evidence of the reigns of the kings and queens it depicts. It demonstrates the self-perception of the monarchy and its court. More important, these images are not merely reflections of the political situation at any particular time. They were actively involved in creating and defining new perceptions of the monarchy to

1. All works in Western languages have been in the form of general surveys, such as R. Mepisašvili and V. Cincaze, *The Arts of Ancient Georgia*, London, 1979; Alpago-Novello, *Art and Architecture*; V. Beridze, G. Alibegašvili, A. Vol'skaia, and L. Xuskivadze, *The Treasures of Georgia*, London, 1984; or catalogues, such as Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*.



Map of Georgia at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

suit different needs and audiences. The images of glory and power seen in the churches have, traditionally, been taken at face value, with little attempt made to investigate their more complex meanings. I argue that the pictorial context of royal images must be examined in order more fully to understand their possible interpretation. The juxtaposition of images, the inclusion of particular scenes, and the choice of individual saints were all used to enhance the portrayal of rulers, and they provide new ways to define and explain the nature of the rulers' power. Analyses of the images that ignore their context pass by much of their meaning.

By placing much greater weight on visual evidence, this book must examine the relationship between the images and the historical texts and chronicles that describe the reigns of the rulers they depict. Both forms of evidence have sought to promote particular images of the people they describe, and have sought to impose patterns of interpretation that will fix those images for posterity. Traditionally, most emphasis has been placed on the models of power presented in the textual evidence, since these also provided the chronological and factual frameworks of each reign. Visual evidence is normally appended to this to provide illustration of these conclusions. Thus, within the scope of this book, the greatness of Davit III *kuropalates* (961–1000)

or of Queen Tamar (1184–1213) is supported by the magnificence or quantity of their images and the buildings that contain them, whereas the military failures of Giorgi II (1072–89) are reflected in the supposed insignificance of images of the king. Art has been used only to support textual conclusions and has been regarded as the natural accompaniment of military or political success. Thus, the interpretation of art derives entirely from external politics: it reflects rather than embodies or creates.

The principal historical sources considered in this book are the chronicles collected together in *Kartlis Cxovreba* (literally *The Life of Kartli = The Annals of Georgia*).² This comprises a series of texts written over several hundred years, which were first collected together in the twelfth century, and then added to in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Each chronicle is a separate entity, but shares many common properties. Principal among these is that all the texts are *royal* accounts of Georgian history. Unlike Byzantine or Armenian historical writers, Georgian chroniclers all seem to have worked within the royal court and to have produced “official” accounts of each reign. Thus, despite their differences, they give an overall uniformity and composure to the reigns, and paint a wholly positive picture of expansionist progression, which stresses the virtues and victories of all rulers, while minimizing or ignoring defects and defeats. This has overwhelmed the visual evidence, which provides instead a more fragmented and at times incoherent picture.

By using visual evidence as my main source of evidence, I seek to reverse this process. The history of the Bagrat'ionis this source provides is no less manufactured or manipulative than that in *Kartlis Cxovreba*, but it is able to reveal new insights. This is because each royal image had to be adapted to its own immediate circumstances, rather than fit into a preconceived structure, as in *Kartlis Cxovreba*. The images produced show the ultimate aspirations of each ruler as well as reveal the immediate concerns and developments to which the rulers' images had to adapt. The monumental art could be directly related to specific times and therefore had to address the specific concerns of those times. It could not divorce itself from circumstances in the same way as the chronicles could. By placing each image in its immediate context, it will be possible to trace the development of the royal image, as well as to examine the possible causes for each change. I will demonstrate that the relatively straightforward progression proposed for each ruler in the chronicles is greatly at odds with the often contradictory and confused image provided in the art produced during his or her reign. This study reveals that there was little stability in the production of royal imagery. It shows that royal imagery had to be adapted to many different audiences, and that it had to change to suit different rulers. This became particularly important in the reign of Queen Tamar, when attitudes toward gender roles forced the presentation of royal power to be rethought. Queen Tamar was the

2. The individual chronicles are listed in the Bibliography. On Georgian historical writing, see C. Toumanoff, “Medieval Georgian Historical Literature (VIIth–XVth Centuries),” *Traditio* 1, 1943, 139–82.

first woman to rule in Georgia in her own right, and the promotion of the queen became very important as others sought to undermine her position. Royal imagery gained a new urgency as the best means to demonstrate her right to rule and her ability so to do.

The aim of this book, then, is to reintegrate visual material into history, and to exploit its evidence.

The evidence of royal imagery in Georgia allows another, fundamental question to be asked. This is about who controlled royal imagery. So far, I have given the impression that royal imagery was produced by the rulers it promoted. However, in more than half of the churches to be discussed here there is evidence from secondary donor images that the imagery was commissioned or paid for by nonroyal donors. This allows us to gain new insights into Georgian history. Unlike the chronicles of *Kartlis Cxovreba*, which present the royal version of Georgian history, we here have the opportunity to uncover aristocratic and ecclesiastical perceptions of the monarchy. It is, therefore, possible to investigate the role played by these people: to assess how much influence they had on the design and creation of royal imagery, and to examine whether they altered the appearance or purpose of royal imagery to their own ends. The evidence from medieval Georgia allows for these questions about patronage to be examined in some detail. It is possible to investigate the dimensions of the social base responsible for building and decorating churches and the individual effect of patrons on each monument.

I argue against any notion of centralized control over royal imagery, but suggest instead that it was manipulated and altered by individuals to suit their particular local requirements or political pressures. The imagery contained in royal portraits was not as straightforwardly "propagandist" as at first appears. It worked on behalf of many different groups, and was aimed at many different audiences. The evidence about patronage helps to explain the apparent inconsistency of the images and the many ways in which royal power is actually defined and presented in the churches.

The argument used in this book necessarily involves, to an extent, the question of patronal or authorial intention, an issue that has been much explored in recent art history.³ Royal imagery was always included with particular purposes in mind; it was an important vehicle for expressing views of royal power and authority. The question of intention cannot, therefore, be avoided. However, I am aware that it is fraught with problems: intentions can never be conclusively established, and any speculation thereupon is open to rival interpretations, especially today, so long after the production of the images. However, given the absence of any information about the viewing public in Georgia and its reception of these images, any interpretations of the images must rely mainly on the visual evidence of the churches. This evidence,

3. For an introduction to the issues involved, see M. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, New Haven, 1985.

supplemented by the chronicle records, provides information about the patrons and historical creation of particular monuments, and it is on this that I base my interpretations. I do not seek to attribute specific intentions to specific patrons; rather, I hope to establish the general patterns of intention that could lie behind the creation of Georgian monuments. I take as my main assumption that all secular imagery was intended to enhance the authority of the people it depicted, and I attempt to ascertain what visual devices were used to achieve this. Changing historical circumstances were clearly important in affecting the limits within which the depictions could operate. My interpretations are based on the comparative evidence provided by all the churches, and I look at how the meanings of all the images in the churches are exploited to explain or enhance the royal images.

The advantage of studying royal imagery in Georgia lies not only in the quantity and quality of the available material, but also in the unique cultural and political position of the country. It lies on many borders: on the physical frontier between Europe and Asia, dominated by the Caucasus Mountains, which make up its northern border, and by the Black Sea to the west; on the religious frontier between Christianity and Islam; and on the cultural border between the great empires of Byzantium and Persia. In addition it had its own local heritage of the Christian kingdom of Georgia, created in the fourth century, and of its Armenian neighbors. The range of possible influences and models open to the Bagrat'ionis was enormous, as were the pressures as each new power to east and west sought to conquer Georgia on its way to its greater rivals beyond.

The Bagrat'ionis rose to power at the end of the eighth century, some two hundred years after the previous Xosroid Georgian monarchy had been abolished by the Persians, and a century after the Arab invasions of the Caucasus. These had combined to destroy much of Georgia's infrastructure, and very few images of these earlier Georgian kings survive. In general, the Bagrat'ionis ignored the inheritance of this previous dynasty, preferring to ground their right to rule on their claimed descent from the prophet-king David and to draw their imagery from more contemporary sources. The Xosroids, who based much of their culture on Persia rather than Byzantium, could provide little extra legitimacy for the new rulers. Their greatest kings, Mirian (who converted Georgia to Christianity) and Vaxtang Gorgasali, are occasionally referred to as model rulers in the chronicles, but otherwise it seems that the Bagrat'ionis wished to look elsewhere for their ideal of power.

The history of Georgia in the period of the rise of the Bagrat'ionis to control and unify the country is very complex.⁴ Even the notion of "Georgia" as a country can be questioned. Throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, the territory of Georgia was divided into many small kingdoms and principalities whose rulers vied with

4. For general treatments of the medieval history of Georgia, see Allen, *History*, 69–108; Salia, *History*, 127–202; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*; A. Manvelichvili, *Histoire de Géorgie*, Paris, 1951, 145–222; H. Fähnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens von den Anfängen bis zur Mongolenherrschaft*, Aachen, 1993, 122–67.

each other for power and land. In the Northwest the Ančabadze family ruled in Abxazeti and dominated the western half of the country, extending their power into Kartli (the "Iberia" of Byzantine sources) in the tenth century. Muslim power was concentrated in the emirate of Tbilisi; and the eastern province of K'axeti was ruled by the Donauri family, with the title of *korepiskopos* (a title adapted from the Greek *khorepiskopos*, archbishop).⁵ The Bagrat'ionis were merely one family of princes among many.⁶ They had only established themselves in T'ao-K'larjeti, in the Southwest of Georgia, under Ašot' I the Great (786–826) at the beginning of the ninth century. Ašot' I ruled from Art'anuj, the principal fortress city of the Č'oroxi (Çoruh) valley, which controlled much of the trade moving east from the Black Sea, and managed to receive recognition for his position from both the caliph in Baghdad and the emperor in Constantinople, who gave him the titles of prince and *kuropalates* of Kartli respectively in 806. This followed the recognition given by the same powers to his distant relative, Ašot Bagratuni of Armenia, in 806.

The lands Ašot' I governed, including T'ao, K'larjeti, and Kartli, were divided among his three children, who indulged in complex internecine politics. In 888 Adarnase II (881–923) received the title of king of Kartli from both Baghdad and Constantinople, again on the tail of Ašot I the Great Bagratuni of Armenia, who had been similarly elevated in 884. Once more Bagrat'ioni lands were fragmented among Adarnase's four sons, and in the course of the tenth century, power became concentrated in the hands of the ruler of T'ao, while the king of Kartli saw his authority usurped by the expansion of Abxazetian power.

The first stage in the unification of Georgia only came about in 1008 when a series of dynastic alliances brought Abxazeti, Kartli, and T'ao-K'larjeti under the control of Bagrat' III, but it was to be another century before both K'axeti and Tbilisi came under Bagrat'ioni rule as well. It was this cumulative kingdom that made up Georgia, but its fragmentary origin and nature were reflected in the titles held by all the Bagrat'ioni kings. Even as late as the reign of Queen Tamar (1184–1213), power was conceived in these cumulative terms: "By the will of God, Tamar Bagratuniani, King and Queen of the Abxazetians, Kartlians, Radians, K'axetians, and Armenians; Šarvanšah and Šahanšah; Ruler of all the East and the West."⁷ Royal imagery had to cope with the diverse nature of the kingdom that the Bagrat'ionis ruled: it had to accommodate both Christian and Muslim subjects, as well as many formerly separate territories.

5. On this title, see T. P'ap'uašvili, *Ranta da k'axta samepo* (The principality of Ran and K'axeti), Tbilisi, 1982, 255–85.

6. On the origins of the Bagrat'ioni family and its relationship to the Armenian Bagratuni family, see Allen, *History*, 79–83; C. Toumanoff, "The Bagratids of Iberia from the Eighth to the Eleventh Century," *Le Muséon* 74, 1961, 5–42. Toumanoff gives an account of all the branches of the family in Georgia from 780 to 1008, when the kingdoms were unified under Bagrat' III.

7. *KISK'*, 77, translated by the author, as are all subsequent translations into English unless otherwise noted; S. S. Kakabadze, trans., *Gruzinskie dokumenty IX–XV vv.*, Moscow, 1982, 56–58 (no. 11):

თამარ ბაგრატიუნია[ნმან - ნ]ეპითა დემერთისაითა აფხაზთა და ქართველთა, რანთა, კახთა და სომეხთა მეფემან და დედოფალმან, შარვანშა და შაჰანშა და ყოვლისა აღმოსავლეთისა და დასავლეთისა თუითმფლობელმან...

PART 1

MONUMENTS

I

ROYAL IMAGERY BEFORE THE UNIFICATION OF GEORGIA (888–1008)

სადა არს პატივი მთავრობისა, მუნ არს მსგავსებაჲ ღმრთეებისა
Where there is the honor of power, there is the likeness of God.
—Giorgi Merčule, *Life of St. Grigol Xandzteli*

The earliest surviving royal image from medieval Georgia comes from the cathedral of T'beti in Šavšeti (Figs. 1–3). It is a high-relief carving in stone, and depicts the relatively obscure prince of T'ao, Ašot' II K'uxi, *eristav of eristavs (eristavt-eristavni, or senior provincial governor)*,¹ who ruled 891–918.² Ašot' wears a heavily patterned tunic and, hanging from his shoulders, a long-sleeved surcoat embroidered with lions. He is bearded and has on his head a turbanlike headdress; fragments of a halo can be seen behind his head. Originally he held a model of the cathedral out in front of himself as an offering to God. Almost nothing is known about this man, who was eclipsed by his nephew and successor, Gurgen II the Great, *magistros* (918–941).³ However, the finely carved details of the image provide an excellent

1. *Eristav* is the equivalent of the Byzantine *strategos*.

2. For details about the cathedral and the donor image, see Appendix I, A.

3. Gurgen appears prominently in KC 1 (*Cxovreba da Uc'q'eba Bagrat'onianta*), 379₂₄–380₁₂; Pätsch, *Das Leben*, 470–71; and in Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando imperio*, ed. and trans. G. Moravcsik and R.J.H. Jenkins, Washington, D.C., 1967, chaps. 45–46.

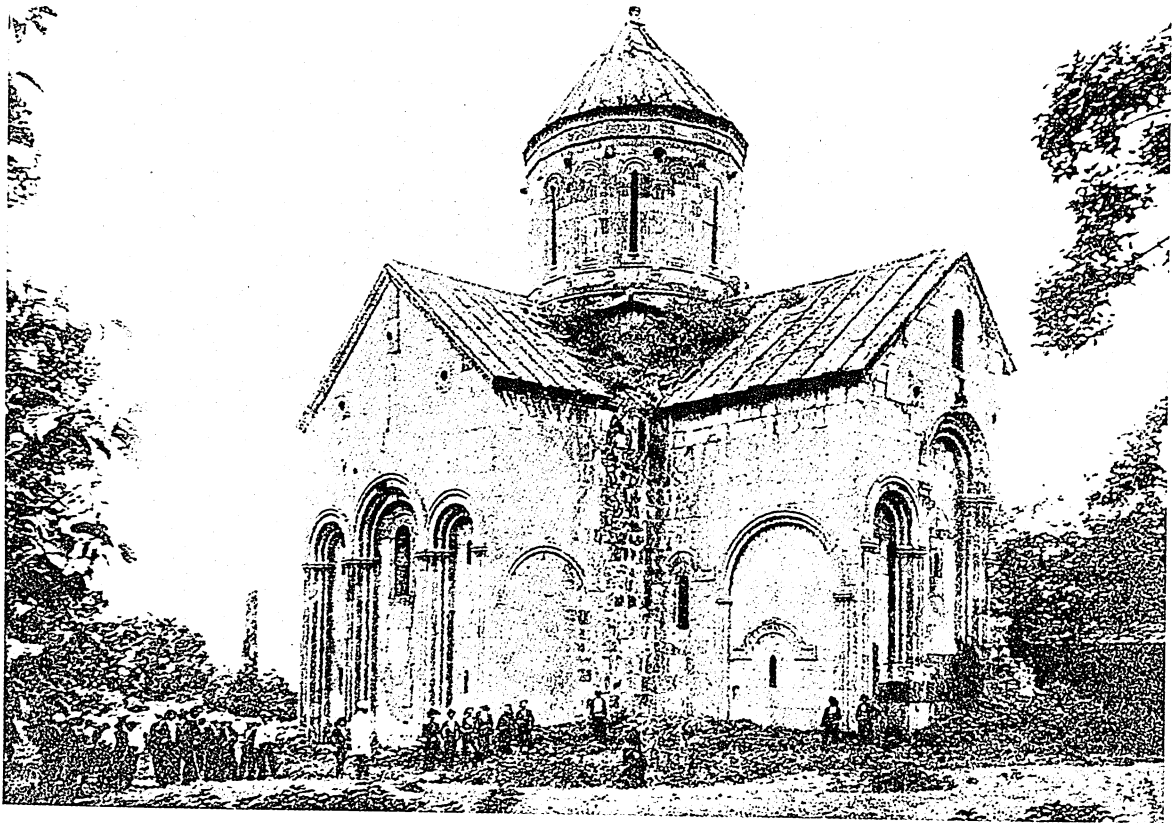


Fig. 1. T'beti. Cathedral of the Mother of God. Exterior from southwest in 1888 (after Pavlinov).

starting point from which to explore many of the issues related to the interpretation of royal imagery.

The first points to note are the date and location of the image. It was carved around the beginning of the tenth century, a century after the establishment of the Bagrat'ioni family in the region under Ašot' I the Great *kuropalates* (d. 826). From these first one hundred years no visual imagery survives. The image of Ašot' II thus appears to burst fully formed into the history of Georgian art.⁴ The extraordinary detail and apparent realism with which the image is carved and the very elaborate nature of Ašot's costume suggest that this cannot be considered a first attempt at portraying royal figures. The records of *Kartlis Cxovreba* and saints' lives tell us that the first rulers were active patrons of the church, and it is probable that their foun-

4. Other images of secular figures do survive from this period, but none can be compared to the T'beti relief in size or quality. See N. A. Aladašvili, *Monumental'naia skul'ptura Gruzii*, Moscow, 1977, figs. 65 (Borjomi), 69 (Kaisi Jvari), 72 (Petobani), 90 (Vale); I. T. Nikoleischwili, "Georgische Ikonostasreliefs des 10.-11. Jahrhunderts mit Darstellungen historischer Persönlichkeiten," *Georgica* 15, 1992, 144-50.



Fig. 2. T'beti. Donor relief of Ašot' II K'uxi (891–918). State Museum of Fine Arts, Tbilisi.



Fig. 3. T'beti. Schema of relief of Ašot' II K'uxi (after Djobadze).

dations also contained images of the early royal family.⁵ The absence of earlier images may be attributable to the rebuilding of many churches in the tenth century, or to the later terrible destruction wrought by the Turks. As will become clear from the later relief images, it is impossible to extrapolate backward to determine the nature of any hypothetical earlier images. We must, therefore, start our investigation in c. 900. This coincides with the elevation of Ašot' II's cousin, Adarnase II Bagrat'ioni, to be first king of Kartli (Byzantine Iberia) in 888, but it is doubtful that this marked any sort of turning point in the use or appearance of royal imagery, especially as Ašot' II belonged to a different branch of the family.

5. For example: Ašot' I the Great's Church of Sts. Peter and Paul at Art'anuj, c. 813 (KC 1 [*Cxovreba da Uc'q'eba Bagrat'onianta*], 377₁₋₆; Pätsch, *Das Leben*, 466), Guaram *mampali* at Op'iza before 882 (KC 1 [*Mat'iane Kartlisa*], 260₂₄₋₂₅; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 264), and all the sons of Ašot' I the Great at Šat'berdi (Merčule, *Life of St. Grigol Xandzteli*, 262₃₂₋₂₆₃₂; Latin trans. in P. Peeters, "Histoires monastiques géorgiennes," *Analecta Bollandiana* 36, 1917, 235₁₋₅).

The location of the image in Šavšeti (the region to the northeast of T'ao-K'larjeti) is perhaps more important, primarily because of the status of the Bagrat'ioni family. Although Adarnase had recently been raised to the rank of king, the various branches of the family were still only minor princes in all the territory of Georgia, their power matched or eclipsed by the emirate of Tbilisi and the expansionist Ančabadzes of Abxazeti.⁶ Yet it is only from the Bagrat'ionis that royal imagery survives. That they should have been so concerned to promote themselves and their images so prominently and so visibly in the churches they founded is, in itself, an important issue, reflecting their self-perception as powerful and noteworthy rulers. In the long term, the Bagrat'ionis' patronage of imagery took on greater significance, since it was they who came to dominate all Georgia: their imagery formed the basis for all future royal art in Georgia. In fact, very little evidence of royal imagery in the other kingdoms of Georgia survives. The only monumental example, from K'umurdo, built under the Abxazetian King Leon III in 964, when his territory extended into Javaxeti, is exceptional and was influenced by the nearby examples of Bagrat'ioni royal art.⁷

The concentration of royal imagery and its promotion in T'ao-K'larjeti had other profound effects on its development and on the functioning of the imagery. T'ao-K'larjeti acted as a border region to both Byzantium and Armenia, which each had designs on the territory. Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos's *De administrando imperio* devotes two chapters to Byzantine involvement in the region in the first half of the tenth century and tries to explain some of the complex family battles in which Byzantium had become enmeshed.⁸ The strong Byzantine presence in the area comes across clearly, however, as do the close links between the Byzantine imperial family and the Bagrat'ionis. This influence makes its mark in the reliefs carved later in the tenth century.

The Armenians to the south were also very influential, with many Armenians living in T'ao (Tayk, in Armenian). More important, the Bagrat'ionis of Georgia were related to the Bagratunis of Armenia, and, at this time, all their promotions and titles were gained after their (at this time more powerful) Armenian relatives had themselves been elevated. The Armenian royal family was more heavily influenced by Persia, and this opened up a new source of influence to the Bagrat'ionis. It should also not be forgotten that a local artistic heritage existed in the Christian monuments erected before the Arabic invasions of the second half of the seventh century.⁹ Some of these churches, notably Jvari in Mcxeta, contained their own elements of royal imagery.¹⁰

6. In 908 the Ančabadzes took effective control of all Kartli, leaving the Iberian branch of the Bagrat'ioni family merely titular kings of the region.

7. This church is discussed below, pages 34–38.

8. Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando imperio*, chaps. 45–46.

9. C. Toumanoff, "Iberia on the Eve of Bagratid Rule: An Enquiry into the Political History of Eastern Georgia Between the VIth and the IXth Century," *Le Muséon* 65, 1952, 17–49, 199–258.

10. G. N. Čubinašvili, *Pamiatniki tipa Džvari*, Tbilisi, 1948, 2 vols. The reliefs at Jvari are discussed below.

Thus, the historical and cultural background to Ašot's relief at T'beti is very complex, and to a certain extent this is reflected in the image itself. Ašot's physical appearance and actions provide the only evidence from which to assess anything about the man or his rule. They provide an impression about his ideal of power: the way in which he wanted to be seen and the way in which he visualized how his authority should appear. This may not have reflected Ašot's actual grasp of power, or the normal appearance of his ceremonial, but it does show the aspirations of his rule and

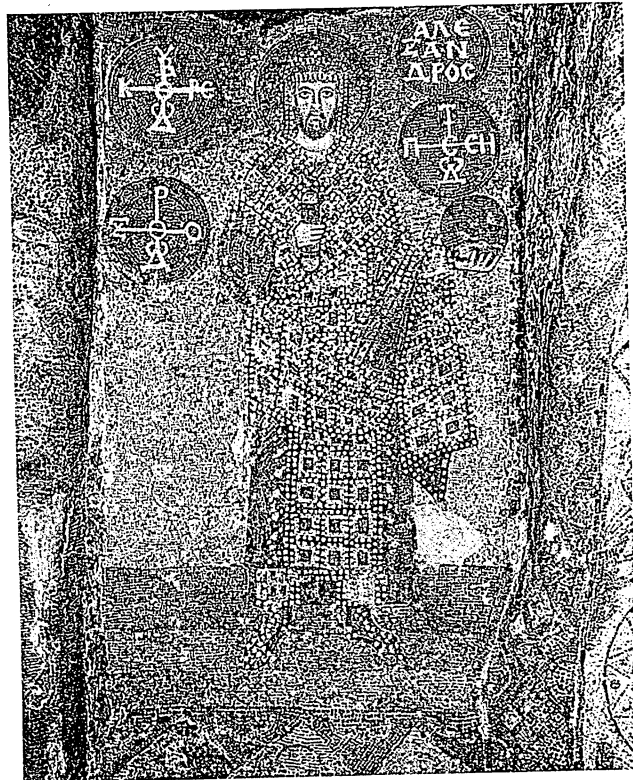


Fig. 4. Constantinople. Hagia Sophia. North gallery. Emperor Alexander (912–13).

the possible models from which he derived his ideas. In this we are greatly helped by the survival of contemporary images of power from both Byzantium and Armenia. These, at least, allow us to compare Ašot's image of power with that of the two other Christian kingdoms in the region.

The first comparison to be made is with the image of the Byzantine emperor Alexander in the north gallery of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Fig. 4). This was set up in 912–13 and shows what must be regarded as the ultimate in Christian imperial costume.¹¹ Alexander wears the most sumptuous ceremonial robes, including

11. P. A. Underwood and E.J.W. Hawkins, "The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia at Istanbul: The Portrait of the Emperor Alexander: A Report on Work Done by the Byzantine Institute in 1959 and 1960," *DOP* 15, 1961, 187–217.



Fig. 5. Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross (915–21). West façade. King Gagik of Vaspurakan.

the imperial *skaramangion* tunic and the *loros*, the heavy gem-encrusted scarf wrapped around his body. The emperor also wears a crown with hanging jewels, *pendilia*; he holds an orb and the *akakia*, the two symbols of imperial power. If Ašot' had wanted a model for the trappings of a Christian ruler, then this would surely have provided it. However, despite his family's acceptance of Byzantine titles and the robes that came with them,¹² Ašot's robes do not seem to have been tailored to imitate the vision of power readily presented by this imperial paradigm. Nor did Ašot' adopt the supreme imperial medium of mosaic for his image, preferring instead to use high-relief carving, a technique almost unknown in Byzantium in this period.

Instead, Ašot' II seems to have been more influenced by Eastern manifestations of power, as seen in the image of King Gagik of Vaspurakan (central Armenia) on the west façade of the Church of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar (built 915–21; Fig. 5).¹³

12. See, for example, Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando imperio*, chap. 46_{48–53}.

13. S. Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar: Church of the Holy Cross*, Cambridge, Mass., 1965, 30–32 and fig. 7. For the most recent discussion of the sculptural program and its possible royal interpretation, see L. Jones, "The Church of the Holy Cross and the Iconography of Kingship," *Gesta* 33, 1994, 104–17.

The lozenge-patterned tunic worn by Ašot' is very similar in both form and decoration to that worn by Gagik and by all the other royal figures on the façades of the church, whether biblical or historical. Gagik's main robe, decorated with birds in roundels, seems to be made of a richly embroidered silk similar to that of Ašot's. However, the form of Gagik's dress, as a simple mantle clasped at the breast by a broach, is clearly different from Ašot's long-sleeved surcoat. Gagik's robes reflect the strong Persian influences on Armenia at this time (even if they do not exactly reproduce them), and it is known that the Armenian king had received both his crown and royal robes from the caliph.¹⁴ In turn, the similar use of luxurious materials by Gagik and Ašot' II suggests that the rulers of T'ao were also influenced by these Eastern manifestations of power. However, the form of the robes still reveals marked differences, and the style of the reliefs is very different. The Islamic world, via Armenia, provided a model for the use of luxurious material in Georgia, but not for the form of dress.

However, this simple dichotomy between East and West and the "orientalizing" nature of Ašot's robes should not be overstressed,¹⁵ since Byzantium too made use of these silk designs. A piece of silk dated by inscription to the joint reigns of the emperors Romanos I and Christophoros Lekapenos (921–23) survives in Siegburg, bearing a lion motif very similar to that on Ašot's robes.¹⁶ This provides contemporary evidence of the sort of material produced in the imperial workshops in Constantinople and shows that such silks were becoming an "international" symbol of rulership, rather than a specifically Islamic image of power.¹⁷

In analyzing Ašot' II's dress, it is also possible to turn to one other source: the local Caucasian heritage of the Christian kingdoms that had existed before the Arabic conquests of the end of the seventh century. The monuments of Jvari (586/7–605/6) in Georgia (Fig. 6)¹⁸ and Mren (638–40) in Armenia¹⁹ show high-ranking donors with draped over their shoulders the same long-sleeved surcoats as worn by Ašot', which suggests that the form of these robes had long acted as an indicator of rank and position in the Caucasus. None of the robes, however, is made of the same richly em-

14. Thomas Artsruni, *History of the House of Artsrunik'*, ed. and trans. R. W. Thomson, Detroit, 1985, 347–48.

15. This is how W. Djbadze, "The Georgian Churches Tao-Klarjeti: Construction Methods and Materials (IX to XI Century)," *OrChr* 62, 1978, 132, characterizes Ašot's robes, even though he notes the Byzantine comparisons.

16. A. Grabar, "Le succès des arts orientaux à la cour byzantin sous les Macédoniens," *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 2, 1951, 32–60.

17. See R. S. Cormack, "But Is It Art?" in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. J. Shephard and S. Franklin, Aldershot, 1992, 218–36, esp. 231–36, who discusses the use of Islamic imagery "to invoke the international 'fellowship' of kings." See also A. Muthesius, "Crossing Traditional Boundaries: Grub to Glamour in Byzantine Silk Weaving," *BMGS* 15, 1991, 326–65, esp. 338.

18. On Jvari, see W. Djbadze, "The Sculptures on the Eastern Façade of the Holy Cross of Mtzkheta," *OrChr* 44, 1960, 112–35; *OrChr* 45, 1961, 70–77. The three figures at Jvari who wear the long-sleeved surcoat are Stepanos I, *patrikios* of Kartli, and Demet're and Adarnase *hypatoi*.

19. J.-M. and N. Thierry, "La cathédrale de Mren et sa décoration," *CabArch* 21, 1971, 43–77, esp. figs. 13 and 17–19. The two figures depicted at Mren are the princes Nerse Kamsarakan and Davit Sarahuni.



Fig. 6. Mtskheta. Jvari (Church of the Cross).
South side of main apse. Demet'rius *hypatos*
(586/7–605/6).

brocaded material as that at T'beti. Is it possible that Ašot' II was using these robes deliberately to invoke the memory and glory of these Caucasian predecessors?²⁰

It would be easy to conclude that the eclectic mixture of elements that are discernible in Ašot's dress reflects the confused nature of his rule and that he had no clear concept of his own power. Given his peripheral grasp on power within the Bagrat'ioni family, this would seem quite probable. However, it is interesting to note that he was not prepared just to adopt wholesale one mode of appearance; his power was not merely imitative. Instead, it seems as if Ašot' were trying to imprint as many indicators of power as possible onto one cloth. This device might appear to have been taken to excess by Ašot', but it displays his own perception of power: he was

20. A series of figures on the south and east walls of the Sioni Church at At'eni are also depicted wearing similar long-sleeved robes. These probably date from the tenth-century restoration of the church and so testify to the use of this form of dress elsewhere in Georgia at this time. See G. Abramišvili, "Dva stroitel'nyx perioda atenskogo Siona," *Macne* 1972, pt. 1, 32–55; T. Virsaladze, *Rospisi atenskogo Siona*, Tbilisi, 1984, figs. 2.2, 3.1, and 4.1.

aware of both contemporary images and those of the past around him. Also, he looked more to the East than to the West to Constantinople; his power was clearly conceived in local Caucasian terms. It may not now be possible to come to a clear picture of the exact nature of Ašot's rule, but the relief at T'beti certainly did portray a complex and sophisticated image of power. And moreover, it presented it in an image of high technical quality and astonishing detail, which in itself must have said much about Ašot's access to power and wealth. The grandeur and sumptuousness of his robes conveyed his authority, as much as the cathedral in which the image was sited.

The exceptional detail of T'beti is made more striking when compared with the next two surviving images at Op'iza and Dolisq'ana, both produced within the next fifty years.²¹ These churches were both built or reconstructed by the sons of Adarnase II, the first king of Kartli (888–923). Adarnase had four sons, Davit II, king of Kartli (d. 937), Ašot' IV *kuropalates* (d. 954), Bagrat' I *magistros* (d. 945), who became king of Kartli after his brother, and Sumbat' I *antipatrikios* (d. 958), who eventually inherited both the titles of king and *kuropalates* in 945 and 954 respectively. The four brothers exercised their rule together, as is known from the long dedicatory inscription at Išxani of c. 937,²² but they were also separately involved in the patronage of the Church: Ašot' IV and Davit at Op'iza, and Sumbat' I at Dolisq'ana.

The reliefs of these kings perform a function very different from that at T'beti. They are not accurate or detailed portrayals of each ruler, nor do they seem to convey as much information about the nature of each king's rule. That at Op'iza (Figs. 7 and 8) is carved in much lower relief than the T'beti image and belongs to a very different aesthetic: faces and robes are reduced to a series of geometric patterns, and hands and gestures are greatly overemphasized. Although more crudely carved, the resulting composition is in many ways more striking than that at T'beti, and it is not easy to compare them. Op'iza reveals a new set of priorities: material details and expressions of terrestrial wealth are relegated to second place, behind the symbolic emphasis on Davit II's and particularly Ašot' IV's relationship with Christ and their act of donation. Details of Ašot's dress can be made out, including the disks attached to the sides of his broad collar and the distinct beadlike shape of the belt, none of which conform to any other contemporary royal dress; but all such details are lost in the overall abstract patterning of the drapery folds. There is no attempt to display Ašot's or Davit's rank: neither of their titles is mentioned on the relief, and they are not shown wearing any form of crown. The kings' prime concern was to demonstrate their faith and support of the church. Such a depiction did, of course,

21. See Appendix I, B and C.

22. See Appendix I, D.

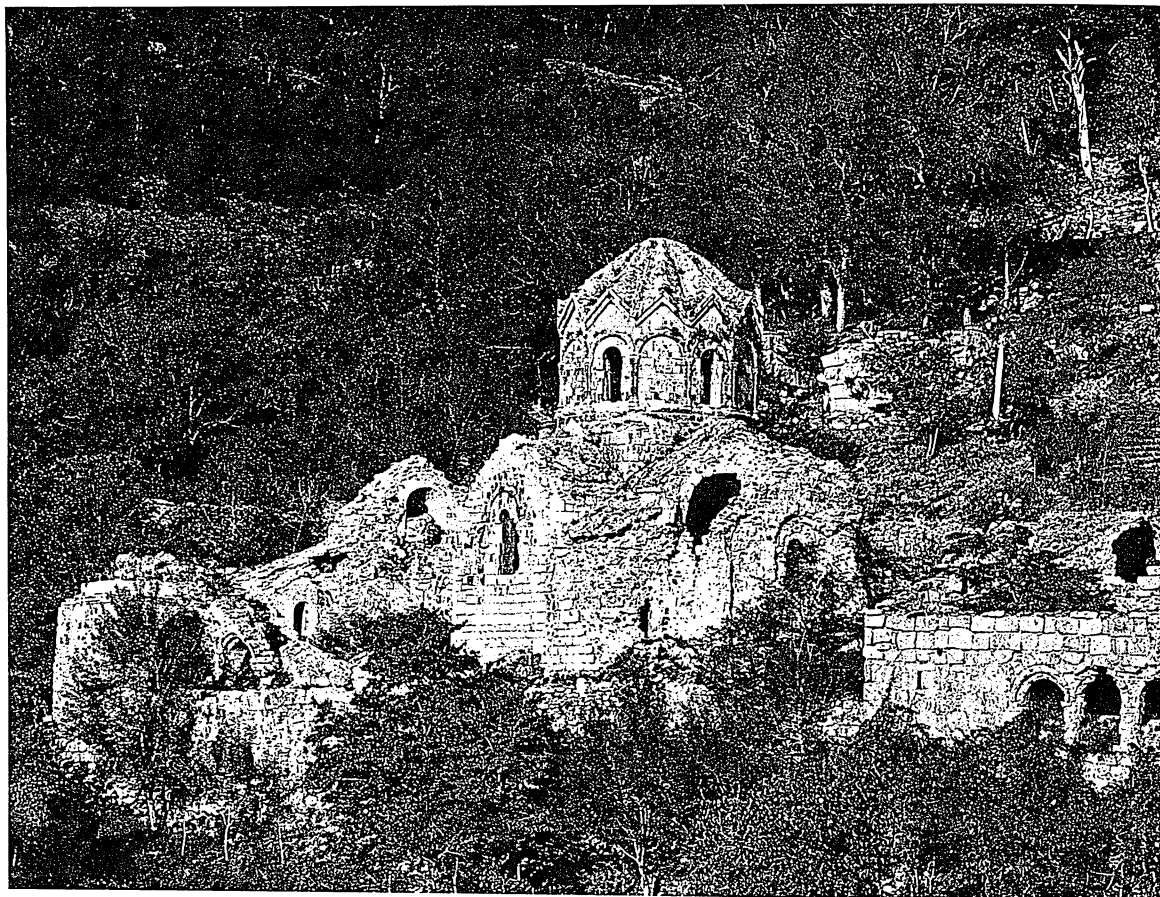


Fig. 7. Op'iza. Church of St. John the Baptist. View from southeast in 1904 (after Marr).

reflect on Ašot's and Davit's earthly position as well, since it demonstrated their unique position among their subjects, but it did so in a less obvious manner than the relief at T'beti.

The contrast is even more marked at Dolisq'ana, which is the earliest church still to have its royal donor portrait *in situ* (Figs. 9–11). Sumbat' was carved in higher relief than his brothers at Op'iza, but with less attention to detail or composition. Costume is delineated only by a surface pattern of crude stripes and chevrons, and Sumbat's beard by simple radiating lines. The act of offering the church was awkwardly handled, with Sumbat's left hand under the church emerging disembodied from the stone. Moreover, the relief is small and placed high up on the drum of the church, where it is hardly visible; the inscription, which does proclaim Sumbat' as king, cannot easily be read by the naked eye. It is hard to accept that this image was ever intended to receive scrutiny from terrestrial viewers. The manifest crudeness of the image might suggest that Sumbat' had no access to the funds employed at Op'iza, and

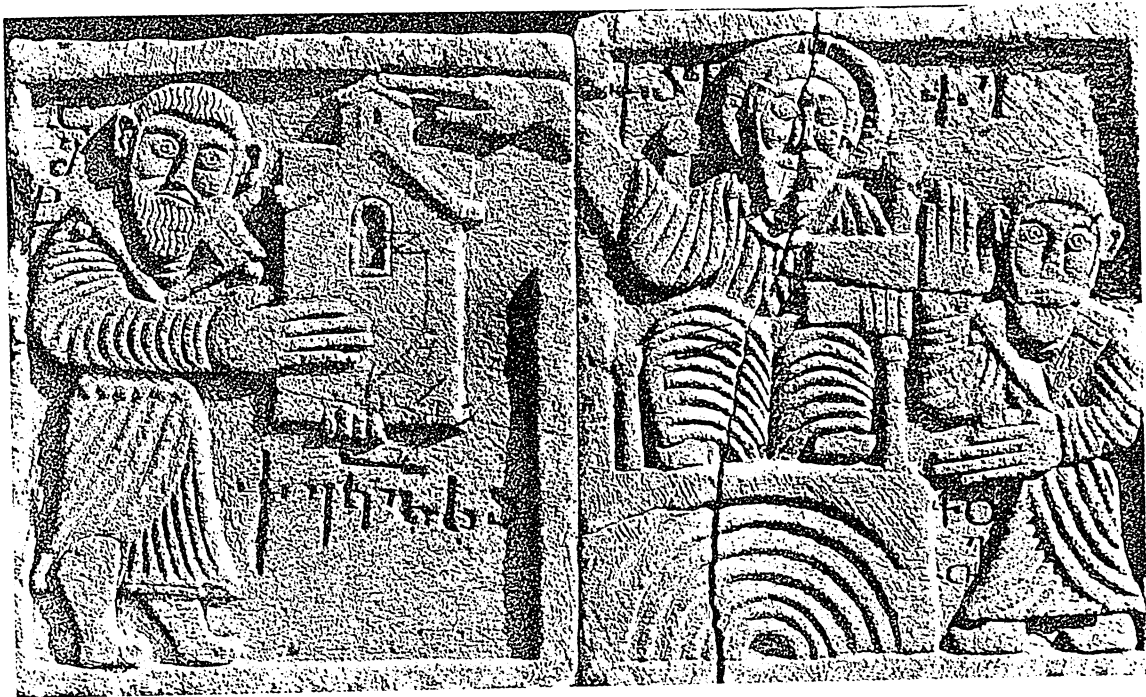


Fig. 8. Op'iza. Donor relief of Ašot' IV *kuropalates* and Davit II *magistros* and king before Christ (923–37). State Museum of Fine Arts, Tbilisi.

this argument is strengthened by the modest scale of Dolisq'ana, but it is not supported by the other evidence of the brothers' joint work.

Op'iza and Dolisq'ana admirably demonstrate the principal purpose of the early donor images. They provide visual proof of the generosity and faith of each donor, and the dedication of their work to God. But, at the same time, they show one of the great problems in interpreting the reliefs: the extent to which they could also be used to impress the Georgian people with their rulers' power. T'beti shows that this was clearly a major concern in the tenth century; the detail of Ašot' II's dress cannot have had any other purpose. But Op'iza and Dolisq'ana show that this was not universal. While Davit II and Ašot' IV did portray aspects of their power, albeit in very abstract terms, their brother Sumbat' did not. Ašot' II's image could, perhaps, be explained as being the grandiose self-advertisement of a relatively minor member of the Bagrat'ioni family, but this alone cannot be considered a satisfactory explanation. The stylistic and compositional differences between these three images argue that there was no coherence to the depiction of power within the Bagrat'ioni family, even within just one branch of it. It suggests that the depiction of power was not an important aspect of royal art, or at least not yet in these ecclesiastical surroundings.

The confusion about the use of art by the Bagrat'ionis in the promotion of their rule is further increased by the images of Davit III the Great *magistros* (d. 1000) and his brother Bagrat', *eristav of eristavs* (d. 966), at Ošk'i (Figs. 12–17, 21–22; see Plates I and II).²³ These images were set up between 963 and 966 by the grandsons of king



Fig. 9. Dolisq'ana (937–54). General view from northwest.

Bagrat' I in one of the largest and architecturally most complex buildings produced anywhere in the Byzantine and Eastern Christian worlds. Ošk'i was just one of a series of large churches and monasteries built by Davit III, all of which demonstrated the artistic, cultural, and political vivacity of T'ao-K'larjeti. By his death in 1000, Davit had become the dominant ruler in the Georgian kingdoms, and the images of him and his brother had a great impact on the future development of royal imagery.

23. See Appendix I, E. Davit III the Great is more commonly known by his Byzantine title of *kuropalates*, which he was awarded in 989/90.

The reliefs represent a return to the realism of T'beti, with its interest in the accurate depiction of the material trappings of each ruler's power. The brothers appear twice at Ošk'i, once on the exterior by the main, south entrance, and once around a niche below the dome in the interior.

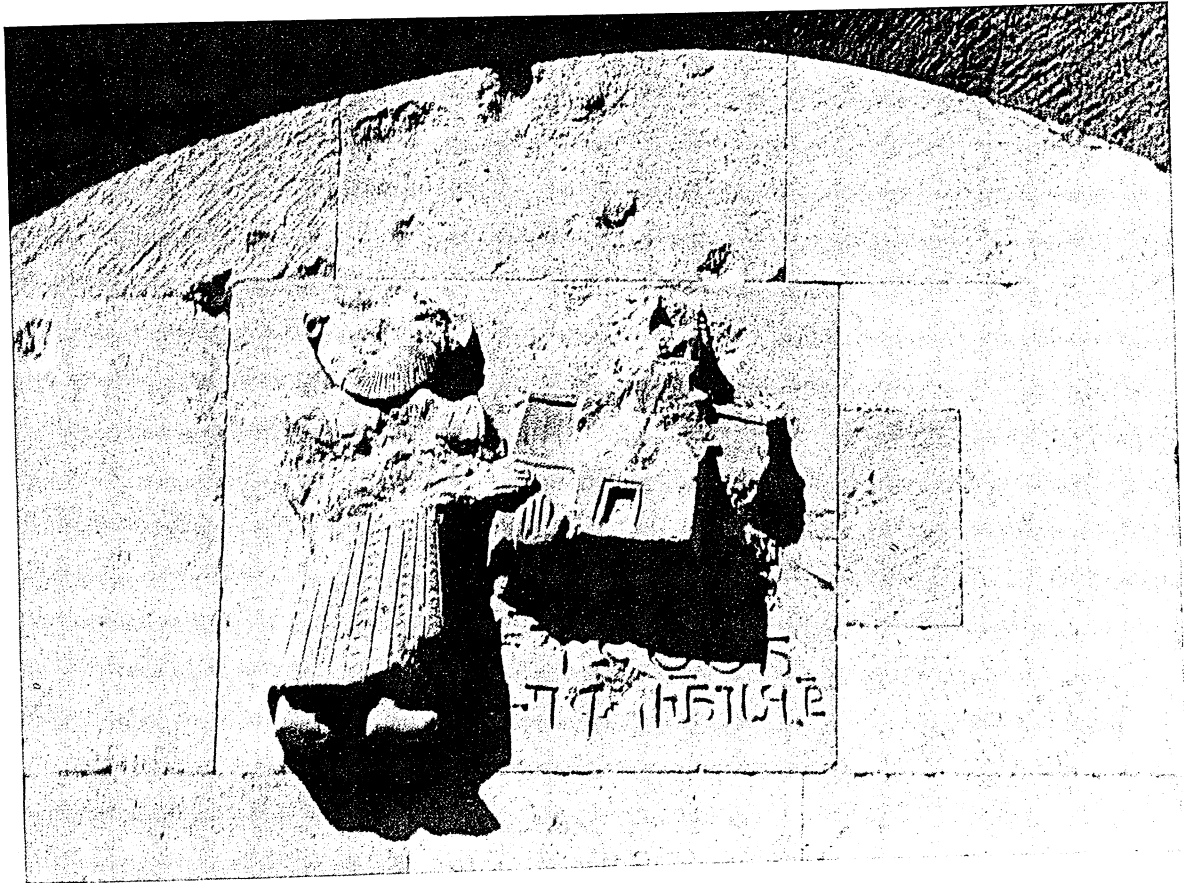


Fig. 10. Dolisq'ana. Detail of donor relief of King Sumbat' on southeast side of drum.

The external relief (Figs. 12–14; see Plate II) survives as the most elaborate of the tenth-century reliefs, with both Davit and Bagrat' offering models of the church to Christ through the intercession of the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist. The two rulers are dressed in Byzantine robes, with tunics surmounted by patterned *chlamydes*. Their crowns also have Byzantine *pendilia*. Thus, the first striking change is that Davit and Bagrat's image of power is now, suddenly, entirely drawn from Constantinople. Thus, within a space of sixty years, the Bagrat'ionis had undergone radical changes in both the use of imagery to convey their power and the type of power they wished to convey. This shows the way in which the Bagrat'ioni



Fig. 11. Dolisq'ana. Sculpture on south façade.

rulers of T'ao were beginning to be drawn far more closely into the Byzantine sphere of influence. Davit's involvement with the Byzantine Empire reached its peak with the aid he sent to Basil II in 979 in his battle against Bardas Skleros.²⁴ The foundation of the Georgian monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos was the result of this aid, and the new monasteries of T'ao-K'larjeti were partly founded to facilitate contacts with the cultural revival under way on Mount Athos.

This move toward Byzantium becomes clear when the images at Ošk'i are compared with the donor image of Davit and Bagrat's Armenian contemporary, King Gagik I Bagratuni of Ani (989–1020), which he set up at his main foundation in the city, the circular Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator.²⁵ The statue, which is now

24. KC 1 (*Mat'iane Kartlisa*), 273; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 373–74. See J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Paris, 1990, 330–31 and fiche 11.

25. N. A. Marr, *O raskopkax i rabotax' v' Ani letom' 1906 goda*, vol. 10 of *Teksty i razyskaniia po armiano-gruzinskoj filologii*, St. Petersburg, 1907, 18–21 and figs. 13 and 15; P. Donabédian and J.-M. Thierry, *Les arts arméniens*, Paris, 1987, 485, fig. 595.



Fig. 12. Ošk'i. Detail of external donor relief: Davit magistros.

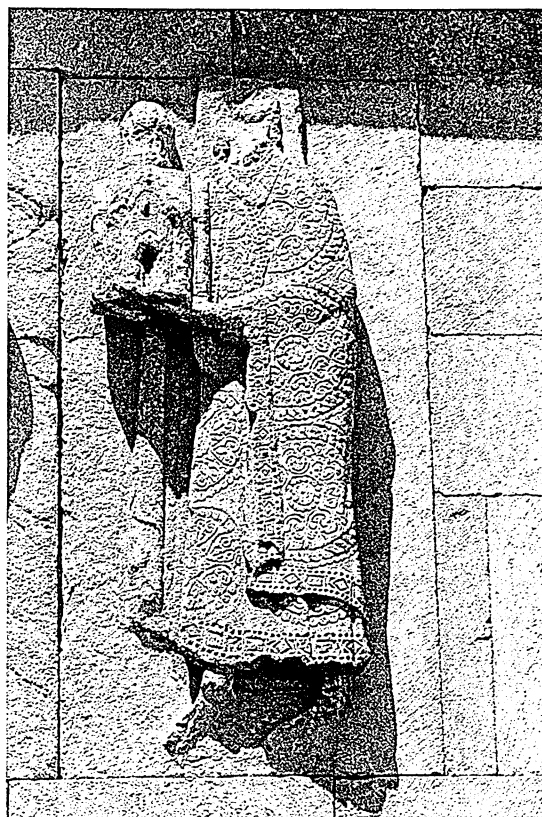


Fig. 13. Ošk'i. Detail of external donor relief: Bagrat', eristav of eristavs.

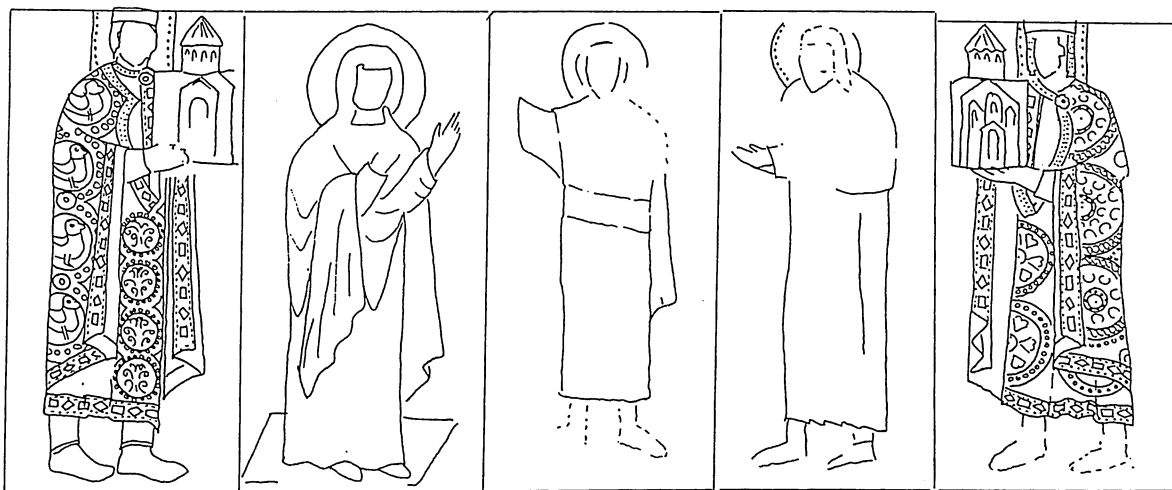


Fig. 14. Ošk'i. Reconstruction of external donor relief (redrawn after Djobadze).

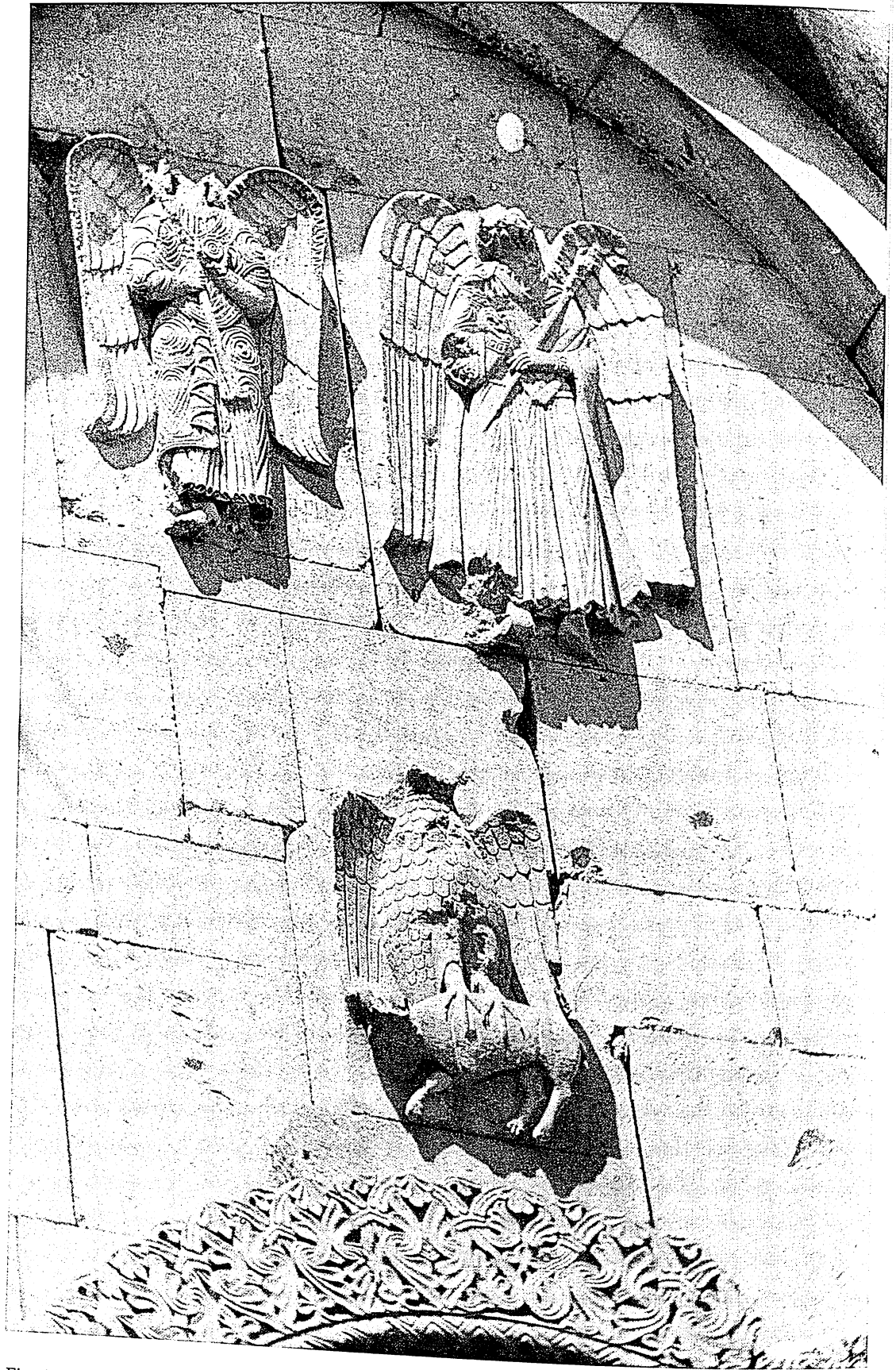


Fig. 15. Ošk'i. Sculpture over main, south door.



Fig. 16. Ošk'i. Octagonal column in southwest vestibule. Detail of sculpture on west face, showing Grigol the supervisor of construction before the Deesis.

lost, is recorded in one photograph (Fig. 18), which shows the king of Armenia wearing a large red caftan and a voluminous turban and demonstrates the strong cultural links still maintained by Armenia with Persia, links no longer so evident in Georgia.

The *chlamys* worn by the brothers at Ošk'i stems from Byzantine imperial ceremonial and is mentioned in Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos's *De ceremoniis* as

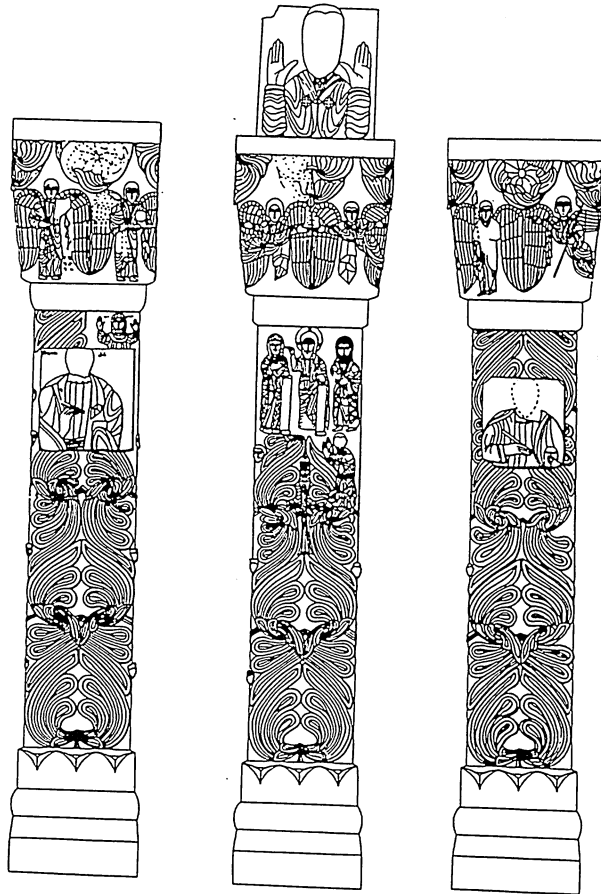


Fig. 17. Ošk'i. Octagonal column in southwest vestibule. Schema of sculpture on western faces (after Winfield).

an important element of the imperial coronation service. *Pendilia* were attributes regarded as the sole prerogative of the imperial crown. Given the closer links between Georgia and Byzantium at this time, the origins and meanings of these imports is apparent: the Bagrat'ionis were modeling their court ceremonial and authority on that of their powerful Christian neighbors to the west. Thus the image presented by the Bagrat'ioni brothers seems very clear.

However, on closer inspection, this imitation is not as simple as it at first appears. First, although the *De ceremoniis* may promote the importance of the *chlamys*, Byzantine art does not. Monumental Byzantine imperial images from this period showing the emperor in such a garment are very rare; instead, he normally wears the



Fig. 18. Ani. Lost relief of King Gagik of Ani from circular church of St. Gregory the Illuminator (990–1020) (after Thierry).

loros.²⁶ This is the case, for example, in the depiction of the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963–69) with four members of his family in the north apse of the Pigeon House Church at Çavuşin in Cappadocia (Figs. 19 and 20).²⁷ Given that this church is exactly contemporary with the image at Oşk'i, that it is relatively close to T'aok'larjeti, and that Davit's main links with Byzantium were through the Phokas family,²⁸ it is inconceivable that Davit was not aware of contemporary Byzantine practice

26. The only known example is on the narthex mosaic of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople. On the occasional appearance of the *chlamys* on coins in this period and its relationship to the *loros*, see P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. 3, pt. 1, Washington, D.C., 1973, 117–25.

27. L. Rodley, "The Pigeon House Church, Çavuşin," *JÖB* 33, 1983, 309–10; N. Thierry, *Haut Moyen-Âge en Cappadoce: Les églises de la région de Çavuşin*, Paris, 1983, 43–57, fig. 22; Thierry, "Le souverain," 128–31.

28. Davit had aided Basil II in 979 at the request of Bardas Phokas in his battle against Bardas Skleros, and four years later he fought against the emperor when Bardas Phokas mounted his own attempt to seize the throne:

or of the standard depiction of the emperor. The depiction at Ošk'i begins, instead, to become distanced from Byzantium and to look a little archaistic.

The presence of *pendilia* is also unsettling. In Byzantium, these attributes marked out the emperor's imperial regalia. This has led one scholar to write that "it is difficult to interpret the presence [of *pendilia*] on Bagrat's crown as anything except a usurpation of imperial status."²⁹ Such a claim on power, if this was the case, would be of enormous significance, since it would dramatically advance the ambition of the Bagrat'ionis beyond any claims made for them in written sources.³⁰ However, I do not believe that the presence of *pendilia* should be read so literally. The appearance of the Bagrat'ioni brothers in *chlamydes* has already been seen to be a rather unusual interpretation of Byzantine imperial dress, and I would argue that the *pendilia* are too. The inscriptions around the rulers' two images at Ošk'i proclaim their titles as *eristav of eristavs* and *magistros*, rather than kings or emperors. Indeed, Davit's title of *magistros* was bestowed on him by the Byzantine emperor and so codified his junior position within the Byzantine hierarchy. The image also dates from very early in Davit's career, when he must have been more concerned to secure his inheritance than to challenge overtly the might of Byzantium. This was because Davit and Bagrat' had seized power from their father, whom they had forced into a monastery.³¹ Even when Davit's position was more secure, reaching its peak in the aftermath of the revolt of Bardas Skleros against Basil II, Davit never claimed a higher position than that granted from Constantinople, and it was only in 989/90 that he was raised to the more senior position of *kuropalates* (by which he is normally known).³²

Bearing these reservations in mind, it seems that a too literal reading of these "realistic" images can be misleading. There is no doubt that the Bagrat'ionis were moving toward an imitation of Byzantine ceremonial practice in the mid-tenth century, but it was not being slavishly or faithfully copied. Nor can the imitation be taken accurately to reflect their political position. It is more likely that the brothers were imitating aspects of the formal appearance of Byzantine dress, regardless of their specific meanings, to demonstrate the aspirations of their rule. The contrast between the exclusivity of the imperial titles within the Byzantine Empire³³ and the relative liberality with which they were given out in Georgia suggests that the Byzantine authorities

Cheyne, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 330–31 and fiche 15. Yahya of Antioch, *History*, in *Histoire de Yahya-Ibn-Sa'id d' Antioche: Continuateur de Sa'id-Ibn-Bitriq*, ed. and trans. I. Kratchkovsky and A. Vasiliev, *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. 23, fasc. 3, Paris, 1932, 424, also notes the close personal ties between the two families.

29. W. Djobadze, "The Donor Reliefs and the Date of the Church at Oški," *BZ* 69, 1976, 50.

30. Davit's most ambitious claim is to be "Ruler of all the orient."

31. *KC 1 (Cxovreba da Uc'q'eba Bagrat'onianta)*, 381^{16–20}; Pätsch, *Das Leben*, 472.

32. The elevation to *kuropalates* was forced on Davit by Basil II after his defeat in the revolt of Bardas Phokas and was part of a treaty that also involved the surrender of land to Byzantium on his death. Yahya of Antioch, *History*, 429–30, notes that Basil II sent "sumptuous vestments" with the title, reflecting the continued importance of costume in the expression of power.

33. J. B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century*, London, 1911, 22–36.



Fig. 19. Cappadocia. Pigeon House Church, Çavuşin. North apse. Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963–69).

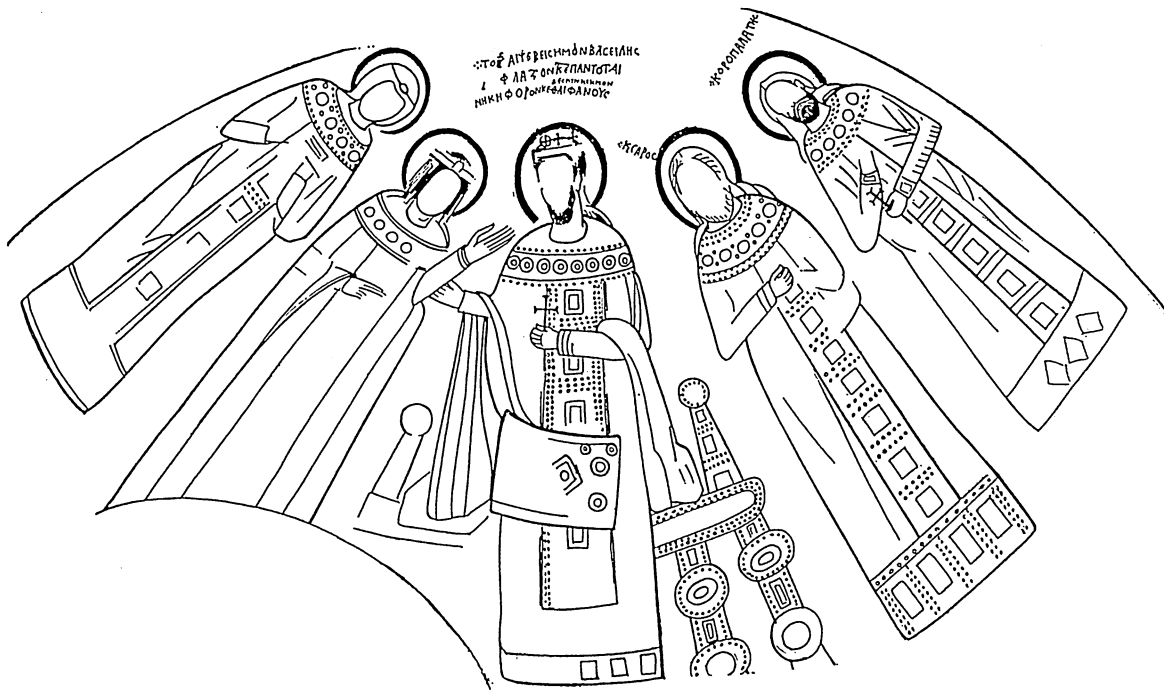


Fig. 20. Cappadocia. Pigeon House Church, Çavuşin. Schema of north apse (after Thierry).

allowed for a certain laxity in foreign adherence to the ceremonial nuances and attributes of each position. The adoption by Davit and Bagrat' of these Byzantine imperial robes and attributes may have simply been to impress an internal audience, rather than to promote any grander international claims. However, the fact that the brothers desired to depict themselves in such a grandiose way does reveal much about their growing self-confidence and their Byzantine leanings. They were on the edge of the Byzantine world, but wanted to appear at its center.

All the royal images discussed so far have had one thing in common. They were all donor images set up on the exterior of the churches they adorned to proclaim the patronage and faith of each ruler to worshipers as they approached. They had, thus, a definite function, although the cases of T'beti and Ošk'i have shown that that function could be exploited for overt secular purposes: to promote the power of each ruler. These images have appeared in isolation on the walls of each church, and where, as at Dolisq'ana or Ošk'i, there are other sculptural elements (Figs. 11 and 15), they do not all create a unified program. There is evidence that within the churches these reliefs were supplemented by painted images of rulers, which may have formed part of a larger programmatic scheme, but none of these survive.³⁴ However, the church of Ošk'i has one other set of royal images, located inside the church, from which it is possible to trace a new development in the expansion of meaning of royal imagery.

Here, Davit and Bagrat' are shown as bust figures on either side of a niche in the southwest pier under the dome (Figs. 21 and 22). The brothers again wear highly ornate costumes, elaborately decorated with rosettes. They have the same low rectangular crowns as they wore on the exterior, but this time they also hold cross-headed scepters in their right hands. These images are not concerned with the act of donation, and no mention of it is made in the accompanying inscriptions. The array of royal paraphernalia shown with the two rulers, and their location facing the apse, indicate that their presence is solely concerned with royal symbolism and the presentation of power. To understand the possible meaning of the internal reliefs at Ošk'i, it is necessary to explore the role of the niche around which they and the inscriptions that accompany them are placed.

There are two niches in the church, one in each of the western pillars supporting the dome. Both face toward the apse, but only the southern niche has reliefs. Wachtang Djobadze has suggested that the two niches were for the use of the two brothers when they attended services in the church. The existence of twin niches in similar locations at Xaxuli and P'arxali, which were also built by the brothers, supports this argument.³⁵ It is also possible that they were designed for members of the ec-

34. The two recorded examples are Ašot' IV at Op'iza (Appendix I, B) and Bagrat' *magistros* with his son and grandson at Išxani (Appendix I, D).

35. See Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, figs. 194–95 (Xaxuli), 265–67 (P'arxali). At Otxta Ek'lesia, which was also built by the brothers, the only niches are at head height and face west from the apse, suggesting that

clesiastical hierarchy. Surviving thrones at Gelati (from the twelfth century) and Svet'icxoveli at Mcxeta (from the fifteenth century) show that there was certainly a later tradition of seating the catholicos in a similar position, although other evidence suggests that the bishop, at least, would sit inside the apse.³⁶ However, if the niches



Fig. 21. Ošk'i. Reliefs of Davit and Bagrat' on niche in southwest pier under the dome.

were designed for the two kings, then why was only one ornamented with their busts? Given the equality of their depictions in both sets of reliefs, it is surely unlikely, despite the hierarchical difference between their titles, that one of them would be highlighted in person in such a way.

they had a liturgical function. It should also be noted that full-sized niches were included in the eleventh-century rebuilding at Išxani, but left unfinished, indicating that they had lost their purpose: Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 196 and pls. 287–88.

36. Djobadze, "The Donor Reliefs," 56 and 61, cites the bishop's throne built into the center of the apse at Xaxuli.

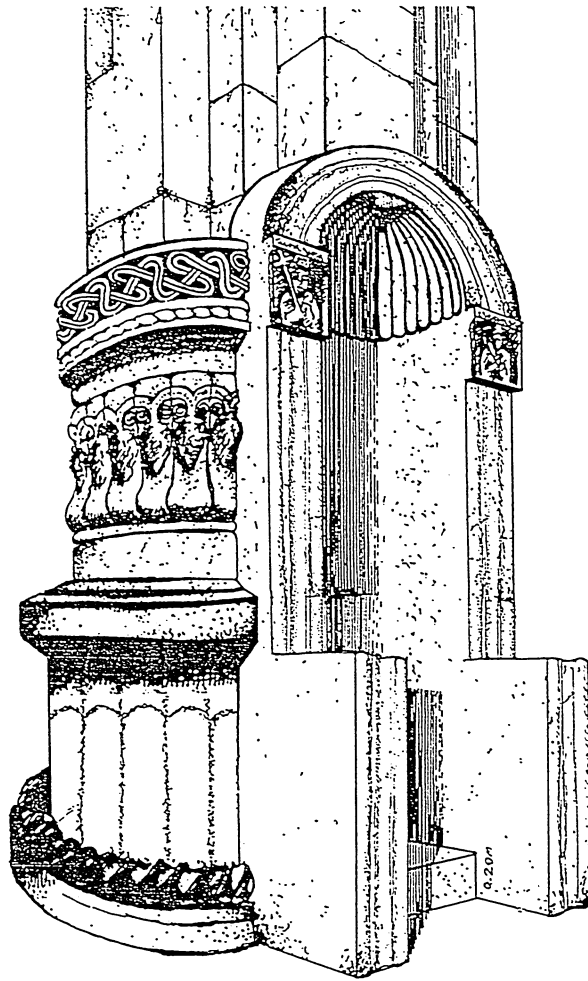


Fig. 22. Ošk'i. Schema of niche in southwest pier (after Djobadze).

It is clear that the niches, which are both shell-headed, did indicate some sort of significant or powerful space, and that the two kings are to be linked with at least one of them. The unusual combination of the relief images with the painted inscriptions supports the idea that this composition was designed to evoke complex symbolic meanings.

The niche and busts would frame whoever was expected to stand there. It has been suggested that, while the relief on the exterior at Ošk'i depicted the kings with the Deesis, this arrangement represented some sort of "nonvisual Deesis," with the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist represented in the inscriptions which accompany the reliefs and Christ by the space in the niche.³⁷ The two kings would then

37. T. A. Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey*, London, 1989, 2:8, and W. Djobadze, "Four Deësis Themes in the Church of Oški," *OrChr* 72, 1988, 168-82, suggest that Christ would have been represented by a fresco image. This interpretation receives modified support from the eleventh-century fresco decoration of the church. In 1036 a full-length standing figure was painted in the niche. This figure is now beginning to emerge from under a layer of Turkish whitewash, and his brown robes and wild hair suggest that he is Saint John the Baptist, the patron saint of the church. Until the image is properly cleaned, this

appear as extra participants appearing on either shoulder of the central, incorporeal figure. However, any interpretation must depend on the potential identity of the figure for whom the niche was designed, which hitherto has not been fully considered. If it was intended to frame a living figure, part of the ecclesiastical or secular hierarchy, then the presence of the kings would act as a support for this dignitary. They would have appeared as guardians, protecting and advising him. Their role would have been similar to the supportive one played by the personifications of Truth and Justice as they appear at the shoulders of the emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates in the opening image of the copy of the *Homilies of St. John Chrysostom* in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.³⁸ It is a way of reenforcing the power of the two rulers, who are always seen to be present, even when physically absent.

If, on the other hand, the niche was meant to represent a spiritual space for Christ (as the idea of a “nonvisual Deesis” might suggest), then it is the kings who are enhanced by their proximity to this sacred space. The two kings are linked with the divine, even though the presence of Christ is only evoked by the inscriptions and the space.³⁹ The presence of the second, undecorated niche and the difficulty in reconstructing the original purpose of the niche mean that this explanation must remain tentative. However, either scenario reveals a far more sophisticated conception of the symbolic and spiritual nature of royal power than seen before. The Bagrat'ionis are in contact with the other world, providing a link between the two. The depictions show their relationship both to the secular hierarchies of this world and to the divine sphere.

This sanctification of the monarchy does have parallels, primarily in the Byzantine world. The first to be noted is the image of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas and his family in the north apse of the Pigeon House Church at Çavuşin, mentioned above. The appearance of the emperor in the conch of an apse is unmatched elsewhere in

cannot be confirmed, but it indicates that seventy years after the niche was erected, it was seen as a spiritual space by its decorators. For a discussion of the surviving fragments of the painting program, see N. Thierry, “Peintures historiques d'Ošk'i (T'ao),” *REGC* 2, 1986, 135–71 (she does not mention the fragments in the niche despite their visibility in her plate 3, or the female saints in the window niches of the south apse), and Djobadze, “Four Deësis Themes,” 176–82 (however, there are serious flaws in his interpretation, which are discussed later in the text).

38. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms Coislin 79, fol. 2r. See J. Durand, ed., *Byzance*, Paris, 1992–93, no. 271; I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, Leiden, 1976, 107–18 and fig. 72. Spatharakis argues that the identity of the emperor has been changed and that the image originally showed Michael VII Doukas, but that does not affect the relevance of this image to the reliefs at Ošk'i.

39. An illustration of how this could have worked can be seen in the mosaics of St. Demetrios, Thessaloniki. The final, east section of the north inner-aisle mosaics (probably set up in the sixth century) shows a shell-headed niche in which Saint Demetrios stands, while two donors worship on either side. The image is designed to show the form of worship around Saint Demetrios's ciborium, which was located opposite this mosaic on the south side of the church. Because it shows the result of a prayer, the mosaic is able to reveal the way in which the niche was perceived by the donors and worshipers: as a space for the saint. The saint, of whom no relics survived, could never be physically present, but was envisaged and represented by the donors as existing within this space. It is possible that the niche at Ošk'i was viewed in a similar way. R. S. Cormack, “The Mosaic Decoration of St. Demetrios Thessaloniki: A Re-examination in the Light of the Drawings of W. S. George,” *Annual of the British School at Athens* 64, 1969, 17–52, pl. 9.

Byzantine art, and the function of this image has not yet been fully established. While images of an emperor within the sanctuary are known, the most famous example being at San Vitale in Ravenna, the placement of the emperor and his family in the liturgical core of the decoration, the conch of an apse, has no precedents. It can only indicate that there was a major attempt to enhance the status and cult of the Phokas family in Cappadocia. It has been suggested that the church was built by members of the Phokas family or their entourage, who held large estates in the region and who sought both to legitimize the new usurper emperor and to establish him as an object of veneration.⁴⁰ This question of legitimization also arises at Ošk'i, since Davit and Bagrat' had come to power by usurping their father's throne.⁴¹ The placement of contemporary rulers in symbolically significant (and perhaps even liturgically significant) space at both Çavuşin and Ošk'i in the 960s indicates an important advance in royal ideology. Çavuşin has been dismissed as merely a "minor provincial monument,"⁴² and it seems to have had no direct impact in Constantinople; but that does not mean that it could not have been influential in Georgia, especially given the close links between the Bagrat'ionis and the Phokai.⁴³

What is most remarkable about this possible new cult development in the promotion of the Bagrat'ionis is that it seems to have been used very sparingly. Ošk'i is the only one of the brothers' churches to show any signs of these royal devices. The other major foundations of this period, such as Xaxuli, P'arxali, and Otxta Ek'lesia, which receive more attention in the chronicle records,⁴⁴ show no evidence of having contained relief sculptures of the brothers. Davit and Bagrat's imagery at Ošk'i appears very isolated.

There is one other possible parallel for the sophistication of the niche reliefs at Ošk'i: the one surviving piece of royal imagery produced by the neighboring rulers of Abxazeti, in the church of K'umurdo in Javaxeti (Figs. 23–25).⁴⁵ This church competes with Ošk'i in terms of its size and architectural complexity and was built at exactly the same time, having been dedicated in 964. Here, two relief carvings showing royal figures appear in the squinches over the eastern arch that opens onto the main apse.⁴⁶ The relief to the north of the apse shows Queen Guranduxt' of Abxazeti (Fig. 24) and that to the south her brother, King Leon III (Fig. 25), who is un-

40. Rodley, "Çavuşin," 323–25; Nikephoros Phokas had been declared emperor in Cappadocia.

41. *KC 1 (C'xovreba da Uc'q'eba Bagrat'onianta)*, 381_{16–20}; Pätsch, *Das Leben*, 472.

42. Rodley, "Çavuşin," 325.

43. On the general cultural and artistic links between Georgia and Cappadocia in this period, see J.-M. and N. Thierry, "Peintures du X^e siècle en Géorgie Méridionale et leurs rapports avec la peinture byzantine d'Asie Mineure," *CahArch* 24, 1975, 73–114 (repr. London, 1977, study V).

44. Ošk'i is not, in fact, mentioned in any chronicle record of this period, despite the size of the church and the evidence of great royal involvement in its construction and functioning.

45. See Appendix I, F.

46. Aladaşvili, *Monumental'naia skul'ptura*, 80a–83 and 94–96.

named but is mentioned in the main dedicatory inscription of the church. Guran-duxt' stands with her head slightly bowed and her hands held out in a gesture of supplication toward the apse. A pattern of roundels can be seen on the cloth where it falls from her arms. Leon is presented frontally, with his arms crossed over on his chest. He wears draped over his shoulders a long-sleeved surcoat that has no ornament except around the hems. This coat is similar to that worn by Ašot' II at T'beti, showing the power of this tradition in Georgian lands.

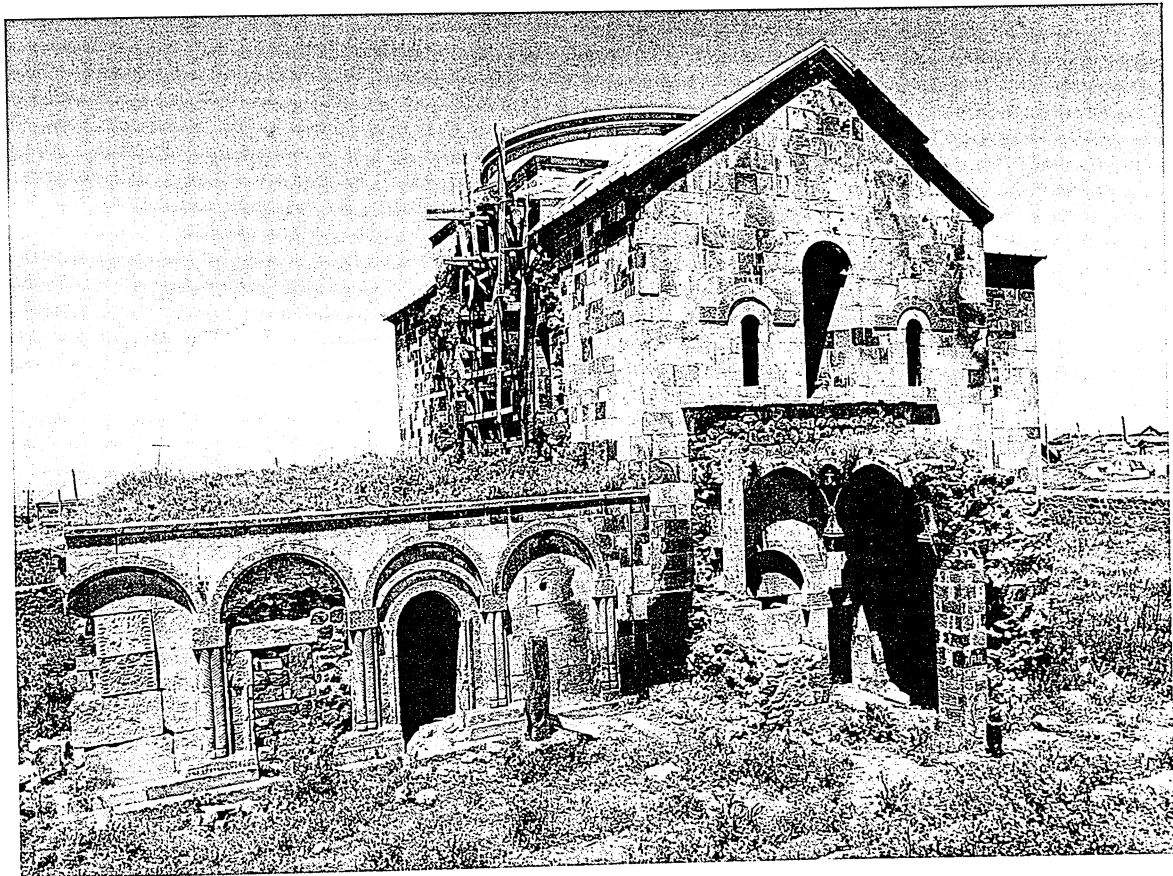


Fig. 23. K'umurdo (964). Exterior from southwest.

Both images are carved in very low relief, and details of drapery folds and decoration are indicated sparingly; there is little stylistic comparison between this and the reliefs at Ošk'i. Neither figure has a halo. Their positioning, on either side of the main apse, and the absence of any reference to donation indicate that they too were included purely to promote the royal family. They seem to draw much of their significance from the spiritual power and symbolism of the apse. There is, at least, a compositional affinity with the niche at Ošk'i, although on a different scale. The



Fig. 24. K'umurdo. Northern squinch over eastern arch. Queen Guranduxt' (after Aladašvili).



Fig. 25. K'umurdo. Southern squinch over eastern arch. King Leon III of Abkhazeti (after Aladašvili).

siting at K'umurdo is more explicit than that at Ošk'i, since the importance of the apse is unquestioned. The significance of the positioning at K'umurdo is emphasized by the placing of angels in the squinches on either side of the apse in the southern portico of the church.⁴⁷

Attempts to understand these images and the importance of their location are complicated by the difficulty of interpreting the figures' gestures. Queen Guranduxt' raises her arms in a gesture of prayer, perhaps indicating the apse or its contents. Against this, however, Leon III on the other side of the apse is presented frontally; his arms are crossed over on his chest. This pose has no parallels to help explain it (it could indicate prayer or death). Guranduxt's gesture of prayer and supplication could even be indicating her brother. The presence of a woman in the reliefs is also striking. She is given no title in the inscription, so it is impossible to tell whether she is represented as queen, sister, or donor.⁴⁸ Since only the queen is named, are we meant to assume that she is more important than her brother, or was she named precisely because she was less recognizable than he? The appearance of a woman in the image demonstrates that she was an important figure in the hierarchy of power, and this in itself is an important innovation: it may have come from her influential position in the unification of Kartli and Abxazeti, through her marriage to King Gurgun of Kartli. Given the scarcity of information about K'umurdo and the nature of the Abxazetian royal family, these reliefs must remain mysterious. Yet, they show that a sophisticated perception of the Ančabadze family existed in Abxazetian territory and that it ran parallel with that in T'ao-K'larjeti.

All the royal images examined in this chapter have shown the growing complexity of the early Georgian reliefs and their development from pure donor images, in which expressions of earthly wealth and power were of incidental value, to more sophisticated images of royal power, which exploited the relationship between the ruler and the divine to communicate the uniqueness and strength of the ruler's authority. However, the fact that the carvings always remained as isolated elements on the churches meant that they could never build up layers of meaning from the imagery around them. Only the final examples, in which the images were carefully located in significant parts of the church interior, could capitalize on their surroundings to enhance the rulers they depicted. The potential for presenting the power of the rulers of Georgia through visual means was only now being fully exploited.

It cannot have been a coincidence that the sudden growth in the complexity of images came at the end of the tenth century, just as the political momentum was growing for the unification of the various kingdoms of Georgia under one ruler. The

47. Aladašvili, *Monumental'naia skul'ptura*, 96.

48. Guranduxt' is named in one other inscription, at the church of C'vimoeti, where she is given the title of *დედოფალი* "queen." However, it is only a commemorative inscription, since the main inscription in the church names her son, Bagrat' III, as the donor and gives a date of 1002. See T. Žordania, *Kronik'ebi da sxva masali sakartvelos ist'oriisa* (Chronicles and other material for the history of Georgia), Tbilisi, 1892, 143.

struggles for supremacy between the various ruling families must have required a more forceful and ambitious program of royal promotion. The unification was first marked in 978, when Bagrat' III, who was heir to King Gurgen of Kartli, inherited Abxazeti from his mother, Queen Guranduxt'. Its major impetus came from the maneuvering of Ivane Marušisdze, who persuaded Davit III the Great *kuropalates*, who had no direct heir, to bequeath to Bagrat' T'ao-K'larjeti on his death in 1000.⁴⁹ It was this that consolidated the future of the country, and in 1008 Bagrat' finally received his birthright, Kartli, on the death of his father, Gurgen *magistros*.

The limited evidence that survives of the royal imagery produced in the 960s shows that the Georgian kingdoms were far from having a unified concept of power in the run-up to unification. The Byzantinizing image of the rulers of T'ao was very different from the Caucasian image presented by Leon III and Guranduxt'. Both exploited the church architecture to achieve their meanings, but the details of their images were still far apart. It was one of the chief tasks of Bagrat' III's successors to develop an image of power that would be effective throughout the constituent parts of their kingdom. In this the ascendancy of Davit III the Great *kuropalates* in T'ao-K'larjeti in the second half of the tenth century had an important impact. He had become the dominant Georgian ruler by the end of the century, and it was his use of Byzantine imagery that brought this influence to the fore. In the following two centuries Byzantine imagery dominated Bagrat'ioni art and determined much of the appearance of royal power.

The influence of the Bagrat'ionis and their image of power had an immediate effect on the other ruling families elsewhere in Georgia. At the very beginning of the eleventh century the *korepiskopos* of K'axeti, K'virik'e III, had himself depicted with a little-known Ossetian ruler, Urdure, in a carved relief on the chancel barrier of the monastery of Zedazeni near Mcxeta.⁵⁰ Both men wear a form of Byzantine dress including the *loros*. However, the form of the dress appears to have been misunderstood, since K'virik'e wears the kite-shaped *loros* normally reserved for imperial women or female saints. Given that no earlier image of a *korepiskopos* survives, we cannot be sure that K'virik'e was following the lead established by the Bagrat'ionis, but since K'axeti was the most remote of the Georgian kingdoms from Byzantium, it is most probable that the idea came through the rulers in T'ao-K'larjeti. Thus, it seems that the new forms of power were being adopted throughout the country, albeit in a slightly corrupt form.

49. This act also served to increase Byzantine interest in the region, since Davit III had already agreed to leave his lands to Emperor Basil II; see J. H. Forsyth, "The Byzantine-Arab Chronicle (938-1034) of Yahya b. Sa'īd Al-Antākī," Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1977, 2:464-78. The wars with Byzantium in the first two decades of the eleventh century, which led to the establishment of the *theme* of Iberia, were directly caused by this: Z. Avalichvili, "La succession du curopalate David, d'Ibérie, dynaste de Tao," *Byzantion* 8, 1933, 177-202.

50. R. O. Šmerling, *Malye formy v arxitekture srednevekovoi Gruzii*, Tbilisi, 1962, pl. 27; I. T. Nik'oleišvili, "Zedaznis k'ank'elis pilaze gamosaxuli ist'oriuli p'irebis ident'ipik'acis sak'itxisatvis" (On the identification of the secular figures represented on the altar screen from Zedazeni), *Proceedings of Tbilisi University (History, Archaeology, Study of Art, Ethnography)* 310, 1992, 175-92 (English summary, 191-92); a German summary appears in Nikoleischvili, "Georgische Ikonostasreliefs," 148-49.

THE IMAGERY OF UNITED GEORGIA (1008–1184)

In the south conch at Ošk'i is a series of fragmentary images that is dated by inscription to the year 1036 (Fig. 26; see Plate III).¹ On the west side is a scene showing two processions of men in secular dress passing the monastery of Otxta Ek'lesia en route to the cathedral of Bana.² This must refer to a scene of contemporary history in Georgia. The two most probable events that it might commemorate are the coronation of Bagrat' IV in 1027 or his marriage to Helena, the niece of the Byzantine emperor Romanos III Argyros, in 1032, both of which took place at Bana. The scene is located opposite an image of the *Crucifixion* and next to a Deesis-like composition showing the donor Jojik' *patrikios* and a bishop praying to Saint John the Baptist.³ Here the modern, secular world has been elevated to and allied with the

1. See Appendix I, G.

2. N. Thierry, "Peintures historiques d'Ošk'i (T'ao)," *REGC* 2, 1986, 135–71; W. Djobadze, "Four Deësis Themes in the Church of Oški," *OrChr* 72, 1988, 168–82.

3. Djobadze, "Four Deësis Themes," 177, misunderstands these images. See N. Thierry, "A propos des Deësis d'Ošk'i," *OrChr* 76, 1992, 227–34, for a rebuttal of his interpretation; see also Appendix I, G.

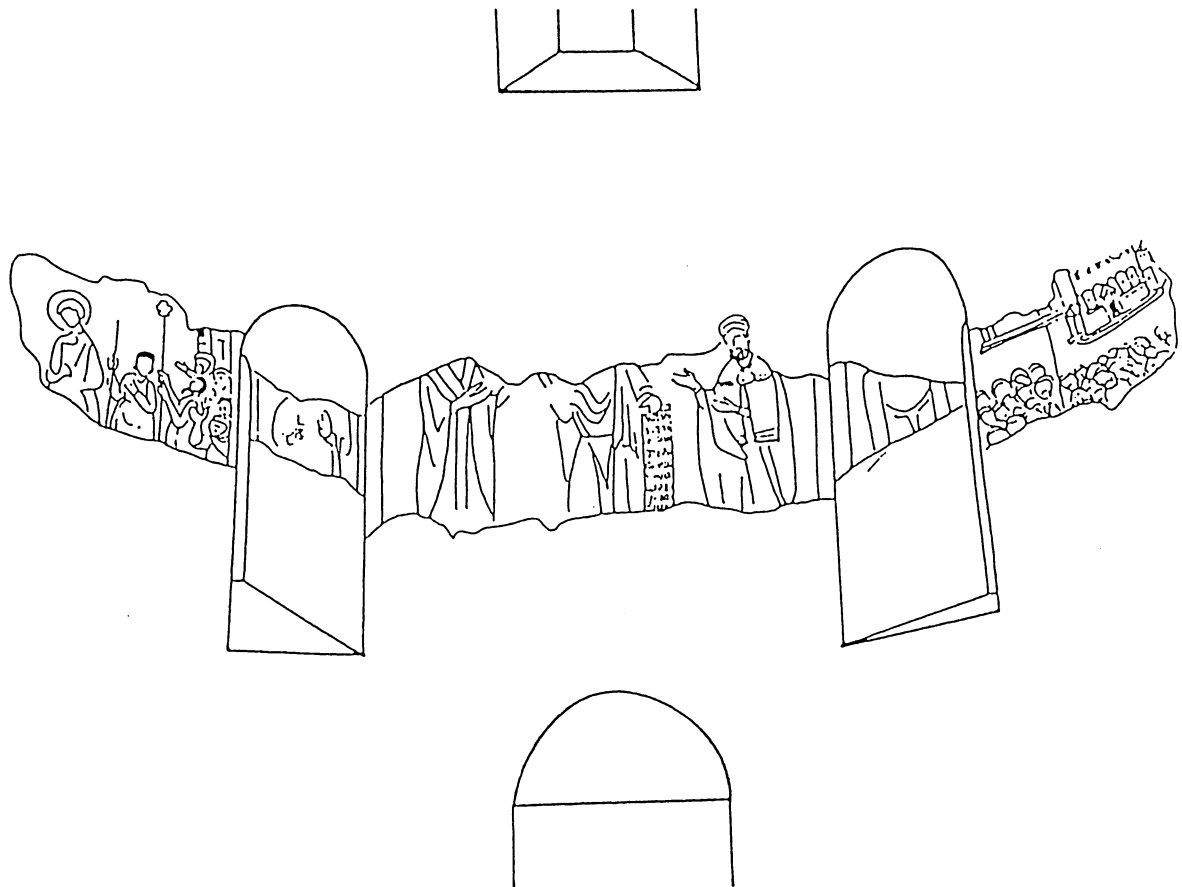


Fig. 26. Ošk'i. South transept. Schema of wall paintings of 1036 (after Thierry).

sacred life and death of Christ. It is a striking testimony to the significance attached to these royal scenes. More important, this scene may have provided visual evidence of the closeness of the political links achieved between Georgia and Byzantium in the second quarter of the eleventh century. Even though Bagrat's Byzantine bride, Helena, died soon after her arrival in Georgia,⁴ the alliance was further cemented by the marriage of Bagrat's daughter Maria "of Alania" to Emperor Michael VII Doukas. These unions, at the highest levels of the imperial court, had a marked influence on the Bagrat'ionis' perception of their power and demonstrated the triumph of the pro-Byzantine imagery adopted by Davit III *kuropalates* at Ošk'i in the 960s. Their ultimate manifestation was to appear in the two churches decorated by Davit IV Aġmašenebeli between 1089 and 1125, At'eni and Gelati.

Byzantine influence in southwest Georgia reached its zenith with Constantine VIII's creation of the *theme* of Iberia in the 1020s.⁵ It was at this time that cultural and political ideas from Constantinople could most easily infiltrate into Georgia, al-

4. KC 1 (*Mat'iane Kartlisa*) 294¹¹-295⁵; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 287-88.

5. V. A. Arutjunova-Fidanjan, "Some Aspects of the Military-Administrative Districts and Byzantine Administration in Armenia During the 11th Century," *REArm* 20, 1986-87, 309-20.

though their effects are most noticeable in royal art. Relations between the two ruling houses seem to have been maintained, although each worked to undermine the political position of the other.⁶ Byzantine power in the East increased with the annexation of Armenia in 1045, but collapsed soon after.⁷ The Seljuk raids into Georgia, which began in 1064, and the Byzantine defeat at Manzikert in 1071 radically changed the political and cultural orientation of eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus.⁸ Georgia was cut off from direct land contact with Constantinople and, instead, had to deal first with the Seljuk powers that surrounded it to the south. In this chapter I examine how these new realities began to affect the idealized Orthodox Christian model of power that was created by Davit IV Aḡmašenebeli (= the Builder). Davit's reign set up a paradox with which his successors had to deal: his stunning military successes, which culminated in the capture of Tbilisi in 1122 after four hundred years of Islamic rule there, allowed him to portray himself as the great Christian power in the East (a possible rival or successor to Byzantium?), but at the same time, it brought into the boundaries of the kingdom very large numbers of potentially rebellious new Muslim subjects, for whom their Christian rulers had to find an acceptable image of power. Equally, the Byzantine leanings of the Bagrat'ioni family had to be reconciled with the more traditional links to the east and south maintained elsewhere in Georgian society, and with the traditional Caucasian images of power that had been presented by various rulers in the past.

Davit IV Aḡmašenebeli (1089–1125)

The Sioni Church at At'eni

The first royal image to survive from this period is to be found in the Sioni (Zion) Church at At'eni, in Kartli.⁹ It is a painted image and forms part of a complete cycle of paintings that covers the interior of the church. The cycle is still largely intact, and this being the case, we can ask more questions of these royal images than of those discussed in Chapter I. In particular it is possible to investigate whether the presence of royal images affected the choice of images elsewhere in the church and, conversely, whether the presence of other scenes in the church was exploited to provide more complex interpretations of the royal images.

6. For example, Romanos III financed a revolt by Bagrat's half-brother Demet're in 1033: KC 1 (*Mat'iane Kartlisa*), 298¹²; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 290. For a good summary of the political situation in T'ao-K'larjeti in the early years of Bagrat' IV's reign, see Thierry, "Peintures historiques," 141–51; Salia, *History*, 149; Allen, *History*, 89–90.

7. M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025–1204: A Political History*, London, 1984, 17–26.

8. On Georgia's relations with its neighbors in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 56–80.

9. T. Virsaladze, *Rospisi atenskogo Siona*, Tbilisi, 1984.



Fig. 27. At'eni. Sioni Church (built in seventh century). Exterior from north.

The church was built in the seventh century and is one of the examples of the domed quadriconch church, which was popular in both Georgia and Armenia at this time (Fig. 27).¹⁰ It was originally decorated with a monochrome aniconic scheme, but was repainted in the eleventh century. The four apses of the church are each decorated with a cycle of paintings.

The main, east apse has a depiction of the Virgin and Child between archangels in the conch (Plate VI), above two rows of apostles and church fathers. The north and south apses contain cycles of the *Life of Christ* and the *Early Life of the Virgin* respectively; and the west apse is taken up with a giant depiction of the *Last Judgment*. This arrangement of the iconographic program was partly determined by the architecture of the church. The presence of a relief cross in the dome precluded anything else from being painted there, and the division of the interior into four apse spaces, with little continuity between them (because of the presence of four tall, deep corner niches), encouraged the designers to concentrate one cycle in each apse, rather than have a continuous frieze running round all the walls of the church.¹¹ Per-

10. G. N. Čubinašvili, *Pamiatniki tipa Džvari*, 2 vols., Tbilisi, 1948.

11. This had been attempted at Aght'amar, which has a similar internal construction, and the result was a very broken narrative sequence. S. Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar: The Church of the Holy Cross*, Cambridge, Mass., 1965, 36-49.

sonifications of the four rivers of paradise were placed in the squinches.¹² The lowest register of the west apse depicts a series of martyrs, saints, and prophets. Among these, on the north side of this apse, are a row of seven donors. They are divided into two groups by a small break in the wall (Figs. 28 and 29).

While there is general agreement that these paintings belong to the second half of the eleventh century, the exact dating of the commission and the identities of the seven donors are very controversial.¹³ In Appendix II, I present the main arguments about the dating and my reasons for accepting that of Guaram Abramišvili to 1090. However, I here propose a new identification of the first figure in the row, which solves many of the problems raised in his proposal.

From the fragmentary remains of the donor panel and from the fairly accurate copy of them made in the 1840s by Prince Grigorii Gagarin (Fig. 30),¹⁴ it is possible to reconstruct the row as follows: The group is headed by a man in monk's clothing holding out a scroll to Christ, who appears in a small aureole before him. The monk is bearded and nimbed. He is followed by a beardless youth wearing Georgian court robes and a crown. The name inscription for neither man survives; the only fragment, by the first man, reads: ". . . son of the great . . ." ¹⁵ The second group is led by a bearded man in Byzantine robes, including the *loros*, who wears a crown. He is described as the "father of King Giorgi" and offers a scroll to the Mother of God. A lost inscription named him as "King Bagrat'," and it is accepted that this is Bagrat' IV (1027-72). These three men, as the leaders of the two groups, are the principal figures of the row, and it is their identities that must be established. The fourth and fifth figures, a prince wearing a diadem and cloaked garment and leading a young boy by the hand, are named as "Sumbat', son of Ašot'," and "Prince Ašot', son of Sumbat'." The sixth figure is now almost entirely lost (and is ignored in the Gagarin drawing), and the final donor is a queen, who wears the Byzantine kite-shaped *loros* and is named as "Queen Isduxt'." The quality of the painting of the seven donors, as of the whole church, is extremely high; the faces in particular are depicted with much delicacy.

The dispute centers on the identity of the leading three figures, those in the most prominent positions. I propose that they are Davit IV Aġmašenebeli in second place, preceded by his father, King Giorgi II (shown as a monk), and followed by his grandfather Bagrat' IV; and I argue that the church was painted soon after Giorgi II handed over the crown to his son in 1089. This changeover is shrouded in mystery and is mentioned only in passing in *Kartlis Cxovreba*. All that is recorded is that Giorgi crowned his son as king with his own hands, after which he disappears from

12. S. Djurić, "Ateni and the Rivers of Paradise in Byzantine Art," *Zograf* 20, 1989, 22-29.

13. On the style of the At'eni paintings, see D. Mouriki, "Observations on the Style of the Wall Paintings of the Sion Church at Ateni, Georgia," in Calo' Mariani, *L'arte georgiana*, 173-85. ✓

14. Prince Grégoire Gagarine (plates) and Count Ernest Stackelberg (text), *Le Caucase pittoresque*, Paris, 1849, pl. 57. The engraving follows the paintings accurately, apart from the pose of Queen Isduxt' and the omission of a space between the queen and the young prince Ašot'.

15. Full details about this and all following inscriptions are given in Appendix II. ✓

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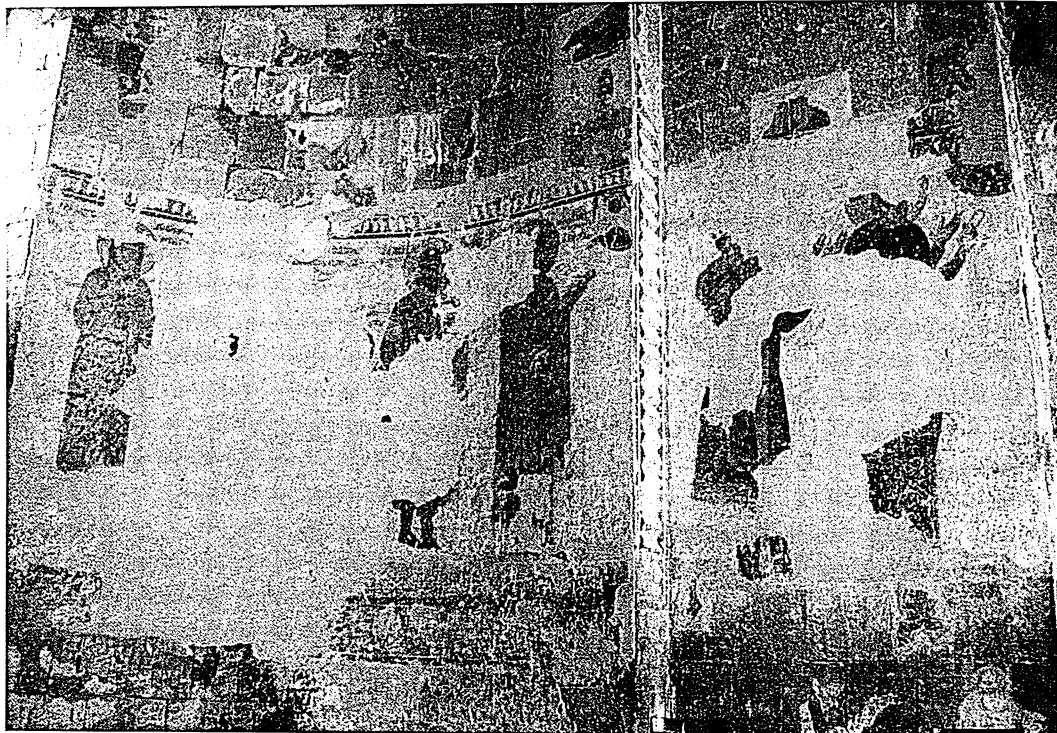


Fig. 28. At'eni. Donor portraits on north side of west apse (c.1090).

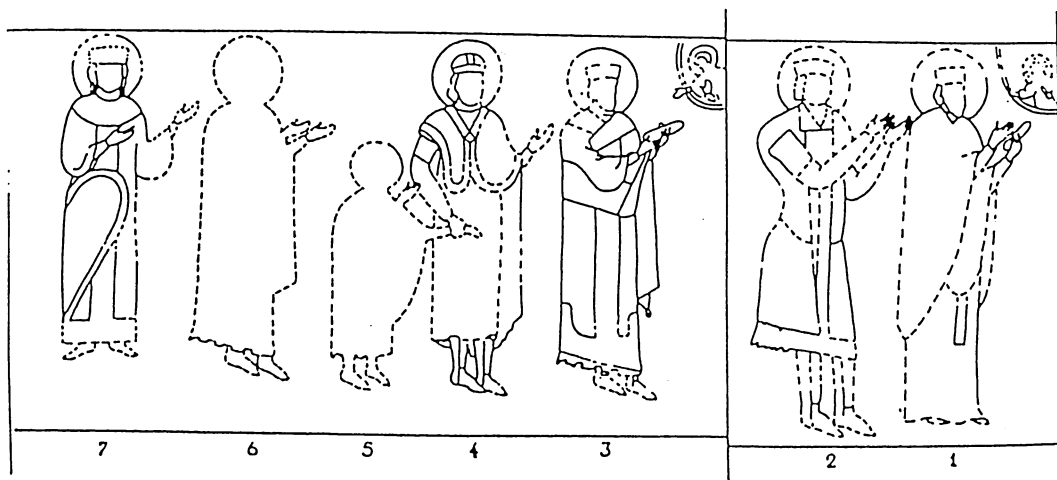


Fig. 29. At'eni. Schema of donor portraits on north side of west apse (after Abramišvili).

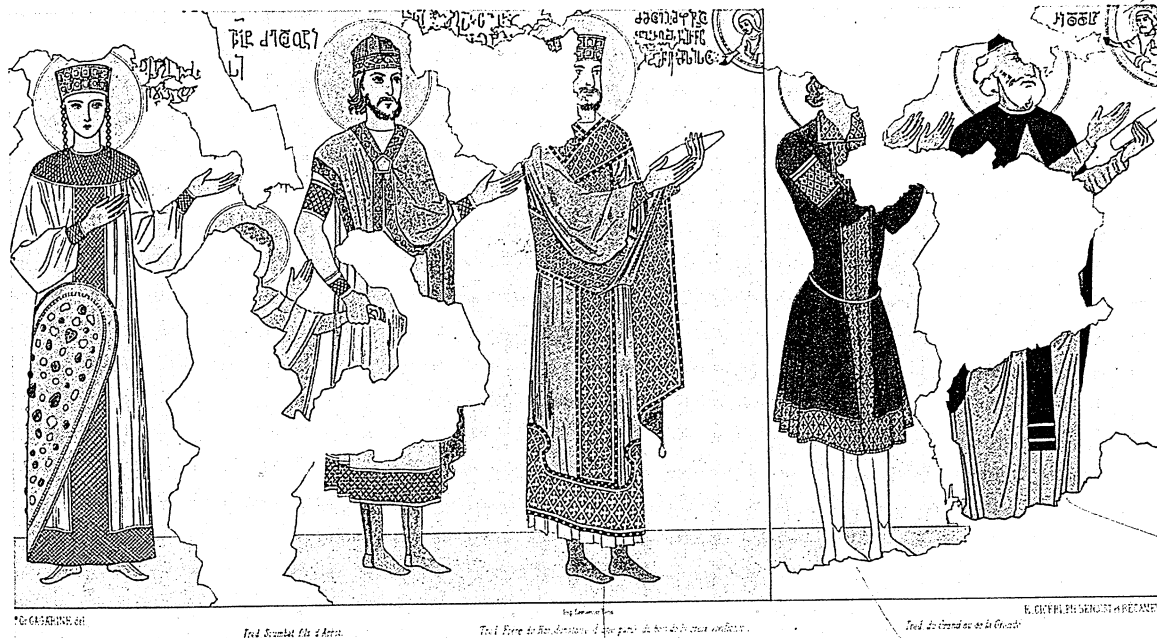


Fig. 30. Engraving of donor portraits at At'eni by G. Gagarin, 1843.

the chronicle record.¹⁶ Given that Davit was only sixteen when he came to the throne and that his father had a dismal record in fighting against the Seljuks, by whom he was forced to pay annual tribute, it is probable that Giorgi was forced by his nobles, in a revolt masterminded by Giorgi Č'q'ondideli, to abdicate in favor of Davit IV.

I contend that Giorgi was forced to retire into a monastery, from which he could no longer offer any political threat as a possible rallying point for nobles discontented with the new regime. It is in this new guise as a monk-king that he is depicted at At'eni. Giorgi lived for some time after his deposition, and Davit still gave his father formal titles. Thus, at the Ruis-Urbnisi council of 1103, Giorgi is mentioned in prayers as “king of kings, and *caesar* of all the East and West,” but he played no part in its deliberations, and real power remained with Davit IV.¹⁷ Such a course of ac-

16. KC 1 (*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 324₃₋₁₁; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 315.

17. I. Dolidze, *Kartuli samartlis dzeglebi* (Monuments of Georgian law), Tbilisi, 1970, 3:125–26:

კეთილად მსახურისა და ღმრთივ-დაცვულისა მეფისა ჩუენისა გიორგი მეფეთა
მეფისა და ყოვლისა აღმოსავლისა და დასავალისა კესაროსისა, მრავალმცა
არიან წელნი

In the same prayers Davit IV has fuller titles:

დავით ღმრთის-მსახურისა და ღმრთივ-დაცვულისა მეფისა ჩუენისა აფხაზთა და
ქართველთა, რანთა და კახთა თუთმპურობელისა, მრავალმცა არიან ცელნი

“Our king Davit, servant and defender of God, autocrat of the Abxazetians and Kartlians, Ranians and K'axetians, may he [live] many years.”

tion had many precedents in Georgia and Byzantium. Davit III *kuropalates* and his brother Bagrat' had forced their father into a monastery in 961,¹⁸ and both of Giorgi II's Byzantine brothers-in-law, Michael VII Doukas and Nikephoros III Botaneiates, also had to follow this route after their abdications in 1078 and 1081.¹⁹

At At'eni, Giorgi is followed by his son, the new, youthful Davit IV, and the second group is led by Giorgi's father, Bagrat' IV, who had done so much to establish the monarchy's status (if not always its actual power) over a united Georgian kingdom in his long, forty-five-year reign. Thus, the row presents a coherent and clear vision of Bagrat'ioni power. The primacy of Giorgi II reflects his spiritual superiority, as both king and monk, over his son, as well as the respect due to an elder. He is literally closer to God. In turn, Davit acknowledges his dependence on his father for his position, but the difference in their dress demonstrates the shift in real military and political power to the younger man. The appearance of Bagrat' IV serves as a reminder of the possible greatness of the Bagrat'ioni dynasty, as a model for Davit to follow. The description of Giorgi as "the son of the great [Bagrat'],"²⁰ and the inscription by Bagrat' naming him as the father of Giorgi, explicitly tie these three figures together and show Davit's inheritance of both material and spiritual greatness from his forebears.²¹ Although the names of the three remaining figures behind Bagrat' IV have survived, they have not yet been identified with any known historical persons. However, Virsaladze's proposal that Sumbat' and Ašot' are probably minor local members of the Bagrat'ioni family and that Queen Isduxt' may have been Giorgi II's sister seems likely.²² My argument is based on circumstantial evidence, but it provides the only plausible explanation for what happened to Giorgi II after his abdication, and the simplest account of the figures in the donor panel.

I therefore believe that the row reveals facts about the later history of Giorgi II that are not recorded in the chronicles. It is, perhaps, surprising that Giorgi's adoption of monastic garb (if my theory is right) is not mentioned in *Kartlis Cxovreba*, since spiritual relatives are normally celebrated as an asset by royal families. But this may be put down to a desire of the chronicler to minimize the importance of Giorgi II

18. KC 1 (*Cxovreba da Uc'q'eba Bagrat'omianta*), 381₁₆₋₂₀; Pätsch, *Das Leben*, 472.

19. Anna Komnena, *Alexiad*, in *Anna Comnène: Alexiade*, ed. and trans. B. Leib, Paris, 1937, 1:102. It is possible that Giorgi's sister, Maria "of Alania," was also forced into a convent; see M. Mullett, "The 'Disgrace' of the Ex-Basilissa Maria," *ByzSlav* 45, 1984, 202-11.

20. *Kartlis Cxovreba* honors Bagrat' with the title of "the Great" twice: KC 1 (*Mat'iane Kartlisa*), 290₄ and 308₆; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 285 and 300.

21. T. Virsaladze, "At'enis mxat'vrobis datariḡebisa da k't'it'orta p'ort'ret'ebis ident'ipik'aciis sak'itxisatvis" (On the question of the identification of the donor portraits and the date of the painting at At'eni), *AG* 10, 1991, 127ff. (French summary, 202-5) (also published in *SabXel* 1988, pt. 4, 129-44), has already noticed the symbolism of the second figure's location between temporal and spiritual leaders, although her identifications of the figures are, of course, different.

22. Virsaladze, "At'enis," 126. She has also proposed that the missing sixth figure may have been Queen Maria, the wife of Bagrat' IV.

(indeed to forget about him as soon as possible), or to a belief that Davit's own sanctity eclipsed that of his father. In either case, it is significant that in 1090 it *was* thought important to show Giorgi and to declare his change in status and that it was deemed necessary or politic to depict the new king as the successor to his father.

Davit is known to have spent time at At'eni, and so it is possible that this location was chosen for this important dynastic image because of its royal associations. If the king visited At'eni, then the rest of his court would also have been present and so could witness the permanence of the change in leader. (It is, of course, conceivable that many similar images were erected, none of which has survived.)

The details of the row of figures provide evidence of an interesting development in the depiction of the trappings of imperial dress. Giorgi's proposed new status as king-monk explains his appearance in monk's clothing, but Davit's simple dress of heavy red cloth with a single trimming of fur is unlike any royal dress seen in Georgia thus far. Its difference is made more striking by the appearance of Bagrat' IV and Queen Isduxt' in the "traditional" Byzantine *loros*. It is clear, then, that for Davit to abandon the aura of power with which these Byzantine robes must have been associated, his new robes must have had great significance. However, to ascribe an exact meaning or significance to these robes is more difficult. Similar robes are worn by both royal and nonroyal figures in other eleventh- and twelfth-century donor images, such as those at Zemo-K'rixi (Figs. 31 and 32), Udabno (Figs. 35–37), Macxvariši (see Plate XI), and Pavnisi.²³ They therefore seem to be examples of aristocratic or royal Georgian court dress. In Chapter IV, I consider when this dress emerged and how exactly its status can be compared with Byzantine robes.

The leading donors are shown raising their hands in acts of supplication and donation to Christ and the Mother of God, who appear above them. However, their gestures also show them pointing to the main, east apse of the church. The imagery here contains many remarkable innovations in Georgian art. The conch of the apse depicts the Virgin and Child between the archangels Michael and Gabriel (see Plate VI). Only one earlier example of this iconographic scheme is known in Georgia, in chapel no. 8 of the rock-cut monastic complex at Sabereebi in the Gareji Desert.²⁴ This is dated to the ninth or tenth century and appears to be an isolated case.²⁵ The typical apse scheme seen in Georgia in the tenth and eleventh centuries, even in

23. Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 40–42.

24. Copies of the images are shown in T. S. Ševiakova, *Monumental'naia živopis' rannego srednevekov'ia Gruzii*, Tbilisi, 1983, 14 and pls. 46 and 47.

25. Z. Sxirt'ladze, *Sabereebis presk'uli c'arc'erebi* (The fresco inscriptions of Sabereebi), Tbilisi, 1985, 111–25; A. Vol'skaia, "Rospisi peščernyx monastyrei David-Garedži," *Gareji, Trudy kaxetskoi arxeologičeskoj ekspedicii* 8, Tbilisi, 1988, 136–37.

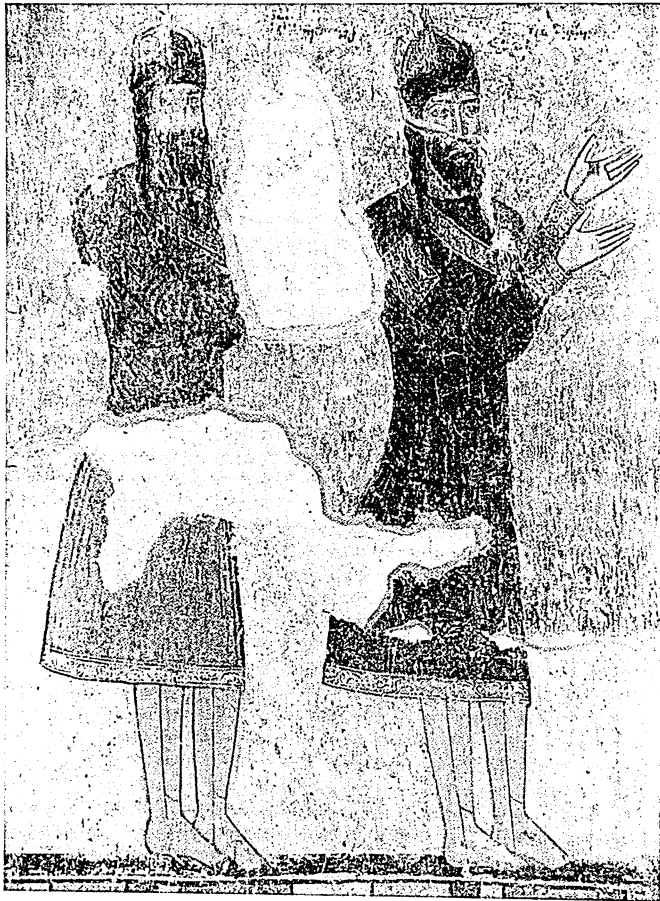


Fig. 31. Zemo-K'rixi. Donors on north wall (west section) (mid-eleventh century).

churches commissioned by Bagrat'ionis, was the Deesis, often with extra eschatological imagery.²⁶ This iconography survived well into the thirteenth century.²⁷

This innovation was influenced by Byzantium, where it was, of course, much more common. The choice of Aaron, Zachariah, David, and John the Baptist, who are placed on the bema arch, may also have been encouraged by Byzantine practices. At the church of Daphni these figures are emphasized by placing them in the prothesis.²⁸ Even the medallion of the Pantokrator in the center of the bema arch (which has previously been described as a decision constrained by the inability to paint over

26. In general, see T. Velmans, "L'image de la Déesis dans les églises de Géorgie et dans celles d'autres régions du monde byzantin," pt. 1: *CahArch* 29, 1980-81, 47-102; pt. 2: *CahArch* 31, 1983, 129-69. In royal churches, fragments of Deesis apse schemes have been found at T'beti, Işxani, Otxta Ek'lesia, and Dolisq'ana: J.-M. and N. Thierry, "Peintures du X^e siècle en Géorgie Méridionale et leurs rapports avec la peinture byzantine d'Asie Mineure," *CahArch* 24, 1975, 73-114. The wall paintings of Dolisq'ana have been dated to the eleventh century and so may not be directly associated with the Bagrat'ionis; see N. Thierry, "Peintures géorgiennes en Turquie," *BK* 42, 1984, 131-67, esp. 135-43.

27. See, for example, Dž. Ioselidze, *Rospis' Ači*, Tbilisi, 1989, 27-29.

28. E. Diez and O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece: Hosios Lucas and Daphni*, Cambridge, Mass., 1931, plan of Daphni following 117. The only exception is David, but his prominence at At'eni may be explained by the proposed descent of the Bagrat'ionis from the prophet.



Fig. 32. Zemo-K'rixi. Donors on north wall (east section).

the relief cross in the dome) in fact follows a precedent at Hosios Loukas.²⁹ The placing of deacons with censers on either side of the entrance to the apse also followed recent Byzantine interest in the liturgical functioning of the apse and in its possible visual depictions.³⁰ A similar reliance on recent Byzantine sources can be seen in the cycle of the early life of the Virgin in the south conch (Fig. 33). The cycle, which contains twelve scenes, is very complex for its early date, and it has been convincingly argued that the combination of textual sources on which it is based came from Byzantium.³¹

The Byzantine nature of At'eni should not, however, be overstressed. Other aspects of the church program show that traditionally Georgian features and motifs

29. Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics*, no. 23, on plan of Hosios Loukas following 117.

30. C. Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church*, London, 1982, 184–98.

31. The cycle is based on the *Protoevangelium* of James and the *Transitus Mariae*; see J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie et l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'empire byzantin et en occident*, vol. 1, 2d ed., Brussels, 1992, and Alpago-Novello, *Art and Architecture*, 92.



Fig. 33. At'eni. South apse. *Annunciation to Joseph* from cycle of *Life of the Virgin*.

retained their power. The western apse, with its *Last Judgment* (see Plate VII), is dominated in the conch by a Deesis with Christ in Majesty drawn directly from the earlier traditions of Georgian apse decoration. The cross in the dome and the four rivers of paradise further emphasize this continued eschatological interest in the proximity of the Second Coming.

It is certain that At'eni was heavily influenced by Byzantine ideas, but the question remains whether these innovations were inspired by the Bagrat'ioni family and particularly associated with them or were just part of a wider process of "Byzantinization" in Georgia. The close family ties between the Bagrat'ionis and the Byzantine imperial families in the eleventh century, noted at the opening of the chapter, pro-

vided a clear channel for the transmission of art and ideas, making it easy to link the two in this royal church. At the same time, it can be pointed out that other routes existed. In the eleventh century many Georgians looked west to Constantinople for their fortunes or spiritual enlightenment. Soldiers, such as John Tornikos and the Pakourianisdze brothers, traveled to live and work in Constantinople, where they could study and adopt these new ideas. In 1083 Grigol Pakourianisdze, who had made his fortune as the Grand Domestic in the West, established the Petrici Monastery at Bačkovo (in modern Bulgaria). Here many Georgian monks lived and worked, including such influential figures as Ioane P'et'ric'i, the Neoplatonist scholar who also studied with Psellos and Italos in Constantinople and who became first abbot of Gelati, Davit IV's principal foundation.³² The monastery at Bačkovo contains many of the Byzantine liturgical innovations seen at At'eni.³³ At the same time, many monks and clerics, including the catholicos Melkisedek' and Saint Giorgi Mtac'mindeli,³⁴ moved west to the monasteries of Constantinople and Mount Athos, rather than south to the Georgian monasteries of the Black Mountain and Jerusalem.³⁵ *Kartlis Cxovreba* gives two extensive lists of the gifts the catholicos Melkisedek' received from the emperors in Constantinople,³⁶ and the monks of Athos made it their lifework to translate Byzantine texts into Georgian. It was as a result of their work that the Constantinopolitan rites replaced the Jerusalem service rites at this time.

It is thus apparent that there were many sources through which Byzantine ideas could reach Georgia, before even considering the unrecorded routes such as commerce.³⁷ We can be sure, then, that at least among the educated classes the Byzantine origins and significance of the innovations at At'eni would have been recognized and

32. E. Bakalova, *Bačkovskata Kostnica*, Sofia, 1977 (Bulgarian text, with English summary, 239–43). The “Georgianness” of the monastery was enshrined in the typikon of the monastery: P. Lemerle, “Le typikon de Grégoire Pakourianos (décembre 1083),” in *Cinq études sur le XI^e siècle byzantin*, Paris, 1977, 113–92, esp. 149 and 157. The ethnic makeup of the monastery and its founders is contentious: for the “Chalcedonian Armenian” view see V. A. Arutjunova-Fidanjan, “The Ethno-Confessional Self-Awareness of Armenian Chalcedonians,” *REArm* 21, 1988–89, 345–63.

33. The date of the wall paintings of Bačkovo is disputed (either the years immediately after the building of the chapel or the mid–twelfth century). See, for example S. Grishin, “Literary Evidence for the Dating of the Bačkovo Ossuary Frescoes,” *Byzantina Australiensia* 1, 1978, 90–100, and D. Mouriki, “The Formative Role of Byzantine Art on Its Cultural Neighbours: Reflections of Constantinopolitan Styles in Georgian Monumental Painting,” *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress* 1, pt. 2 (= *JÖB* 31/2), 1981, 725–57, esp. 733, who both argue convincingly for a late-eleventh-century date.

34. For fuller lists, including Ephrem Mcire, Ioane P'et'ric'i, and Arsen Iq'altoeli, see K. Salia, “Les moines et les monastères géorgiens à l'étranger,” *BK* 8–9, 1960, 30–59.

35. These monasteries were still very popular, but their influence began to be supplanted by those to the west. See W. Djobadze, *Materials for the Study of Georgian Monasteries in the Western Environs of Antioch-on-the-Orontes* (CSCO 372 Subsidia 48), Louvain, 1976.

36. KC 1 (*Mat'iane Kartlisa*), 282_{15–28} and 290_{13–22}; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 374–75 and 376.

37. The presence of Georgian merchants in Constantinople is recorded, for example, by Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, in *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, ed. J. L. van Dieten, Series Berolinensis, Berlin, 1975, vol. 11, pt. 1, 384; trans. H. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: The Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Detroit, 1984, 211.

appreciated. I believe, however, that the new iconographic elements would have been directly associated with the Bagrat'ioni family. The evidence of the Bagrat'ioni patronage of the church was, of course, explicitly spelled out in the row of donors, but the iconography also has direct royal implications.

The prime concern of the Bagrat'ioni family in the eleventh century, as is made abundantly clear in *Kartlis Cxovreba*, was the unification of the country and the suppression of the rebellious nobles. The practical side of this campaign was the annual battles against the separatist aristocracy of each region, but there was a symbolic battle as well. This involved the promotion of imagery specifically tied to a unified Georgia and, through it, to the Bagrat'ioni family. In this, the idea of the Mother of God as the patron saint of all Georgia was most significant. The interest at At'eni in the cult of the Mother of God and her dominance in the apse fit in well with the desire to establish her as the governing royal image of the whole country.

The image of the Mother of God at At'eni, in fact, represents the artistic culmination of the promotion of her cult, which can be traced back in other media to the reigns of Bagrat' IV and Giorgi II. Evidence for this can be found in the coins issued by both men (Fig. 34). These depicted a bust of the Mother of God on the obverse

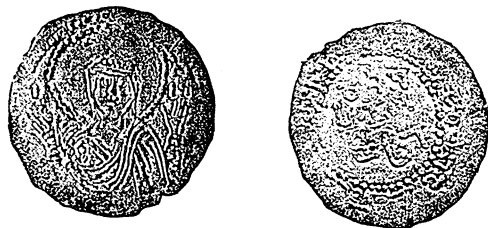


Fig. 34. Coin of Bagrat' IV.

and inscriptions proclaiming the kings' Byzantine titles (*nobelissimos* or *sebastos*, and *caesar*, respectively) on the reverse.³⁸ The formulas that these coins follow were derived exclusively and entirely from Byzantine exemplars and so could be ascribed merely to the derivative nature of much of Bagrat'ioni symbolism in this period. However, in the light of the symbolism of unity that they represent, their local relevance and meaning become apparent.

This royal interpretation cannot explain every feature of the innovative iconography at At'eni. The specifically liturgical elements, such as the censuring deacons, can only refer to theological concerns and serve to remind us of the overt religious purpose of the art. However, if the paintings were to have been regarded specifically as the result of Bagrat'ioni patronage, then the message was clear: the rulers of Georgia were showing themselves as modern patrons, abreast of the latest innovations.

38. E. A. Paxomov, *Monety Gruzii*, Tbilisi, 1970, 61-86; R. Met'reveli, "Die byzantinisch-georgischen Beziehungen in 11. Jahrhundert," *Georgica* 17, 1994, 29-33; D. M. Lang, *Studies in the Numismatic History of Georgia in Transcaucasia*, Numismatic Notes and Monographs, no. 130, New York, 1955, 19-20.

Such an impression would have been made more pronounced by the conservatism seen elsewhere in Georgian art patronage in this period. A strong body of nonroyal material survives from the mountainous northern province of Svaneti, especially from four churches painted between 1096 and 1130.³⁹ All are stylistically and iconographically linked to the work of one artist, who is named in two of the churches as "Tevdore, the king's painter." All the Svan churches follow the same architectural and decorative schemes. They are small, hall churches and are decorated in the apse with a Deesis, often with extra eschatological imagery, with an abbreviated row of church fathers and apostles below. The walls of the churches have very limited Christological cycles and figures and scenes involving warrior and other locally venerated saints (notably Saints George, Katherine, K'virik'e, and Ivrita [that is, Quiricus and Julitta]).

Despite Tevdore's title, the Svan churches do not appear to be royal commissions: no inscriptions mention the king, but instead they all make pleas on behalf of local *aznaurs* (lower nobility). This evidence of patronage, and the similarities in iconography and style, suggest that they can be taken as representative of contemporary Svan interests in painting and program choice. The Christological scenes are very abbreviated, covering no more than the *Nativity*, *Baptism*, *Crucifixion*, and *Anastasis* of Christ, and the eschatological nature of the apses is very marked.⁴⁰ It should be noted, however, that Svaneti was fiercely loyal to local traditions, even in the fourteenth century, and was isolated from the rest of Georgia for much of the year by mountains and snow. This conservatism and enforced insularity may well have affected the willingness to accept new programs.

Nevertheless, the fact that Tevdore, the king's painter, was chosen to decorate the churches shows that the Svan nobles were not entirely cut off from court life and were keen to imitate some royal precedents, if only the choice of artist. It also shows that they were aware of court fashions and could have chosen to adopt different schemes: Nak'ipari and Cvirmi, the last of the churches in this group to be painted, do include images of Saint Stephen the Protomartyr as a deacon, suggesting that some of the innovations seen at At'eni were beginning to seep through.⁴¹ However, for the most part, the Byzantine elements in the apse at At'eni are strikingly different from these more traditional schemes, and this must have been immediately noticeable to anyone entering the church. Although exactly contemporary paintings from the more traditional heartlands of Georgia are lacking, examples such as Pavnisi (c. 1170–80) show that Deesis apses were still common in the twelfth century.⁴²

39. Aladašvili, *Živopisnaia škola Svaneti*, chap. 1. (This book is an updated version of N. A. Aladašvili, G. V. Alibegašvili, and A. I. Vol'skaia, *Rospisi xudožnika Tevdore v verxnei Svanetii*, Tbilisi, 1966.) The churches are the Church of the Archangels at Iprari (1096), the Church of Sts. K'virik'e and Ivrita at Lagurka (1112), the Church of St. George at Nak'ipari (1130), and the Church of the Saviour at Cvirmi (c. 1130). See also B. Schrade, ed., *The Art of Svanetia*, London, 1997, forthcoming.

40. Velmans, "L'image de la Déesis," pt. 1, 47–102.

41. Aladašvili, *Živopisnaia škola Svaneti*, figs. 22 and 25, pl. 56.

42. E. L. Privalova, *Pavnisi*, Tbilisi, 1977, 21–24 and pls. 2–3; Velmans, "L'image de la Déesis," pt. 1, 89–92.

The main church in the rock-cut monastery of Udabno in the Gareji Desert also shows the dominance of local and traditional Georgian motifs at this time, since the commission centered on a cycle of the local saint, Saint Davit Garejeli.⁴³ The southern half of the church has collapsed, but five donors, divided into two groups, are shown in the lowest register below the remaining scenes of the Saint Davit Garejeli cycle. In the first group is the main donor, who offers a model of the church to Saint Davit and is very similar to the donors at Zemo-K'ixi in both dress and style (Fig. 35). (A second figure, who originally accompanied the first donor, is now completely lost.) In the second group are three men shown with haloes and crowns (Figs. 36 and 37). Two of the men wear Georgian court robes, while the third wears military uniform, with a cloak, sword, and spear. The style of the paintings indicates that they were painted in the middle of the eleventh century,⁴⁴ which suggests that these men may represent the rulers of K'axeti, which was independent from the Bagrat'ionis until Davit IV's conquest in 1104.⁴⁵ With so much of the church now lost, it is impossible to characterize the commission accurately, but it seems to show none of the innovations seen at At'eni. It is clear that this church was commissioned by a K'axetian noble rather than the Donauris themselves, and it is interesting to note that he made no attempt to imitate the Bagrat'ionis.

Thus, the church of At'eni would certainly have stood out from those built at the same time, and it is certain that its royal patronage, especially at a time of crisis like Davit's accession to the throne, would have attracted much attention to the iconography and program of the church. The church shows the importance of Byzantine influence on the Bagrat'ionis at the end of the eleventh century, but equally it shows how eclectically Byzantine elements had been selected, and how meanings had been altered to suit Georgian needs. The appearance of non-Byzantine dress among the donors and the continued emphasis on eschatological theology in the *Last Judgment* in the west apse and the rivers of Paradise in the squinches demonstrate the persistence of these Georgian themes.

As Davit's reign progressed, however, the Georgian elements in his imagery became more subdued. Coinage from Davit's reign is relatively rare, but one surviving coin in the British Museum shows the king as a true Byzantine monarch (Fig. 38). He wears the *loros* and carries a scepter and cross-headed orb. He also wears a crown surmounted by a cross. The reverse has a cross in the center, around which runs a Georgian inscription that reads "Christ! Davit, king of the Abxazetians,

43. Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 41–42; Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 78–80.

44. G. Abramišvili, *Davit garejeliš cik'li kartul k'edlis mxat'vrobaši* (The cycle of St. Davit Garejeli in Georgian mural paintings), Tbilisi, 1972, 74, argues that one inscription can be restored to give a *kronik'on* of 203 (= 983). However, this depends on a very conjectural restoration of the inscription. My dating is based on the very close stylistic comparison between the first donor and the donors at Zemo-K'ixi.

45. On the history of K'axeti, see T. P'ap'uašvili, *Ranta da k'axta samepo* (The principality of Ran and K'axeti), Tbilisi, 1982, 217–54.



Fig. 35. Udabno. North wall of main church. Donor (mid–eleventh century).



Fig. 36. Udabno. North wall of main church. Royal (?) donors.



Fig. 37. Uدابno. Schema of north wall of main church.



Fig. 38. Coin of Davit IV Ağmašenebeli.

Kartlians, Ranians, K'axetians, and Armenians.”⁴⁶ Where the coins of Bagrat' IV and Giorgi II had slavishly imitated Byzantine examples, Davit had taken over the imagery to glorify himself.

Gelati

This confidence in the use of Byzantine forms is seen again in Davit's greatest monument, the monastery and academy at Gelati (see Plate VIII). The foundation is lo-

46. D. M. Lang, “Notes on Caucasian Numismatics (Part 1),” *Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, 6th ser., 17, 1957, 144–45:

ქ[რისტ]ე! დ[ავით] მ[ე]ფ[ე] ავ[საზ]თ[ა] ქ[ართველთა] რ[ა]ნთ[ა] კ[ა]ხთ[ა] და
ს[ომე]ხთ[ა]

I have taken my reading of this inscription from Kapanadze's commentary to Paxomov, *Monety Gruzii*, 296. On Davit's earlier coins, which were based on the issues of his father and grandfather, see D. G. Kapanadze, “Novii tip money Davida Stroitelia,” *VizVrem* 8, 1956, 338–43.

cated near Kutaisi in Imereti, the principal city in Georgia before the capture of Tbilisi in 1122, and is the epitome of all Davit's ideas about the state and about the ways in which his power should be visualized. The monastery was built as a royal mausoleum to house Davit's tomb and then those of his descendants; and its decoration and functions were chosen to be suitable for such a task.

It was begun by Davit IV in 1106, but according to his testament, it was still unfinished at his death in 1125: "I leave the monastery, my tomb and the ossuary of my children, unfinished, and I take leave from it with eternal longing. Let my son, Demet're, complete it for ever—for me, for himself, and for posterity."⁴⁷ The complex was completed by Demet're,⁴⁸ but there has been some debate regarding the amount of work that had been completed by 1125.⁴⁹ *Kartlis Cxovreba* says that when Davit's first *mc'ignobartuxucesi* (head of the royal chancellery), Giorgi, was buried at Gelati in 1118, the church was "newly built,"⁵⁰ which suggests that the overall scheme of the monastery must already have been well established. It is therefore probable that any work added by Demet're had already been planned, especially since the details of the iconography of the church have specific associations for Davit's reign and acts.

The royal patronage of the church, and its aims, are clearly stated in *Kartlis Cxovreba*. The church was to be "a second Jerusalem, a New Athens, better than of old, the model of all ecclesiastical splendor."⁵¹ These references point to the spiritual and academic aspirations of the monastery, but the true inspiration for Gelati is to be found in Byzantine imperial foundations. Davit IV was imitating the magnificent commissions of Constantinople, such as Constantine IX Monomachos's St. George of Mangana.⁵² The closeness of Davit's ideas to Byzantine examples can be seen in the similarities between Gelati and John II Komnenos's Pantokrator monastery (built 1118–36). Although the Pantokrator monastery was founded a few years after Gelati, it provides the closest parallel to it. Both foundations were designed primarily to be the dynastic mausoleums for their respective imperial families; however, the survival of the *typikon* of the Pantokrator allows us to see the full

47. Dolidze, *Kartuli samartlis dzeglebi*, 2:19; R. Mepisašvili, *Arxitekturnyi ansambl' Gelati*, Tbilisi, 1966, 4.

48. KC 1 (*Laša Giorgis-droindeli Memat'iane*), 367₅₋₆; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 50.

49. Mepisašvili, *Arxitekturnyi ansambl'*, 71, believes that the narthex and south chapel and porch were added by Demet're I; and Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 217 (also *Istoriia gruzinskoi monument'noi živopisi*, Tbilisi, 1957, 1:116), believes that he also decorated the interior of the church. Amiranašvili dates the mosaic to 1125–30, but gives no supporting evidence for this. The dates have, however, been followed by most later historians without criticism. Their views are based on imprecise stylistic comparisons, none of which can absolutely tie these phases to the first years of Demet're's reign, rather than the last years of Davit IV's.

50. KC 1 (*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 337₃₋₄; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 20; see also Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 328.

51. KC 1 (*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 330₁₉₋₃₃₁₁; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 13–14; see also Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 322.

52. For all contemporary references to Constantine IX's foundation and its archaeology, see R. Demangel and E. Mamboury, *Le quartier des Manganes et la première région de Constantinople*, Paris, 1939, 19–37.

extent of the aims of that foundation.⁵³ It was to be a great artistic monument, both to please God and to provide a suitable setting for John's body: he imported relics to be near the site of his tomb and requested the monks to look on the interior as an appearance of heaven on earth. The monastery was also to be a great philanthropic venture, with hospitals and leper houses, thereby depicting the emperor as protector and benefactor of his people.

All these aims are mirrored at Gelati, where Davit IV Aġmašenebeli was buried and where he intended his descendants to be buried as well. It had a hospital nearby,⁵⁴ and mosaic was used to decorate the apse, showing that no expense was spared on its decoration. Thus, in its conception the church is directly modeled on Byzantine examples in a way no previous Georgian monument had been. The inclusion of an academy at Gelati also followed Constantinopolitan models. Since Gelati's first abbot, the Neoplatonist scholar Ioane P'et'ric'i, had studied with Psellos and Italos in Constantinople, it is probable that this provided the model for the new academy. The one significant difference between the two rulers' perceptions of their foundations as mausoleums was that Davit requested to be buried beneath the gateway to the monastery, where all worshipers would walk over his grave. This was a symbol of royal humility quite alien to the imperial splendor of the Komnenian tombs in the Pantokrator.

At first sight, the architecture of the main church appears to be typically Georgian, with a conical dome, ashlar construction, and blind arcading, but it has some unusual features. Externally, the church has projecting apses at the east end (instead of containing them within the thickness of the east wall as happened in other contemporary churches) and a self-contained narthex to the west. The internal organization of space, whereby the dome is supported by the projecting walls of the apse to the east and by freestanding pillars to the west, is also a relatively unusual arrangement in Georgia in this period.⁵⁵ All these changes would seem to bring Gelati into line with standard Byzantine architectural practice, but the overall visual effect of the church is still unmistakably Georgian. The only possible change of real significance is the construction of the narthex, since it could indicate a change in liturgical operation, but this cannot be proved, as our knowledge of Georgian liturgical developments in this period is very poor.

Of the interior decoration of Gelati, only the apse mosaic and narthex paintings survive from the original scheme. The rest of the church was repainted and restored in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although this work probably follows the

53. P. Gautier, "Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator," *REB* 32, 1974, 1-146.

54. The hospital was probably located at Soxasteri, two hundred meters from the monastery. See V. Cincadze, "Arxitekturnyi ansambl' 'Soxasteri,'" *AG* 8, 1979, 29-44; R. Mepisašvili and T. Virsaladze, *Gelati: Architecture, Mosaic, Fresco*, Tbilisi, 1982, 11.

55. One of the few examples is Samtavisi: G. Soxašvili, *Samtavisi*, Tbilisi, 1973.

original cycle quite closely, including an image of Davit IV presenting a model of the church to Christ on the north wall of the north transept.⁵⁶

Apse Mosaic

The mosaic in the apse shows the Virgin and Child between the archangels Gabriel and Michael (see Plate X). The lower half of the mosaic has suffered badly and was restored with paint in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. The presence of this apse scheme in the Bagrat'ioni mausoleum church supports the argument in relation to At'eni that this iconography was particularly associated with the Georgian royal family. In both cases the Virgin is of the *kyriotissa* type. The Bagrat'ionis were identifying themselves with the national imagery of a unified Georgia. This association was, of course, secondary to the overt theological message of the image, which was proclaimed in a Greek inscription that runs round the conch of the apse: "Imitating in spirit the cherubim and singing in honour of the life-bringing Trinity the thrice holy hymn, we lay aside every earthly thought in order to receive the king of the universe whom the invisible legions of angels escort."⁵⁷ But even the use of Greek establishes the uniqueness and Byzantinizing nature of the church.⁵⁸

However, at Gelati the medium is as important as the message. This is the only known monumental mosaic image to have survived after the seventh century,⁵⁹ and so its appearance at this time is of great significance. Mosaic had a strong symbolic value—which was easily recognized—beyond its enormous cost. Byzantine emperors had used it as a diplomatic gift,⁶⁰ resulting in the medium being closely associated with Byzantine imperial splendor. It was regarded as the supreme material. When Vladimir of Rus' was converted to Christianity and wanted to build a worthy church to commemorate this, it was to Byzantium and mosaicists that he turned.⁶¹ Equally, when the Normans in Sicily determined to ape the Byzantine emperors, they seized upon mosaic as the medium that best fitted their imperial ambitions, as did the Venetian doges at San Marco.⁶² The use of mosaic at Gelati was a demonstration of the ambitious imperial example on which the Bagrat'ionis modeled themselves,

56. He is identified in an inscription: Mepisašvili, *Arxitekturnyi ansambl'*, 8–9. The other secular figures depicted here date from the sixteenth century.

57. Alpago-Novello, *Art and Architecture*, 93.

58. For more on the use of Greek inscriptions in Georgian art, see T. S. Kauxčičšvili, "Grečeskie nadpisi na gruzinskix freskax," in Ieni, *Primo simposio*, 135–46.

59. Fragments of mosaic have survived from the early churches of Pitsunda and C'romi. There is evidence that mosaic was employed at Martvili, Šoreti, and Mokvi, although there is little evidence about the extent or contents of any of these: V. Beridze, G. Alibegašvili, A. Vol'skaia, and L. Xuskivadze, *The Treasures of Georgia*, London, 1984, 95.

60. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972, 132.

61. Mango, *Art*, 221.

62. O. Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, London, 1949; E. Borsook, *Messages in Mosaic: The Royal Programmes of Norman Sicily (1130–1187)*. Oxford, 1990, chap. 1; O. Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice*, Washington, D.C., 1984.

as well as of their willingness to commit large sums to the church, showing their dedication to the church and the glory of God. The use of mosaic enabled the church to compete in magnificence with those of Constantinople. The link between the medium and the donor was presumably clarified by the existence of a portrait of Davit IV holding a model of the church in the north transept, where the later version now stands.

It is impossible to discuss the rest of the program in the apse of the church, since it only exists in its sixteenth- or seventeenth-century form. However, if the present scheme was based on the original paintings, then it seems that it included a row of church fathers and a *Communion of the Apostles*. This was another liturgical innovation derived from Byzantium, and it is interesting to note that, once again, novel imagery is first found in a royal foundation.

Narthex Paintings

The wall paintings in the narthex further demonstrate the increasing sophistication with which the Bagrat'ionis created an identity for themselves using imported Byzantine imagery (Figs. 39–41; see Plate IX).

They depict the seven ecumenical councils of the church. They have been badly damaged by damp and partly restored, but the overall scheme can be discerned. The scenes cover the four walls of the narthex, rising onto the barrel vault, which runs from north to south. The cycle starts with the first council on the south wall; the second, third, and fourth councils appear on the west wall, the fifth council on the north wall, and the sixth and seventh councils on the east wall. The central section of the vault of the narthex has a depiction of the *Glorification of the Cross*, and the tympana above the doorways and the spaces above capitals have representations of Christ (Mandylion), the Mother of God, the archangel Gabriel, Saints Peter and Paul, and four other unidentifiable saints. Each council is shown on two registers: the emperor, seated between four of the patriarchs and other prelates, is shown above two crowds of orthodox and heretical clerics. The frame around the southern window on the west wall also has a painting of the miracle of Saint Euphemia at the fourth council at Chalcedon in 451. The cycle was extensively analyzed by Tinatin Virsaladze in 1959.⁶³

These are the earliest surviving monumental depictions of the seven councils, although earlier manuscript examples do exist.⁶⁴ They are a striking testimony to Orthodoxy and its seven major triumphs over heresy. As such they are appropriate decoration for a theological academy. However, they also provide a strong pictorial demonstration of royal power, since the emperor, much larger than the patriarchs around him, dominates each council.

63. T. Virsaladze, "Fragmenty drevnei freskovoï rospisi glavnogo gelatskogo xrama," AG 5, 1959, 163–203.

64. C. Walter, *Iconographie des Conciles*, Paris, 1970, 78–120. He did not know of the frescoes at Gelati.

Church councils were very important in Davit's reign, both as symbolic occasions and as practical events. The king convened two councils during his reign, and the chronicles record a stress on Orthodoxy and discipline throughout the reign. The first council was summoned to Ruis-Urbnisi in 1103 in an attempt to reform the church in Georgia.⁶⁵ It was to purge the church of all its ills and to remove from their posts the many clerics who had gained them only through inheritance. A hereditary church served its own regional and family interests in just the same way as the rest of the nobility. It was working for its own local, autonomous interests against the centralizing power of the crown. Davit's reign, like that of Bagrat' IV before him, aimed to diminish these local power sources.⁶⁶ Davit succeeded in expelling or excommunicating the unwanted clergy, although "not without difficulty."⁶⁷

The records of the council list the battles against simony and corruption among the clergy and show that the council achieved its ecclesiastical goals. However, it also accomplished its royal, secular aims. It changed the church from a hereditary aristocracy to a system dependent ultimately on royal patronage. The new bishops and priests owed their positions and their loyalty to the crown. The foundation of the academy at Gelati, which was followed by that at Iq'alto, was probably partly inspired by the need for more educated clerics who could be used in the growing governmental bureaucracy. The council also reinforced the idea of the king as the active head of the Georgian church and portrayed Davit as a successor to Constantine the Great.⁶⁸ This idea reappears in *Kartlis Cxovreba*.⁶⁹

At the end of his reign, in 1123–25, Davit convened a second council, to discuss religious differences with the Monophysite Armenians.⁷⁰ Again, this council had strong political purposes behind its scholastic façade. Since his conquest of much of northern Armenia starting in 1118 and culminating in the capture of Ani in 1123, Davit had many new Monophysite Armenian subjects, who had to be incorporated into his kingdom. To convert the Armenians to Orthodoxy would lessen their self-identity and reduce possible nationalistic calls for independence. The council was under the effective leadership of Arsen Iq'altoeli, who had translated the *Great Nomocanons, Acts of the Ecumenical Councils*, and a number of anti-Monophysitical and anti-Armenian texts,⁷¹ but the king was present at the discussions.

65. KC 1 (*Davit Aḡmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 328; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 10–11; Dolidze, *Kartuli samartlis dzeglebi*, 3:106–27.

66. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 82–85.

67. KC 1 (*Davit Aḡmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 328_{1–2}; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 10–11.

68. Dolidze, *Kartuli samartlis dzeglebi*, 3:109–10.

69. KC 1 (*Davit Aḡmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 328_{6–8}; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 11. On this theme, see A. Eastmond, "Royal Renewal in Georgia: The Case of Queen Tamar," in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino, Aldershot, 1994, 285–88.

70. KC 1 (*Davit Aḡmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 356–57; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 39–41.

71. M. Tarchnišvili, *Geschichte der kirchlichen georgischen Literatur*, Vatican, 1955, 201–11; J. Karst, *Littérature géorgienne chrétienne*, Paris, 1934, 31–37; see also D. Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History*, Oxford, 1994, 28 and 90–91.

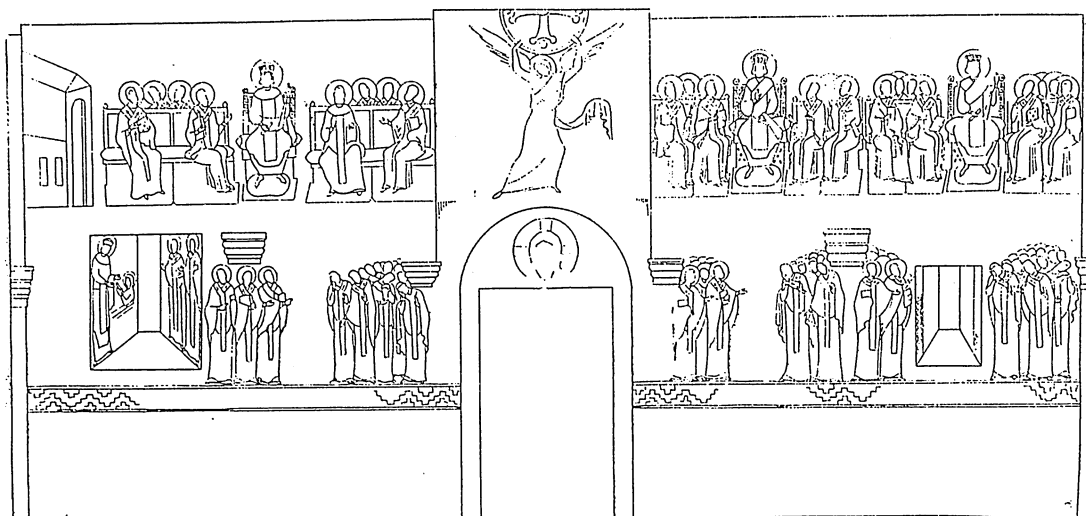


Fig. 39. Gelati. Narthex. Schema of councils on west wall (after Virsaladze).

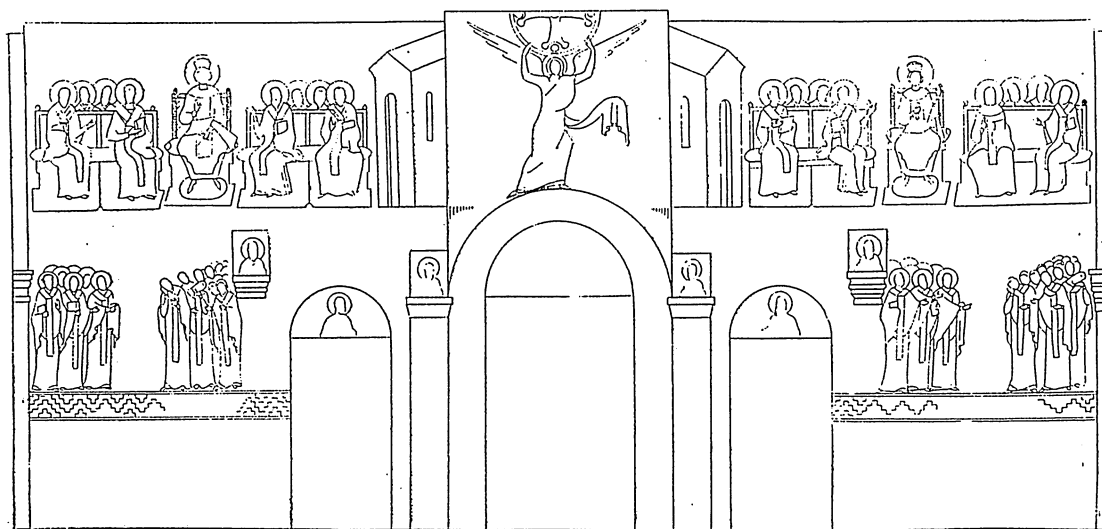


Fig. 40. Gelati. Narthex. Schema of councils on east wall (after Virsaladze).

Kartlis Cxovreba says that, after the sophistry of his clerics failed, the Armenians were beaten in argument by the king himself; but it seems they were not converted.⁷² However, the fact that the council took place in the king's presence demonstrated his commitment to Orthodoxy and the virtues of the Georgian, Chalcedonian faith.

72. KC 1 (*Davit Aġmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 356₁₁–357₁₇; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 39–41.

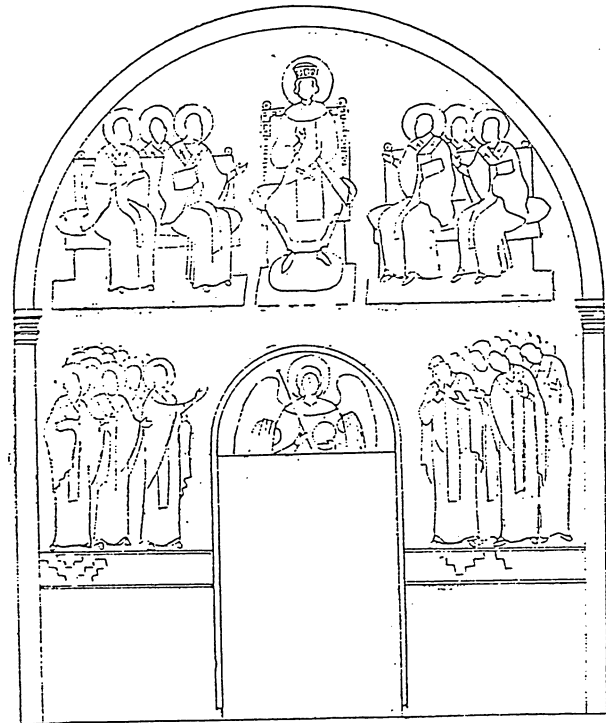


Fig. 41. Gelati. Narthex. Schema of councils on south wall (after Virsaladze).

It is these councils that provide the historical background to the narthex paintings. Details of the iconography suggest that they were most probably painted either in preparation for, or commemoration of, the 1123–25 council. Although no particular council is given special emphasis on the walls of the narthex, one additional scene has been included: the *Miracle of St. Euphemia*. This miracle confirmed the Orthodox position at the fourth council of Chalcedon of 451, when Monophysitism was declared a heresy. The painting cycle seems to have been geared to argue most strongly against the Armenian faith.

However, the iconography reveals rather more about the nature of the councils and the king's view of his role in them. *Kartlis Cxovreba* describes Davit as a second Constantine in his dealings at the councils, and this is reflected in the wall paintings. Each council is dominated by the figure of the presiding emperor, with the patriarchs and associated clerics all looking up to him. This emphasis on the secular ruler can be contrasted with the earlier manuscript examples. In the miniature in the *Homilies of St. Gregory of Nazianzus* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, gr. 510, fol. 355), the council is dominated by an open gospel book on the central throne (a sign of Christ's presence), while the king sits to one side, level with the patriarchs.⁷³ Similarly, in the *Menologion of Basil II* (Vatican, gr. 1613, fol. 108) the emperor and patriarchs are given almost equal prominence.⁷⁴ At Gelati, the emphasis is on the emperor, and not the Church or Christ.

73. Walter, *Iconographie*, 35–37, fig. 7.

74. Walter, *Iconographie*, 37–38, and frontispiece.

It is probable that the immediate inspiration for Davit's interest in the councils and their imagery derived from very recent Byzantine sources, although the general theme and its potency had a much longer history. In the late eleventh century, Alexios I Komnenos's conflict with the church revived some aspects of council imagery, as the emperor sought to establish both his Orthodoxy and his position over the church.⁷⁵

However, in the twelfth century, there is much evidence of imperial interest in the public representation of the ecumenical councils. The typikon of John II Komnenos's Pantokrator monastery in Constantinople notes that candles are to be lit before an image of the councils, probably sited in the narthex or exonarthex.⁷⁶ In 1166 Manuel I Komnenos convened a council whose decrees subsequently were prominently displayed in a long stone inscription in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople.⁷⁷ Manuel Komnenos couched these decrees in deliberately archaic language of the late Roman Empire. He too was using the formula of the councils to promote an enhanced image of himself by comparing himself with the universal emperors of the past.

The Gelati councils are accompanied by extensive inscriptions that name all the figures present but that go on to concentrate on each emperor's actions. Thus, the surviving fragments of the inscription for the fourth council proclaim: "The apostolic council was at Chalcedon before the emperor Marcian, in the presence of Pope Leo, Anatolios of Constantinople, Juvenal [of Jerusalem, and Michael of Antioch] . . . The fourth ecumenical council was summoned by Marcian . . . the righteous."⁷⁸ Once again the greatest emphasis is on the emperor and his leading role in convening the councils. There is no mention of the theological arguments involved, on which Manuel I placed most stress. It is the symbolic and royal nature of the councils that is important. Again, the image of the *Miracle of St. Euphemia* stresses the emperor's part in the miracle by showing Marcian leaning over the grave to see the saint's choice. The only other known images of the miracle, which are all later, stress the victory of the Orthodox priests over the Monophysites.⁷⁹

75. Angold, *Byzantine Empire*, 114–23. On the imagery, see Walter, *Iconographie*, 31, and J. Anderson, "The Date and Purpose of the Barberini Psalter," *CahArch* 31, 1983, 59. The image refers to the Iconoclast Council of 815, and its interpretation is therefore complex.

76. Gautier, "Pantocrator," 37–39.

77. C. Mango, "The Conciliar Edict of 1166," *DOP* 17, 1963, 315–30. Other contemporary images were set up in Bethlehem: L.-A. Hunt, "Art and Colonialism: The Mosaics of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (1169) and the Problem of 'Crusader' Art," *DOP* 45, 1991, 78–80.

78. Virsaladze, "Fragmenty," 175:

მოციქულთა [კრება იქმნა] ქალკიდონს შინა მეფობასა მარკიანესსა, ლეონ რომთა
[პაპისა, ანატოლი [კონსტანტინეპოლელ]ისა, იოზენალი [იერუსალიმელისა,
მაქსიმე ანტიოქიელისა] ... რომელნი ესე შეკ[რბეს] ... ვრისა ჩუნემან ... დ
მსოფლიო მეოთხე კრებაჲ ქმნა მარკიანე ... მართალი ... ვცტჳკი

79. For example, R. Naumann and H. Belting, *Die Euphemia-Kirche am Hippodrom zu Istanbul und ihre Fresken*, *Istanbuler Forschungen*, vol. 25, Berlin, 1966, 139–42; G. Millet, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra*, Paris, 1910, figs. 82–84; Walter, *Iconographie*, 248–49.

Clearly, viewers were expected to make the link between the prominence of Davit IV at his councils and the Byzantine emperors at theirs, as *Kartlis Cxovreba* makes explicit.⁸⁰ He was being displayed as the direct heir of this tradition: Davit is presented as the champion of Orthodoxy who is concerned for the church and able to bring together different nationalities and sects. He was a new Constantine. No explicit visual link is made between Davit IV's councils and the ecumenical councils, as was made in the thirteenth century at Sopoćani, which includes the Council of Stefan Nemanja as the eighth council,⁸¹ but still the parallel is clear.

This association finds visual expression in one other painting in the Church of St. George at Boč'orma in K'axeti. The church was built as a domed hexaconch in the eleventh century, but, judging by the style of the paintings, it was decorated at the beginning of the twelfth.⁸² The wall paintings, which are in a very poor state, are virtually unpublished (Fig. 42).⁸³ In the lowest register of the northeast conch of the church is a donor who, Asmat Okrop'iridze has recently demonstrated, is Davit IV.⁸⁴ He stands next to an image of Saints Constantine and Helena.⁸⁵ This is among the earliest known appearances of these imperial saints in Georgia. The iconography fits in well with Davit's promotion of the royal leadership and protection of the church, as well as with the idea of Davit as the successor of Constantine the Great noted in *Kartlis Cxovreba*. It also shows how Davit sought to impose his vision of power on his subjects in his newly acquired territories, since Davit only captured K'axeti in 1104.⁸⁶

We are fortunate that one other image of Davit IV has been preserved that further strengthens our knowledge of his use of visual imagery. This is an icon in the collection of the Monastery of St. Katherine on Mount Sinai.⁸⁷ It shows the king with a saint standing below Christ (Fig. 43). The men are named in Greek inscriptions as "Pious emperor of all the East, Bagratounianos," and "St. George."⁸⁸

Davit is presented frontally, wearing the Byzantine *loros* over a garment embroidered with vine leaves. He holds a *labarum* in his right hand and a scroll in his left. He also wears a crown with *pendilia*. It is very much a formal, hieratic image of

80. KC 1 (*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 328₆₋₈; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 11.

81. V. J. Djurić, *Sopoćani*, Leipzig, 1967, 39-43, and schema on 232.

82. On the architecture of Boč'orma, which is the only aspect of the church to have received scholarly attention, see G. N. Čubinašvili, *Arxitektura Kaxetii*, Tbilisi, 1959, 416-23.

83. The only published information about the wall paintings is the schemas and brief description given in Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 47-53.

84. A. Okrop'iridze, "K't'it'oris gamosaxuloba boč'ormis c'minda giorgis saxelobis ek'lesiaši" (The image of the donor in the Church of St. George at Boč'orma), *Lit'Xel* 1990, pt. 1, 235-51.

85. Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 51 and fig. 12.

86. KC 1 (*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 328₁₀₋₃₂₉₁₂; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 11-12.

87. G. and M. Sotiriou, *Icones du Mont Sinai*, 2 vols., Athens, 1956/58, 131-32 and pl. 152.

88. These, and all the other inscriptions on the icon, have been analyzed by D. K'ldiašvili, "L'icône de Saint Georges du Mont Sinai avec le portrait de Davit Aymašenebeli," *REGC* 5, 1989, 107-28. The Greek inscriptions read "ΠΙΣΤΟΣ] ΒΑΣΙΛ[ΕΥΣ] ΠΑΣ[ΗΣ] ΑΝΑΤΟΛ[ΗΣ] 'Ο ΠΑΓΚΡΑΤΟΝΙΑΝΟΣ" and "'Ο ΑΙΓΙΟΣ] ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ." It is this article that has demonstrated that the icon shows Davit IV and not his grandson, Giorgi III.

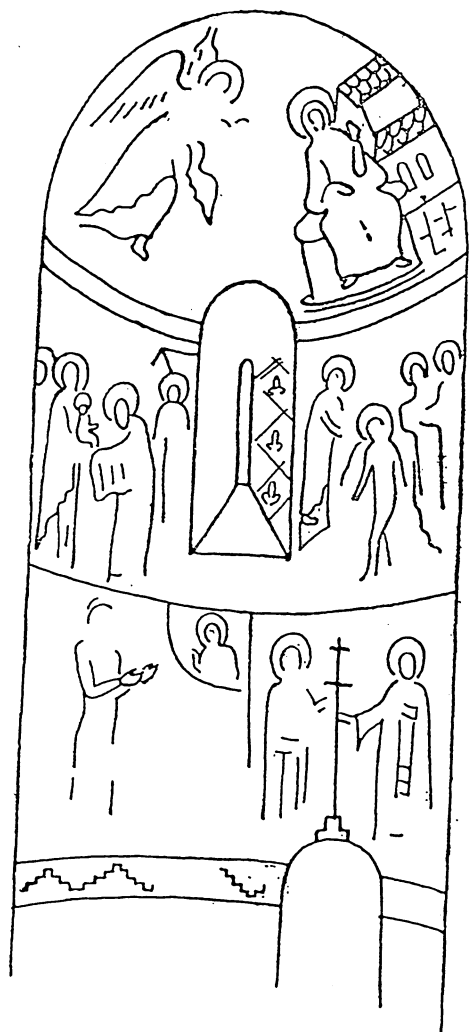


Fig. 42. Boč'orma. Church of St. George. Schema of north conch (after Alibegašvili).

the king and once again provides a purely Byzantine image of royal power. Saint George, in contrast, is presented in a much more dynamic pose, turning toward the king, whom he indicates with his right hand. With his left hand, he gestures to Christ, who appears above them in an aureole. Saint George is clearly the intercessor between king and Christ, and an intercessory prayer, which seems to have referred to Davit's donations abroad, is recorded in Greek between the two men.⁸⁹ Christ turns toward Saint George to hear the supplication, but reaches out toward Davit to bless him and offer him a crown.⁹⁰

Thus, Davit is presented here as a Byzantine ruler with his grandiose title of emperor of all the East. This is expanded and explained in a Georgian inscription at the

89. This inscription is very fragmentary, and only a few words are known from an early twentieth-century report; see K'ldiašvili, "L'icône," 110.

90. The crown can no longer be seen, but was recorded by V. N. Benešević in 1912; K'ldiašvili, "L'icône," 109 n. 11.



Fig. 43. Mount Sinai, St. Katherine's Monastery. Icon of St. George and Davit IV Ağmaşenebeli.

base of the panel: “king of the Abxazetians, Kartlians, Ranians, and K'axetians.”⁹¹ The appearance of the king on an icon indicates that he was becoming the focus of a royal cult, and the extensive use of Greek on the icon suggests that this cult was at least partly aimed at a non-Georgian audience.

The selection of Saint George as intercessor is also interesting, since elsewhere the Bagrat'ionis were promoting the Mother of God as the prime protector of the royal family and country. However, Saint George had strong claims to royal attention. First, his cult was already strong in Georgia; and second, he provided an excellent symbol of the ultimate victory of the Christian holy warrior. As such he was an invaluable ally in Davit's battles against the Seljuks. Saint George is even depicted with a shield bearing Kufic symbols. *Kartlis Cxovreba* records that the saint appeared to the Georgian troops at the battle of Didgori in 1122, when Davit led his men to a decisive victory over the Seljuks under Ilghazi-bin-Ortok, ruler of Aleppo.⁹²

The importance of this icon lies in its evidence of the promulgation of royal imagery, both in smaller-scale objects and outside Georgia itself. *Kartlis Cxovreba* records that Davit provided funds and support for many monasteries and holy sites over the whole Christian world, from Mount Athos to Jerusalem, Cyprus to Sinai, and Bulgaria to Libya,⁹³ and this icon indicates that royal nature of these donations was visibly recorded. This finds support in the testament of Davit IV to the monastery of Šio-Mğvime near Mcxeta, which describes among the many gifts given by the king to the monastery an “image of the king ornamented with pearls and precious stones.”⁹⁴ Royal imagery was much more widely disseminated than the otherwise exclusive survival of monumental images might suggest.

The visual evidence has all stressed the Byzantine nature of Davit's imagery. However, its interpretation must be more complex than the simple imitation of Byzantium. Davit's ambitions required more than emulation. He did not simply slavishly copy Byzantine models, but rather took over these models in order to use them to his own ends. He wanted to replace Byzantium rather than just copy it. His independence from Byzantium can be seen in the fact that, although he was awarded the title of *panhypersebastos* at the beginning of his reign, he later dropped it in favor of the Georgian title seen on his coins. Davit was able to break away from the shadow of Byzantium and convert its imagery to reflect only on himself, rather than on his relationship to the emperor in Constantinople.

91. K'ldiašvili, “L'icône,” 114:

...დავით აფხაზთა, ქართველთა, რანთა, კახთა, მკურობელსა...

In 1118, Davit added to this list “king of the Armenians,” which gives a *terminus ante quem* for the icon.

92. KC 1 (*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 340–41; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 24; H. Fähnrich, “Die Schlacht am Didgori,” *Georgica* 17, 1994, 33–39.

93. KC 1 (*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 352²³–353⁷; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 36.

94. KISK', 56; trans. in B. Martin-Hisard, “Les biens d'un monastère géorgien (IX^e–XIII^e siècle): Le témoignage des actes du monastère Saint-Šio de Mghvime,” in *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantin*, ed. V. Kravari, J. Lefort, and C. Morrisson, Paris, 1991, 2:147.

In Davit IV's reign, royal imagery developed enormously into a very sophisticated system that used complex and often indirect symbols in order to attain its goal of royal promotion. However, it developed only in one direction. All Davit's imagery was Byzantine in origin, and it is clear that it was to the imperial cult in Constantinople that Davit aspired. The decline in Byzantine power in the East after 1071 allowed the Georgian king to usurp its imagery. While links between the Bagrat'ionis and the Byzantine imperial families facilitated this line of development, a tension emerged with the cultural aspirations and orientation of the rest of the country. As noted at the opening of this chapter, general links with Byzantium weakened dramatically after 1071, even though they could still be maintained at the highest level.

King Demet're I (1125–1154)

It is in the reign of Davit's son, Demet're I, that this divergence becomes clear, as the new king's public, formal image underwent a noticeable shift in emphasis.

The most obvious need for a change in royal image came from Davit's military successes, which brought him and his successors control over many new non-Christian subjects. The reconquest of Tbilisi in 1122, which returned the city to Christian rule for the first time in four hundred years,⁹⁵ brought the Bagrat'ionis a large number of Muslim subjects. The city was a major trading city and important financial center and so of great value to Demet're. Its restoration was an important symbolic victory for the Georgians as well as a strategic one. The continued presence and work of the Muslims in the city was vital for the financial well-being of Demet're's government, and so these new subjects had to be appeased and encouraged. The evidence of Demet're's reign shows that this new section of the kingdom had an important effect on the visualization of power.

The image of Demet're presented by one of his loyal Muslim subjects stands out in very marked contrast to the Christian image of Davit IV. According to the chronicler of Mayyafariqin, Ibn al-Azraq, Demet're protected Muslims' religious freedoms and required Christians to respect their religious needs.⁹⁶ He gave them tax incentives to remain in Tbilisi under Christian rule and he also employed Arabic secretaries, one of whom was Ibn al-Azraq himself. Demet're even attended mosque and supported Muslim scholars and Sufis. Ibn al-Azraq concluded that "I witnessed on [Demet're's]

95. Tbilisi had been captured by Bagrat' IV in 1030, but had been lost soon after. M. Lordkipanidze, *Tbilisi (IV-načalo XII v.)*, Tbilisi, 1991, 70–71.

96. Ibn al-Azraq, *Mayyafariqin Chronicle*, in C. Hillenbrand, *A Muslim Principality in Crusader Times: The Early Artuqid State*, Istanbul, 1990, 43; V. Minorsky, "Caucasica [I] in the History of Mayyafariqin," *BSOAS* 13, 1949, 27–35.

part such esteem towards the Muslims as they would not enjoy even if they were in Baghdad.”⁹⁷

Evidence of this sensitivity can be found on Demet're's coins. Where the last three generations of Bagrat'ionis had all employed unambiguously Christian imagery, Demet're used Arabic forms. The reverse of his coins named the caliph of Baghdad in Arabic and the obverse proclaimed Demet're as “Sword of the Messiah,” again in Arabic.⁹⁸ To identify the ruler, only the initial “D” appeared in Georgian on the coins.⁹⁹ It has been argued that this employment of the caliph's name reflected Demet're's military weakness, but the proclamation of Demet're's titles in Arabic suggests that the coins were used to proclaim Georgia's new strength in what was the diplomatic language of the Caucasus and Near East. The use of Arabic also served further to emphasize Georgia's separation from Byzantium. Whatever the case, it was certainly successful, and the coins were commented on enthusiastically by the Mayyafariqin chronicler.¹⁰⁰

However, it seems as if this image making was very precisely targeted at its intended audience. None of the matters mentioned by Ibn al-Azraq receives any attention in the brief account of Demet're's reign given in *Kartlis Cxovreba*, which portrays the king in the same vein as his father. Here he is still a great Christian warrior who shows no signs of compromise with the Turks.¹⁰¹ Demet're continued the campaigns against the Seljuks and attacked the Muslim city of Gandza, whose gates he carried off to act as the entrance gates to the monastery of Gelati, where they remain. And it should not be forgotten that it was Demet're who completed the building and decoration of the monastery and who provided it with its greatest ornaments, such as the enlarged Xaxuli triptych. He thus retained the traditional, military virtues of a Christian ruler and even retired into a monastery before his death. Demet're seems to have succeeded in presenting a different but effective image of power to each section of his kingdom.

However, Demet're's image as a Christian ruler did not remain unchanged. The Byzantine image of power that dominated the imagery of Davit IV Aġmašenebeli was too inflexible to cope with the different ordering of Georgian society. The Georgian kings did not have the universal, absolute power of the Byzantine emperors, and they had none of the centralized structures of government that allowed Byzan-

97. Minorsky, “Caucasica [I],” 34. Given Ibn al-Azraq's role as Demet're's secretary, his panegyric is certainly exaggerated, but it is balanced by the Christian excesses of the *Kartlis Cxovreba*.

98. The final acclamation, “Sword of the Messiah,” is an adaptation of “Sword of Islam,” applied to many Islamic rulers, such as Sultan al-Malik al-Aziz Imad al-Din in 1227: R. Amitai, “Notes on the Ayyubid Inscriptions at al-Subayba (Qal'at Nimrud),” *DOP* 43, 1989, 114.

99. Paxomov, *Monety Gruzii*, 80–86; Lang, *Numismatic History of Georgia*, 20. Lang notes how this type also reflects the coins of Bagrat' III, which are slavish imitations of Abbasid coins (although there is doubt whether Bagrat' III actually had control over the issue of these coins).

100. Hillenbrand, *Muslim Principality*, 42. Ibn al-Azraq credits these coins to Davit IV, but only Demet're issued coins of this type.

101. KC 1 (*Laša Giorgis-droindeli Memat'iane*), 365–66; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 49–50.

tium to be ruled directly from Constantinople. Instead, the Georgian court traveled around the country all year, and royal power had to be negotiated or fought for with the local aristocracy. Davit IV's Byzantine image may have suited his ideals of power, but it did not match the realities of his position. More important, it did not correspond with the aristocracy's expectations of that position.

Macxvariši

This can be seen in the church of Macxvariši at Lat'ali, which provides a different view of royal power from that at Gelati. The church is situated in the mountainous region of Svaneti and is dated by a painted inscription to the year 1140: "painted in the fifteenth year of the reign of Demet're, by the hand of Mikael Maḡlak'eli."¹⁰² Like many of the churches built in this region in the first half of the twelfth century, such as the Tevdore churches mentioned earlier, it is a relatively small, single-nave hall church in design, with one apse at the east end. Its south door is preceded by a porch, and there is evidence that an ambulatory once ran around the west and north walls as well. The interior is covered with wall paintings, and their style and program owe much to the model of the Tevdore churches (Figs. 44–47). The apse contains a Deesis with Christ in Majesty and prophetic imagery, above a row of the twelve apostles. The vault and much of the walls of the church are taken up with a Christological cycle on two registers, containing the *Annunciation*, *Nativity*, *Presentation at the Temple*, *Baptism of Christ*, *Raising of Lazarus*, *Transfiguration*, *Crucifixion*, *Entry into Jerusalem* (Fig. 48), and *Ascension*. The lowest register contains a series of individual figures who, on the north and south walls, are placed in niches. The northwest niche contains a scene of the *Coronation of King Demet're I* (see Plate XI); the northeast niche shows Saint Barbara and the *Coronation of St. Katherine* (see Plate XII); the southeast niche has Saints Marina and Irina with the executor of the work, *mamasaxlisi* (literally, head of the household) K'virik'e (Fig. 49); and the west wall and southwest niche have figures of three mounted warrior saints: George, Theodore, and Demetrios (see Fig. 52 below).¹⁰³ The identity of the orant figure above the door in the west wall is unclear, but it probably represents the Mother of God.

The prominence of the *Coronation of King Demet're I* implies that there was a great interest in the presentation of power throughout the king's reign. The scene shows the king being blessed by Christ, while the archangel Gabriel crowns him and

102. T. Virsaladze, "Freskovaia rospis' xudožnika Mikaela Maḡlakeli v Macxvariši," AG 4, 1955, 174:

მოხატა საყდარი ეს მეფობას დემეტრეს წელსა იე კელითა მიქაელ
მაღ[ლ]აკელითა

103. The large head shown in Figure 46, beneath the scene of the Coronation of Saint Katherine, is a much later addition to the paintings.

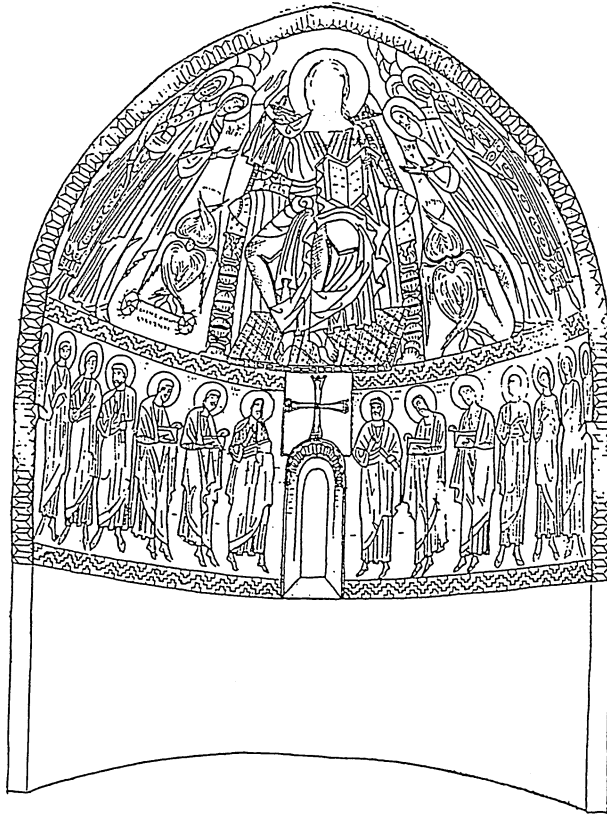


Fig. 44. Macxvariši (1140). Schema of east wall (after Virsaladze).

two *eristavs* (regional governors) gird him with a sword. However, we know from the donor inscription and portrait that the immediate patronage of the church was not royal: "This is *mamasaxlisi* K'virik'e, who took great trouble organizing the painting of this church. Amen."¹⁰⁴ Thus, it seems that the king was not involved in the decoration of the church. I contend that Macxvariši does not represent an image of the king as he would like to be seen, but rather the image expected or desired by certain of his subjects.

The Coronation of King Demet're I

The two coronation images on the north wall give this motif enormous stress in this small church, and they were clearly an essential element in the overall scheme of painting in the church.

104. Virsaladze, "Macxvariši," 186:

ესე არს კ[ვირიკ]ე მამასახლისი რომელმან დიდი მოიჭირვა [ამ]ის ეკლესი[ი]სა
ზედგომაჲ ხატვასა. ამინ

A third inscription explains the ownership and responsibility of the church:

[ვინცაამ]ას ეკლესია[სა] ...ან მამასახლისი: ყო[ს] კვამლისაგნ შეი[კ]რძაღეთ
[ხატუ]ლი რ ~ ლ [ვ]ერი არ [და] აკლოს

"To whomever shall be *mamasaxlisi* of this church: protect the colors from dirt and smoke."

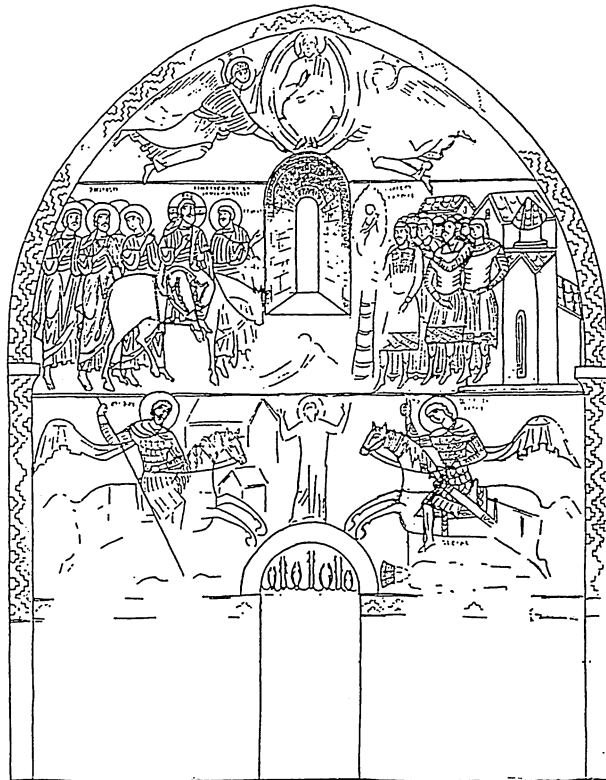


Fig. 45. Macxvariši. Schema of west wall (after Virsaladze).

The presentation of Demet're in the royal coronation scene is unique in Byzantine and Georgian art (see Plate XI), although it had a possible precedent in the “cathedral of Bana” scene in the 1036 paintings at Ošk'i; however, the fragment that survives there indicates that it was a narrative scene and so very different in nature from that at Macxvariši.

The depiction of the election and investiture of the king at Macxvariši appears to offer ambivalent messages about his position. The divine selection of the king, shown by the figure of the blessing Christ and the crown placed by the archangel Gabriel, is quite standard and has very many parallels in Byzantine coronation iconography.¹⁰⁵ That such imperial imagery was known and established in Georgia by this time can be shown from an enamel that was added to the Xaxuli triptych by Demet're when he had it enlarged and moved to Gelati. It shows Emperor Michael VII Doukas and his wife Maria “of Alania” (Demet're's great-aunt) being crowned by Christ (Figs. 50 and 51).¹⁰⁶ The icon of Davit IV also showed the coronation of

105. See, for example, A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Paris, 1936, pl. 19/2 (St. Katherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, gk. 364, fol. 3r) or 23/1 (psalter of Basil II; Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, gk. 17, fol. 3r).

106. L. Z. Xuskivadze, *Medieval Cloisonne Enamels at the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts*, Tbilisi, 1984, pl. 39. The enamel was probably brought to Georgia in 1072 when the empress Maria returned to Georgia for the funeral of her father, Bagrat' IV.

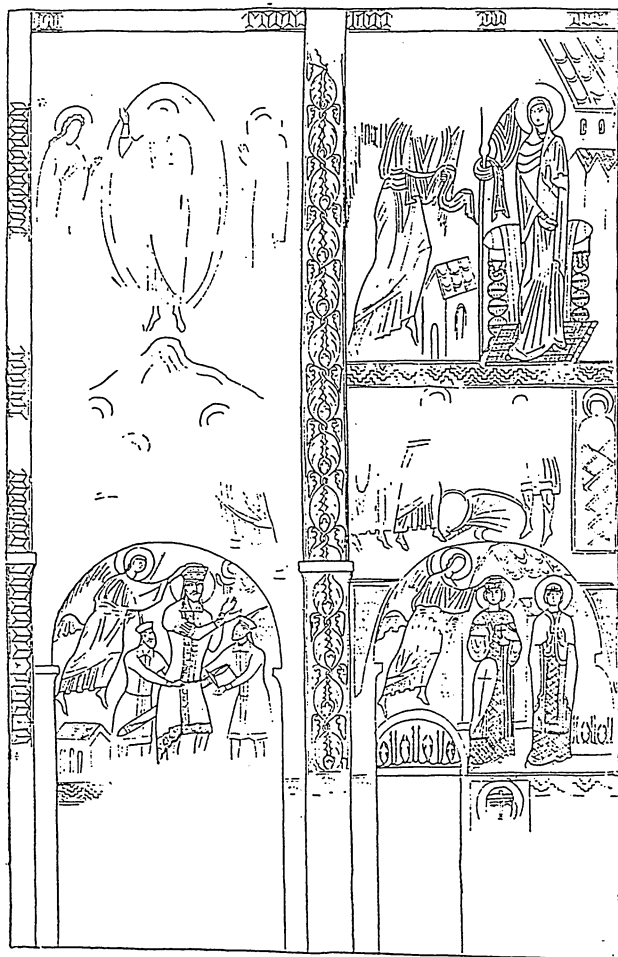


Fig. 46. Macxvariši. Schema of north wall (after Virsaladze).

the king by Christ. We can be certain, therefore, that there was no lack of models for the coronation scene to follow. It certainly shows that this part of the scene reflects the continuing imitation of Byzantine art and political theory in Georgia.

However, the rest of the image, which shows the girding of the royal sword by two *eristavs*, alters this. Neither the appearance of subsidiary officials nor the presence of the sword has any precedent in east Christian art. Indeed, in Byzantium, the link between the sword and the right to rule was altogether more ambiguous. When Isaak I Komnenos (1057–59) minted a coin showing himself holding a drawn sword, some chroniclers thought that it implied that he had gained the throne through force of arms, rather than by God's will.¹⁰⁷ Since the sword in the coronation image is specifically named as the "sword of Davit," it must be taken as a symbol of royal legitimation, both through Demet're's father, Davit IV, and through the Old Testament prophet-king David from whom the Bagrat'ionis claimed descent. Wearing the sword

107. For all references to this coin and its contemporary interpretation, see P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. 3, pt. 2, Washington, D.C., 1973, 759–60.

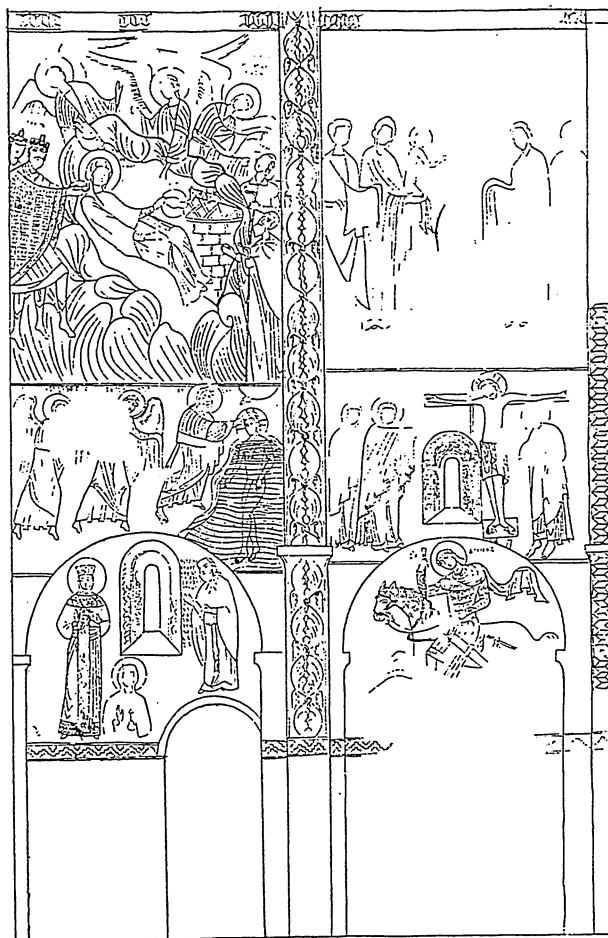


Fig. 47. Macxvariši. Schema of south wall (after Virsaladze).

demonstrated the rightful succession from the previous ruler and symbolized the nature of royal rule. This alone indicates the practical difference in the nature of royalty and power between Byzantium and Georgia.

The formal presentation to the king of the royal sword was an important element of the coronation ceremony and is described in a document dated to the mid-thirteenth century: "The Rule and Order for the Blessing of Kings" (see Appendix III).¹⁰⁸ Although this document is some one hundred years later than the image at Macxvariši, many of its elements reflect twelfth-century practice. However, there is a crucial difference between the image and the text. According to the document, the sword girding formed a minor part of the ceremony compared with the ecclesiastical elements

108. Dolidze, *Kartuli samartlis dzeglebi*, 2:50–53. There are some differences between the ceremony portrayed in the wall painting and that described in the document, notably a variance in the number and rank of the personnel involved in giving the king his sword; but Virsaladze, "Macxvariši," 179–83, argues that this was due to political changes during the century that passed between the Macxvariši paintings and the compilation of the document. During this period the *amirsp'asalari*, who appears as the more important figure in the document, increased his power over the *eristavs* and took over many of their roles at the coronation service. Virsaladze therefore believes that the Macxvariši image reflects the actual course of this earlier ceremony, which includes both ecclesiastical and secular elements.



Fig. 48. Macxvariši. West wall. Detail of *Entry to Jerusalem*.

or even the secular acclamations of the king, which lasted for three days afterward. So why was this one element chosen for the image? It was clearly included to symbolize a particular aspect of secular involvement in the ceremony. It could be argued that it shows Demet're's bestowal of a royal honor on the two *eristavs* who have been selected to carry out this service for him; but on the other hand, it could be seen as an exertion of aristocratic power in that the king's election is dependent on their choice and support. Both arguments require some sort of shift in the balance of power between the king and his nobles, since the king's rule is shown to be mediated through these men. Such imagery is unimaginable in Byzantium, where no nonimperial figure plays any part in similar imperial scenes, unless to bow down in proskynesis before the emperor. The only exceptions are in the miniatures of the *Madrid Skylitzes*, but even here their intervention is limited: either the patriarch, as servant



Fig. 49. Macxvariši. South wall. *Mamasaxlisi K'virik'e*.

of Christ, crowns the emperor,¹⁰⁹ or the new ruler is shown being acclaimed by his people.¹¹⁰ These scenes are in any case narrative illustrations of the events described in Skylitzes' *History* and so are not really comparable to the dogmatic, symbolic, and public nature of the scene at Macxvariši.

If the aim of the scene was to reflect either the ritual of the ceremony or the divinely inspired and hereditary nature of Demet're's rule, then surely Demet're would have been shown differently. *Kartlis Cxovreba* records that "during Davit's lifetime . . . he

109. A. Grabar and M. Manoussacas, *L'illustration du manuscrit de Skylitzès de Madrid*, Venice, 1979, fig. 140 (fol. 114v), fig. 164 (fol. 133v).

110. Grabar and Manoussacas, *Skylitzès*, fig. 269 (fol. 230).

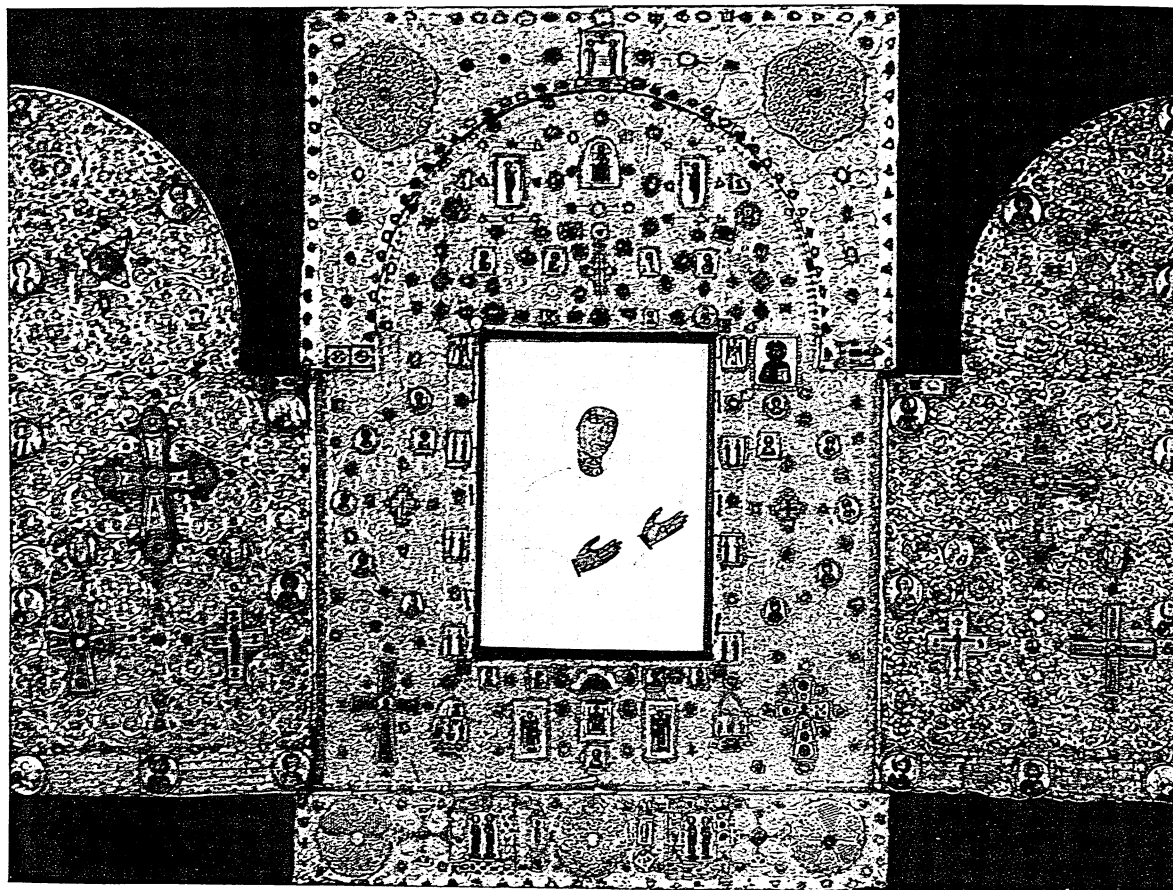


Fig. 50. General view of Xaxuli triptych.

set his own son Demet're on the throne and crowned him with his own hands,"¹¹¹ and the chroniclers' constant reference to this act of parental involvement at every succession suggests that it was this part of the ceremony that gave the heir his legitimacy.¹¹² Demet're's claim to rule came through his descent, as eldest son of Davit IV, and was confirmed when he was crowned coruler with his father. Such a scene is shown in the Madrid *Skylitzes*.¹¹³

This discussion of what could have been represented further highlights what was actually shown. The secular element of the image stresses the role the *eristavs* played in investing the king with his symbols of power. Although the *eristavs* are significantly smaller than Demet're, they take up a large part of the compositional space, and their actions are explicitly described in an inscription: "The *eristavs* gird

111. KC 1 (*Laša Giorgis-droindeli Memat'iane*), 365₁₋₃; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 49.

112. Davit IV, Demet're I, Tamar, and Giorgi IV Laša are all recorded in *Kartlis Cxovreba* as being crowned by their predecessors before their deaths.

113. Grabar and Manoussacas, *Skylitzès*, fig. 1, pl. 1 (fol. 10v).



Fig. 51. Xaxuli triptych. Detail of enamel of *Coronation of Michael VII Doukas and Maria of Alania* (c.1070).

[Demet're] with Davit's sword."¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, unlike Demet're, Christ, or Gabriel, they are not named. So despite the fact that the scene appears to refer to an explicit event, its participants remain just general representatives of their class and rank. It must also be remembered at this point that the painting of this scene is dated to the year 1140, fifteen years after any coronation actually took place. It cannot, therefore, be a direct commemoration of Demet're's accession or of the actual ceremony. Nor, given the reference to Davit's sword, can it refer to an otherwise unrecorded local event that we could posit as taking place in Svaneti in 1140, although the presence of a small building in the lower left corner of the image, which could be Macxvariši itself, suggests that it was intended to have local relevance. Virsaladze has sought to explain the presence of the scene as an assertion of local authority by the *eristavs* of Svaneti and Agvruli.¹¹⁵ However, if this is right, then why are these men not named? The absence of local names weakens Virsaladze's argument, since it does not direct our attention to the particular individuals who would have benefited. Their anonymity suggests that a more generalized message was intended.

114. Virsaladze, "Macxvariši," 176:

კრმ[ალსა] აბმე[ნ] დავითისს[ა] ერისთავნ[ი]

115. The former of whom she names as Vardanisdze; Virsaladze, "Macxvariši," 184.

The coronation scene was clearly not designed to commemorate *royal* power alone, since, if this had been intended, enough Byzantine parallels were available that concentrated solely on the royal figure. It seems, rather, to be a commemoration of the *creation* of royal power, in which the *eristavs* play an important role. I believe that the scene was designed to demonstrate the *eristavs*' position in the hierarchy and to legitimize and explain their local power.

It does not follow from this that the scene should be interpreted as an image of some sort of semiconstitutional or elected monarchy, dependent on nobles' support. Christ cannot be regarded as merely confirming the *eristavs*' choice of ruler. Nor is it just a self-important scene included by the two *eristavs* to demonstrate their own prominence at court. If the scene had been designed to display the *eristavs*' personal power and prestige, then they could have depicted themselves alone, as four *eristavs* had done about forty years earlier in the church of Zemo-K'rixi in Rač'a (Figs. 31 and 32).¹¹⁶ This scene specifically shows the relationship between the king and his nobles.

I believe that the scene reflects a view of the monarchy from the point of view of these *eristavs*. The king is the center of power in the kingdom, and he receives his authority to rule directly from Christ. In this he is like the Byzantine emperors, divinely appointed and so an absolute monarch. However, much of the mystic aura of power in Byzantine imperial portraits came from their inaccessibility to other mortals and their untouchability. They appear alone, in the presence of God and his saints, and in the few cases where other men do appear, their inferiority to the emperor is manifest, as can be seen in the Psalter of Basil II (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, gk. 17, fol. 2r). At Macxvariši the importance of power lies in the relationship between the king and his subjects. The *eristavs* are in close physical contact with their king, who, in turn, is in direct communication with Christ. This arrangement sets up a line of contact through the hierarchy of earthly and heavenly power. The king is more of a channel between man and Christ than the sole wielder of Christ's power on earth. As his dress shows, Demet're is not cut off from his subjects, since he appears as one of them; but he is superior.

The image shows the simultaneous confirmation of both Demet're's and the *eristavs*' power and the hierarchical relationship between them. It also acts to demonstrate the king's acceptance of these men and so confers some of his power on them. The coronation scene does not show the king's power and authority being "undermined" by the presence of the *eristavs*, as a comparison with Byzantine images would suggest. It simply addresses different expectations of what the power of the king represented. The king is not shown as the sole wielder of power—as Demet're might have been expected to depict it and as it has been shown in all the royal images discussed above—but as a channel for power to move through the hierarchy.

116. T. Virsaladze, "Freskovaia rospis' v cerkvi arxangelov sela Zemo-K'rixi." *AG* 6, 1963, 116–20 and fig. 2. Thierry, "Le souverain," 141–42.

The scene shows the way in which royal power should function, but from an aristocratic point of view. Given the internal stresses in Georgia, as nobles sought independence from the king, this depiction at Macxvariši of the nobles' ultimate acceptance of the king as the primary source of power and authority is significant. The few mentions of the region of Svaneti in *Kartlis Cxovreba* note its habitual lawlessness, and so the image at Macxvariši should, perhaps, be seen in this light: the image is a reassertion of order in which power derives directly from the king, but is then shared with the local noblemen.

A final question that affects this interpretation is the part played by *mamasaxlisi* K'virik'e on the south wall (Fig. 49). He seems to have been ultimately responsible for the church and its painting, and yet he seems excluded from the power relationship depicted on the north wall. His position is unclear, since it is now impossible to ascertain exactly what status he held. This depends on the interpretation of his title, which is addressed in Chapter IV.

Individual Saints

Although the imagery within the coronation scene suggests a moderate and mediated image of the king's power, its position in the church is less ambivalent. It fits in as part of a carefully organized structure.

The principal link to be made is with the scene in the neighboring niche on the north wall. This shows the coronation of Saint Katherine of Alexandria by an angel (see Plate XII).¹¹⁷ It represents Saint Katherine's reception of her royal and martyr's crown after her death at the hands of the pagan emperor Maxentius and symbolizes her mystical marriage to Christ. Saint Barbara stands next to her. Apart from the obvious similarities of subject and iconography, the scene is also very closely linked to the Demet're panel in compositional and visual terms. They are placed side by side in similarly sized niches, and in each the scale and pose of the crowning angel is the same. The principal figures are also similar in size. Thus the two panels appear to be presented as two versions of the same event.

The decision to show Saint Katherine's coronation is unusual. The saint stands frontally, holding her martyr's cross, in the same pose as the three other women saints depicted in the church and as if the archangel were not there. There has been little attempt to adapt her figure to the scene in which she is now placed.¹¹⁸ The archangel seems to be an extra element, added to a standard frontal depiction of the saint. However, the conversion from the simple presentation of a holy martyr, as

117. Virsaladze, "Macxvariši," 177:

ანგელ[ოზ]ი გვირ[გ]ვინსა დასდამს თავსა ეკატერინას

118. Compare the depiction of Saint Katherine at Zemo-K'rixi, see Plate IV. A similar situation is seen in the depiction of warrior saints in the window jambs in the south wall at Vardzia. These saints are also shown oblivious of the figure of Christ above them, who proffers them their martyrs' crowns (see Plate XVIII).

seen elsewhere, to the more narrative act of her coronation was clearly made to link the saint with King Demet're. The two scenes present the *act* of divine recognition and acceptance rather than just the completed fact, which is seen, for example, in the frontal depiction of the crowned Saint Marina on the south wall. There is a link drawn between the saint's ennoblement by Christ and the divine approval of Demet're to rule on earth with Christ's blessing. Both are receiving similar gifts from Heaven. It seems as if Saint Katherine acts as a model for Demet're's own experiences at his coronation. Interestingly, the saint wears the kite-shaped *loros*, reflecting her royal birth and her celestial resting place, which contrasts strongly with Demet're's Georgian robes.

Although the coronation scene is very unusual, the presence of Saint Katherine is not, and it is in this that the significance of the comparison lies. The cults of certain saints were very strongly promoted in Svaneti and elsewhere in Georgia. Saints Katherine and Barbara (and to a lesser extent Saints Marina and Irina) were particularly venerated at this time, as were male saints such as George and Theodore. The evidence for this comes from their frequent appearances in the wall paintings of the twelfth-century churches. Saints Katherine and Barbara appear together at the Church of Saints K'virik'e and Ivliita in Lagurka and at the Church of the Archangels at Iprari,¹¹⁹ and Saint Barbara has a church dedicated to her at Xe.¹²⁰ At Zemo-K'rixi in Rač'a the four women saints all appear on the triumphal arch on the east wall of the church, around the apse (see Plates IV and V).¹²¹ A surviving inscription from Ošk'i invoking Saints Marina, Irina, Katherine, and Barbara (as well as four apostles) suggests that the cult of these women saints may have spread throughout the Georgian kingdoms as early as the beginning of the eleventh century.¹²²

It seems, then, as if Demet're's power was being very closely associated with a saint who had a strong cult in Svaneti, if not all Georgia, and that this was an attempt to use the veneration of the saint to promote that of the king. The fact that Demet're is so closely associated in the church with a woman saint, however, is very unusual; there are no other examples of ruling kings being associated with women saints apart, of course, from the Mother of God. This must be ascribed to the specific local circumstances of Svaneti.

Support for this argument can be found in the juxtaposition of Demet're and the three warrior saints shown at Macxvariši. Saints George and Theodore, shown triumphing over the emperor Diocletian (paganism) and a dragon (evil) respectively, appear in all the main Svanetian churches of this period. Like the women saints, they appear to be a central part of Svanetian worship. Macxvariši has made an addition

119. Aladašvili, *Živopisnaia škola Svaneti*, pls. 33, 21, and 30.

120. T. Velmans, "L'église de Khé, en Géorgie," *Zograf* 10, 1979, 71-82.

121. Virsaladze, "Zemo-K'rixi," fig. 1.

122. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 56; inscription XIII.



Fig. 52. Macxvariši. South wall. St. Demetrios.

to this roster of saints by including Saint Demetrios, shown on horseback killing a dragon (Fig. 52). The reason for his inclusion seems dependent on his name. He is the name saint of the king and appears opposite the coronation scene, in the west bay of the south wall. There is thus both a visual and a verbal axis created across the space of the church between the two Demet'res. Again, this was surely an attempt to associate the king with the saint and so give him the virtues and strength of his namesake.

King Demet're is undoubtedly the subject of these connections. The axes and changes from the expected norm of the Svanetian churches make this the only possible explanation. The reasons for the manner of its execution are more obscure. It seems that this was an attempt to increase the authority and standing of the king by allying him with locally venerated figures. This would suggest that Demet're's power was weak in Svaneti and that his acceptance by the local community depended on his receiving approval from the local protecting saints. Macxvariši would be a very

concrete demonstration of this saintly sanction. It would certainly seem that the king's power was being mediated through the saints. In this case, the *eristavs* appear a further rung down the ladder, having the saints' approval filtered through the king.

The associations appear to work in two ways: Demet're is able to use the saints' local presence and power to enhance his own, but at the same time, he is dependent on them. They provide him with protection and an "introduction" in the region. The model for this relationship was established by Peter Brown, who has demonstrated the importance of holy relics in the sixth century in enhancing the authority and social position of bishops, whose power and legitimacy derived from their privileged relationship with the celestial world.¹²³ It seems that in the volatile politics of Svaneti, the king had to resort to a similar scheme, building on well-established cults.

Beyond the wall paintings that survive today there is no evidence to explain further the veneration of the saints in Svaneti. It is therefore difficult to re-create the way in which twelfth-century worshipers at Macxvariši would have understood the nature of the link between Demet're and Saints Katherine and Demetrios. There are no relics of these saints in Svaneti, or any records of miracles performed by them in the region. The obvious emphases in the pictures on military prowess, the defense of Christianity, royal birth, and the proximity to the divine are clearly applicable to King Demet're. Attempts have been made to link these saints with earlier pagan Svanetian cults, which had only been superficially superseded by Christianity.¹²⁴ However, the popularity of Saint Demetrios in Thessaloniki provides an example of how the image of a saint, with no surviving relics, could act as the core of his cult.¹²⁵ The use by the Constantinopolitan church of Saint Andrew to claim apostolic origins shows the political importance that could be derived from a saint.¹²⁶ Thus, there are precedents for the supreme importance of certain saints to the well-being and ordering of a community.

Whoever devised the scheme at Macxvariši, and so determined the companions with which the king was to be depicted, clearly understood the value of placing him with these saints and the probable effect it would have on the king's standing in local society. Thus Demet're's position seems to have been determined by his status with reference not only to the *eristavs* of the region but also to the local cults. His authority is very much depicted in terms of local relevance to Svaneti.

123. P. Brown, "Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours," in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, 1989, 222–50.

124. Alpaço-Novello, *Art and Architecture*, 94. This view suggests that Saint Barbara is merely the Christian equivalent of the moon god and Saint George the sun god. If this is accepted, then these saints would have played an active part in the day-to-day running of the community, dependent as it was on the weather and other physical concerns, and so they would have been endowed with enormous importance. See also Velmans, "L'église de Khé," 79 and n. 77.

125. R. Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, London, 1985, 50–94, esp. 54.

126. F. Dvornik, *The Idea of Apostolicity in Byzantium and the Legend of the Apostle Andrew*, Cambridge, Mass., 1958.

Christological Cycle

The use of religious imagery to add meaning to the royal image does not end with the individual saints. The Christological cycle in the rest of the church provides further opportunities for comparison with King Demet're and the coronation scene. Whereas the associations made above were in connection with specifically local men and cults, these are more generalized.

The Christological cycle is more detailed at Macxvariši than those at any of the earlier Tevdore churches, which certainly provided the model for the wall paintings here. Nine feast scenes are shown in the cycle, and perhaps the most notable absence is the *Anastasis*, the image of Christ's triumph over death. The choice, positioning, and composition of the scenes suggests very particular readings.

All the scenes are dominated by the overpowering image of Christ in Majesty in the conch of the apse, consistent with Svanetian and Georgian tradition (Fig. 44).¹²⁷ Here, the figure of Christ dwarfs the other figures in the church, and the apocalyptic imagery included in the apse combine with Christ to create an awe-inspiring vision of the ruler of the heavens. It is an image of supreme power: Christ's approaching victory over evil at the Second Coming.

The majority of the elements in the cycle can be linked with the theme of the nature and glory of Christ. Tania Velmans has shown how the west wall at Macxvariši is a compilation of triumphs: the *Ascension* and the *Entry into Jerusalem* show the celestial and terrestrial triumphs of Christ, as victor over death and king of the Jews, and the two warrior saints below show the defeat of paganism and evil (Figs. 45 and 48).¹²⁸

It is also possible to trace another theme that has perhaps more relevance to the royal panel. This is the idea of revelation and recognition, which is prominent in the wall paintings. The most imposing of the Christological scenes, although it is now badly damaged by damp, is the *Transfiguration*, which, alone of all the scenes, is allowed to fill up the whole wall in its bay, immediately above the *Coronation of King Demet're I* (Fig. 46). It represents the revelation of Christ's divine nature to man and directly echoes the scene below, where Demet're's royal future is revealed by God to the *eristavs* (as the apostles had been the witnesses on Mount Tabor).¹²⁹ A similar juxtaposition of the *Transfiguration* and a royal anointing appears in the marginal illuminations of the ninth-century Khludov psalter (Moscow, Hist. Mus. gr. 129D).¹³⁰

127. Velmans, "L'image de la Déesis," 47–102.

128. Velmans has traced these themes in a number of later Svanetian churches as well. T. Velmans, "Observations sur l'emplacement et l'iconographie de l'entrée à Jérusalem dans quelques églises de Svanétie (Géorgie)," in *Rayonnement grec: Hommages à Charles Delvoye*, ed. L. Hadermann-Misguich and G. Raepsaet, Brussels, 1982, 471–81.

129. S. Ćurčić, "Some Palatine Aspects of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo," *DOP* 41, 1987, 125–44, esp. 127–38, supports such an interpretation of the *Transfiguration*. However, he sees it as a literal parallel to the experience of having an audience with the emperor.

130. M. V. Ščepkina, *Miniatiury xlvovskoi psaltyri*, Moscow, 1977, fols. 88v and 89r.

The *Baptism of Christ* has a similar role. The emphasis on the anointing of a chosen one is obvious and so fits in well with the royal iconography. This idea has a long history in Byzantium, where in the tenth century the emperor Alexander depicted himself on coins as being blessed by John the Baptist in place of Christ, and in the 1120s Theodore Prodromos wrote a poem comparing John II Komnenos with the baptized Christ.¹³¹ The validity of this interpretation at Macxvariši comes from the use of an identical pose for Saint John the Baptist, with his right hand reaching out over Christ's head, as for the archangels in the two coronation images. The scenes of the *Annunciation*, *Nativity* (which includes the *Adoration of the Magi and Shepherds*), and *Presentation* are also all overtly concerned with the questions of the selection and recognition of the chosen figure. They not only record Christ's progress toward his destiny, but could also be interpreted as providing a number of models for the election and recognition of Demet're as king.

It is possible that the scenes on the west wall, described above as illustrating the glory of Christ, could also be seen in conjunction with the coronation of Demet're. The iconographic origins of the *Entry into Jerusalem* have been well established. It was based on the late Roman and Byzantine *Adventus*, the royal triumphal procession, and so had clear royal associations.¹³² It could also be more closely linked to the Georgian coronation service, which describes in some detail the two processions involved in the ceremony (see Appendix III). In Macxvariši the scene takes up the entire width of the west wall, a space in which (because of the window in the center) two separate scenes would seem more appropriate. There must have been a conscious decision to devote so much room to this scene. It provides a good parallel for the glory and triumph of the king. It would be unsupportable to say that these Christological scenes were included solely, or even principally, for their royal interpretation, but such a meaning can be drawn from them.

Support for this argument can be found in a small state off the western end of the Byzantine Empire, Norman Sicily. The Cappella Palatina in Palermo was decorated in mosaic between 1143 and 1166 for Kings Roger II and William I and so is almost exactly contemporary with Macxvariši.¹³³ In many ways the decoration and purpose of the Cappella Palatina are very different from those at Macxvariši, but the chapel has one similarity, the orientation of the program around the figure of the king. This is best seen in the so-called "royal vista," which runs from the royal box in the north transept across to the Christological scenes in the south transept.¹³⁴ This contains many of the same elements as the iconographic scheme at Macxvariši.

131. This has been noted by H. Maguire, "Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art," *Gesta* 28, 1990, 217–31, esp. 226–27; Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins*, vol. 3, pt. 2, pl. XXXV coins: 2.1 and 2.2; Theodore Prodromos, "Hymnus domino Joanni Comneno in baptismali festo Christi," *PG* 133, 1390–92. On the continuing importance of the symbolism of baptism to imperial imagery in Serbia, see S. Čurčić, "The Original Baptismal Font of Gračanica and Its Iconographic Setting," *Zbornik Narodnog Muzeja* 9–10, 1979, 313–23.

132. Grabar, *L'empereur*, 234–36; E. Kitzinger, "The Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo: An Essay in the Choice and Arrangement of Subjects," *Art Bulletin* 31, 1949, 269–92, esp. 279ff.

133. Demus, *Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, 46–58.

134. Kitzinger, "The Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina," 269–92.

The vista is framed by a group of warrior saints on the crossing arch.¹³⁵ Included with the warrior saints is Saint Nicholas of Bari, patron saint of the Hauteville family,¹³⁶ and three women saints, of whom the central figure, dressed in imperial robe and crown, is Saint Katherine.¹³⁷ The scenes in the south transept correspond exactly with the position of the royal box and include the *Nativity*, *Flight into Egypt*, *Baptism of Christ*, *Transfiguration*, *Raising of Lazarus*, and *Entry into Jerusalem*. It has been convincingly argued that the organization of this vista and the specific choice of scenes were designed to glorify the king and his family and that the scheme was devised in relation to Roger's coronation in 1130.¹³⁸ The similarities to Macxvariši are apparent.

There are, of course, great differences between the cycle at the Cappella Palatina and that at Macxvariši, and the scale and cost of the two buildings make it hard to compare them, but there are remarkable similarities. The prime aim of both churches was the promotion of the royal image, and both seem to have gone about it in very similar ways. The Hautevilles and the Bagrat'ionis associated themselves with the cults of popular local saints and made clear reference to relevant passages in the Christological cycle that would support their legitimacy and claim to rule by divine authority.

It would be quite unsupportable to claim any direct link between the two churches, or indeed between the royal families of the two kingdoms, divided as they were by the entire length of the Byzantine Empire, and I do not believe that a common, presumably Constantinopolitan, source should be sought for these ideas. However, it is interesting to note that both turned at the same time to similar ideas and iconographic themes to support their claims.

The value of the comparison between the Cappella Palatina and Macxvariši lies in the fact that it reveals the unusual conception of power at the Georgian church. The Cappella Palatina was conceived by Roger II as the royal church for his Sicilian dynasty. It was built of the most expensive materials and was the center of his kingdom. It gave him legitimacy, an instant Byzantine heritage, and an argument for divine authority that could be used to challenge the position of the emperor in Constantinople.¹³⁹

Macxvariši, on the other hand, was built on a much smaller scale in a remote region of the kingdom, inaccessible for much of the year. There was no attempt to mimic imperial decoration as there had been at the Cappella Palatina. Indeed, the

135. Borsook, *Messages*, pl. 37.

136. Kitzinger, "The Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina," 284-85.

137. I. Beck, "The First Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo," *Byzantion* 40, 1970, 119-64, esp. 141-43, argues that she is in fact an image of the king, but this is mistaken.

138. Čurčić, "Some Palatine Aspects," 128-40, has extended this imperial interpretation to other scenes, notably the *Transfiguration*, which lies directly opposite the royal box, and to the organization of the rest of the chapel.

139. It was used to impress visiting monarchs, such as Louis VII of France (for whom, perhaps, Saints Denis and Martin were included on either side of the *Entry into Jerusalem* in the south transept). See Kitzinger, "The Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina," 288-90.

style of the wall paintings consciously imitated that of the dominant local painter, Tevdore. More important, the church was not built by the king.

The location and patronage of the two churches illustrates the crucial difference between the two designs. The Cappella Palatina requires the presence of the king for the scheme to work. The royal vista can only work for the royal family seated in the royal box. They must be present both to see the imagery and for the comparisons between the two to be made. Equally, the throne at the west end of the nave, which is placed beneath an image of Christ enthroned between Saints Peter and Paul, could only be fully comprehensible while the king sat there.¹⁴⁰ An empty throne would leave the program incomplete. The chapel depends on ceremonial and on the presence of the king, which is perhaps why there is no image of the king himself: his person formed part of the scheme.

Macxvariši, on the other hand, works to a different set of ceremonial circumstances. The church does not show the king glorified, nor does it show his exercise of power. Rather, it shows the conferral of power on the king. He is the mediator of power and authority from Christ, and from him the *eristavs'* own power derives. In this regard, the difference between the Cappella Palatina and Macxvariši is the difference between the self-image of a king, created with the sole aim of proclaiming his own glory, and the representation of power in which the means of power are more important than its exercise. The Cappella Palatina is a monument to Roger II's grandiose claims; Macxvariši is a record of the power structure in Svaneti; and I suggest that is how they were meant to be seen in the twelfth century. The *eristavs* would not have gained any benefit from showing the king as the all-powerful royal incarnation of Christ, which is how the Hauteville kings must have seemed as they appeared in their royal chapel. At Macxvariši the local nobles are able to participate in the processes of power.

At this point we should return to the church of Gelati to understand how the image of power has changed. It was noted earlier that Gelati was completed by Demet're after the death of Davit IV. The extent of Demet're's work has long been disputed, and it has been variously argued that he was responsible for the decoration of the church and the building and painting of the narthex.¹⁴¹ I have suggested above that whatever work Demet're did was probably following a scheme established before the death of Davit IV.

However, in the light of the images of the king seen through Muslim eyes and then through aristocratic eyes, the work carried out by Demet're becomes more significant. Whether Demet're was responsible for the grandiose mosaic apse and the thoroughly royal narthex wall paintings or not, he certainly continued the glorification of the dynasty through the embellishment of Gelati. The importation of the gates of

140. There is some argument about the date of these particular mosaics: see Borsook, *Messages*, 20–22, and Demus, *Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, 57.

141. See note 48 above.

Gandza symbolized his military power. The transfer of the Xaxuli triptych did so too. This huge gold and enamel icon featured at its apex, immediately above the central panel of the Mother of God, the enamel of Michael VII Doukas and Maria "of Alania," which was the only visible figural image when the triptych was closed (Figs. 50 and 51). Thus, even on this object, which must have formed the central focus of the church, royal concerns were very prominent.

In the heart of the kingdom, Demet're maintained the traditional image of a Christian king. The work he produced shows no signs of moderating the comparatively "purist" Byzantine image promoted by Davit. However, it is certain that this image could not be universally maintained. Thus, by the 1150s, the single image promoted by Davit was replaced by many different images. There was no definitive mode of depiction for the Bagrat'ioni king. The Byzantine forms that had become increasingly dominant under Davit IV faced competition from Islamic and more traditional Georgian images seen at the end of Demet're's reign. Demet're seems to have been all things to all men.

Moreover, these images show that the royal image was not necessarily the sole preserve of the royal family: nonroyal donors and Muslim image-makers seem to have had as much impact on the appearance of the king. The church of Macxvariši shows the extent to which the aristocracy could control the image and use it to its own ends. They clearly exerted some influence on the presentation of the Bagrat'ionis. It is the great diversity of patrons that lies behind the lack of overall coherence in the images. But it is the diversity that also shows how unimportant coherence was.

King Giorgi III (1156–1184)

This diversity of images continued in the reign of Demet're's son, Giorgi III, who came to the throne after the murder of his elder brother, Davit V, who had ruled for just six months in 1155. The principal source of evidence of imagery in Giorgi's reign comes from the coinage that again seems to copy the same Islamic leanings, as in Demet're's reign. However, the image of power shown on the coins is far removed from anything seen elsewhere in this study (Fig. 53). Giorgi III is shown sitting cross-legged on a low throne, holding a falcon in his right hand, while his left hand rests on his thigh. Giorgi wears loose trousers and a tight-fitting jeweled tunic (which resembles a *loros*). His unusual flared crown is surmounted by a cross and has *pendilia*. On the obverse, Giorgi is identified and the date is given in Georgian, but the inscription on the reverse proclaims in Arabic: "King of Kings, Giorgi, son of Demet're, Sword of the Messiah."

Although the inscriptions and symbolism of the cross proclaim Giorgi's Christianity, the general composition is undoubtedly Islamic. The nearest comparisons to Giorgi's cross-legged pose are found on carved reliefs from Konya and on slightly



Fig. 53. Coin of Giorgi III.

later coins produced by the Artuqid ruler Nasir al-Din Artuq Arslan in Mardin (1201–39),¹⁴² but it had been used in the eleventh century to display the power of the Christian kings of Armenia.¹⁴³ The significance of the pose and its diffusion throughout the Byzantine world is well established, despite its Islamic origin.¹⁴⁴

Other evidence of a shift in Giorgi III's reign toward a more Islamic expression of power can be found in the adoption of new royal titles. On a charter given to the monastery of Šio-Mğvime in 1170, Giorgi III added to his titles those of Širvanšah and Šahanšah.¹⁴⁵ This is the first evidence of these titles being adopted by a Georgian ruler and must have been taken over from the Shaddadid rulers of Ani, whom Giorgi had defeated in 1161.

Thus, Giorgi III's reign can be seen to mark a decisive shift in the nature of Georgian power. Any expression of inferiority to Byzantium had been ended by Davit IV Ağmašenebeli, who abandoned the use of Byzantine titles and took over Byzantine forms of imagery to promote himself as an independent power. Now Giorgi III was establishing this more clearly by incorporating his rivals' titles into his own in an expression of his dominance over them. As with his coins, in his titles Giorgi III seems to have been trying to create a composite image of royal power, although it is still impossible to know whether this was intended to produce a universal change in the perception of royal power or was more narrowly designed to appeal only to a certain part of the population. The precedent of Demet're's coins suggests that the latter is more probable.

Giorgi III's coins provide the only evidence of his use of visual imagery. Given the wealth of material produced by his father and grandfather, this lack is striking. However, Giorgi features prominently in the art produced in the reign of his daughter, Queen Tamar (1184–1213), where he takes on a far greater significance.

142. T. Talbot Rice, *The Seljuks in Asia Minor*, London, 1961, pl. 60; W. F. Spengler and W. G. Sayles, *Turkoman Figural Bronze Coins and Their Iconography*, vol. 1, *The Artuquids*, Lodi Wisconsin, 1992, 147–49.

143. See, for example, the image of Gagik-Abas of Kars of c. 1050, in *Treasures in Heaven: Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. T. F. Mathews and R. S. Wieck, Princeton, 1994, pl. 7.

144. U. Monneret de Villard, *Le pitture musulmane al soffitto della Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, Rome, 1950, 37–38, pls. 179–90; see also the image on the Darmstadt casket: A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X–XIII Jahrhunderts*, 2d ed., Berlin, 1979, pl. 76.

145. Dolidze, *Kartuli samartlis dzeglebi*, 2:20; Martin-Hisard, "Les biens d'un monastère géorgien," 147. On the titles of Širvanšah and Šahanšah, see E. A. Paxomov, *Kratkii kurs istorii Azerbaidžana*, Baku, 1923, 47–48.



Color Plate I. Ošk'i. Church of St. John the Baptist (963–73). Exterior from the south.



Color Plate II. Ošk'i. Church of St. John the Baptist. Donor relief with Davit *magistros*, Bagrat' *eristav of eristavs* and Deesis on southeast exterior (963–966).



Color Plate III. Ošk'i. Church of St. John the Baptist. West side of south transept. *Procession to the Cathedral of Bana* (1036).



Color Plate IV. Zemo-K'rixi. Church of the Archangels. Sts. Barbara and Katherine on east wall (mid-eleventh century).



Color Plate V. Zemo-K'rixi. Church of the Archangels. Sts. Marina and Irina on east wall.



Color Plate VI. At'eni. General view of main, east apse (c. 1090).



Color Plate VII. Ar'eni. Detail of the Just from the *Last Judgment* on south side of west apse (c. 1090).



Color Plate VIII. Gelati (1106–30). Exterior, from southwest.



Color Plate IX. Gelati. Narthex. Detail of Third and Fourth Ecumenical Councils on west wall (c. 1125).



Color Plate X. Gelati. Apse mosaic (c. 1125).



Color Plate XI. Macxvariši (1140). North wall. *Coronation of King Demet're I* (before restoration).



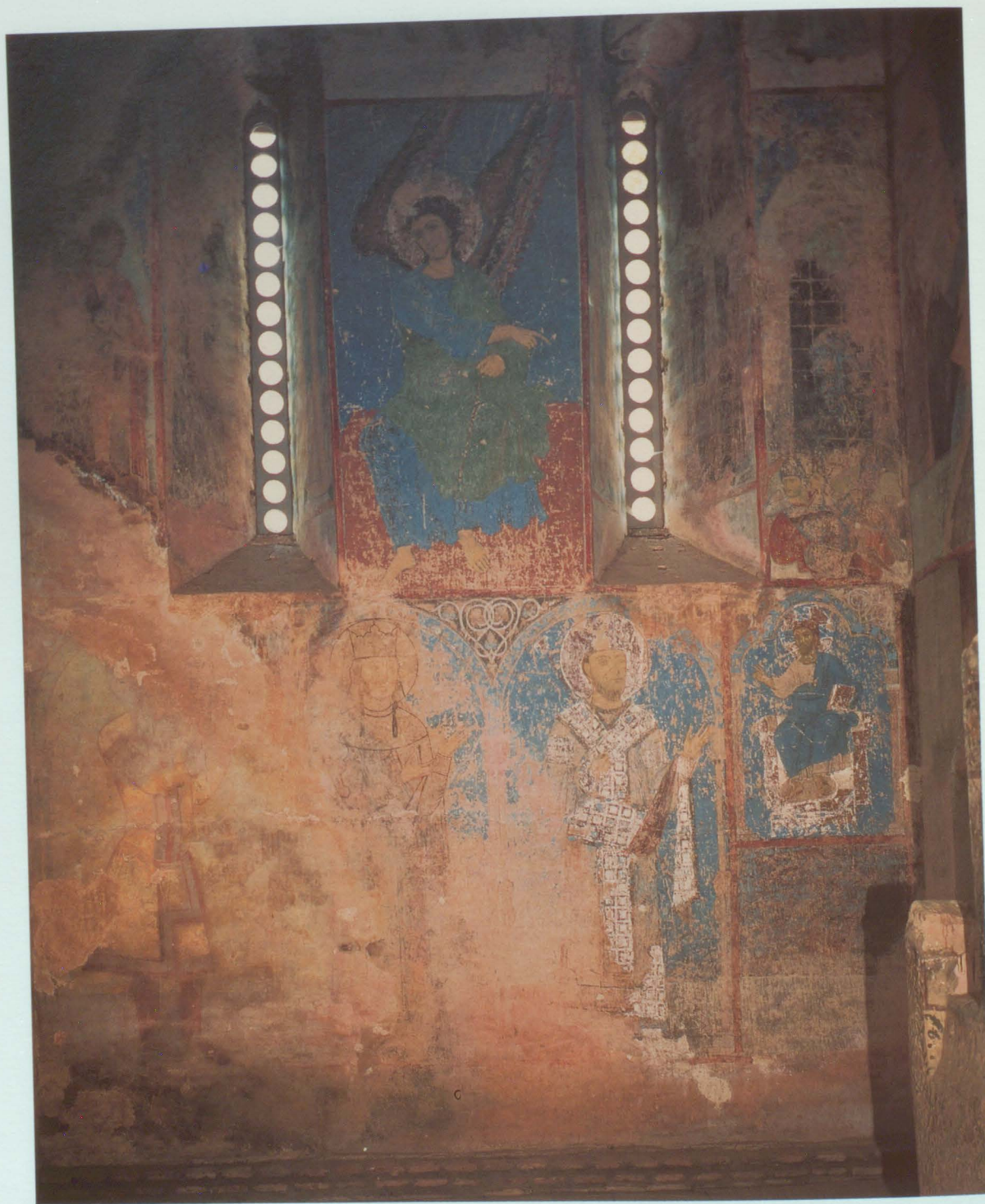
Color Plate XII. Macxvariši. North wall. *Coronation of St. Katherine, with St. Barbara* (before restoration).



Color Plate XIII. Vardzia (1184–86). Church of the Dormition. North wall. Donor image of Giorgi III and Tamar.



Color Plate XIV. Vardzia. Church of the Dormition. North wall. Detail of Queen Tamar.



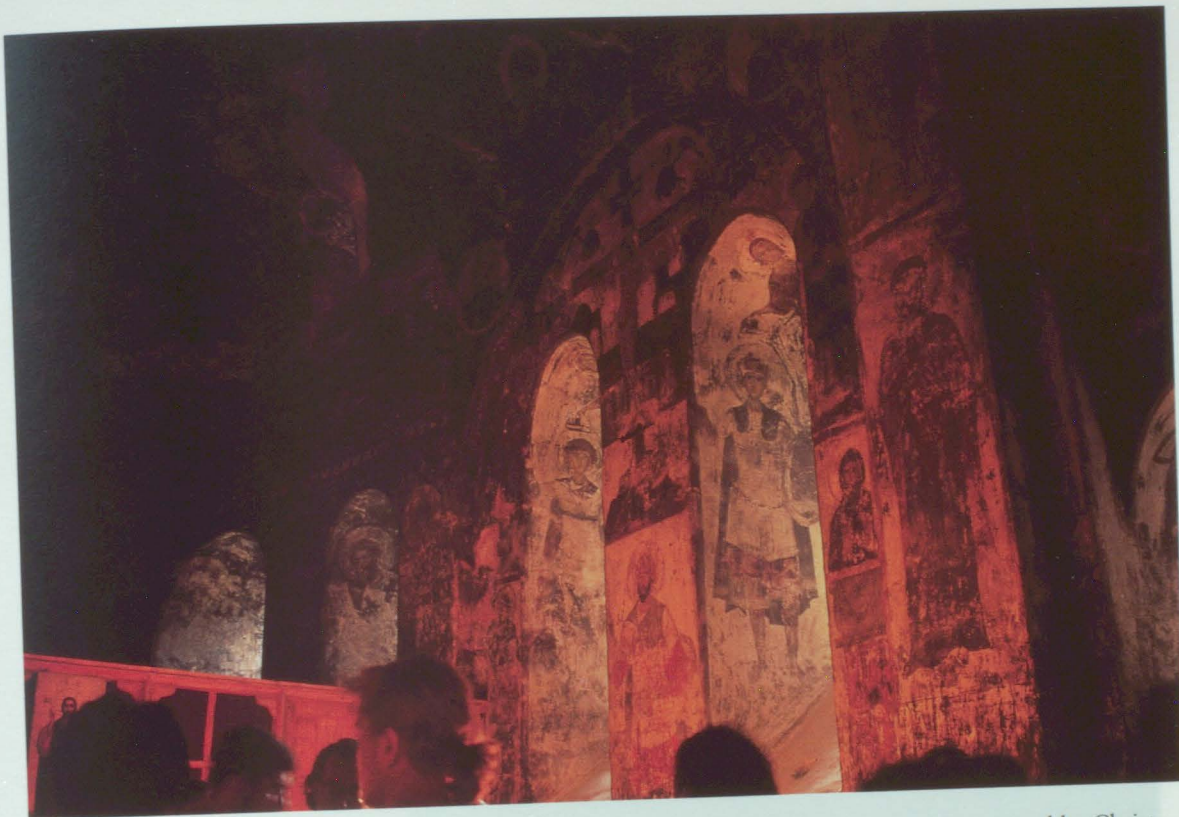
Color Plate XV. Q'inc'visi (c. 1207). Giorgi III, Tamar, and Giorgi IV Lasã before Christ in north transept.



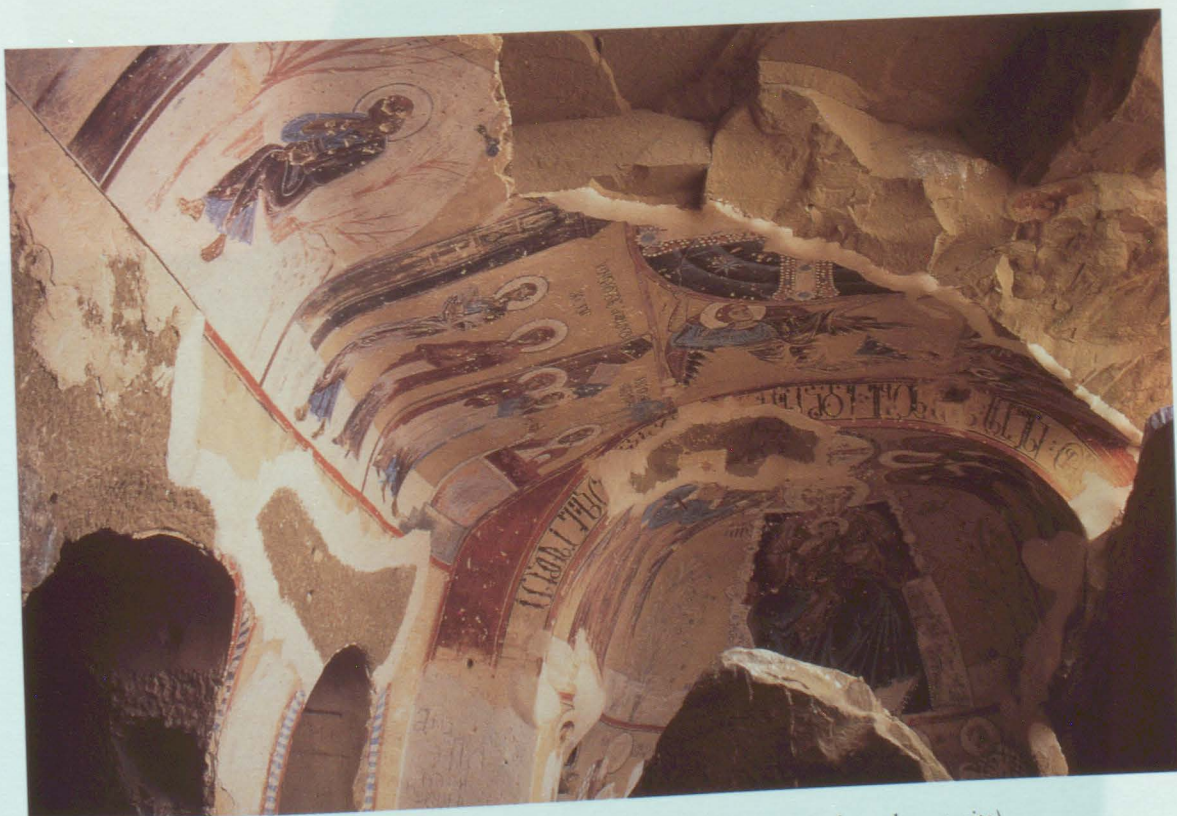
Color Plate XVI. Betania (c. 1207). Church of the Mother of God. Exterior from southwest.



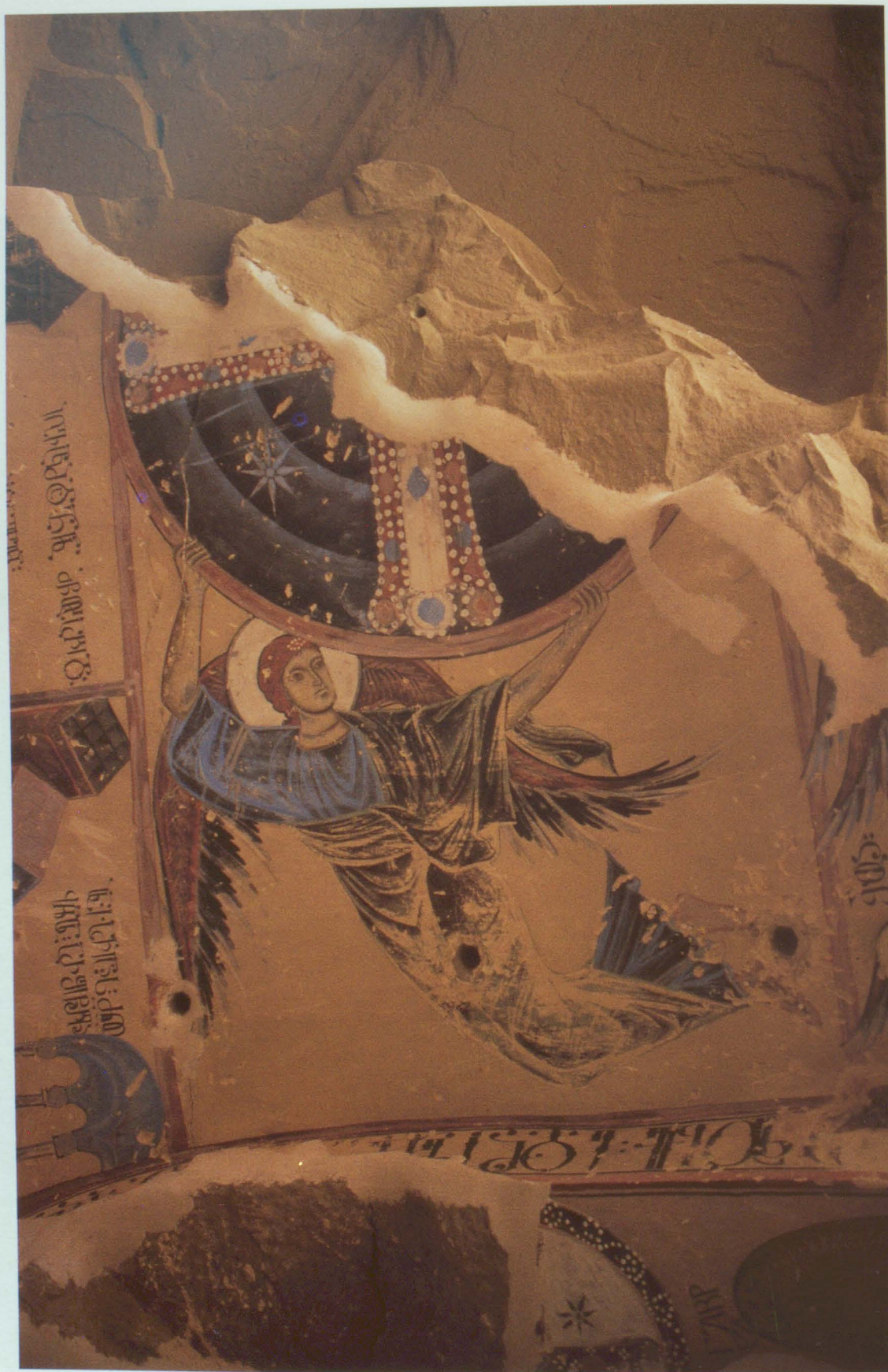
Color Plate XVII. Betaniam. North transept. Portraits of Giorgi III, Tamar, and Giorgi Lasã.



Color Plate XVIII. Vardzia. South wall, with St. Nino on pilaster and warrior saints being crowned by Christ in window jambs.



Color Plate XIX. Bertubani (1212-13). General view of apse (after removal of royal portraits).



Color Plate XX. Bertubani (1212–13). Vault. *Glorification of the Cross*.

THE IMAGERY OF QUEEN TAMAR (1184–1213)

თუცა ქალია, ხელმწიფედ მართ ღმრთისა დანაზადია;
არ გათნევთ, იცის მეფობა, უთქვენოდ გვითქვამს კვლა დია;
შუქთა მისთაებრ საჭმევცა მისი მზეებრ განაცხადია.
და ლეკვი ლომისა სწორია, ძუ იყოს, თუნდა ხვადია

Though indeed she be a woman, still as sovereign she is begotten of God. She knows how to rule. We say not this to flatter you; we ourselves, in your absence, often say so. Her deeds, like her radiance, are revealed bright as sunshine. The lion's whelps are equal, be they male or female.

—Šota Rustaveli, *Vep'xist'q'aosani* (The man in the panther's skin), verse 39

In 1184, King Giorgi III died, leaving only his daughter, Tamar, as his heir and successor. She was crowned queen and proceeded to rule for twenty-nine years, the most successful period in Georgia's history. However, her accession required all the models of royal power to be reexamined in order to create an image suitable for a queen. Tamar was the first woman to rule in her own right in Georgia; no precedents existed, either for the fact of her wielding power or for a system of visual imagery to depict it. The legacy of imagery that Tamar inherited, with its rivalry between Georgian, Byzantine, and Islamic manifestations of power, had to be adapted to fit this new situation: an image of strength had to be found that could depict the queen's authority but at the same time could confer on her all the necessary "female" virtues of the age. Georgia was a military society in which war and conquest were major governmental functions; yet participation in fighting was the one area from which Tamar was specifically excluded. Her position on the throne was very weak. Giorgi II had been forced to abdicate in favor of his son Davit IV in 1089 because of his military failures against the Seljuks. Much of the popularity of Tamar's first husband,

Iurii Bogoliubskii (shown by the number of nobles who joined his attempted coup in 1191) derived from his proven military abilities. While Tamar did occasionally accompany the army and is described as planning some campaigns, she could not participate in the fighting, the most crucial act of all. As the *Life of Tamar, Queen of Queens* (one of the two chronicles that records Tamar's reign) makes clear, when the nobles forced Tamar to marry, they did so because they were "demanding a leader for the army."¹ Moreover, the country was surrounded by nations which were all ruled by men and in which women's access to power was strictly curtailed. To them, the accession of a woman in Georgia could be, and indeed was, seen as a sign of internal weakness. The Persian historian Ibn-Bibi was able to dismiss Tamar as a libidinous woman.² Thus, to protect the queen and the country, an effective image of power had to be found.

Worries about the prospect of a woman ruler in Georgia emerged immediately after Giorgi III's death. There was substantial opposition to Tamar's coronation, and several attempts were made to undermine the authority of the monarchy.³ Despite being crowned as coruler with her father in 1178, following the normal Bagrat'ioni tradition, Tamar had unprecedentedly to be crowned again after her father's death.⁴ Her accession was challenged by various nobles within the kingdom, who also sought to curb the power and authority of the crown, hoping to limit its influence and reassert aristocratic control over government.⁵ Their opposition was, no doubt, partly a reaction to the excessively harsh and repressive rule of Giorgi III, but its momentum and popularity among the nobility derived from the fact of Tamar's sex, which made her claim to rule of dubious legality.

The use of royal imagery took on a new importance in these circumstances, since it was able to define Tamar's claim to legitimacy, her ability to rule, and the very nature and origins of her power. These matters can be examined in great detail because five monumental images of the queen survive. They allow us to trace the ways in which Tamar's right and ability to rule were presented to her subjects throughout the reign. The need to define or explain away the relationship between gender and power became one of the principal driving forces behind the development of imagery in this period. Other political circumstances also played their part, notably Georgia's increasing domination of the Caucasus and eastern Anatolia, which came about through military victory and the collapse of the rival powers of Byzantium and the Seljuks between 1190 and 1210. This allowed a more grandiose vision of royal power, the inheritance of Gelati, to be presented on the walls of churches.

1. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 120₆; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 60.

2. Ibn-Bibi, *The History of the Seljuks*, trans. H. W. Duda, *Die Seltchukengeschichte des Ibn Bibi*, Copenhagen, 1959, 33; M. Canard, "Les reines de Géorgie dans l'histoire et la légende musulmanes," *REI* 42, 1969, 3-20, esp. 6-7.

3. Salia, *History*, 177-78 and 186; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 134-40.

4. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 115₂₅-116₂; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 56.

5. KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Saravandedtani*), 30₈-18; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 136-39.

However, certainly in Tamar's first years, it was her sex that became the central issue in the depiction of power. Attitudes to gender difference imposed expectations and limitations on the actions and behavior of women throughout the Christian East. Queens, by definition, held an exceptional position within society, but even their access to freedom of action was circumscribed and had to be exercised with care. A number of women had held prominent positions in Georgia, such as Mariam Ar-cruni, who traveled to Constantinople to negotiate with the emperor Romanos III Argyros on behalf of her son Bagrat' IV in the late 1020s,⁶ and Tamar's aunt, Rusudan, who was very influential in the period immediately after Giorgi III's death.⁷ But their power had not been officially sanctioned, and relied on their relationship to present or past male rulers. Their access to power was clearly defined and limited and had no visual equivalent. The few women in the past who had tried to rule in Georgia in their own right had been unable to do so. When the widow of Gurgen II the Great took control of the city of Art'anuj in 941 in her own name, the city was seized by her male Bagrat'ioni relatives, who told her: "You, as a woman, cannot control a city."⁸ Thus, the accession of Tamar represented a new departure in the definition of the monarchy and power.

The devices exploited by the Bagrat'ionis in the eleventh and twelfth centuries all reappear in the churches of Tamar. The use of the whole church environment to provide additional meanings and layers to the image of the ruler; the use of Georgian, Byzantine, and Islamic styles or motifs to enhance aspects of rule; the depiction of selective family dynasties; and the promotion of military and theocratic power—all recur in Tamar's reign as means of portraying power. However, in every case, their use is developed or changed to explain away the problem of Tamar's sex. The image of the queen, then, forced a reassessment of the power of imagery in Georgia as it acquired a new and more urgent role.

Over the centuries, the image of Queen Tamar has acquired layers of myth, folklore, and romance that in themselves make a fascinating study.⁹ Tamar has been cast as a model warrior-queen, in the footsteps of Boudica, or as a sirenlike temptress using her power and beauty to lure men to their deaths after a brief moment of ecstasy.¹⁰ More commonly, however, she has been seen as the symbol and figurehead

6. KC 1 (*Mat'iane Kartlisa*), 294₄₋₇; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 287–88.

7. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 115₁₁₋₁₉ and 119₆; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 55 and 59.

8. Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando imperio*, ed. and trans. G. Moravcsik and R.J.H. Jenkins, Washington, D.C., 1967, 46₂₂₋₃₄. The woman, whose name is not known from any source, had very strong claims to the city, both as the widow of Gurgen II and, by birth, as the only daughter of the *patrikiōs* Ašot' of Art'anuj.

9. A. Eastmond, "Gender and Orientalism in Georgia," in *Women, Men, and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. L. James, London, 1997, 100–118; R. Met'reveli, "La reine Thamar dans le folklore géorgien," *BK* 27, 1970, 126–34.

10. See, for example, A. Fraser, *Boadicea's Chariot: The Warrior Queens*, London, 1986, 167–81, or the poems of Mikhail Lermontov in *Lermontov: Major Poetical Works*, trans. A. Liberman, London, 1983, 264. See also Canard, "Les reines," 7–11.

of Georgia's "Golden Age": both its inspiration and its instigator. The foundations of these views lie in the two chronicle accounts of her reign in *Kartlis Cxovreba*—the *Life of Tamar, Queen of Queens* and the *Histories and Eulogies of Sovereigns*—but they have all affected the ways in which the visual evidence has been studied. From the chronicles, we learn that by 1213 Georgia covered its greatest territorial extent: the victories of Tamar's second husband, Davit Soslan, and her generals, Zakaria and Ivane Mxargrdzeli, surpassing even those of Davit IV Aḡmašenebeli and Giorgi III. In addition to the traditional Georgian lands, Queen Tamar now ruled over much of Armenia and Azerbaijan and held many Arab and Seljuk territories in suzerainty, including the sultanate of Erzincan and the emirate of Erzurum. She helped to establish the empire of Trebizond in 1204,¹¹ and her military influence stretched even further afield, reaching as far as Khorassan in eastern Persia.¹²

At the same time, Georgia is regarded as having reached its cultural apogee in Tamar's reign.¹³ Magnificent buildings were erected, and decorated with wall paintings. Advances were made in science and agriculture.¹⁴ Great works of literature were produced, including Č'axruxadze's *Tamariani* and Ioane Šavteli's *Abdul-Mesia*, which poems are both devoted to praise of the queen.¹⁵ Most famously, it is at this time that Šota Rustaveli wrote his poem *Vepxist'q'aosani* (The knight in the panther's skin), now nationally revered as the greatest Georgian vernacular epic poem.¹⁶ Tamar regained Georgia's position on the international stage, and the *Life of Tamar, Queen of Queens* praises her universal patronage and protection of Christianity, supporting churches throughout the eastern Mediterranean, from Libya to Bulgaria and Cyprus.¹⁷ The *Life of Saladin* claims she outbid the Byzantine emperor in her efforts to regain the relics of the Holy Cross for Christendom.¹⁸ These elements have

11. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 142₁₈₋₂₃; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 86–87. For a full bibliography on Georgian involvement in the capture of Trebizond, and its subsequent history, see A.A.M. Bryer, "Preface: A View from the Byzantine Side of the River Akampsis," in Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, xviii n. 17.

12. KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šaravandedtani*), 106₁₅; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 138. However, the list of towns captured in the expedition of 1210 suggests that the campaign was limited to what is now northwest Iran.

13. This is best expressed in Salia, *History*, 189: "The epoch of queen Tamar, when the kingdom was at the height of its political power, was also one of efflorescence in the field of culture."

14. The developments include astronomy (such as the astronomical tract of 1188: Tbilisi, Institute of Manuscripts, MS A-65) and agricultural technology (Salia, *History*, 185).

15. N. A. Marr, *Drevnegruzinskie odopiscy*, vol. 4 of *Teksty i razyskaniia po armiano-gruzinskoj filologii*, St. Petersburg, 1902; Č'axruxadze's poem has been translated into Russian by S. Nucubidze, *Č'axruxadze: Tamariani*, [Tbilisi?/Moscow?], 1942. See also D. Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History*, Oxford, 1994, 82–86; and G. Č'ereteli, "Tamar dedoplis saxe (L'image de la reine Tamar dans l'oeuvre du poète Tchakroukadsé)," BK 4, 1949, 25–27; BK 5, 1949, 26–28.

16. Š. Rustaveli, *Vepxist'q'aosani*, ed A. Šanidze and A. Baramidze, Tbilisi, 1966; trans. M. Wardrop, *Shot'ha Rust'haveli: The Man in the Panther's Skin*, Oriental Translation Fund, n.s., 21, London, 1912. The earliest recorded lines from the poem have been found in the church at Vanis Kvabebi, near Vardzia, and are dated to the fifteenth century (G. Gaprindašvili, *Ancient Monuments of Georgia: Vardzia: History, Architecture, Wall Painting*, Applied Arts, Leningrad, 1975, 10). The dating of the poem to the twelfth century, therefore, depends on the internal evidence of the dedication to Queen Tamar, which may be a later interpolation into the text.

17. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 141₂₄₋₂₈ and 142₃₋₇; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 85 and 86; KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šaravandedtani*), 91₁₀₋₁₇; Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 455.

18. This is noted by Baha' al-Din in his *Life of Saladin*, in *Receuil des historiens des Croisades: Historiens orientaux*, Paris 1884, 3:299.

all been combined to paint a glorious picture of the flowering of civilization in a politically and militarily ascendant kingdom. It is an image of success and glory that is made more striking by its female head and that dominates the modern histories of the period.¹⁹

What makes the "Golden Age" these authors describe so unusual, however, is the position they give to Queen Tamar herself. The whole reign and all the achievements within it are inextricably linked to the personality and cult of the queen. Rustaveli claims Tamar as the inspiration for his poem at both its start and close.²⁰ The *Life of Tamar, Queen of Queens* places her at the center of national life: "The tints of happiness faded from the countenance of the Georgians; for they had no name but Tamar's on their lips, which now became like soil that salt had made sterile. Tamar's praises were engraved in acrostics on their houses, and adorned seals, knives and staffs of office. Every mouth was ready with one accord to utter some word of praise worthy of Tamar; herdsmen as they tilled the soil composed verses extolling her: musicians in Iraq playing the psalter or zither sang songs composed to the glory and praise of Tamar. Frankish and Greek seamen with a fair wind at sea uttered eulogies of Tamar. Thus the whole world was filled with praise of her, and every tongue in which her name was pronounced exalted her."²¹ This eulogizing of the queen is carried to greater excess in the *Histories and Eulogies of Sovereigns*.²² Every action is inspired by her or carried out in her honor. Even wars are fought to avenge slights to her name, as the sultan Rukn-ad-Din discovered when he wrote an insulting letter to her in 1204/5.²³

This construction of the reign of a "Golden Age" clearly began in the reign itself. The lavish poems in praise of Queen Tamar were a conscious effort to build up the glory of the reign.²⁴ The queen was even named as a saint in her lifetime in a colophon written in Greek and Georgian at the end of the Vani Gospels, which were copied by Iovane, a Georgian monk in Constantinople.²⁵ However, the movement gained its greatest impetus from the Khwarazmian and then Mongol invasions, which followed each other in quick succession in the 1220s and 1230s. These shattered the political hegemony of the country and undid two hundred years of union by dividing the country once more into separate kingdoms. The independence of the

19. See, for example, D. M. Lang, *The Georgians*, Bristol, 1966; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*; R. Met'reveli, *Mepe Tamari* (Queen Tamar), Tbilisi, 1991, 354–74; Salia, *History*, 188–90; Allen, *History*, 103–8; A. Manvelichvili, *Histoire de Géorgie*, Paris, 1951, 181–98.

20. Rustaveli, *Vepxist'q'aosani*, 1₄₋₅, 3₁₅, 5₂₆, 256₁₅₇₃₋₇₄.

21. Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 91–92; KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 146₁₃₋₂₂; Salia, *History*, 188–89.

22. For a typical example of the hyperbolic prose, see KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šaravandedtani*), 26–28; Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 404–5.

23. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 133₁₄₋₁₃₄₂; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 77–83.

24. The same had been done by the emperor Augustus in early imperial Rome: P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, Michigan, 1988, 101ff.

25. The manuscript is in the Institute of Manuscripts, Tbilisi, MS A-1335, fol. 272v. See K. Šarašidze, *Sakartvelos saxelmc'ipo muzeumis kartul xelnac'era ağc'eriloba* (Catalogue of Georgian manuscripts in the State Museum of Georgia), Tbilisi, 1954, 4:409; E. Taq'aišvili, "L'évangile de Vani," *Byzantion* 10, 1935, 655–63.

Bagrat'ionis was replaced by Mongol vassalship and the heavy taxes of the oppressor. It was under these new conditions that the histories of Tamar's reign were written, and the change of circumstances had a profound effect.²⁶ The loss of empire and the advantages of hindsight recast Tamar's reign in the realm of myth and unregainable glory, building on the image that had already emerged from the poetry. The whole reign is treated as a study in triumph, and all acts and battles support this image. The general acceptance of this view of Tamar's reign has blurred the distinction between the cult of the queen and her actions. No distinction is made between Tamar's personae as symbolic figurehead and focus of the country, on the one hand, and as the acting head of the government, army, and patronage, on the other. The effect of Šota Rustaveli's poem and the chronicles is to confuse these two areas and leave unclear the extent to which Tamar was personally responsible for the events of her reign. No attempt is made to separate the Tamar who is represented in all the praise from the queen who instigated it. I shall make no positivist attempt to find the "real" queen behind the mythology, but rather an investigation of how and why the various images of the queen were created and presented to her subjects during her reign.

The mythologizing of Queen Tamar has affected the modern study of the visual evidence particularly strongly. The images of the queen have, generally, been examined in the light of Tamar's successes: they have been used only to *illustrate* the queen in glory. The images have been ripped from their historical contexts, with the result that much of their value has been lost and their meanings and interpretations have been predetermined by perceived views of the success of the reign. Even the major studies of Queen Tamar and royal imagery by Gaiane Alibegašvili and Nicole Thierry, which have contextualized the images, have tended to obscure much of their individual meanings.²⁷ In some cases the abuse or ignorance of the art has been taken to the extreme of using romanticized nineteenth-century copies of the early thirteenth-century wall paintings to illustrate histories of the reign.²⁸

There can be no doubt that each portrait of Tamar does proclaim her triumph, as every royal image examined so far has done, but too many historians have seen these images merely as the reflection of triumph. Yet, the images of the queen manipulate her public persona in much the same way as the chronicles and later histories. To assume that art follows and reflects is to deny it its own history and importance. This study so far has shown that much of the significance of royal imagery lies in its *creation* of meaning and its promotion of new images of power and authority. Art

26. On the dates of the chronicles, see Rayfield, *Literature*, 95–96. C. Toumanoff, "Medieval Georgian Historical Literature (VIIth–XVth Centuries)," *Traditio* 1, 1943, 156–57 and 175–76, assumed both chronicles to be contemporary to Tamar's reign. A confusing account of the history of the texts in *Kartlis Cxovreba* can be found in M. Lordkipanidze's introduction to Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, xxxviii–xxxix.

27. Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, and Thierry, "Le souverain."

28. This occurs, for example, in Salia, *History*, pl. 22, and Manvelichvili, *Histoire*, 183.

could define meanings as well as just copy them. In the reign of Queen Tamar this facet of royal imagery took on particular importance, since the power of the queen had to be justified and explained in different ways as her reign progressed.

Another tendency in the analysis of the images of Queen Tamar has been to study them together as a group with common themes and a unifying sense of progression and development. In this assumption of coherence, nuances of meaning are lost and important differences played down. Since each portrait can be accurately dated to a particular period of Tamar's reign, it is precisely the changes in meaning that can be examined with precision. They also allow us to investigate whether there was just the one image of the queen portrayed so compellingly in the histories. The additional evidence provided by these five churches of the patronage and circumstances of creation of each image tests the unitary façade, just as the earlier images of Davit IV Ağmašenebeli and Demet're I portrayed differing facets of their rule and power. The concentration on just one figure allows the question of diversity and difference to be minutely investigated, since it becomes possible to examine whether a more narrowly defined view of power emerged in this brief period. The evidence of patronage also raises the question of the control of royal imagery: To what extent could Queen Tamar determine her own depiction, and to what extent was it created independently elsewhere? Do the images of Tamar present a strong queen in control of her portrayal and her kingdom or a façade of female power determined by and for the male aristocracy?

Vardzia

The earliest surviving image of Queen Tamar is found in the Church of the Dormition at Vardzia. The church is the central feature of a large rock-cut monastic complex situated in a cliff face on the north bank of the river Mt'k'vari, in the Tmogvi Gorge in Javaxeti (Fig. 54).²⁹ The complex stretches across five hundred meters of the cliff face and through nineteen tiers of caves. Despite the collapse of the fronts of all the caves, its defensive strength is evident: the monastery could only be entered through two small gateways at either end of the site. There are many other rock-cut monasteries in this area, but this is the largest and best defended of them all. The monastery was originally located further upstream at Zeda (Upper) Vardzia, where an eleventh-century church still stands,³⁰ but it was moved to its present site by Giorgi III, presumably for its increased security.

29. Gaprindašvili, *Ancient Monuments of Georgia*; G. Gaprindašvili, *Peščernyi ansambl' Vardzia 1156-1213* gg, Tbilisi, 1960; K. N. Melitauri, "K voprosu o naznačenií sooruženiia Vardzia," *Soob AN GSSR* 26/3, 1961, 377-83; K. N. Melitauri, *Vardzia*, Tbilisi, 1963; G. D. Džamburiiia, K. N. Melitauri, and S. A. Čantadze, *Vardzia: Putevoditel'*, Tbilisi, 1975; E. L. Privalova, *Vardzia*, Tbilisi, 1982.

30. C. Gabiašvili, *Zeda Vardzia*, Tbilisi, 1985.



Fig. 54. Vardzia. Church of the Dormition. Exterior from southeast (1184–86).

There are a number of churches and chapels in the complex at Vardzia, but the Church of the Dormition is clearly the most important building. It stands in the center of the site, is the largest church, and is completely covered in wall paintings. The church is a simple hall church with a barrel vault and one broad apse at the east end.³¹ Its walls are man-made, defining the space of the church within an originally much larger cave. There are additional chambers to the north, west, and south, all of which have entrances to the church. The north chamber contains a baldachin, whose original use is unclear; although, since the room has a direct entrance into the apse as well as into the naos, the chamber must have been for the use of the clergy. This room also contains another door, which leads to a passage cut through the cliff to a small cave high above the church. The west chamber leads to a “holy” well within the rock; the south chamber, which is also painted, provides the main entrance to the church. It seems to have acted as some form of narthex or porch and perhaps as a separate chapel, since part of an apse decorated with a Deesis composition survives

31. The dimensions of the church are 14.5×9.2 m and 9.2 m high.



Fig. 55. Vardzia. Schema of north wall (redrawn after Alibegašvili).

at the east end. The south wall of this chamber collapsed after an earthquake in 1283, with the resultant loss of part of the original decoration. It was replaced with the present arched structure by the *atabag* Beka Jaq'eli-Cixisjvareli (1285–1306).

The program of decoration in the church is relatively straightforward. The apse contains a monumental image of the Virgin and Child enthroned between the archangels Michael and Gabriel, above a row of twelve church fathers, some of whom hold scrolls bearing Greek texts.³² The naos is divided in two from north to south by a pilaster that runs right around the barrel vault. Each half of the north and south wall contains a broad, shallow niche. The two niches on the north wall are dominated by donor scenes (Fig. 55). In the main panel are shown King Giorgi III and his daughter, Queen Tamar, and in the second panel, to the west, is a portrait of the *eristav* Rat'i Surameli. The rest of the church is taken up with a Christological cycle (consisting of the *Annunciation*, *Nativity*, *Presentation in the Temple*, *Baptism*, *Transfiguration*, *Raising of Lazarus*, *Entry into Jerusalem*, *Last Supper*, *Washing of the Apostles' Feet*, *Crucifixion* [Fig. 56], *Anastasis*, *Pentecost*, and *Dormition*) and representations of individual saints. The southern narthex, in addition to the Deesis

32. T. S. Q'auxčičšvili, *Berdznuli c'arc'erebi sakartveloši* (Greek inscriptions in Georgia), Tbilisi, 1951, 306–17.

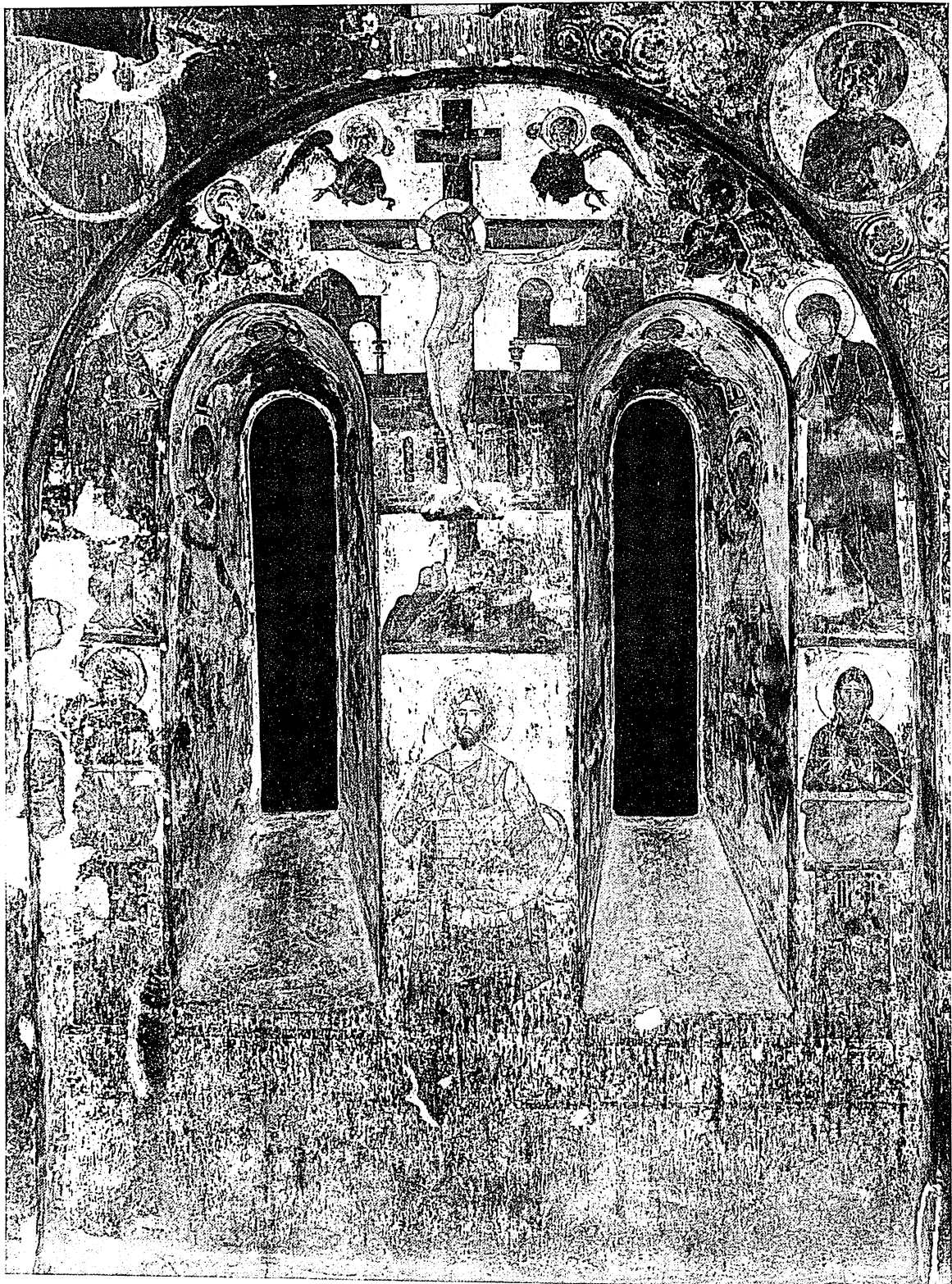


Fig. 56. Vardzia. South wall. *Crucifixion*.

apse, is dominated by a *Last Judgment* on the north wall (that is, the exterior south wall of the church), with a *Glorification of the Cross* on the vault, and two unidentified scenes from the *Life of St. Stephen the Proto-Martyr* on the west wall, which were partially destroyed in the earthquake of 1283.

Donor Images

After the apse figures, the donor panels are the largest-scale works at Vardzia. They are the best lit and most visible scenes in the church. They dominate the interior, and their prominence is confirmed by their depiction on uninterrupted vertical surfaces in contrast to the scenes on the south wall, such as the *Crucifixion*. At first sight they present the viewer with a clear vision of royal power.

The main scene, in the northeast niche, shows King Giorgi III in prayer before a seated Virgin and Child, who make gestures of welcome and blessing in acknowledgment (see Plate XIII). An angel hovers above the king's head and passes a scepter or labarum between the Virgin and the king. The direction of the angel's movement is deliberately ambiguous and can be interpreted either as a dedicatory offering from the king or as a symbol of divine legitimacy given by the Virgin. The king is followed by his daughter, Tamar (see Plate XIV), who holds a model of the church.³³ The *Histories and Eulogies of Sovereigns* tells us that Vardzia was begun by Giorgi III and then completed by his daughter.³⁴ The donor scene provides visual evidence of this, since Tamar holds the model of the completed church and follows her father. It is thus a standard donor scene: the royal pair offer themselves and their gift to the heavenly pair, who offer signs of acceptance and benediction in return.

Both Giorgi and Tamar wear Byzantine imperial dress, with heavily embroidered robes surmounted by *loroi*. They also wear identical crowns, each embellished with five large jewels. This form of depiction seems to represent a return to the neo-Byzantine outlook of Davit IV, after the alterations seen in the reign of Demet're I. The significance of this change is made even more pronounced when compared with the only known earlier image of Giorgi III, the portrait placed on his coins, which was described in Chapter II. Once again, it seems that the coinage presented an image of the king rather different from that of the monumental Christian art. The details of Giorgi and Tamar's dress and attributes can also be used to give an approximate date for the wall paintings, since they show Tamar as crowned but unmarried.³⁵ They must therefore date from after 1178, when Tamar was crowned as coruler

33. Alpaogo-Novello, *Art and Architecture*, 95, claims that Tamar holds a "model of the town (better than of the church)." However, it is clearly a model of the church: the order of windows repeats that of the main south wall of the church (behind the present arched south narthex).

34. KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šaravandectani*), 90₂₁-91₉; Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 455.

35. Tamar's unmarried state can be inferred from the absence of a veil, the traditional symbol of marriage (which is seen in all the later images of the queen), and, of course, of a husband. See Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 220-23; Gaprindašvili, *Vardzia*, 23.

with her father, but before 1186, when she married her first husband, Iurii Bogoliubskii of Suzdal'. Tamar was certainly active at this time, sending donations to the Georgian Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos.³⁶ (These dates will be significantly refined below.)

The second donor scene in the northwest niche shows Rat'i Surameli, the *eristav* of Javaxeti and Kartli, in prayer before a standing Virgin and Child (Fig. 57). Once again there is an exchange of gestures: Rat'i raises his hands in prayer, and his prayer is received by the Virgin, while he is blessed by the Christ Child. It is a second image of the mechanics of prayer and of the links between earth and Heaven and conforms to general expectations of a donor panel.

The two scenes fit in a neat, hierarchical scheme. The royal donors are in the niche closest to the apse and take up the whole wall space; the Rat'i panel is further away and fills only half of the niche. The Bagrat'ionis wear Byzantine imperial robes and have haloes; but Rat'i wears Georgian costume and is not nimbed. Tamar, holding a model of the church, and Giorgi III are the obvious donors. The superiority of the royal family is apparent, as is their hierarchical relationship with the aristocracy.³⁷ The north wall, then, neatly summarizes the order and construction of Georgian society. It establishes the position of the king and his family and that of their courtiers; their desire for conspicuous piety; their privileged closeness to the celestial world of Christ and the saints; the near certainty of their ultimate acceptance into Heaven; and their possible imperial ambitions. These, I would argue, would be the main meanings read into the images by anyone entering the church and are not controversial. All the elements at Vardzia are designed to reinforce the privileged status of the royal family and to set them apart from the rest of society. The presence of Rat'i demonstrates his local right to rule and his authority, but stresses their divine and regal origins. Rat'i also serves to give royal authority a local manifestation and a direct relevance in the region.

These are the "obvious" interpretations, which are self-evident and apparent at first sight. However, for those able to read the inscriptions accompanying the two sets of donor images, a somewhat different interpretation becomes possible. The audience for this new meaning was restricted to the literate and those with access to a literate "interpreter."³⁸ The information in the inscriptions begins to undermine the authority of the royal family and, in particular, of Queen Tamar.

The inscriptions in the main scene read as follows: Tamar is named as "King of Kings of all the East, Tamar, daughter of Giorgi; may God grant her a long life"; her father is described as "King of Kings of all the East, Giorgi, son of Demet're, King of

36. Her donations are recorded in the *Synodikon* of the monastery: J. Lefort, N. Oikonomides, D. Papachrysanthou, V. Kravari, and H. Métrévéli, *Actes d'Iviron (du milieu du XI^e siècle à 1204)*, Paris, 1990, 2:10 (no. 153).

37. The only exception to this is that Rat'i Surameli is shown slightly larger than either Giorgi III or Tamar.

38. This latter group was theoretically all-encompassing, but in practice was surely limited to the nobility and clergy, and we may assume that the inscriptions were directed to this limited audience.



Fig. 57. Vardzia. North wall. Donor image of the *eristav* Rat'i Surameli.

Kings.”³⁹ The absence of the final acclamation in Giorgi’s inscription indicates that Giorgi was no longer alive when the church was painted, since it implies that there was no longer any need to wish him longevity. Thus, the paintings must date from after 1184. It is this fact that requires the scene to be reassessed, since we must find a way of reconciling Tamar’s status as *ruling* queen with her secondary placement in the scene.⁴⁰ Why is the queen shown as the deputy of her father, rather than as ruler in her own right? She had, after all, been crowned for a second time, after Giorgi’s death, to reinforce her legitimacy and to emphasize her authority. The composition seems to stress Tamar’s blood right to the throne and the debt she owed to her dead father.

The reasons for this form of presentation can be found in the political situation in Georgia and the particular problems Tamar faced in the early years of her reign. This is the only time at which the chronicles of *Kartlis Cxovreba* even hint at the many difficulties Tamar faced. She was met by strong resistance to her accession, which had to be overcome, and by many overt attempts to reduce her power. The opposition came on two counts: the legacy of her father and the hindrance caused by attitudes to her gender.

The most immediate problem faced by Tamar was the legacy left her by her father, Giorgi III. Giorgi had alienated and weakened much of his aristocracy, which now wanted to try to restore its powers while the new monarch was young and inexperienced. This alienation had, partly, been caused by Giorgi’s attempts to weaken the regional power bases of the great aristocratic families and, partly, by a more sinister event in Giorgi’s own past. The policy to reduce aristocratic power and the separatist tendencies that went with it had been applied by all Giorgi’s predecessors since 1008, and Giorgi differed from them only in the excessive brutality by which he administered it. This alone seems to have provoked a series of revolts, culminating in a major revolt in 1177, which was led by the Orbeli family. It was partly as a result of these revolts that Tamar was crowned coruler with her father in 1178, to establish her acceptance by the nobility.

However, the leaders of the revolts tried to justify their actions, especially those of the 1177 revolt, by referring to Giorgi’s own illegality. This is disclosed in the Armenian chronicles of the thirteenth century, which explore Giorgi’s rather murky past, unlike *Kartlis Cxovreba*, which makes no reference to it. The most explicit, the “Historical Compilation” written by Vardan Arewelc’i in c. 1267, claims that Giorgi had usurped his elder brother Davit V by arranging his murder and had then sup-

39. Gaprindašvili, *Vardzia*, 63. The inscriptions read as follows: Tamar:

ყოვლისა აღმოსავლეთისა მეფეთა მეფე შვილი გიორგისა თამარ, რომელი
მრავალჟამეულობსმცა

Giorgi:

ყოვლისა აღმოსავლეთისა მეფეთა მეფე გიორგი, ძე დემეტრე მეფეთა მეფისაჲ

40. Other donor images showing rulers following their ancestors do exist, but they are either more consciously dynastic or overtly funerary.

pressed the succession of Davit's son, Demna.⁴¹ In other words, Giorgi had no right to be king. The Georgian and Armenian chronicles are confused about the length and nature of Davit V's reign and disagree over the circumstances in which it ended, but Giorgi does seem to have been deeply implicated.⁴² Vardan Arewelc'i says that Davit was murdered "by Sumbat' and Ivane [Orbeli] in a plot of the Orbelis . . . They had made an agreement with Giorgi, Davit's brother, that he would appoint them generals."⁴³ Ivane Orbeli was indeed rewarded by Giorgi III with the post of *amirsp'asalar* (minister of war) on his coronation. The Armenian Stepanos Orbeliani, writing shortly after Vardan Arewelc'i, gives his family's version of the events, which, unsurprisingly, exonerates them but still firmly condemns Giorgi.⁴⁴ Stepanos denies any family involvement in the murder of Davit V and says that Giorgi had sworn to Davit V that he would rule only until Demna (Davit's son) reached his majority, but then reneged on his vow. He claims that the Orbelis had been the witnesses of this vow and that they led the 1177 revolt to restore Demna, who was now adult, to his rightful position. Since Demna had married the daughter of Ivane and Rusudan Orbeli, the family's interest in the revolt is clear. However, the way Giorgi III dealt with the rebels after their final defeat supports the thrust of Stepanos's account, since it shows that Giorgi's prime concern was for his legitimacy. Demna was castrated to ensure the primacy of Giorgi's branch of the family,⁴⁵ and the Orbelis were extirpated and their lands and wealth seized.⁴⁶

Thus, there was a great need for Giorgi and his heirs to reestablish their legitimacy. The inscription by Giorgi's head at Vardzia, stressing his descent from Demet're I, his father, was perhaps a further attempt to emphasize his legitimacy. Giorgi also sought divine support for his actions. The angel over Giorgi's head at Vardzia (who appears again with Giorgi in a second depiction in the Monastery of Natlismcemeli) is the visual equivalent of this claim. The angel can be interpreted as passing a symbol of power and divine approval from the Virgin to the king. This royal staff of office is mentioned as one of the attributes of the crown in the

41. Vardan Arewelc'i, "The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelc'i," trans. R. W. Thomson, *DOP* 43, 1989, 125–226, esp. 205.

42. Vardan Arewelc'i, "Historical Compilation," 205, claims that "Davit V took the crown, an intelligent and kindly man . . . but a month later he died," and Stepanos Orbeliani, *History*, in *Histoire de la Sionie par Stéphanos Orbélian*, trans. M. Brosset, St. Petersburg, 1864, 1:216, claims he ruled for two years. *KC 1 (Laša Giorgis-droindeli Memat'iane)*, 366₁₁; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 50, says he ruled for six months. This confusion has passed into the modern histories: Salia, *History*, 175, implies that Davit V did not rule, but then includes him (with regnal dates) in the genealogy of the Bagrat'ioni rulers (409); and Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 129–30, claims that Davit ruled for a brief period during his father's life, as the result of a coup, but died before his father. Given the extra evidence from the Armenian chronicles, that Giorgi did usurp, if not murder, his father, it seems understandable that Davit V did reign briefly. The scant reporting of Davit's possible reign in *Kartlis Cxovreba* is understandable, since it had to support the ruling branch of the Bagrat'ionis.

43. Vardan Arewelc'i, "Historical Compilation," 205.

44. Stepanos Orbeliani, *History*, 216–17.

45. Vardan Arewelc'i, "Historical Compilation," 208.

46. Vardan Arewelc'i, "Historical Compilation," 207; Stepanos Orbeliani, *History*, 218 and 220–21. The Orbelis had been alienated from the Bagrat'ioni regime after a dispute over control of the city of Ani, which had been captured by Giorgi in 1161 and briefly handed over to the Orbelis to rule.

thirteenth-century description of the coronation ceremony⁴⁷ and appears in other later-thirteenth-century royal images as a symbol of divine approval.⁴⁸

Viewed from this perspective, Tamar is placed second at Vardzia to show how her legitimacy derives, through her father, from Heaven. She rules, but her position is entirely dependent on her father's gains. Conversely, however, Tamar acts to legitimize or even justify her father's usurpation. Since she has been accepted by everyone at her second coronation in 1184, she therefore gives posthumous proof of the divine will for the triumph of Giorgi's line, as opposed to Davit V's. Father and daughter thus support each other, both proving the claim of the other. The presence of Rat'i affords further visual evidence that support for the Bagrat'ionis exists both in other areas of society and, more important, at local level.

This argument might seem to have more relevance if Giorgi III were still alive at the time the frescoes were painted, since it was in the aftermath of the revolt that he had the greatest need to demonstrate his power and legitimacy. It would also, then, provide greater support for Tamar by showing her succession as a *fait accompli*. The joint depiction would thus be an example of a compelling use of images to mold opinion to accept a royal ambition. However, as we have seen, the church postdates Giorgi's death, and the symbolism of the angel is repeated at Natlismcemeli, which was painted at least ten years later. This shows that the explicit need to show Giorgi III's divinely approved legitimacy was paramount in Tamar's reign and continued for a long time into it. However, the portrait of Giorgi also acts to create a new image of him. Its conservative, orthodox image contrasts markedly with the more radical and confused image presented on Giorgi's coins.

The family's dynastic problems were accentuated by Tamar's other perceived weakness, her sex. Aristocratic resistance to rule by a woman served only to confirm their opposition to the dynasty. Although Tamar was Giorgi's sole heir and the only surviving member of the Bagrat'ioni dynasty that had ruled all Georgia since 1008,⁴⁹ her gender caused considerable opposition to her succession. There was an attempt to dethrone her on Giorgi's death, after which parts of the aristocracy tried to exploit her youth and (supposed) weakness and inexperience to regain greater autonomy for themselves. The co-coronation of Tamar in 1178 was a partially successful attempt to preempt these attacks on her.⁵⁰ In this sense, Tamar's appearance behind her father could be seen as an attempt to overcome the perceived obstacles to Tamar's rule as a woman. Giorgi III acts to introduce and support his daughter. This is an ex-

47. See Appendix III.

48. A. G. K'ldiašvili, "Rospis' zapadnogo pridela cerkvi Ananauri v Vardzia ktitorskii portret," in *Sakartvelos mǧvimeebi da gamokvabulebi* (Georgian caves), vol. 12 (Dedicated to the 800th Anniversary of Vardzia), ed. O. A. Samsonia, Tbilisi, 1988, 61–70. This king has tentatively been identified as Giorgi IV Laša.

49. It is possible that Tamar had a younger sister, Rusudan; but she is only mentioned once in all the historical sources.

50. Since it was a standard policy of the Bagrat'ioni kings to crown their heirs during their lifetime, this should not be unduly stressed, as does Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 134.

tra claim to legitimacy that most newly crowned kings did not require: no other sole ruling monarch in this period is dependent to such an extent on his predecessor. It seems that Tamar's gender and power had to be mediated through a more traditional male figure.

The inscription by the head of Tamar at Vardzia shows that the matter of her sex was addressed in other ways too. Tamar is described as მეფეთა მეფე, *meṗeta meṗe* (king of kings), which has similarities to the ninth-century male description of the Byzantine empress Irene as βασιλεύς *basileus*.⁵¹ However, as a language Georgian has no grammatical genders, so perhaps it would be more accurate to translate this title as "sovereign of sovereigns." In the Georgian sources, however, მეფე, *meṗe* (king), does have a female equivalent, დედოფალი, *dedopali* (queen), which is applied to the king's consort or closest, senior female relative. Tamar's aunt Rusudan, for example, is always given this title.⁵² Tamar is occasionally called *dedopali* in *Kartlis Cxovreba* and on some charters. Thus, although *meṗe* may not be a specifically masculine word, its feminine equivalent gives it such associations. The application of the title to Tamar, then, marked out her unique position among women. One of the devices to make Tamar acceptable to the aristocracy was to stress how unlike other women she was.

The visual depiction of Tamar could not, of course, go as far as the inscription, insofar as it could not ascribe male appearance to Tamar, but, equally, it does not unduly stress her femininity. She wears almost exactly the same robes as her father and the same broad crown, which act to confirm her succession. The only differences between Tamar's dress and that of her father are that Tamar wears large earrings in addition to the *pendilia* of her crown, her main robe is more highly patterned, and her *loros* is worn straight round her neck, rather than crossed over on the chest. It is noticeable that Tamar does not wear the kite-shaped *loros* that is often part of the dress of empresses in the eleventh century and that is used at Vardzia to depict the imperial nature of the female saint to Tamar's right.⁵³ The patterning on Tamar's robes makes her the more striking figure and so has the advantage of placing greater emphasis on her.⁵⁴ She is shown as a ruler and not just as a ceremonial decoration to accompany any future husband.

There has been no attempt to deny the femininity of Tamar: indeed the depiction could be regarded as that of the ideal female ruler. She is correctly dressed and is de-

51. G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 2d ed., London, 1968, 181 n. 1.

52. See, for example, KISK', 77. The question of translating Tamar's title has now been examined in greater detail by S. Rapp, "The Coinage of Tamar, Sovereign of Georgia in Caucasia: A Preliminary Study in the Numismatic Inscriptions of Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Georgian Royal Coinage," *Le Muséon* 106, 1993, 314 n. 12.

53. This is worn by Maria "of Alania" on the coronation (although it is now almost completely lost): T. Whittemore, *The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia at Istanbul*, vol. 3, *The Imperial Portraits of the South Gallery*, Oxford, 1942, 16, and figs. 16 and 17. On the *loros*, see K. Wessel, in *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, 3:480-83.

54. This extra decoration seems to be a standard feature of female imperial robes (for example, the robes of both Zoe and Irene, in the two panels at the east end of the south gallery of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, are more lavish than those of their husbands); see Whittemore, *Mosaics of Hagia Sophia*, 3:14-17 and pl. 13 (Zoe), and 24-26 and pl. 29 (Irene).

picted with a pale face, especially when compared to that of her father. This fits contemporary opinions of aristocratic, feminine beauty (see Plate XIV). The stylistic differences between the two faces are striking. The smooth oval that delineates Tamar's face, the absence of modeling, and the strongly oriental form of the eyes are unlike that of any other figure in the church. This individualistic characterization of Tamar is still very schematic and conforms to a Persian ideal of beauty, rather than to any sense of portrait realism. This can be seen by comparing the image of Tamar with the almost identical features given to the personification of Virgo in the famous Georgian astronomical tract written in 1188 (Fig. 58).⁵⁵ At Vardzia this form of depiction derives its impact from the contrast it draws with other figures in the church, including the Virgin and woman saints, such as Saint Katherine (Fig. 59). That Persian models should be stressed in this context, which is otherwise dominated by Western ideas from Constantinople, suggests that the feminine virtues of the queen, her beauty and purity, were considered of especial importance in the expression of queenship, requiring this change in style. To some extent this reflects a different aspect of the phenomenon seen on the coins of Giorgi III, in which Eastern manifestations of royal power became more apparent.

Thus, Tamar is shown both with the masculine attributes of power worn by her father and with the female attributes required of a woman. Although the emphases on Tamar as the ideal of feminine beauty and as a strong traditional (and therefore masculine?) ruler may seem contradictory, they do combine to present an image of her as unassailable: she deviates neither from the role models for women nor from the expectations of a good, male ruler. This uneasy and unusual attempt to conflate male and female can be further demonstrated by the choice of saints elsewhere in the church, which will be discussed below. But first it is necessary to return to the second donor panel, which further affects the ways in which the main royal image can be understood.

The interpretation of the second donor image is again affected by the lengthy inscription that accompanies it. The text declares: "O Mother of God accept . . . the offering of your servant Rat'i, *eristav* of [Javaxeti?] and of Kartli, who has zealously decorated with painting this holy church to your glory. And in exchange intercede with your Son, our Lord, on the Day of the Last Judgment, and in this life act as protector for me and my sons."⁵⁶ This indicates that the church was, in fact, decorated

55. Š. Amiranašvili, *Gruzinskaia miniatiura*, Moscow, 1966, 28–30 and pl. 66. The manuscript is in the Institute of Manuscripts, Tbilisi, MS A-65, fol. 370r.

56. G. M. Gaпрindašvili, "Neizvestnaia nadpis' iz Vardzia," *Soob AN GSSR* 12/4, 1951, 249:

მ ღმრთისა დედაო მიითუალე . . . მსახურებაჲ ჩემ მიერ მონისა შენისა რატი . . . და ქართლისა ერისთავისაგან რომელმან ვიგულსმო დგინე და მოხატვით აღვაძკვე წმიდაჲ ესე ტაძარი დიდებისა შენისაჲ და ნაცვალ მაგე წინაშე ძესა შენსა და ღმერთსა ჩუენსა დღესა მას დიდსა საშუკელისას[ა] და ამას სოფელსა შინა ძეთა ჩემთა თანა მც[ველა]და მფარველ მექმენ

on the instructions and patronage of the *eristav*. This complicates and subverts the image showing the royal family as donors. It also undermines the description in the *Histories and Eulogies of Sovereigns*, which claims that "it was Tamar who finished it [Vardzia], who completely ornamented it, who gave it many great villages, and who defrayed the expenses of the table, as well as other necessities, in a manner that is impossible to recount."⁵⁷ The link between monarch and commission is not as simple as the chronicle suggests. There is a shift of emphasis away from the royal family, as prime mover at Vardzia, to the *eristav* as the actual patron. There seem to be two possible interpretations: visually Tamar is the donor, but in textual terms it is Rat'i. Was this ambiguous relationship between the two panels a deliberate ploy, or does it merely reflect a modern confusion about the nature of these images?

If we accept that the ambiguity was deliberate, then it could be argued that each of the possible readings was meant for a separate audience. This would suggest that there was a split between the literate and illiterate (which respectively could be identified with the court and the rest of society). To those with access only to the visual, the image would show its conventional face, reinforcing the standard ideals of hierarchy, piety, continuity, and generosity. To the other, more select group, who would presumably be the manufacturers and commissioners of the imagery, there emerges between queen and courtier a more complex relationship that accentuates the role of the second donor. If this interpretation is correct, it would act to enforce the class divisions in society, by limiting the dispersal of knowledge. It also implies that the elite expected to receive a set of meanings different from those received by the others entering the church and that the art was designed to achieve this. This explanation would suggest that art could communicate to different groups on different levels and provide each with different meanings. This overstates the division between the two donor panels and overemphasizes the idea of subversion, but nevertheless illustrates the complex nature of their construction. For this approach to be valid it must be assumed that text and image were given equal weight in interpretation and that they could act in opposition. This particular interpretation has stressed the importance of the textual evidence, although normally the visual is thought to take precedence in monumental art.⁵⁸ It reduces the argument to the dichotomy between Tamar as the author of the work (visual) and Tamar as the patron in the modern sense of figure-head (textual). This interpretation is too extreme (although it has some merits); a more coherent interpretation can be made if the texts and images are viewed in conjunction rather than in opposition.

57. KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šarvandedtani*), 91₃₋₇; Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 455.

58. R. S. Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and Its Icons*, London, 1985, and M. Camille, "Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Art History* 8, 1985, 26-49, have both stressed the importance of the visual over the written; however, they have not dealt with the specific case of inscriptions in wall paintings, although here the primacy of the visual has always been assumed.

I argue that the inscriptions in the two panels have differing purposes, which are only indirectly related to the question of "authorial" patronage. It is in these differences that the interpretation of the panels lies. The inscriptions for Tamar and Giorgi are presented in very generalized terms that stress their royalty, ancestry, and power, whereas that for Rat'i is more specific. It is termed as a prayer, and can be read as a plea by Rat'i himself, although partly couched in the third person. It is the textual equivalent of the gesture he makes to the Virgin. They are interdependent and mutually explanatory. The royal inscriptions, on the other hand, are merely loyal descriptions of the rulers and bear no direct relation to the narrative of the images. The inference from this is that Rat'i's image responds immediately to the patronage of the church, whereas those of the monarchs could be placed in any context.

This interpretation again places Rat'i in the center of patronage at Vardzia and renders Tamar and Giorgi merely honorary figures; but it does so in a less politicized way. It goes against the evidence of the *Histories and Eulogies of Sovereigns* and the fact that Tamar is shown holding the model of the church. If the texts and images are viewed together in this way, it implies that the two panels served different purposes, instead of acting as two examples of just one iconographic scheme, as implied above. The Rat'i panel works as a donor panel in its fullest sense. It records the act of donation through the gesture and describes the gift and hoped-for reward in the text; it is the combination of text and image that illustrates the purpose of the donation. It is a personal act between Rat'i and the Virgin, but its public presence enables the viewer to witness the act and, by reading the prayer, to reenact the donation. The scene also shows the proposed result of the donation, the eternal blessing of Rat'i by Christ.

The royal panel, in contrast, is a more formal affair. It is more concerned with the presentation of Tamar and Giorgi III to the viewer than to the Virgin and Child. The inscriptions describe just the figures and not their actions. The fact that Tamar holds a model of the church seems, in many ways, incidental: the scene is not as strictly about the exchange of gifts as the Rat'i panel. It shows the more universal image of the "queen as donor," thus projecting Tamar as protector and benefactor in a broader context than that of Vardzia (although the model of the church also gives it that local relevance). This again indicates that Rat'i should be seen as the donor and that Tamar and Giorgi, in this context, were included as figurehead rulers.

There are many possible reasons for giving royal figures great prominence in the church. Court hierarchy and precedence may have "required" Rat'i to show his loyalty and also to reflect the semidivine nature of the monarchy by depicting them. A similar relationship can be seen at Q'inc'visi, which was built and decorated by Ant'on Č'q'ondideli but which displays Giorgi III, Tamar, and Giorgi Laša in the most prominent position on the north wall. Whether this derives from a royal ap-

appropriation of aristocratic hard work or from a deft use of sycophantic flattery by the *eristav* is more thoroughly discussed in Chapter V.

Even if we accept the evidence of the *Histories and Eulogies of Sovereigns* that Vardzia is a royal foundation and conclude that the two scenes are complimentary, one being a record of the foundation and endowment of the monastery, the other that of the final donation of the decoration, Rat'i Surameli's position remains central. He is still the final donor, but Tamar's donation of the church to Heaven then reflects both her more prestigious status and also her involvement in the foundation at an early stage. However, this still effectively means that there was little direct royal involvement in the final and most public aspect of the patronage, the wall paintings, which remained in the hands of the *eristav*.

This discussion has left the question of the ultimate responsibility of the patronage unresolved. However, it has demonstrated the possible complexity of the images and, more important, has shown that patronage was certainly not led from above, as much of the modern literature assumes. Vardzia, therefore, fits into the pattern established by the earlier churches, discussed above, of great nonroyal involvement in churches with royal imagery. As the later churches also show, much of the momentum behind artistic patronage in Georgia in this period continued to be produced by the aristocracy, rather than by the monarchy. At Vardzia, as at Macxvariši, this is important, since the rest of the church still seems to be dedicated to the royal cult.

The Overall Program

The overall program of the wall paintings in the church at Vardzia provides further evidence of the way in which Tamar is given preference, regardless of her actual role in the decoration of the church. In particular, many of the individual saints seem to have been chosen to endow particular values and virtues on the queen. In the twelfth century they had certain contemporary associations and meanings that were particularly suitable for promoting Tamar's position.

Female Saints

Female saints take up prominent positions in the naos of Vardzia, second in number only to the many warrior saints who appear mainly in the window jambs in the south wall. There are five women saints in total: two on the north pilaster, between the two donor panels, two opposite them on the south pilaster, and one in the soffit over the main, south door. All the women are, therefore, prominently sited in the church, mainly in the center of the two main walls; and the lower saint on each pilaster, in particular, is at an easily visible height. Only two of the women saints are

still identified by surviving inscriptions: Saint Nino (the lower of the saints on the south pilaster, who faces Tamar) (see Plate XVIII) and Saint Mary of Egypt, receiving communion from Saint Zosimus (on the soffit of the south door). The other three women saints all wear various forms of Byzantine imperial costume.

The lower saint on the north pilaster, standing at the same level as Tamar (and next to her), wears a crown and imperial kite-shaped *loros*, emblazoned with a cross (Fig. 59). There is a strong visual link between Tamar and this saint. Their physical proximity and royal costumes invite the viewer to connect them. Indeed the saint seems to act as a gloss or model for the young queen. Although no inscription has survived for the saint, I believe that she can be identified, as can the other two unidentified women saints.

As seen in Chapter II, women saints appear prominently in many eleventh- and twelfth-century Georgian churches, especially in the mountain region of Svaneti, where their cults were particularly strong. These depictions provide close parallels for all three unidentified women at Vardzia. The church of Zemo-K'rixi in Rač'a, for example, depicts four identified women saints, Saints Katherine of Alexandria, Barbara, Marina, and Irina, all of whom wear various forms of imperial dress (see Plates IV and V).⁵⁹ The attributes shown with each saint here and the consistency with which they are maintained in depictions of these saints elsewhere allow us to identify the three women saints at Vardzia with some certainty. Thus the kite-shaped *loros* and imperial crown worn by the saint who stands next to Queen Tamar identify her as Saint Katherine of Alexandria; and she is seen in this dress in images on the iconostasis at Kuraš,⁶⁰ in the churches of Iprari,⁶¹ Lagurka,⁶² Xe,⁶³ and in the Church of the Savior at Lagami.⁶⁴

The other two women saints can be identified by similar comparisons. Thus, the higher figure on the north pilaster follows the iconographic attributes of Saint Barbara, with her jeweled diadem and Byzantine robes. The other female saint, above Saint Nino on the south pilaster, finds closest visual comparison with either Saint Marina or Saint Irina, who often wear identical robes. Of these two, Saint Marina is more probable. This is suggested by the images of women saints in the church of Bertubani, painted at the end of Tamar's reign. The west wall of this church includes five women saints, all of whose inscriptions survive. Apart from Saints Nino and Mary of Egypt, the other three saints are Katherine of Alexandria, Barbara, and Marina. Once again, their forms of dress are in each case identical with those worn by

59. T. Virsaladze, "Freskovaia rospis' v cerkvi arxangelov sela Zemo-Krixi," *AG* 6A, 1963, 107-66, esp. 112 (fig. 1) and 126, and pls. 41, 60, 61, and 62.

60. R. O. Šmerling, *Malye formy v arxitekture srednevekovoi Gruzii*, Tbilisi, 1962, 247-48.

61. Aladašvili, *Živopisnaia škola Svaneti*, pl. 21.

62. Aladašvili, *Živopisnaia škola Svaneti*, 58.

63. T. Velmans, "L'église de Khé, en Géorgie," *Zograf* 10, 1979, 71-82, esp. 79.

64. G. Č'eišvili and M. Bučukuri, "On Certain Peculiarities of Medieval Mural Paintings in Upper Svaneti," *IV^e Symposium*, 24 pp.

the saints at Vardzia, and their recurrence in this later church, also very closely associated with Queen Tamar, confirms the identifications.

This allocation of identities finds additional support in Macxvariši, which, as has been seen, is closely linked to Demet're I, Tamar's grandfather.⁶⁵ The north wall shows the coronation of Saint Katherine, accompanied by Saint Barbara,⁶⁶ while Saints Marina and Irina appear on the south wall.⁶⁷ All wear the same imperial apparel as their counterparts at Vardzia. The images at Macxvariši also provide for the appearance of women saints a possible context from which meanings and associations for the royal images can be drawn. It was argued above that visual echoes, proximity, and repetition of motifs served to link King Demet're to the saints around him and that the king was trying to associate his cause with their cults. The appearance of Saint Katherine and Saint Barbara so close to Tamar at Vardzia immediately establishes certain similar associations. The placing of the queen side by side with the saints imitates the composition at Macxvariši very closely; and the fact that the queen wears the same type of dress as worn by the saints overcomes the difference in form. The links between Saint Katherine and Demet're return us again to the dynastic emphases of Vardzia. The figure of Tamar is showing devotion to a saint identified with her grandfather. This reinforces the idea that Saint Katherine might have been seen as some form of emblem or patron saint of the dynasty and, particularly, of a member of the dynasty with none of the dubious associations of Giorgi III. Tamar is emphasizing her links to an ancestor who was remembered for his sanctity. In the church of Natlismcemeli, painted for Tamar after 1194, Demet're is depicted in his monk's cowl, rather than in imperial robes, to highlight this aspect of his life. At a simpler level inclusion of Saint Katherine also demonstrates Tamar's adherence to the royal family's traditions (however newly established): she is being shown as the real perpetuator of the Bagrat'ionis.

The problem with this analysis is, of course, the degree to which we should associate Demet're with Saints Katherine and Barbara. At Macxvariši the links are quite explicit and unambiguous, but elsewhere the link is less clear. In the *Histories and Eulogies of Sovereigns* Giorgi III's queen, Burduxan, is compared with Saints Katherine, Irina, and Penelope, but this allusion may postdate the reign of Queen Tamar, given the date of this chronicle.⁶⁸ The church of Ošk'i in T'ao-K'larjeti contains an inscription mentioning Saints Katherine, Barbara, Marina, and Irina, but this cannot be linked specifically to the Bagrat'ioni family (although it does show the popularity of these saints throughout Georgian lands).⁶⁹ The link is established in the case of Macxvariši, but it is harder to know whether one can extrapolate from this

65. T. Virsaladze, "Freskovaia rospis' xudožnika Mikaela Maglakeli v Macxvariši," AG 4, 1955, 169-231.

66. Virsaladze, "Macxvariši," pl. 57.

67. Virsaladze, "Macxvariši," pl. 58a.

68. KC2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šaravandetani*), 4₆₋₇. I am grateful to Stephen Rapp for pointing this out to me.

69. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 56, inscription XIII.



Fig. 59. Vardzia. North pilaster. St. Katherine.

Saint Katherine as the patron saint or protector of King Demet're I, let alone of the Bagrat'ioni family. The remoteness of Macxvariši has been discussed, as has the question whether Demet're was just associating himself with local cults, in a purely regional policy with no ramifications in Kartli. It is impossible to establish how far these associations traveled within Georgia, or how far Demet're's subjects traveled to see these associations.

Thus, although it is tempting to describe Saint Katherine as some form of national symbol, closely associated with the divine sovereignty of the Georgian kings, there is not yet enough evidence to provide conclusive proof that this interpretation lasted into Tamar's reign. It is, of course, simple to propose other reasons for the appearance of Saint Katherine and the other women saints in a church dominated by a woman ruler. The models of female piety and purity they provide could easily be allied to the virtues of a queen, especially one who had not yet married. The imperial nature of Saints Katherine, Barbara, and Marina mark them out as obvious choices for such allusions.

The image of Saint Mary of Egypt on the soffit of the south door, where she is shown receiving communion from Saint Zosimus, is the earliest known individual appearance of this saint in Georgian art. Her introduction may have direct relevance to Tamar.⁷⁰ Indeed, Saint Mary's only other contemporary appearances in Georgia are in the other churches where Tamar is also present.⁷¹ As a reformed prostitute, Saint Mary is perhaps not the best exemplar for a queen, but her repentance and life of female asceticism could be interpreted as a model of humility. In earlier churches, such as the Sioni Church at At'eni, Saint Mary is clearly distinguishable and prominent among the holy women in the scene of the *Last Judgment* (see Plate VII), which suggests that the triumph of her salvation and repentance was recognized as an important element in her cult.⁷² However, the placing of the scene by the main entrance to the church, which has many parallels elsewhere in the Byzantine world, and its obvious eucharistic symbolism imply that it could be a recent Byzantine import, forming part of the continuing interest in the visual interpretation of the liturgy.⁷³ The direct correlation between the presence of Saint Mary and that of Tamar suggests, however, that other, more specific references to Tamar were intended, although they are no longer readily apparent to modern viewers.

70. For the most recent work on Saint Mary of Egypt, see B. Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources*, London, 1987.

71. The churches of Betania and Bertubani. Saint Mary also appears in the narthex of the Church of Ananauri, at Vardzia. This has recently been redated to the early thirteenth century; see K'ldiašvili, "Ananauri," 61-70.

72. T. Virsaladze, *Rospisi atenskogo Siona*, Tbilisi, 1984, pls. 123 and 125.

73. In Byzantium, this increased interest in the visual representation of the liturgy only appears in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; see C. Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church*, London, 1982. Georgia seems to derive the iconography directly from Byzantine sources. The best comparisons for the cult of Saint Mary of Egypt and her appearance in Byzantine art come from Cyprus: see, for example, A. and J. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus: Treasures of Byzantine Art*, London, 1985, 119, 171.

The most concrete case can be made for the figure of Saint Nino. She does act as a direct and important model for Tamar in the church. Again, the appearance of this saint at Vardzia is the earliest known painted image in Georgian art (see Plate XVIII). Her location on the south wall, opposite Tamar, creates a visual axis across the church between the two. Saint Nino is a female saint with strong national overtones that act to override her sexuality and make her more of a sexless, or even male, symbol. Saint Nino is the apostolic saint of Georgia and was responsible for converting the country in the fourth century by winning over its rulers, King Mirian and Queen Nana.

Saint Nino initiated the construction of the first churches in east Georgia, at Mcxeta; the hunt for Christ's last garments, which, legend said, had been brought to Georgia; and the appeal to Constantine the Great for more priests and fragments of the True Cross.⁷⁴ She was thus associated with all the central preoccupations of Georgian Christianity: its spiritual center at Mcxeta and the church of Svet'icxoveli, the worship of the Cross, and the royal leadership of Christianity. The Georgian texts of the *Life of St. Nino* became established in their definitive forms in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but she is established in art only in the reign of Tamar. There is only one definite earlier example of her representation, on a sculpted column in the southwest vestibule of the tenth-century church of Ošk'i (see Figs. 16 and 17).⁷⁵ However, her image there is part of a larger and confusing composition, centered on the Deesis. Saint Nino, shown in orant pose, is very small and rather hidden by a much larger bust of Saint Cosmas.

Saint Nino epitomizes the very essence of Christianity in Georgia and, as such, is a very nationalistic figure.⁷⁶ She can, to a strong degree, be taken to represent the country she converted. Placed in the same context as the saint, Tamar inherits her associations. The link with Tamar has an obvious purpose: it reinforces, through the saint, Tamar's claim to universality in Georgia. Both can be taken to represent the nation and to be its guiding force. Here again the link is not so much with the "his-

74. *Life of St. Nino*, trans. M. and J. O. Wardrop, in *Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica*, Oxford, 1900, vol. 5, pt. 1, 1-88.

75. D. Winfield, "Some Early Medieval Figure Sculpture from North East Turkey," *JWCI* 31, 1968, 33-72; W. Djobadze, "Four Deësis Themes in the Church of Oški," *OrChr* 72, 1988, 168-82; N. A. Aladašvili, "Vos'migrannaia kolonna iužnoi galerei xrama Oški," *AG* 10, 1991, 69-80. J.-M. and N. Thierry, "Peintures du X^e siècle en Géorgie méridionale et leurs rapports avec la peinture byzantine d'Asie Mineure," *CahArch* 24, 1975, 78 and fig. 5, have suggested that the female figure in the soffit of the central apse window in the tenth-century church of Otxta Ek'lesia is also Saint Nino. However, a fragmentary inscription identifies her as სიონი, Sioni—the Church. This reading is supported by Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 176-77, and Z. Sxirt'ladze, "The Mother of All the Churches: Remarks on the Iconographic Programme of the Apse Decoration of Dört Kilise," *CahArch* 43, 1995, 103.

76. M. Tarchnišvili, "Die Legende der heiligen Nino und die Geschichte des georgischen Nationalbewusstseins," *BZ* 40, 1940, 48-75; A. Eastmond, "Royal Renewal in Georgia: The Case of Queen Tamar," in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino, Aldershot, 1994, 283-93.

torical" Saint Nino, the fourth-century woman from Cappadocia, as with the saint as a symbol of the country and its values.

However, Saint Nino does also act to bolster Tamar's position as a woman, establishing biblical precedents for the giving of positions of power and responsibility to women. One story, in the main text of the *Life of St. Nino*, includes a response to the saint's fears that her sex would be a hindrance to her mission. In a vision, she is given a scroll containing ten biblical quotations that all reassure her that she is capable of carrying out the task. Six of the quotations are general statements about witnessing, but four are explicitly concerned with the ability of women to lead and even hint at sexual equality.⁷⁷ The most famous of the quotations is from Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians, 3:28: "There is neither male nor female: for you are all one." This has obvious relevance to Tamar's own position. By denying the difference between the sexes Saint Nino helps to minimize any possible complaints made against the new queen. The ground for this gender-based interpretation of Saint Nino's significance in Georgian history was prepared in advance of Tamar's accession. In the 1170s, the catholicos Nik'oloz Gulaberisdze (who reigned 1150–78) wrote his *Sermon on the Living Pillar, the Lord's Tunic, and the Catholic Church*, based on Saint Nino's miracle at Mcxeta, which examined the reasons why God should have chosen a woman to be the evangelist of Georgia.⁷⁸ Thus, the significance of Saint Nino as an important woman seems to have been built up as soon as the future of the monarchy became clear. It is also interesting to note that when Tamar was crowned, she recalled Nik'oloz Gulaberisdze from Jerusalem, to which he had retired, clearly demonstrating his importance to her.

Since Saint Nino is to be regarded as a national symbol whose gender is immaterial, the implication is that Tamar is to be viewed in the same way. Given that Saint Nino does not seem to appear in art earlier than the reign of Tamar, with the one exception noted above, this idea of her as a personification of Georgia and its ruler must be new, but it fits Tamar extremely well. These comparisons between the queen and the saint would lack the same significance for a king, which may explain why the saint only appears in art at this late stage in Georgian history. Saint Nino is also depicted in the wall paintings of Q'inc'visi and Bertubani (both of which also have images of Queen Tamar) and the Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator of Tigran Honenc' in Ani (1215), which was decorated while the city was under Georgian control.⁷⁹ The fact that Saint Nino is largely absent before Tamar's reign adds weight

77. *Life of St. Nino*, 17–18. The relevant quotations are Matt. 26:13; Gal. 3:28; John 20:17. The fourth quotation (number seven on Nino's scroll) is not a direct quotation from the New Testament.

78. Nik'oloz Gulaberisdze, *Sak'itxavi suet'is cxovelisay k'uartisa sauploysa da k'atolik'e ek'lesiisa* (Sermon on the Living Pillar, the Lord's tunic, and the Catholic Church), ed. V. K'arbelašvili, Tbilisi, 1908; M. Tarchnišvili, *Geschichte der kirchlichen georgischen Literatur*, Vatican, 1955, 235–37.

79. A. Ia. Kakovkin, "Scena Čudesnoe iavlenie životvoriasčego stolpa v rospisi xrama Grigoriiia (1215 g.) v Ani," *Zograf* 20, 1989, 30–32; see also J.-M. and N. Thierry, *L'église Saint-Grégoire de Tigran Honenc' à Ani* (1215), Louvain-Paris, 1993, 60–62.

to the argument that she was specifically chosen as a symbol for Tamar, to support her rule.

Warrior Saints

A more direct and obvious association of Tamar with "male" attributes in the church is accomplished through the very strong presence of military saints on the north and south walls. Nine such saints, of whom five still have their inscriptions,⁸⁰ are on the two walls. One is in each donor panel, six in the window jambs of the south wall, and the most prominent is placed beneath the *Crucifixion* in the south-east niche. The visual axes between Tamar, this large saint on the south wall, and that in Tamar's panel (who guards either her or the entrance to the northern chapel room) encourages parallels to be drawn between them. The advantage to Tamar of appearing in close connection with warrior saints is obvious: they act both as her protectors and as models to show her as a strong, military figure. This provides an easy answer to any accusations made about her femininity.

Warrior saints are very commonly seen in Georgian churches, and often appear in large numbers.⁸¹ However, no church has such a concentration as Vardzia. There are royal precedents for the linkage with warrior saints, even to the detail of the visual axis between ruler and saint across the nave of the church. This, again, comes from Macxvariši, where King Demet're I is shown with three mounted warrior saints, Saints George, Theodore, and Demetrios. This last saint, the king's namesake, is placed opposite Demet're on the south wall, and it is this arrangement that Tamar seems to be echoing at Vardzia, although she cannot, of course, form such a direct link as her grandfather. Four of the saints in the window niches are shown receiving their martyrs' crowns from Christ (see Plate XVIII), and this unusual image of coronation (which again parallels the emphasis on coronation at Macxvariši) seems to refer to the royal bias of the decoration of the church. It is interesting to note that Demet're I and Tamar both associate these images of martyrdom and coronation with saints of the opposite sex.

The military presence at Vardzia can, perhaps, also be partly explained by the monastery's secondary role as the main gathering place for the Georgian army before going on campaign. The *Life of Tamar, Queen of Queens* describes how the army assembled at Vardzia before moving on to fight the Battle of Basiani in 1205 and how Tamar addressed the troops from the balcony of the church.⁸² In these circumstances, the military emphasis of the church seems very suitable for its purpose.

80. They are Saints Procopios, Mercurios, George, Theodore, Demetrios.

81. For example, in T'imotesubani, painted in c. 1220; see E. L. Privalova, *Rospis' Timotesubani*, Tbilisi, 1980, 98–103.

82. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 134₁₁₋₁₅; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 78–79.

Christological and Other Scenes

It is possible to find royal interpretations for some of the narrative scenes at Vardzia, although these are harder to establish. First, it should be noted that the overall iconography and choice of program in the main church are very heavily dependent on Byzantine precedents. Apart from Saint Nino and the emphasis placed on women saints, the church is entirely Byzantine in orientation. Traditional Georgian elements, such as the Deesis apse and the *Glorification of the Cross*, are relegated to the southern narthex. It is possible to argue that the placing of the scene of *Christ Washing the Apostles' Feet* above the royal donor image could be interpreted as a sign of royal humility, in imitation of Christ. Equally, the juxtaposition of the two donor images with the *Crucifixion* and *Anastasis* on the north and south walls may have some meaning. Nicole Thierry has noticed a similar juxtaposition in many other Georgian churches.⁸³ Since these two scenes contain the central tenets of Christianity—Christ's humanity, death, and resurrection—they could be seen as a reassuring reminder to the donors of the triumph of their faith. But it would be wrong to place too much emphasis on this line of interpretation, since the life of Christ was, of course, a model for all humankind to copy. Nevertheless, the frequency with which the *Crucifixion* and *Anastasis* are associated with donor images in Georgia suggests that these general links were a common feature of the layout of the program of wall paintings.⁸⁴

The narthex contains two scenes from the *Life of St. Stephen the Proto-Martyr*.⁸⁵ Saint Stephen does appear in earlier Georgian churches (for example in Nak'ipari and Iprari in Svaneti, and At'eni), but in each case he is depicted frontally as an officiating deacon with a censer. This seems to have formed part of the growing interest in the visual depiction of the liturgy. His appearance as part of a narrative cycle at Vardzia suggests a growing interest in his cult and relics, rather than in his life as a deacon. In Serbia in the early thirteenth century, Saint Stephen was adopted by the ruling Nemanjid dynasty as a patron saint, since he was thought to embody royal power, and it is possible that a similar association was intended in Georgia.⁸⁶ The Saint Stephen scenes may also reflect Georgian royal interests in the *loca sancta* of the Holy Land. The *Life of Tamar, Queen of Queens* mentions Tamar's endowment of Georgian monasteries in the Holy Land and her desire to equip every monastery with a dependency (*metochion*) in Jerusalem.⁸⁷ By the twelfth century,

83. Thierry, "Le souverain," 153.

84. Elsewhere in the Byzantine world these scenes are linked with donors' burial sites. See H. Maguire, "The Mosaics of Nea Moni: An Imperial Reading," *DOP* 46, 1992, 206 and n. 11.

85. Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 220–23.

86. M. Ćorović-Ljubinković, "Obraz kulta sv. Stefana u srpskoj srednjovekovnoj umetnosti," *Starinar*, n.s., 12, 1961, 45–60 (French summary: "Reflets du culte de St. Étienne dans l'art médiéval serbe," 61–62). For an example of a fragmentary Saint Stephen cycle of the mid-thirteenth century, see V. J. Djurić, *Sopoćani*, Leipzig, 1967, 80–82.

87. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 141₂₄–142₇; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 85–86.

eight Georgian monasteries are listed in Jerusalem. Tamar is also supposed to have offered 200,000 gold pieces to Saladin in return for repossession of the Holy Cross, which was then in his hands.⁸⁸ James of Vitry gives further evidence of the Georgians' presence in Jerusalem. He writes that while other Christians cowered under Muslim rule, the Georgians were able to walk freely in the city with their banners unfurled, unmolested by the Saracens.⁸⁹ This was presumably the result of an agreement between the two parties, perhaps in return for the nonparticipation of the Georgians in the crusades. The scenes could, then, act as a reminder of the international scale of Tamar's piety.

This section has concentrated purely on the possible royal interpretations of the decoration of Vardzia, but it should be pointed out that this is not the sole level at which the decoration can be read. Other approaches would be to look for the possible parallels and models by which Rat'i Surameli's virtues are explained. In particular, the five saints included in his donor panel in the northwest niche may have been chosen with reference to the *eristav* (Fig. 57). Nicole Thierry has argued that they are irrelevant to the panel and, indeed, "harm" its beauty and political impact. She sees it as the triumph of religion over politics and art.⁹⁰ However, this argument depends on a medieval *horror vacui* and the absolute division between politics and religion. The very presence of donors before the Virgin at Vardzia disproves this latter argument: politics and religion were in fact indistinguishable, and the idea that the saints were included simply to fill up space denies the obvious planning that went into the church decoration. The idea that the saints help to elucidate the secular figures seems much more in keeping with the didactic nature of the art. Unfortunately, none of the five figures are identifiable, and so precise interpretations are impossible.

Equally, all the saints and scenes so far discussed can be viewed in relation to their liturgical position. Thus, they become part of a visual calendar, to adorn the annual cycle of Christological feasts and saints' feast days. Some saints may also have been of particular local importance or the focus of local cults (similar to those of Saints Katherine and Barbara in Svaneti). Here again, lack of evidence from other churches in the area prevents any definite conclusions being drawn. Clearly, however, the saints and scenes in the church can be discussed on any of a number of different levels. The polyvalency of Byzantine art is well attested, and Vardzia provides an excellent example of how it worked.

88. This is noted by Baha' al-Din in his *Life of Saladin*, 3:299. This appears in the context of a contrast between Georgia's generosity and Alexios Angelos's excessive demands for religious rights in the Holy Land. See R. B. Rose, "The Native Christians of Jerusalem, 1187-1260," in *The Horns of Hattin*, ed. B. Z. Kedar, Jerusalem, 1992, 243-44.

89. James of Vitry, *History of Jerusalem*, vol. 10 of *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society*, London, 1896, 84; C. Canuier, "Les Géorgiens dans l'*Histoire Hierosolimaitana* de Jacques de Vitry," *BK* 41, 1983, 175-87; J. Prawer, "Social Classes in the Crusader States: The 'Minorities,'" in *A History of the Crusades*, ed. N. P. Zacour and H. W. Hazard, Wisconsin, 1985, 5:87-89.

90. Thierry, "Le souverain," 145.

The combination of all the iconographic elements described above shows that Vardzia was designed to show power in all its manifestations. Tamar's right to rule is stressed, as is her ability so to do. Vardzia created an image of power that was to be unassailable, to protect the queen from attack, and to assert her authority. As the reign progressed, this image of power was to be increasingly refined, as Tamar's position grew stronger and as the notion of rule by a woman was worked out with greater sophistication.

Natlismcemeli

The second image of Queen Tamar was painted a decade after Vardzia and comes from the Monastery of Natlismcemeli (John the Baptist), one of the sixteen rock-cut houses that make up the Davit Gareji complex of monasteries in the Gareji Desert in eastern Georgia. The main Lavra, to which Natlismcemeli is attached, was founded by Saint Davit Garejeli in the sixth century. The wall paintings in the Church of the Nativity of John the Baptist, the main church in the monastery, have only recently been restored, having previously been covered by whitewash. It had long been noticed that a row of secular figures existed under the whitewash,⁹¹ but they were only fully identified in 1983 by Zaza Sxirt'ladze.⁹² The recency of the discovery has meant that these images have not yet been incorporated into studies on Queen Tamar or medieval Georgian art.

The church is a large barrel-vaulted hall church with a single apse and has been hewn out of the rock in the center of the monastery. It is entered through a chamber to the south and opens onto a second smaller chamber to the north. It is therefore similar in layout to Vardzia.

The few surviving fragments of painting are in bad repair, but fragments of gold and lapis lazuli indicate that the decoration was originally very rich. It can be seen that a long line of royal figures once adorned the north and west walls of the hall church. All the secular figures have rich lapis backgrounds and are themselves depicted in deep, warm colors. The overall effect would originally have been very sumptuous. Remains of the *Ascension* survive in the apse, above a row of sixteen church

91. The main references to the church are Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 40–41, and Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 218–19. Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 49–51, does not mention any wall paintings.

92. The secular portraits and their inscriptions have been published by Z. Sxirt'ladze in "Samepo k't'it'oruli p'ort'ret'i garejis natlismcemelis monast'ris mtavar t'adzarši" (Royal donor portraits in the main church of Natlismcemeli Monastery in Gareji), *SabXel* 1983, pt. 11, 95–110, and "K'vlav natlismcemelis monast'ris sak't'it'oro gamosaxulebebis šesaxeb" (On the donor images on the wall of Natlismcemeli Monastery), *SabXel* 1987, pt. 3, 108–13. The portraits have now been published in Z. Sxirt'ladze, "Les portraits de l'église principale du monastère Natlismcemeli à Garedja," *Zograf* 23, 1993–94, 5–13. The portraits have also been incorporated into a recent general work on the wall paintings of the Gareji Desert: A. I. Vol'skaia, "Rospisi peščernykh monastyrei David-Garedži," *Gareji, Trudy kaxetskoi arxeologičeskoj ekspedicii* 8, Tbilisi, 1988, 144–46.

fathers. On the north wall, above the secular figures, were Christological scenes of which only the *Entry into Jerusalem* is now identifiable. The south wall had a cycle of the life of John the Baptist (the first and last scenes, the *Nativity of John the Baptist* and the *Feast of Herod*, survive) and an image of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste.⁹³ The loss of so much of the painting at Natlismcemeli means that it is now impossible to locate the royal portraits within the context of the overall iconographic scheme of the church. However, it is clear that the line of Bagrat'ioni rulers was a major part of the scheme and almost certainly dominated the interior of the church.

The interest for this study lies, of course, in the figures on the north and west walls. They are in two groups: that on north wall consists of six figures who are all framed by trilobed arches⁹⁴ and face the apse; that on the adjacent section of the west wall, of just three figures facing frontally and grouped together under one large arch. They all clearly belong to one program. The identity of most of the figures has been established from their attributes and inscriptions or from the records of their inscriptions made in the last century.⁹⁵ The procession of figures on the north wall is headed by a saint, probably either Saint Davit Garejeli or Saint Lukian, who were responsible for founding the monastic communities in the desert in the sixth century.⁹⁶ The second figure is badly damaged and is now unrecognizable. These two men are separated by the doorways into the northern chamber from the remaining four figures on the north wall, who represent the kings of united Georgia (Fig. 60). The leading king is described in a fragmentary inscription as "the first builder of this monastery."⁹⁷ He wears a grey cloak, clasped at the neck, over a light-colored tunic with an elaborate collar and cuffs. He has a crown and halo and holds up a scroll, indicating his donation. He is followed by a figure of whom only the lower third survives. However, it can be seen that he is dressed in Georgian robes and holds a sword and shield. These men have been convincingly identified as Bagrat' IV (1027–72) and his grandson, Davit IV Ağmašenebeli (1089–1125).⁹⁸ Again, only the lower part of the third figure survives, but he is dressed in a black monk's cowl, and the remains of an inscription describe him as "King of Kings."⁹⁹ This must be

93. Vol'skaia, "Rospisi peščernyx monastyrei," 146. I am very grateful to Dr. Zaza Sxirt'ladze for additional, unpublished information about the church.

94. The only published photographs of the decoration (Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, pls. 85 and 86) show details of the painted arches.

95. Sxirt'ladze, "Samepo k't'it'oruli p'ort'ret'i," 99–106.

96. These saints appear as intercessors for donors in images in the main church at Udabno as well as in the Church of the Annunciation at the same monastery (Alibegašvili, *Svetskii Portret*, 41). On the lives of the saints, see B. Martin-Hisard's "Les 'Treize Saints Pères': Formation et évolution d'une tradition hagiographique géorgienne (VI^e–XII^e siècles): Première partie," *REGC* 1, 1985, 141–68, and "Les 'Treize Saints Pères': Formation et évolution d'une tradition hagiographique géorgienne (VI^e–XII^e siècles): Appendice de la première partie," *REGC* 2, 1986, 75–111.

97. Sxirt'ladze, "Samepo k't'it'oruli p'ort'ret'i," fig. 1: პირველი მაშენებელი ამის უდაბნოსა.

98. The arguments for these two identifications are given in Sxirt'ladze, "Samepo k't'it'oruli p'ort'ret'i," 104–5.

99. Sxirt'ladze, "Samepo k't'it'oruli p'ort'ret'i," fig. 2: მეფეთა მეფე.

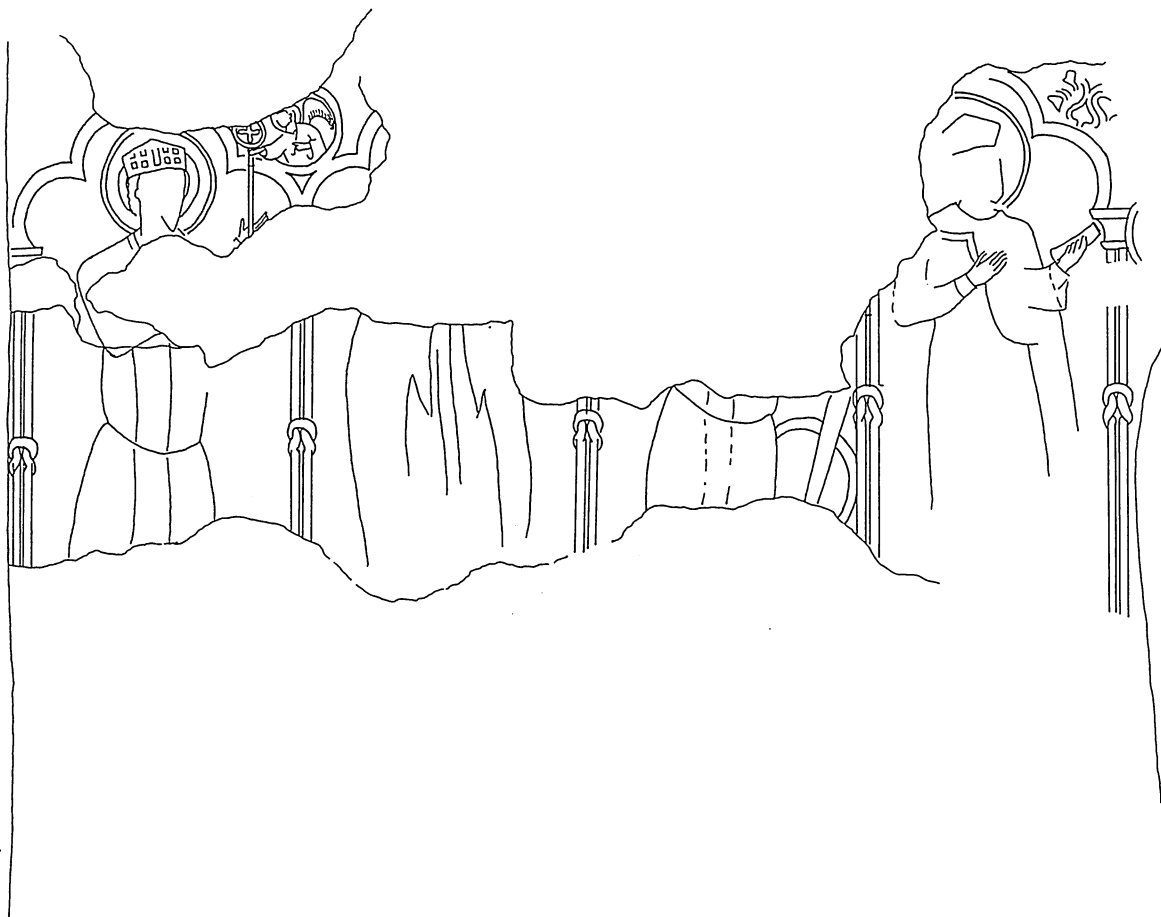


Fig. 60. Natlismcemeli. Church of St. John the Baptist. Schema of royal donors on north wall (late 1190s).

Demet're I (1125–54), who retired to a monastery one year before his death. The choice of this dress, rather than royal robes, places emphasis on the king's piety and sanctity. This is suitable for his monastic setting, but also ties in with the possible links Tamar was seen to be making with her grandfather at Vardzia, with the purpose of emphasizing family piety.¹⁰⁰ The juxtaposition of text and image is again interesting: the one stressing Demet're's royalty, the other his clerical status.

The final figure on the north wall is accompanied by the inscription "Giorgi, King of Kings, son of Demet're," and is Giorgi III (1154–84) (Fig. 61).¹⁰¹ His inscription confirms the identity of Demet're before him. He wears Georgian court robes. From a roundel in the painted arcade to the right of the king leans an angel who hands Giorgi III a scepter. This is a repetition of the iconography at Vardzia. The inclusion of this imagery could be a sign of the continued need to overcome his bad reputation and, retrospectively, improve his claim to the throne. This, then, raises the question

100. This is paralleled at Sopoćani, where Stefan Nemanja, the founder of the dynasty, is shown as a monk (Simeon).

101. *Sxirt'ladze*, "Samepo k't'it'oruli p'ort'ret'i," fig. 3: მეფეთა მეფე გიორგი ძე დემეტრესი.



Fig. 61. Natlismcemeli. North wall.
King Giorgi III.

of why it should be necessary to stress Giorgi's legitimacy in the late 1190s, up to sixteen years after his death. This issue recurs more acutely in the churches of Q'inc'visi and Betania (and is discussed further below).

The members of the second group, on the west wall of the church, are identified in inscriptions recorded by an expedition in the 1840s but now lost.¹⁰² There are three figures, two adults with a child between them, who stand together under a single arch. All wear Byzantine robes and carry *labara*. The inscriptions named them as "Tamar, King of Kings, daughter of the great King of Kings," "Davit, King of Kings," and "Son of them, Laša"—that is, Tamar, her second husband, Davit Soslan, and their infant son, Giorgi Laša, the future Giorgi IV, who stands between them (Figs. 62–64).¹⁰³

These last three figures provide the best evidence for dating the decoration of the church. Tamar married Davit Soslan in 1189, two years after her divorce from her

102. Sxirt'ladze, "Samepo k't'it'oruli p'ort'ret'i," 106–7 and fig. 4.

103. The inscriptions read as follows: Tamar: მეფეთა მეფე თამარ: ასოლი დიდისა მეფეთ მეფისა; Davit Soslan: მეფეთა მეფე დავით; Giorgi IV Laša: ძე ამათი ლასა.



Fig. 62. Natlismcemeli. Schema of royal portraits on west wall (after Sxirt'ladze).

first husband, Iurii Bogoliubskii. Giorgi Laša was born in 1194,¹⁰⁴ which provides a *terminus post quem* for the painting. Since Giorgi Laša is shown as an infant, the probable date of the decoration lies in the late 1190s.¹⁰⁵

The main elements of the design and layout of the row of rulers seem to stress the continuity of the Bagrat'ionis. They are shown in an unbroken row and are connected by the arcade that frames them. However, the details of the depictions are structured to display the glory of the present rulers and the hope for the future of the dynasty, at the expense of its past members. The stature of Tamar is displayed by contrasting it with that of her predecessors. The queen, her husband, and son are displayed on a new wall, thus showing a break with the past. Tamar, Davit Soslan, and Giorgi Laša also wear Byzantine robes, while their ancestors wear forms of traditional Georgian costume (except Demet're, in his monastic habit). Tamar's imperial standing is enhanced by their local dress. In particular, there is a strong contrast between the ceremonial, Byzantine appearance of Tamar and the martial attributes of Davit IV Ağmašenebeli. Since Giorgi III is shown elsewhere in monumental art in Byzantine robes, their absence here must be significant. There does seem to have been a definite desire to portray Tamar and her family in a manner different from

104. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 124₈₋₁₅; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 64.

105. It is possible that the painting could date to as late as 1207, when Davit Soslan died. However, this is very unlikely, since Giorgi Laša is shown as a young child, whereas at Q'inc'visi and Betania, which are thought to date to c. 1207, he is shown as an adolescent.

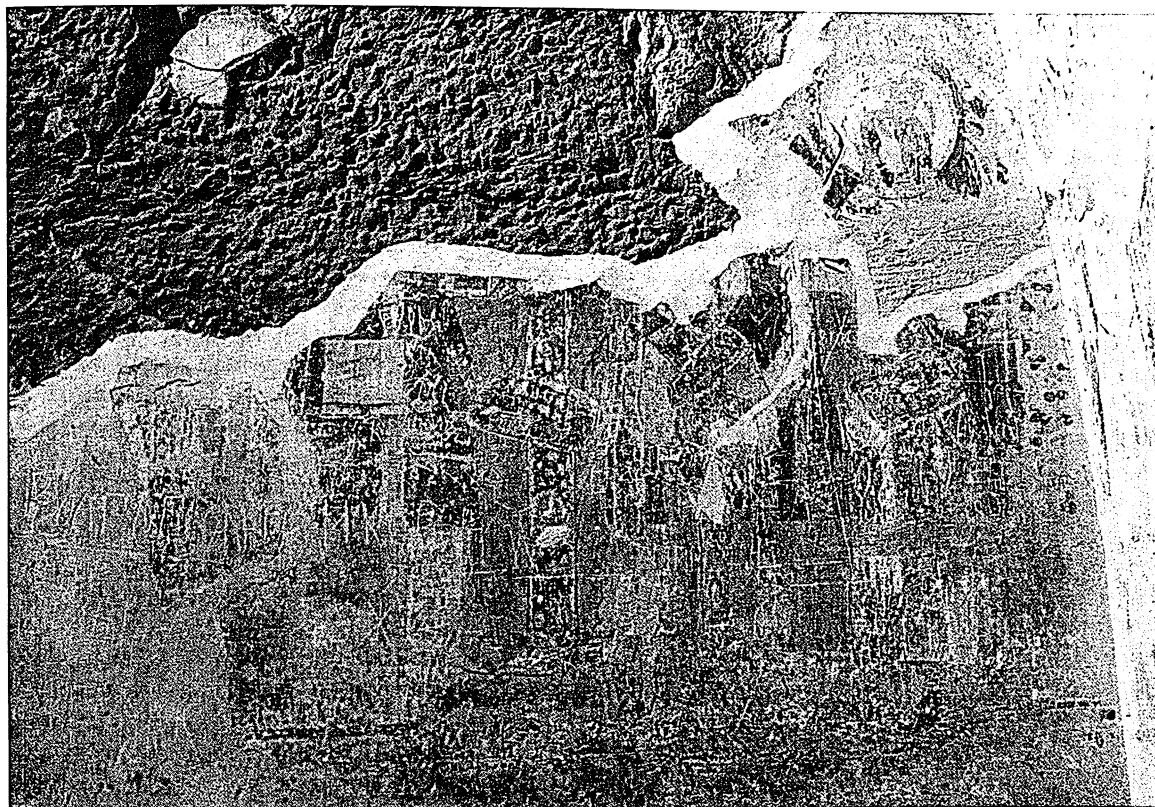


Fig. 63. Natlismcemeli. Davit Soslan, Giorgi IV Laša, and Tamar on west wall.

that in which her predecessors are shown. This change could, perhaps, be a reflection of Tamar's newly acquired confidence. Natlismcemeli was painted after Tamar's first foreign conquest, the result of the battle of Šamxori in 1195¹⁰⁶ and, perhaps more important, after the final defeat and exile of Tamar's first husband, Iurii Bogoliubskii. Therefore, the monarchy was by now more securely established.

The figures on the west wall appear to represent a standard image of the ruling family, showing both the parents and the principal heir. Indeed, there are many parallels for this form of image throughout the Byzantine world. In the south gallery of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, Emperor John II Komnenos is shown with his wife, Irene, and their son Alexios (c. 1120);¹⁰⁷ and in the narthex of Sopoćani in Serbia, King Stefan Uroš I appears with Queen Jelena and their sons Dragutin and Milutin (c. 1260).¹⁰⁸ Numerous smaller-scale examples exist in manuscripts, such as the unnamed imperial family in the eleventh-century Barbarini Psalter (Vatican,

106. KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šaravandedtani*), 687–71₁₀; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 129–31.

107. Whittemore, *The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia*, 3:21–28, pls. 20–35.

108. V. J. Djurić, *Sopoćani*, Leipzig, 1967, 12–17, schemas on 230–31, 232, and 233. The family, in fact, appears together three times in the church: twice in the narthex and once in the naos (which shows the children as being rather older).



Fig. 64. Natlismcemeli. West wall. Detail of Tamar in c.1920 (after Amiranašvili).

Barb, gr. 372, fol. 5r) or the depiction of Basil I and his family in the *Homilies of Gregory Nazianzus* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, gr. 510, fols. Br and Cv).¹⁰⁹

However, Natlismcemeli differs from these examples in the internal hierarchy of power within the panel. Although the Byzantine and Serbian images given above present all the members of the family as equal in status before Christ, to contemporaries there can have been no doubt where power lay: it resided with the emperor or king and would be passed on to the son. This model cannot be so easily transferred to Natlismcemeli where legitimacy and power were officially vested in the queen, through right of birth, rather than Davit Soslan through divine appointment. It is therefore necessary to look for other parallels of images of ruling empresses, which can be found in Byzantium.

Although the Byzantine and Georgian political systems were very different, since the Georgian system required more active, personal government from its ruler, these

109. I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, Leiden, 1976, 26–36, pls. 7 and 8 (Vatican); 96–99, pls. 62 and 63 (Paris).

Byzantine parallels are valid and useful. Both countries shared many of the same cultural and social values, based on their common Orthodox Christian foundations, which manifested themselves in their attitudes toward women. These acted to restrict the acceptable public behavior of women and to limit general perceptions of their "natural" inclinations and abilities.

The underlying hostility with which women were viewed in Byzantine culture has been well explored by Catia Galatariotou.¹¹⁰ It can be seen in the virtues attached to women regarded as ideal role models.¹¹¹ These ideals center on qualities of purity, humility, subservience, seclusion, and devotion to the good of the family. They all explicitly avoid any contact with power. Indeed in the view of many authors, any combination of woman and power was a recipe for evil and disaster.¹¹² Women who did wield power were outside the norm of gender expectations. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries there were a large number of such women in Byzantium, including the empresses Zoe, Theodora, and Eudokia Makrembolitissa. The degree and manner in which these women wielded power varied, as did contemporary commentators' reactions to them. In general, however, they were regarded with suspicion and hostility. It is therefore important to study the ways in which they were able to negotiate their power and to render it acceptable to the society around them. In 1067, after the death of her first husband, Constantine X, Eudokia Makrembolitissa tried to rule alone in order to protect the inheritance of their children (and so she is seen to adhere to the prime "female" quality of devotion to the family), but she was forced to remarry to find an army commander to protect the crumbling frontiers of the empire.¹¹³ Her need for army commanders is strikingly similar to the demands placed on Tamar for a man to fulfill a similar role.

However, the best comparison for Tamar is Empress Zoe (1028–50). Both women inherited the throne from their fathers and faced no male competitors. They were the sole members of their dynasties and faced many problems in trying to maintain their rule. If anything, Tamar's position was more acute, since she could not hide behind the veil of palatine seclusion and imperial mystique ever present in Byzantium and was still unmarried at her accession. A mobile court and the need to campaign furiously every summer gave the Georgian monarchs no opportunity to create an aura of royal aloofness through ritual and seclusion.

110. C. Galatariotou, "Holy Women and Witches: Aspects of Byzantine Conceptions of Gender," *BMGS* 9, 1984–85, 55–94, and C. Galatariotou, "Structural Oppositions in the Grottaferrata *Digenes Akrites*," *BMGS* 11, 1987, 29–68, esp. 52ff. See also J. Herrin, "In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt, London, 1983, 167–90; A. E. Laiou, "The Role of Women in Byzantine Society," *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress* 1, pt. 2 (= *JÖB* 31/2), 1981, 233–60.

111. The best example is Anna Komnena's mother: Anna Komnena, *Alexiad*, in *Anna Comnène: Alexiade*, ed. B. Leib, Paris, 1945, bk. XII, chap. 3; Galatariotou, "Holy Women and Witches," 68.

112. This is particularly true of Neophytos of Cyprus, although his views were, perhaps, more extreme than most. Galatariotou, "Holy Women and Witches," 62.

113. Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, ed. E. Renaud, Paris, 1926, bk. VII, chaps. 4–5.

For Zoe, the most important way to legitimate her rule was to associate it with a man. The empress married three times, but in no case can it have been to continue the Macedonian dynasty, for Zoe was past child-bearing age by the time she came to the throne.¹¹⁴ The relationship between Zoe and each of her husbands remains unclear, but to a large extent the question of who “actually” ruled is irrelevant: what matters is that Zoe is seen to have required and desired pliant husbands to front her reign. This is made explicit by Psellos, who commented that “they assured her [Zoe] that their nephew would be emperor only in name, while she, apart from the title, would have, besides, the power that she inherited by right of descent. If she so desired, she would administer the state in person; if not, she would give her orders to him and use him as a slave-emperor to do her bidding.”¹¹⁵ She seems to have been trying to present a traditional male-centered rule to her subjects. The only times that Zoe appears on coins are before and between marriages; during each marriage she is supplanted by the name and bust of her husband.¹¹⁶

This situation is similar to that of Tamar. At the beginning of her reign the aristocracy was unwilling to let Tamar rule alone and, acting in collusion with Tamar’s aunt Rusudan (who seems to have acted as some form of regent), insisted that Tamar marry immediately after her accession. In this, the aristocracy had two explicit aims: to produce an heir, and so settle the perennial problem of the succession, and to provide a leader for the army.¹¹⁷ There was clearly a consensus that a strong military leader was required to take charge of the kingdom and that Tamar was barred from adopting such a role. The details of the relationship between Tamar and her first husband are now unknown, in both personal and professional terms.¹¹⁸ However, Iurii was divorced from the queen and exiled after only two years.¹¹⁹ *Kartlis Cxovreba* blames this on his appalling, “unnatural” behavior,¹²⁰ but the lack

114. Psellos, *Chronographia*, bk. III, chap. 5. Equally, suggestions that it was sexual lust that drove Zoe’s marriages can be dismissed.

115. Psellos, *Chronographia*, bk. V, chap. 4. As Psellos continues, Zoe was in fact forced to accept a secondary role, and saw her power taken away by the new emperor.

116. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins*, vol. 3, pt. 2, 711–47, pls. LVI–LIX. Grierson regards this as a “well-established Byzantine custom . . . which relegated [the empress] to second place during the reigns of successive husbands or protégés.” The only exceptions are Zoe’s joint coins with her sister, Theodora, and one issue on which Zoe appears with an unnamed emperor (possibly Constantine VIII).

117. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 119₄–120₁₂; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 59–60; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 140–41.

118. Coins minted in the names of both Tamar and Giorgi do exist, although it is unclear whether the Giorgi mentioned refers to Tamar’s father (dating from their joint rule, 1178–84) or Iurii, his name being given in Georgian. On this problem, see D. M. Lang, *Studies in the Numismatic History of Georgia in Transcaucasia*, Numismatic Notes and Monographs, no. 130, New York, 1955, 22–23, and E. A. Paxomov, *Monety Gruzii*, Tbilisi, 1970, 97–99.

119. It is worth noting that *Kartlis Cxovreba* explains the divorce in moral terms, which are used to enhance the purity of the queen, rather than in political terms, which might have highlighted her fragile constitutional position. The phrasing of this incident also makes it clear that, since Tamar initiated the divorce, it was she who was in control.

120. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 120₁₂–121₁₈; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 60–61; Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 416–17; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 142–43. The terminology used in *Kartlis Cxovreba* is clearly a rhetorical construct designed further to discredit Iurii.

of an heir must have been a contributing factor. After this divorce Tamar married Davit Soslan, who was able to maintain the royal male leadership of the army and who was also able to provide her with an heir. However, the first marriage showed how precarious Tamar's position was. Iurii twice led rebellions to seize the throne for himself after his divorce and on each occasion received strong support from parts of the aristocracy. He was even crowned sole ruler in the main Bagrat'ioni palace at Geguti near Kutaisi.¹²¹ This suggests that his claim to the throne by marriage was recognized as legitimate by much of the nobility. Indeed, it seems that in the eyes of the rebels, Tamar was just the vehicle by which the crown was passed from Giorgi III to the next king. Their loyalty lay with the *man* and not with the direct heir. The need for a male front was also determined by foreign prejudices against female rule. In 1205, the sultan of Rum, Rukn-ad-Din, used the excuse of Tamar's gender to attack Georgia, claiming that "every woman is feeble of mind" and demanding that she become either his Muslim wife or his Christian concubine.¹²² He was subsequently defeated at the battle of Basiani.

The comparisons between Zoe and Tamar can be continued with the visual depictions of the Byzantine and Georgian rulers. Zoe appears in two surviving portrait images.¹²³ The first is the mosaic panel in the south gallery of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople, which shows Zoe and her third husband Constantine IX Monomachos donating money and a legal scroll to the church, represented by Christ (Fig. 65).¹²⁴ The second is the frontispiece of the manuscript of the *Homilies of St. John Chrysostom* (Monastery of St. Katherine, Mount Sinai, gr. 364, fol. 3r), in which Zoe is shown with her sister Theodora flanking Constantine IX, while Christ and angels offer crowns from Heaven.¹²⁵ In both cases Zoe is subordinated to her husband. In the mosaic she stands to the left of Christ and is smaller than her husband, and the scroll she carries bears Monomachos's name, reinforcing the idea that the deed is the work of her husband. Indeed, her presence serves only to confirm that the gift is Constantine's and not her own. The fact that the name and face of Constantine have been changed (from those of Romanos III Argyros, Zoe's first husband) shows that this relationship between Zoe and her husbands remained constant throughout her life.¹²⁶ In the manuscript, the poem that accompanies the miniature remarks on the

121. KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šaravandedtani*), 48_{10ff.}; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 117–23. The *Life of Tamar, Queen of Queens* gives a much briefer account: KC 2:122_{15–20}; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 62. See also Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 423–29, and Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 144–46.

122. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamaris*), 133_{14–134₂}; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 77–78; Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 458.

123. There is a third image of Zoe on the so-called crown of Monomachos in Budapest, but the authenticity of this crown has recently been challenged: N. Oikonomides, "La couronne dite de Constantin Monomaque," *TM* 12, 1994, 241–62. The empress also appears in the narrative images of the Madrid *Skylitzes*.

124. Whittemore, *The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia*, vol. 3, pl. 3.

125. Spatharakis, *The Portrait*, 99–102 and pl. 66.

126. The fact that the heads of Zoe and Christ have also been changed does not affect this argument. On this issue, see R. Cormack, "Interpreting the Mosaics of S. Sophia," *Art History* 4, 1981, 131–49; N. Oikonomides, "The Mosaic Panel of Constantine IX and Zoe in Saint Sophia," *REB* 36, 1978, 219–32.



Fig. 65. Constantinople. Hagia Sophia. Constantine IX Monomachos and Zoe before Christ in south gallery (c.1045).

“shining trinity of earthly rulers,” but reserves its greatest praise for Constantine.¹²⁷ Thus, whatever the actual case, the public presentation of Zoe showed her adhering to the imposed stereotype of inferiority.¹²⁸

At first sight, the image of Tamar and Davit Soslan at Natlismcemeli seems to follow this same pattern. The king is shown on the left-hand side of the composition and originally appeared larger than his wife. But beyond this, they are shown with remarkable equality. Whereas Zoe was given lesser titles than Constantine IX, Tamar shares the same titles as Davit. Both are honored as *mepeta mepē*, “king of

127. Spatharakis, *The Portrait*, 100. Zoe and Theodora do, however, bear the titles of *porphyrogenetae*.

128. B. Hill, L. James, and D. Smythe, “Zoe: The Rhythm Method of Imperial Renewal,” in *New Constantines*, ed. Magdalino, 215–29, note the subtleties of the depiction of Zoe, especially in the Madrid *Skylitzes*.

kings,” although Tamar’s descent from the “great king of kings” is also noted. Both wear the same form of Byzantine *loros*¹²⁹ and seem to share equally in power.

Thus, there does seem to be some divergence between the Georgian and Byzantine models. Tamar may have been required to marry in order to provide the army with a commander, but after her second marriage the presentation of power was definitely oriented around the cult and person of the queen.

This is supported by the evidence of the charters produced during Tamar’s reign. All the surviving documents are issued in the name of the queen and receive only a confirmatory signature from Davit at the end. Thus, on a charter issued at Gelati in 1193 Tamar is named—“By the will of God, Tamar Bagrat'uniani, King and Queen of the Apxazetians, Kartlians, Radians, K'axetians, and Armenians; Šarvanšah and Šahanšah; Ruler of all the East and the West”—whereas Davit is just named as “king.”¹³⁰ Equally, the inscriptions on coins indicate that Davit Soslan was not given prominence equally with Tamar. While both names are given in Georgian abbreviations on the obverse of their joint coins (თ ~ რ TamaR; and დ ~ თ DaviT) (Fig. 66b),

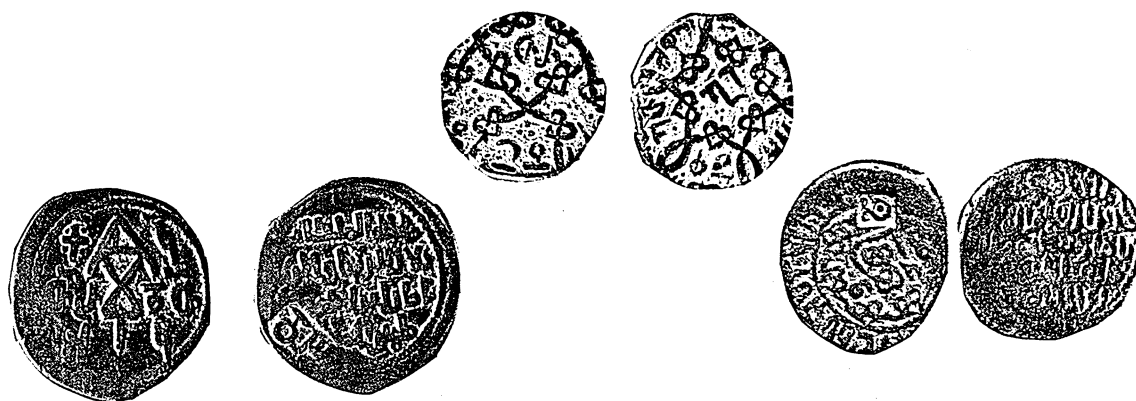


Fig. 66. Coins of Queen Tamar: (a) and (b) Tamar and Davit Soslan; (c) Tamar alone.

the Arabic inscription on the reverse names only Tamar: “Queen of Queens, Glory of the World and Faith, Tamar, daughter of Giorgi, Champion of the Messiah.”¹³¹

The most extreme manifestation of this is in the accounts given in *Kartlis Cxovreba*, which are solely determined by the need to promote the queen. On Davit

129. Compare this with Zoe, who wears the kite-shaped *loros*, while Constantine wears the standard “male” *loros*.

130. KISK¹, 77; trans. S. S. Kakabadze, *Gruzinskie dokumenty IX–XV vv.*, Moscow, 1982, 56–58 (no. 11):

თამარ ბაგრატიონია[ნმან - ნ]ეზითა ღმრთისაითა აფხაზთა და ქართველთა, რანთა, კახთა და სომეხთა მეფემან და დედოფალმან, შარვანშა და შაჰანშა და ყოველისა აღმოსავლეთისა და დასავლეთისა თუთიმფლოზელმან...

131. Lang, *Numismatic History of Georgia*, 26; Rapp, “The Coinage of Tamar,” 309–30. Tamar’s choice of terminology clearly derives from Islamic coins and is very similar to known examples of coins minted by Mamluk queens in the thirteenth century; see F. Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, Oxford, 1993, 89–90.

Soslan's marriage to Tamar we are told that "they proceeded to Tbilisi, where those luminaries, twin suns radiating light, took their places upon the blessed throne";¹³² but after this, Davit retires into the background, and mentions of him become increasingly infrequent. Almost all occur in the context of military victories, reflecting Davit Soslan's role as the commander-in-chief of the army. Thus, he is credited with winning the battle of Šamxori against Abu-Bakr in 1195, after which he was set on the sultan's throne in Gandza to enjoy the ultimate Christian triumph over Islam, a feast of pork.¹³³ He also played a prominent role in the other great victory of Tamar's reign, the battle of Basiani in 1205,¹³⁴ and Vardan Arewelc'i's "Historical Compilation" boasts that Davit "filled Georgia with captivity and pillage from the Turks."¹³⁵ But these are exceptional cases, and elsewhere, according to *Kartlis Cxovreba*, policy is made by Tamar. It is she who decides on war, leaving Davit Soslan to execute her plans; she also convenes councils, dispenses justice, and appoints ministers. When the city of Kars was forced to surrender after a siege by Zakaria and Ivane Mxargrdzeli, it was to the queen in person that the inhabitants demanded that they should hand over the keys.¹³⁶ Tamar, not her generals, represented the state.

This suggests that a deliberate distinction was sought between the "dignified" and "efficient" aspects of state, the one personified by Tamar, the other by Davit Soslan.¹³⁷ However, Davit's role in the army, from which Tamar was barred by virtue of her gender, gave him a position of exceptional power in the control of the state. Iurii's rebellions had shown how much influence the holder of this position could wield. It was to compensate for this, indeed to prevent the abuse of this power, that the verbal and visual language of power were carefully restructured around Queen Tamar. The contrast to be drawn is between Davit's "actual" role in governmental affairs and as commander of the army and his theoretical status in the royal family and court hierarchy, which declares his ceremonial importance. These two natures are, of course, closely interlinked, but the division is important, since it was the ceremonial and hierarchical aspects of power that were represented in the royal portraits. These royal panels present the official view of the monarchy, in accordance with public and ceremonial expectations and not necessarily with the day-to-day realities of power. A modern analogy can be found in the difference between the real and apparent division of power between the queen and prime minister as represented at the State Opening of Parliament in the United Kingdom. Thus, Davit Soslan

132. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 122⁷⁻⁹; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 62.

133. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 127¹³⁻²⁰; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 66-67.

134. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 137²²⁻¹³⁸²; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 81-82; Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 459-60.

135. Vardan Arewelc'i, "Historical Compilation," 212.

136. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 143²⁴; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 88. On the Mxargrdzeli family and its complex relationship with Georgia, see J. M. Rogers, "The Mxargrdzeli Between East and West," in Ieni, *Primo simposio*, 257-88; also in BK 34, 1976, 315-25.

137. The problem of the relation between the dignified and efficient aspects of the state is discussed in S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*, Cambridge, 1984, 234-41.

was officially shown as the subordinate ruler, whose power derived from Queen Tamar, so that he could claim no independent legitimacy that could be turned against the queen. This is apparent from the inscriptions that stress the royal paternity of the queen alone. Davit Soslan's presence in art, on charters, and on coins is required to demonstrate the necessary male aspects of kingship, but he had no independent power.

The image at Natlismcemeli represents the highpoint in the public presentation of Davit Soslan, which is matched nowhere else in the evidence about him. This is the one occasion on which he appears as Tamar's equal. This can be explained by the particular context of the image. Davit Soslan's prominence here stresses the paternity of Giorgi Laša and, therefore, helps to annul and dismiss Tamar's first marriage. Since Davit Soslan had been brought up in the Georgian court by Tamar's aunt Rusudan and was distantly related to Tamar, his prominence also helped to restore the Bagrat'ioni name.

In the family scene at Natlismcemeli, all three figures are shown holding *labara*, suggesting that they were all to be seen as wielding equal power. The importance of this scene lies in the way it prepared for a smooth succession. Thus, before any coronation, Giorgi Laša was already being commemorated and seen in elect company and in ruling robes. Given the problems of hereditary succession in Georgia, the dispute between Giorgi III and his brother, the revolt of 1177, and the attempted coups and claims to independent legitimacy of Iurii Bogoliubskii, the desire and need to promote Giorgi Laša must have been great.

However, it should be noted that the idea of the family is limited. Although Tamar is shown with her husband and heir, her daughter, Rusudan, is absent. Since Rusudan was born only a year after her brother,¹³⁸ it is highly probable that she was born by the time Natlismcemeli was painted (especially since Giorgi Laša is shown as a child of about six). The image is concerned only with the *ruling* family: the queen, king, and heir. Other members of the family are irrelevant, although, since Giorgi Laša died without legitimate heir in 1223, his sister did, in fact, ascend to the throne and reign for twenty-two years (1223–45). Thus, retrospectively, she did require legitimation. This is similar to the family image portrayed in the John II Komnenos panel in Hagia Sophia, since Alexios predeceased his father, leaving the throne to his youngest brother, Manuel, who is not depicted in the panel. The wall paintings cater to very limited circumstances, leaving no doubts about the inheritance. The absence of Rusudan was, no doubt, primarily determined by her being both younger and female; she may also have been omitted to further highlight the choice of Giorgi Laša as heir. The triumph of Giorgi III over his elder brother Davit in 1155–56 and the reign of Tamar had proved that male primogeniture was not absolute in Georgia. The inclusion of Rusudan could, therefore, have raised her legitimacy against her

138. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 124₈₋₁₅; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 64.

brother. The dangers of this are well illustrated in Serbia, where the two sons of King Stefan Uroš I, who fought to inherit their father's crown, could both claim a degree of legitimacy from their depictions with their father in the monastery church at Sopoćani.¹³⁹

The dynastic aspect of this image is further enhanced by its location next to the row of Bagrat'ioni kings on the north wall. Here, the ruling line is traced back to Bagrat' IV, the first king to exploit the power of a united Georgia. However, the dynastic line is selective and seems to have been carefully chosen. It cannot compare with the comprehensive genealogies seen in Byzantium or Serbia. Antony of Novgorod, a Russian pilgrim to Constantinople in around 1200, claims to have seen depictions of every Byzantine emperor in Hagia Sophia, regardless of heresy or civil war, bearing witness to the continuity of the empire from the days of Constantine the Great.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, the Serbian royal family trees, which were based on the iconography of the *Tree of Jesse*, trace themselves back to their saintly founder, Saint Stefan Nemanja.¹⁴¹ In each case, their aim is to outline the descent of the ruling family, either by blood or inheritance, from the supreme early founder.

The purpose of the row of kings at Natlismcemeli seems to have been rather different. The line is traced back only to Bagrat' IV, whose description as "the first builder of this monastery" stresses his patronage, rather than any of his other royal achievements. Thus the aim seems to have been just to show local patronage, to demonstrate the Bagrat'ioni line as great benefactors, from the founder of the monastery to the present donors of the decoration. However, two kings, Giorgi II (1072–89) and Davit V (1155), are missing from the register. For this there are two possible explanations. The two men could have been omitted because neither of them had donated any money or privileges to the monastery, or they could have been left out for political reasons. Given that both Giorgi II and Davit V ended their reigns in dubious circumstances, which could undermine the legitimacy of their successors, it seems highly likely that they were ignored in order to promote an official version of the Bagrat'ioni dynasty that stressed successful rulers and glossed over any problems. Difficult relatives, it seems, are best forgotten. Indeed, although Natlismcemeli's presentation of the Bagrat'ioni dynasty is unique, I would argue that it is merely the sole surviving example of the officially approved view of the past. In this, Natlismcemeli follows the same pattern of selectivity as *Kartlis Cxovreba*, which also wrote unsuccessful kings out of Georgian history. Thus, although it is by definition a political image, the row of kings contains no contemporary political resonances

139. On the civil war in Serbia and the use of art to legitimize rule, see S. Ćurčić, *Gračanica: King Milutin's Church and Its Place in Late Byzantine Architecture*, University Park, Pa., 1979, 7–9.

140. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972, 237.

141. P. Mijović, *Dečani*, Belgrade, 1974, pl. 44; S. Ćurčić, "The Original Baptismal Font of Gračanica and Its Iconographic Setting," *Zbornik Narodnog Muzeja* 9–10, 1979, 313–23; S. Petković, *The Patriarchate of Peć*, Belgrade, 1982, color pl. 15 (unnumbered); R. Hamann-MacLean and H. Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien*, Gießen, 1976, 2:178–81.

relevant to the late 1190s. It shows, rather, how standardized the preferred self-image of the Bagrat'ionis could become.

This is made more pronounced by the context and location of the royal images at Natlismcemeli, which suggest that it was outside the mainstream of Georgian court or political life.¹⁴² Natlismcemeli is a relatively inaccessible, ascetic, desert monastery.¹⁴³ It is, therefore, different from the great churches of Byzantium or Serbia, with their dynastic images. Although the monastery seems to have attracted much support throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, especially from the royal family (like some of the other monasteries in the Gareji Desert),¹⁴⁴ a fact which is reflected in the expense of the decoration, it cannot have served as a dynastic shrine or royal church, nor can it have attracted large numbers of visitors or pilgrims, simply because of its remote location.¹⁴⁵ It could never have played a part as a military or court center in the way that Vardzia did.

The long history of the monks and saints of the Gareji Desert had given the region a reputation for sanctity, which provided ample reason for the Bagrat'ionis to donate to the monastery. The region attracted much support, and a high number of donor images survive in these monasteries from the tenth to thirteenth centuries. However, even allowing for the donative nature of the Bagrat'ionis' appearance, this cannot fully explain the presence of this long dynastic image in the monastery. The fact that the actual donors, Tamar and Davit Soslan, are not shown in the of donation, makes this point clearly. As was seen at Vardzia, the relationship between donation and royal donor image is not straightforward. The manifest wealth of the wall paintings suggests that the monastery must have received extensive support from Tamar, yet the evidence we have of the program of decoration indicates that it was designed to suit a primarily monastic audience. The wall paintings follow local precedents in their choice and location of scenes, which can only be paralleled in churches in the other Gareji monasteries. Thus, the *Ascension* in the apse follows the models of the apses in the Church of the Ascension at Udabno¹⁴⁶ and chapel No. 7 at Sabereebi.¹⁴⁷ Equally, the concentration on the cycle of Saint John the Baptist on the south wall and vault follows the Garejan tradition of narrating the life of the

142. The question of why royal donors should donate to remote monasteries has best been examined in the case of Nea Moni on Chios: C. Bouras, *Nea Moni on Chios: History and Architecture*, Athens, 1982, 21–28, and D. Mouriki, *The Mosaics of Nea Moni on Chios*, Athens, 1985, 1:21–29. More recently, Maguire, "The Mosaics of Nea Moni," 205–14, has argued that the arrangement of mosaics was determined by the interests of the donor, which I argue is not the case at Natlismcemeli.

143. For an unusual impression of Natlismcemeli's remoteness, see Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, pl. 31.

144. Royal donors also appear at Bertubani and at the late-thirteenth-century Church of the Annunciation at Udabno (see Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 71–75, pl. 91; Vol'skaia, "Rospisi peščernyx monastyrei," at Udabno (see Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 71–75, pl. 91; Vol'skaia, "Rospisi peščernyx monastyrei," at Udabno (Figs. 35–37; see also Alibegašvili, *Svetskii Portret*, 41–42, fig. 6; Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 79–80, pl. 20).

145. Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 43–56.

146. Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 80–81 and pls. 21 and 80.

147. Vol'skaia, "Rospisi peščernyx monastyrei," 135.

patron saint of each church prominently on its walls.¹⁴⁸ None of the elements that has been associated with the other royal or court-commissioned churches, such as a depiction of the *Virgin and Child* or *Communion of the Apostles* in the apse, is present. It seems then, that the program was designed within the Garejan monastic tradition.

This suggests that there is an important distinction between the acts of donation and commissioning. The Bagrat'ionis may have financed the decoration of Natlism-cemeli, but I would argue that they played little or no part in the design of the paintings. This was organized by and for the monks of the monastery. The monks commemorated their benefactors willingly and prominently and noted the direct link between their current patrons and their founder, but had no further political axe to grind. This explains the relative absence of complex juxtapositions and relationships between the royal figures and their surroundings (seen at Vardzia and also in the later churches), since the monastic designers were not as concerned with creating a particular image of Tamar as the queen or her court would have been. The monks had no direct stake in the maintenance and presentation of power. Ecclesiastical interest lay in merely commemorating the donors, although to create a recognizable and relevant image they necessarily used some of the associations and motifs adopted for the Bagrat'ionis elsewhere. This has broader repercussions, since it indicates that the Bagrat'ionis did not always exert full control over the manner and context in which they were depicted, leaving the details of their images up to each commission. It also suggests that when they were involved, the Bagrat'ionis were concerned with making a political statement about the nature of their rule. These ideas will be more fully examined in Chapters IV and V.

One possible objection to this line of argument has been raised by Aneli Vol'skaia, who has argued that the style of the paintings and their use of rich lapis lazuli blue and gold are characteristic of secular taste in this period, and so concludes that the decoration was a royal commission.¹⁴⁹ This creates an apparent paradox: on the one hand the church, its location, and much of its decoration seem to have been designed with local precedents and requirements in mind, for the monks, but on the other hand the numerous royal figures and rich decoration evoke royal, secular tastes. Such arguments, which have been rehearsed elsewhere in the Byzantine world in relation to the distinction between the "aristocratic" and "monkish" psalter, have come under increasing criticism, notably from Robin Cormack.¹⁵⁰

148. The best example of this is the cycle of the *Life of St. Davit Garejeli* in the main church at Udabno. See G. Abramišvili, *Davit garejelis cik'li kartul k'edlis mxat'vrobaši* (The cycle of St. Davit Garejeli in Georgian mural paintings), Tbilisi, 1972 (English summary, 167-72).

149. Vol'skaia, "Rospisi peščernyx monastyrei," 146. She characterizes the decoration as "worldly."

150. R. S. Cormack, "Aristocratic Patronage of the Arts in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Byzantium," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX-XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold, B.A.R. International Series, no. 221, Oxford, 1984, 158-72, esp. 158-63.

The whole approach of associating styles with audiences presupposes far wider divisions between the "worldly court" and "ascetic monasteries" than can be supported by any other evidence. Indeed, examples of "secular" art are extremely thin on the ground in Georgia in this period.¹⁵¹ It would seem more logical to assume that each commission would try to achieve the best, most lavish results, with the aim of glorifying God and the church (and the patrons), in which case matters of quality and richness could not be used to support either case. The complexities of the commissioning system further muddy the waters between these two proposed groups. This argument places too much stress on the notion of style as a bearer of meaning. Style was surely subservient to the choice of program and iconography and liturgical requirements, which were the prime concerns of the decoration.

Natlismcemeli, then, seems to provide an image of Queen Tamar, with few of the overt political messages seen at Vardzia. I have characterized it as a nonroyal and, more important, given the patronage of the other churches of Tamar, a non-court-produced image. Although it must, by its very nature, present a political image of the queen, her family, and ancestors, the image of Tamar at Natlismcemeli is much less overtly political than her image in any of the churches that preceded or followed it. Natlismcemeli allows us to see more clearly the way in which the representation of the Bagrat'ionis was manipulated elsewhere.

Q'inc'visi

The Church of St. Nicholas at Q'inc'visi is the richest and most lavish of the churches of Tamar.¹⁵² Situated near Gori, the church is a cross-in-square construction, built of brick, rather than stone (Fig. 67).¹⁵³ All parts of the church were originally decorated with paintings, but water seepage has damaged large areas of the program (Fig. 68). The apse, the best-preserved part of the decoration, displays the Virgin and Child enthroned between archangels, above two rows of church fathers and officiating priests. The side walls of the bema include a depiction of the *Communion of the Apostles*. The vault of the dome contains the *Glorification of the*

151. Vol'skaia, "Rospisi peščernyx monastyrei," 146, claims her characterization of "secular" style is mainly based on manuscript illumination. However, there is only one surviving secular manuscript, the astronomical tract of 1188 (Tbilisi, Institute of Manuscripts, MS A-65), and since even this was probably produced in a monastic scriptorium, its position as characteristic of "secular" style must be in doubt. In Georgia, a better argument can be made for style being an indicator of regional, rather than social, origin, as can best be seen in the consistent peculiarities of wall painting in Svaneti.

152. The only works on Q'inc'visi are O. Pirališvili, *Q'inc'visi Murals*, Tbilisi, 1979; Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 225-29; Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 23-25.

153. The use of brick for such a design seems to have emerged only at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Compare T'imotesubani (Privalova, *Rospis' Timotesubani*).



Fig. 67. Q'inc'visi. Church of St. Nicholas. Exterior from northwest (c.1207).



Fig. 68. Q'inc'visi. General view of apse and north transept.

Cross and the drum the Deesis with angels and two rows of prophets. The side apses contain a cycle of the *Life of the Virgin* and the transepts a Christological cycle, with two sets of secular images below them. Scenes from the *Lives* of Saints George and Nicholas are depicted on the west wall and west vault. The *Tree of Jesse*, the earliest known example in Georgia, appears at the west end of the south wall. In the lowest register of the west wall are many individual saints, of whom few have surviving inscriptions (see Figure 72 below). The church is dominated by the deep lapis lazuli background to all the scenes and has many highlights in gold.

Secular Images

The image of Queen Tamar is to be found in the lowest register of painting on the north wall of the north transept (Figs. 69 and 70; see Plate XV). The queen stands between Giorgi III and her son, Giorgi Laša. All are enclosed in an arcade decorated with floral patterns and are shown much larger than life-size. Their hands are raised in prayer to Christ, who sits enthroned facing Giorgi III. The figure of Christ is much smaller than those of the three Bagrat'ionis, with the result that the rulers appear to be praying to an icon of Christ, rather than to Christ himself. The figures of Christ and Giorgi III have survived well, and it is possible to see large amounts of gold attached to their robes and haloes and to Christ's throne. The figures of Tamar and Giorgi Laša, unfortunately, are badly damaged: Tamar only survives as the preliminary outline drawing, and much of the detail of Giorgi Laša's face and robes has disappeared. These two have also lost their accompanying inscriptions, although that of Giorgi III survives, reading "King of Kings, Giorgi." Tamar and Giorgi III both wear Byzantine robes, including the *loros*, but Giorgi Laša wears Georgian court robes trimmed with fur. His head is lost, but it can be seen that he is not wearing a sword (as he does in the later images at Betania and Bertubani). Given the importance of the sword in the Georgian coronation service, it therefore seems probable that the church was painted before Giorgi IV was made coruler with his mother.

Opposite the Bagrat'ionis on the south wall of the south transept is an image, now badly damaged, of a man offering a model of the church to Saint Nicholas, who also appears as an icon. The accompanying inscription has been reconstructed by K'. Vačeišvili to read "Ant'on Č'q'ondideli, archbishop, *mc'ignobartuxucesi*, and *prototypertimos*."¹⁵⁴ This is Ant'on Glonistavisdze, Tamar's chief minister.¹⁵⁵ His

154. K'. Vačeišvili, "Q'incvisi mšeneblis gamosaxulebis šesaxeb" (On the representation of the builder of Q'inc'visi), *Soob AN GSSR* 32/3, 1963, 750:

ანტონ ჭყონდიდელი, მთავარეპისკოპოსი, მწიგნობართა-უხუცესი,
პროტო-ჰპერტიმოსი

The adoption of the final Greek title is striking, given that the Bagrat'ionis had abandoned them early in the twelfth century.

155. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 122₂₁-123₆; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 62-63.



Fig. 69. Q'inc'visi. Schema of north transept (redrawn after Alibegašvili).

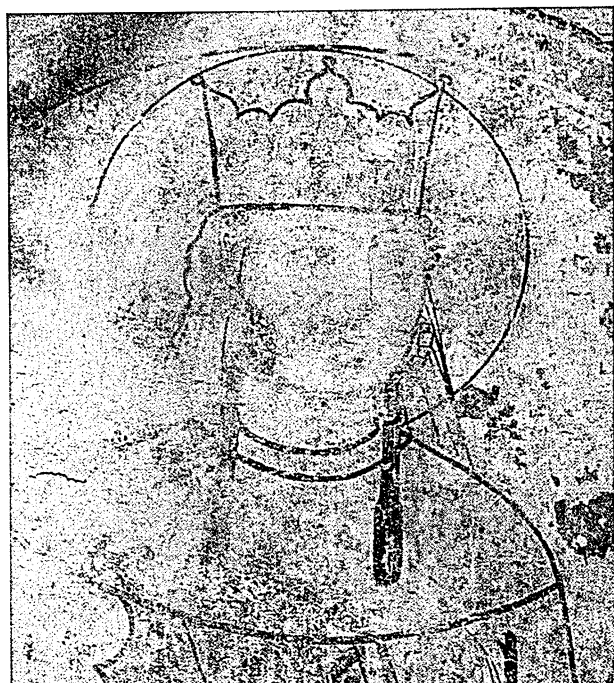


Fig. 70. Q'inc'visi. Detail of Queen Tamar.

figure is now barely discernible, but it can be seen that he wears a red cloak and tall hat and that he has a beard. The image is impossible to reproduce.

The most striking aspect of the main royal donor image is the choice of people to be included in it. Davit Soslan, who was seen to share power with Tamar at Natlismcemeli, is omitted, but Giorgi III, who by now had been dead for twenty years, is still included. Having said that, I should also note that much of the modern writing on the church has not considered this question to be in the least problematic. Indeed, it has regarded Davit Soslan's absence as unworthy of comment. Gaiane Alibegašvili's book on secular imagery in Georgia, *Svetiskii portret v gruzinskoj srednevekovoj monumental'noi živopisi*, does not even mention Davit Soslan, let alone refer to his omission. The general assumption with respect to Davit Soslan's absence is that Q'inc'visi was painted after the king's death in 1207¹⁵⁶ and that he was excluded because his status as consort meant that he was not important. However, there is a circularity to this argument, in that Davit Soslan's absence is explained by his lack of importance, which, in turn, explains his absence. Nevertheless, for an explanation of the omission of Davit Soslan we must look to the question of his status. First, the dating of the church to the approximate time of Davit Soslan's death receives some support from the characterization of Giorgi Laša in the royal panel as an older and rather portly young man. It is, therefore, possible that Davit Soslan was omitted because he had recently died and his position had been taken over by his son.

156. Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 225.

Moreover, Davit's absence fits the argument, outlined above, that after Tamar's second marriage royal imagery was more carefully structured around the queen to show her as the only source of power in the kingdom. The absence of Davit Soslan confirms his subsidiary position and his dependence on Tamar for his own authority. This indicates that these royal images were concerned with the depiction of only those *inherently* able to wield divine power. Q'inc'visi is the end point of this process, in which all power is seen to be vested in the queen.

Thus, the absence of Davit Soslan can be explained on two counts, but they do not explain the presence of Giorgi III. As at Vardzia and Natlismcemeli, Tamar is preceded by her father before Christ. She was now the sole ruler of the kingdom, with no apparent need to mediate her rule through a husband, yet her power is still publicly depicted as deriving from and following Giorgi III's.

It seems that, once again, the dynastic nature of Tamar's position is being stressed. This fits into a well-established pattern, best exemplified by Sopoćani, where Stefan Uroš I is led to Christ by his deceased ancestors.¹⁵⁷ The replacement of the (probably) dead Davit Soslan by the longer dead Giorgi III makes this very clear. It also serves once more to elevate the status of Giorgi, by showing him as the medium between Tamar and Christ. This is supported by the location of the image in the overall program of the church. The royal panel is surrounded by images of resurrection: the *Raising of Lazarus* and the *Women at the Tomb* are above, and the figures face images of the *Crucifixion* and *Anastasis* (Fig. 71). With these scenes in juxtaposition, the panel can be viewed as affirming the hope of everlasting life for the dead: the presentation of Giorgi III to Christ, by his daughter and grandson. This becomes clearer when the three figures are looked at closely. Tamar and Giorgi Laša raise both hands in gestures of supplication, indicating Giorgi III as much as Christ. In contrast, Giorgi raises only his left hand; his right clutches the *labarum*, the symbol of legitimacy that is seen being given to him both at Vardzia and Natlismcemeli. It is interesting to note that there is no other visual differentiation between Giorgi III and his living descendants. Thus, while this interpretation was available to the congregations of Tamar's reign, who would be able to recognize the difference in status between them, it would be lost to later generations, who would only see a general image commemorating their dead Bagrat'ioni rulers.

This generalized interpretation also provides another explanation for the absence of Davit Soslan. The church painting was commissioned by Ant'on Č'q'ondideli, and there is no reason to suppose that Tamar was herself involved in the determination of imagery. The royal panel was chosen by Ant'on to reflect his perception of royal power, which, in accordance with the aims of Queen Tamar, excluded her husband.

157. Djurić, *Sopoćani*, 230.

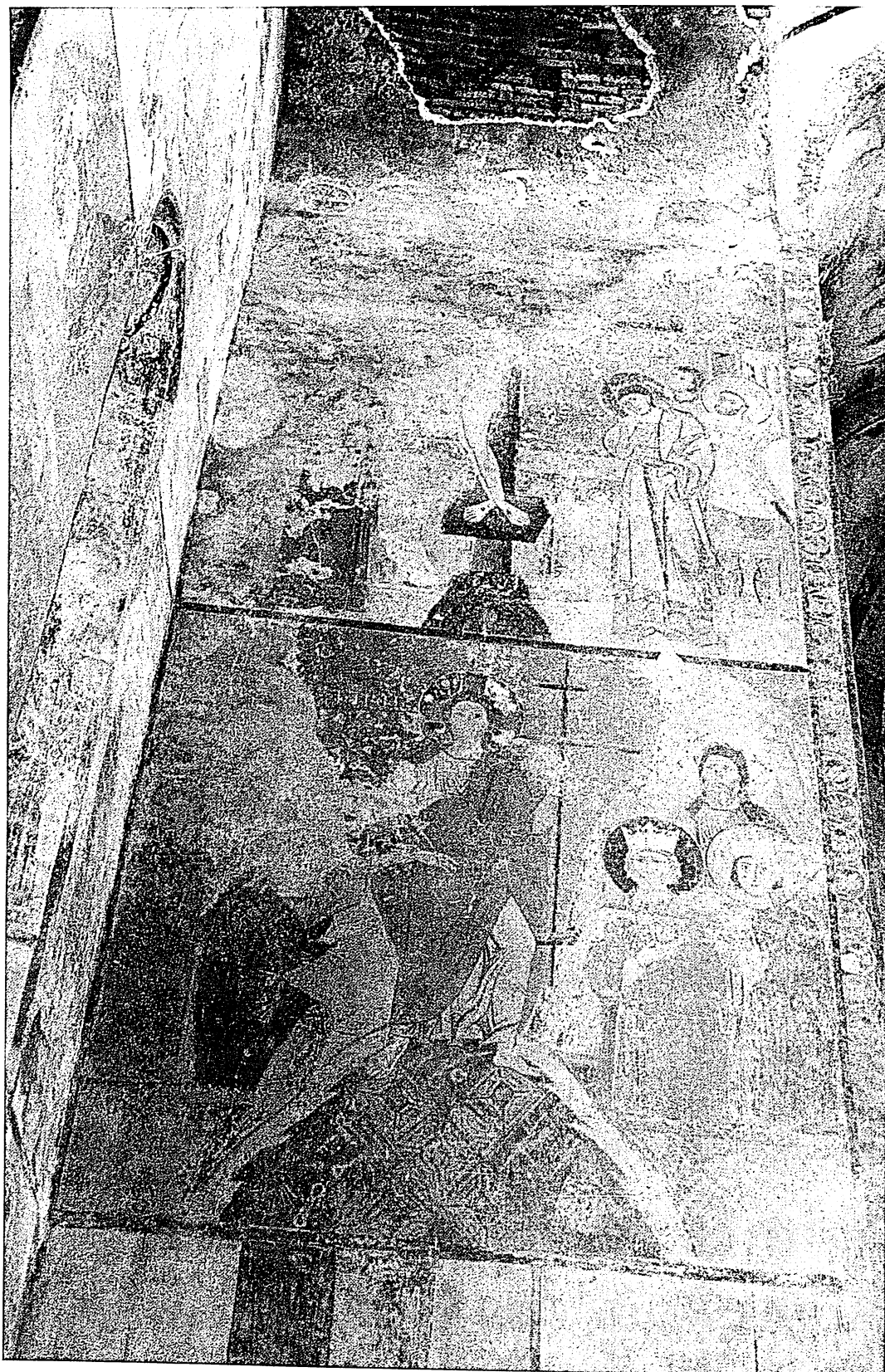


Fig. 71. Q'inc'visi. *Crucifixion* and *Anastasis* on east wall of north transept.

The choice of Giorgi III for inclusion may also have had another effect on its first audience, again a meaning that would have been lost on Tamar's death. Giorgi provides the necessary male front to Tamar's reign, which was still a necessary illusion of government, without detracting from it. He acts superficially to mediate and present Tamar's rule, but without undermining her actual access to power. Tamar is seen to be having the best of both worlds. Her location in the center of the panel allows all attention to be directed toward her. Her father cannot cause any distraction: she alone is the link between the generations. Thus, her importance is increased by portraying only her as the current ruler. In this case the scene can be read as stressing her power alone.

The Purposes of the Panel

The discussion above about the possible causes for the presence and absence of figures is perhaps misleading, since much depends on the exact nature and purpose of the royal panel, and this must now be established. First, it was not a donor panel. The two sets of secular figures at Q'inc'visi have none of the ambiguity of those at Vardzia. There is no question of joint patronage here, as in the case of Rat'i Surameli and Tamar, since the south transept establishes Ant'on Č'q'ondideli as the donor, giving a model of his church to Saint Nicholas. This implies that he was ultimately responsible for the decoration of the church and, presumably, for the inclusion and design of the royal panels as well. The presence of the Bagrat'ionis is commemorative, a homage from Ant'on Č'q'ondideli to his superiors, in what seems to be a standard element of a nonroyal church, acknowledging the monarchy. Nevertheless, the design of the panel, as of the whole north transept, is rather more ambitious and seems to have been designed to encourage one overwhelming reading. It is no mere recognition of the royal family, but something with more grandiose aims.

The royal panel at Vardzia set out to create an image of Tamar that would support and justify the needs of the newly crowned and insecure queen. The surviving scenes in the north transept at Q'inc'visi echo to the grander themes of glory, triumph, and enhanced royalty. The materials used, lapis lazuli for backgrounds and gold for haloes and robes, both of which are rare in Georgia, confirm that the church is out of the ordinary. They show that Q'inc'visi was more expensive, more lavish, and presumably, therefore, more prestigious than other foundations at this time. This extravagance may have been intended simply to show off the opulence and wealth of the donor, Ant'on Č'q'ondideli, an example of one-upmanship, but its main beneficiaries appear to have been the royal figures. They are shown in sumptuously rich surroundings, far more elaborate than those given to Ant'on himself. Each figure in the royal panel, including that of Christ, is depicted in an illusionistic, architectural

arcade with an entwined leaf decoration. There is a marked contrast between the quality and richness of the decoration here and that at Vardzia.

The iconography and arrangement of the scenes in the north transept form the core of this new, sophisticated imagery. The surviving scenes show, on the north wall, the *Raising of Lazarus*, the *Entry into Jerusalem*, and the *Women at the Tomb* and, on the east wall, the *Crucifixion* and the *Anastasis* (Figs. 68 and 69). No scenes survive on the vaults of the transept or on the west wall (except for the figure of an unidentified warrior saint). The *Raising of Lazarus* and especially the *Entry into Jerusalem* have been shown to have royal connotations and often appear in connection with royal figures, as at Macxvariši.¹⁵⁸ The latter scene, which takes up the whole width of the wall at Q'inc'visi, has been identified as an illustration of the royal *adventus* and so provides an apposite companion to the Bagrat'ionis below.¹⁵⁹

More interesting still, however, is the scene of the *Women at the Tomb*, which is very unusual. The two windows in the north wall divide up the composition, and this has changed the emphasis in the scene considerably. The three women approaching the tomb, and the sleeping soldiers guarding it, have been placed in the two narrow end sections, where they become peripheral. The central section, which is much larger, is dominated by the imposing figure of the angel guarding the tomb. He is shown on the same scale as the royal figures below and is much larger than the other figures depicted. He dominates the scene and the whole wall. Although nominally taking part in the narrative of the resurrection, the angel's main role is to draw attention to the royal figures. With his right hand, he points to the figure of Christ below while gazing either down to Tamar or out to the viewer. He acts as the centerpiece of the wall, providing a strong focus and the core of the central, vertical axis, which runs from the victorious Christ in the *Entry into Jerusalem* down through the angel to Tamar and Giorgi III below. This strong compositional integration of carefully matched iconographies of triumph has a striking impact. It is emphasized by the gold in the angel's halo, which would have matched that in the royal panel below.

The impact is further enhanced by the two scenes on the east wall (Fig. 71). They proclaim the central tenets of Christianity: Christ's humanity and death and His divinity. Tamar and Giorgi III, on the north wall, make gestures of prayer to the small iconlike figure of Christ with them in the arcade, but through him they also indicate the two scenes before them on the east wall. It is a visual interpretation of prayer: they are shown praying to an icon through which they have access to the depicted figure and his acts: in this case, the resurrection and the hope of everlasting life it brings. They are thus bearing witness to the truth and glory of Christian beliefs and so confirm their own positions as rulers of a Christian nation.

This complex interrelation of scenes and figures is far more sophisticated than the

158. T. Velmans, "Deux tendances iconographiques dans l'Entrée à Jérusalem en Géorgie (résumé)," in Calo' Mariani, *L'arte georgiana*, 169–71.

159. A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Paris, 1936, 234–36.

juxtaposition seen at earlier royal churches and especially at Vardzia. It is further enhanced by the use of language in the north transept, which adds an extra layer of meaning to the interpretation. Some of the Christological scenes have inscriptions, not in Georgian, but in Greek, which can be seen most clearly in the *Crucifixion*.¹⁶⁰ Greek inscriptions are rare in Georgian churches, except to designate Christ and the Virgin (who are usually accompanied by the standard Byzantine abbreviations of ΙΣ ΧΣ and ΜΗΡ ΘΥ). The fact that it was normally reserved for these two figures suggests that Greek was imbued with an aura of sanctity denied to Georgian. If this is true, then to use it more commonly in other scenes would elevate them. It does not now seem possible to establish the reason for giving some scenes Greek inscriptions, especially since Greek was not used to name the individual saints or church fathers, whose scrolls all have Georgian texts, or for the main inscription around the base of the drum, or for the titles of the royal figures. But with inscriptions for certain scenes (that would have been readily recognizable to contemporaries) in Greek, the church appears more "Byzantine." Thus, the very surroundings of the church transported the Bagrat'ionis into a superior, Byzantine world. Other aspects of the church iconography support this view. The apse scheme, with its monumental Virgin and Child and *Communion of the Apostles*, was, as we have seen, restricted to Bagrat'ioni churches in this period, and other innovations at Q'inc'visi, such as the *Tree of Jesse*, were also probably imported from Byzantium.

However, the "Byzantinization" of Q'inc'visi should not be overstressed, since other traditional Georgian elements, most notably the *Glorification of the Cross* in the dome, are retained in the church. Indeed, crosses are very prominent in the church, appearing at the top of the vaults as well as in the soffits of the windows and arches. The choice of individual saints also reflects particular Georgian interests. A large number of warrior saints appear in the church, including one on the south wall, directly opposite Queen Tamar, repeating the arrangement of Vardzia. The registers of saints on the west wall are also very interesting.¹⁶¹ In the second register from the bottom is a series of ten bust figures (Fig. 72), unfortunately now badly damaged. However, Saint Nino is identifiable among them, on the south side by the door, as is Saint Barbara, further along. Between these two are another two female saints wearing imperial dress and crowns, who probably represent Saints Katherine and Marina. The relevance of all these saints, but particularly Nino, to Queen Tamar has already been noted. Above these saints, on either side of the door into the chamber over the narthex, are four full-length male saints, of whom three can be identified as, from south to north, Davit Garejeli, Ioane Zedazneli, and Šio-

160. Pirališvili, *Qintsvisi*, pl. 7. The inscription is from John 19:26–27, the standard invocation from Christ to the Virgin and Saint John. Q'auxčišvili, *Berdznuli c'arc'erebi*, 188–90, does not include this Greek inscription.

161. The lowest register of saints includes many family saints, including Saints K'virik'e and Ivliṭa and Saint Eustathius and his family. This probably reflects Saint Nicholas's role as patron saint of families. I am grateful to Zaza Sxirt'ladze for bringing this to my attention.



Fig. 72. Q'inc'visi. Saints on west wall.

Mğvimeli (the fourth figure is presumably another of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers). Thus, there seems to have been a strong interest in displaying the virtues of Georgian Christianity.¹⁶²

The north transept, then, may represent an attempt to display a new vision of royal power. The replacement of Davit Soslan by Giorgi III has already shown that the royal panel was not just a family memorial. The choice of figures may, instead, have embodied an ideal nature of the royal family and their government. The Byzantine dress of Giorgi III and Tamar and the absence of Davit Soslan, who is characterized as a warrior in *Kartlis Cxovreba*, suggest that the donor panel was trying to re-create the image of a “Byzantine,” bureaucratic form of rule. It was at this time that the impressive palace of Geguti was built near Kutaisi, which must have been an attempt to create a more settled, regal monarchy.¹⁶³ Tamar, who alone proclaimed

162. Martin-Hisard, “Les ‘Trieze Saints Pères,’” *REGC* 1:147–49, 149–58; D. M. Lang, *The Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, London, 1956, 81–93. The *Lives* were written by Catholicos Arsenius II (955–80). It is possible to find further connections between these saints and Tamar. For example, Saint Ioane Zedazneli is noted in his *Life* for his ability to calm wild animals (Martin-Hisard, “Les ‘Trieze Saints Pères,’” *REGC* 2:98), and a similar talent is claimed for Tamar in *Kartlis Cxovreba* (Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 434). The presence of the saint at Q'inc'visi may have been an early attempt to link Tamar with this saintly attribute, a link that was later confirmed in the chronicles.

163. Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 212; but see also W. Zinzadze [Cincadze], “Der Königs-palast in Geguti,” in Calo' Mariani, *L'arte georgiana*, 105–10.

charters and did not fight, perfectly exemplifies this new governmental system (perhaps with Giorgi III as its founder).¹⁶⁴ Davit Soslan, on the other hand, is its antithesis, since he was involved only in the feudal, military areas of government. This again indicates that Davit Soslan's absence was to promote Tamar, but, in this case, as part of a much wider aim of changing the perception of the monarchy itself. This explanation is supported by our knowledge of the patronage of the church. The concentration on the Bagrat'ionis as court and governmental figures, rather than as a family, fits in with Ant'on Č'q'ondideli's interests as the senior member of the court at the time. There is a paradox here in that this new development in imagery coincided with the most militaristic phase in Georgian history. The royal panels demonstrate how successfully the image of government could be manipulated.

Historical Background

The presentation of a static, bureaucratic state on the model of Byzantium was probably intended to give more prestige to the monarchy and to make the possibility of rivalry with Byzantium more realizable. Such an aim must have been stimulated by historical circumstances. The fourth crusade and the fall of Constantinople in 1204 radically altered the balance of power in Asia Minor, as the Byzantine Empire was splintered and its heart divided among its Latin conquerors. This left Georgia as the strongest individual power in the region, especially since local Seljuk power had also fragmented¹⁶⁵ and Muslim forces still had to concentrate on the crusading armies in the Holy Land. A sign of Tamar's confidence was her willingness to provide sanctuary for Alexios and David Komnenos from Isaak II Angelos in Constantinople after the murder of their grandfather, Andronikos I Komnenos, in 1185.¹⁶⁶ The fact that Georgia considered itself powerful enough to harbor imperial exiles shows that it believed itself capable of dealing with any possible retribution from its vastly stronger neighbor. This confidence was proved when Tamar helped the Komnenoi brothers to establish themselves in a new empire at Trebizond.¹⁶⁷ By the time Q'inc'visi was built and decorated, the Grand Komnenoi were well established at

164. On the growth of Georgian governmental bureaucracy in this period, see Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 160–67.

165. C. Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, London, 1968, 110–18.

166. There is some evidence that the Komnenoi brothers may have been related to Queen Tamar. See C. Toumanoff, "On the Relationship Between the Founder of the Empire of Trebizond and the Georgian Queen Tamar," *Speculum* 15, 1940, 299–312; M. Kuršanskis, "L'empire de Trébizonde et la Géorgie," *REB* 35, 1977, 237–56.

167. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 142_{7–23}; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 86–87, explains the attack on Trebizond as revenge on Alexios III Angelos for stealing alms money sent by Tamar to Mount Athos. On Georgian involvement in the foundation of Trebizond, see A.A.M. Bryer, "David Komnenos and Saint Eleutherios," *Arkheion Pontou* 42, 1988–89, 161–88, esp. 178. The standard (but out-of-date) account of the creation of the empire is A. A. Vasiliev, "The Foundation of the Empire of Trebizond," *Speculum* 11, 1936, 3–37.

Trebizond and probably no longer in close contact with Georgia,¹⁶⁸ but this new role as imperial kingmaker may have encouraged Tamar and her government to establish a suitably grand visual imagery to accompany it. Whether or not the ultimate goal of Tamar's reign was imperial rule, the queen developed an impressive image of power.

It might be concluded that the art at Q'inc'visi is merely the record of external political success. However, I would argue that it was in fact part of that success. It created the atmosphere that gave military success its overtones of grandeur, providing an ideal for which to fight. The success of a new image of government could not be based solely on military victories. It had to be prepared in other spheres as well, especially since the processes of government were so intimately tied up with the monarchy and the church establishment. The fact that it is possible to read these statements of power in the art of Q'inc'visi implies that there was a shift in perceptions about government that allowed the monarchy to make such assertions. This is why the question of patronage is important, since it shows that this movement was not simply imposed from above by the Bagrat'ionis, which imposition could alienate their subjects, but rather came from a broader social base centered around the nobility, which shared the new aims and values of the government.

This interpretation of Q'inc'visi has again concentrated on the possible royal implications of the choices of iconography. These do, I think, show a much more sophisticated approach to the presentation of the royal family, as a result of the increasing confidence of the regime. However, it must be remembered that the church is not a royal church. The patronage of Ant'on Č'q'ondideli, clearly declared in the south transept, means that the question of the ultimate sponsor of the decoration must be raised, as at Vardzia. The scheme of painting seems solely to benefit Tamar, so what did Ant'on Č'q'ondideli stand to gain from the church? This I examine in Chapter V, where I investigate the issue of patronage.

Betania

The fourth representation of Queen Tamar appears in the Church of the Mother of God at Betania. It is a large monastic church located in an isolated valley of the river Vere in Kartli. It is surrounded by woods, but is only about eighteen kilometers southwest of Tbilisi. The church is a cross-in-square design with a dome and is stone built, with some external carved decoration (see Plate XVI). There are many parallels in the eleventh and twelfth centuries for this form of architecture, such as the

168. There is little evidence about contacts between Georgia and Trebizond in this period. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia*, 156, regards the empire of Trebizond in its early days as an appendage of Georgia, but there is no evidence for this. David Komnenos's plans for expansion suggest that he was independent of Georgia.



Fig. 73. Betania. Church of the Mother of God. Prophets in the apse.

church at Samtavisi.¹⁶⁹ The church was in very bad condition in the nineteenth century when discovered by Prince Grigorii Gagarin, who rebuilt the vaults and dome and restored the wall paintings. The heavy restorations of the church have complicated the dating and interpretation of the wall paintings and the architecture, neither of which can be gauged with great accuracy. The paintings of Betania have never been fully published, although Ekaterina Privalova has recently published a number of invaluable preliminary studies.¹⁷⁰ A second, smaller, unpainted church, dated by an inscription over its south door to 1196, is situated at the northwest corner of the main church.¹⁷¹

Description

Because of the poor state into which the church had fallen by the nineteenth century, no paintings now survive in the dome or vaults, but elsewhere on the walls they survive in varying states of repair. The paintings in the apse are best preserved and show three rows of prophets (Fig. 73), apostles, and church fathers, surmounted by a

169. G. Soxašvili, *Samtavisi*, Tbilisi, 1973.

170. E. L. Privalova, "Betaniis moxat'uloba" (The paintings of Betania), *SabXel* 8, 1980, 55–62; E. L. Privalova, "Sur les peintures murales de Betania," in Calo' Mariana, *L'arte georgiana*, 153–60; E. L. Privalova, "Nouvelles données sur Betania," *IV^e Symposium*, 24 pp.; see also Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 223–25. The inscriptions referring to the Orbeli building campaigns have also been published: V. Silogava, *Betaniis c'arc'erebi* (The inscriptions of Betania), Tbilisi, 1994.

171. Silogava, *Betaniis c'arc'erebi*, 17–37.

monumental image of the Deesis, with Christ in Majesty surrounded by eschatological imagery.

The naos contains three distinct cycles. The south transept has a series of Old Testament scenes, which also continue in parts of the upper registers of the north transept. These all represent prefigurations of the Virgin, including *Ezekiel at the Closed Gate*, *David Dancing in the Temple*, *The Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace*, *Moses Before the Burning Bush*, *Aaron and the Flowering Rod*, *The Sealed Source*, *Gideon and the Fleece*, *Daniel in Front of the Mountain*, and the *Ark of the Covenant*.¹⁷² The rest of the north transept is taken up with a long and intricate Passion cycle, which is detailed in many scenes. The surviving scenes cover the *Last Supper* to the *Pentecost* (Figs. 74 and 75). The west part of the church is dominated by the *Last Judgment*, accompanied by some scenes of the *Miracles of Christ*. There are marked differences in style between the various parts of the church, from the bold, active poses of the apse figures, to the dense, miniaturist style of the Biblical scenes, to the monumental but flat drawing of the *Last Judgment*. There are also noticeable differences in color between the groups; especially distinctive is the grey-blue background that dominates the Passion cycle.

In the lowest register around the church are a series of individual saints, among whom, in the two transepts, are images of the donors and royal family. The north wall of the north transept shows Giorgi III, Tamar, and Giorgi Laša, their arms raised in prayer in a composition almost identical to that at Q'inc'visi (Figs. 76 and 77; see Plate XVII). The three Bagrat'ionis are all named in inscriptions. Before them stands Saint George, and they are followed by another unidentified warrior saint. The south wall of the south transept shows two men offering a model of the church to an iconlike image of the Virgin and Child (Fig. 78). The first man was identified in a now lost inscription as "Sumbat' the great, *mandat'urtuxucesi* [head of ceremonies] and *amirsp'asalar* [minister of war]."¹⁷³ A hand can be seen overlapping the body of the second figure, indicating that, originally, more figures were included in this donor image.

According to Stepanos Orbeliani's *History*, the monastery of Betania had been built by the Orbeli family as their mausoleum church, and so the donors in the south transept must be of that family.¹⁷⁴ Privalova has convincingly identified the main figure as Sumbat' I Orbeli (active 1128–56), who held the posts of *mandat'urtuxucesi* and *amirsp'asalar* under King Demet're I and was an active patron in the 1150s, rather than his grandson, Sumbat' II Orbeli, who held official posts under Giorgi III until the revolt of 1177, as earlier studies had suggested. The second figure is,

172. The first two are depicted in Privalova, "Betaniis moxat'uloba," unnumbered figs. on p. 56.

173. Silogava, *Betaniis c'arc'erebi*, 11, fig. 3:

დიდი სუმბატ მანდატურტუხუცესი და ამირსპასალარი

The post of *mandat'urtuxucesi* was similar to the Byzantine *dromos-logothete*.

174. Privalova, "Sur les peintures," 153.



Fig. 74. Betania. General view of north transept (c.1207).

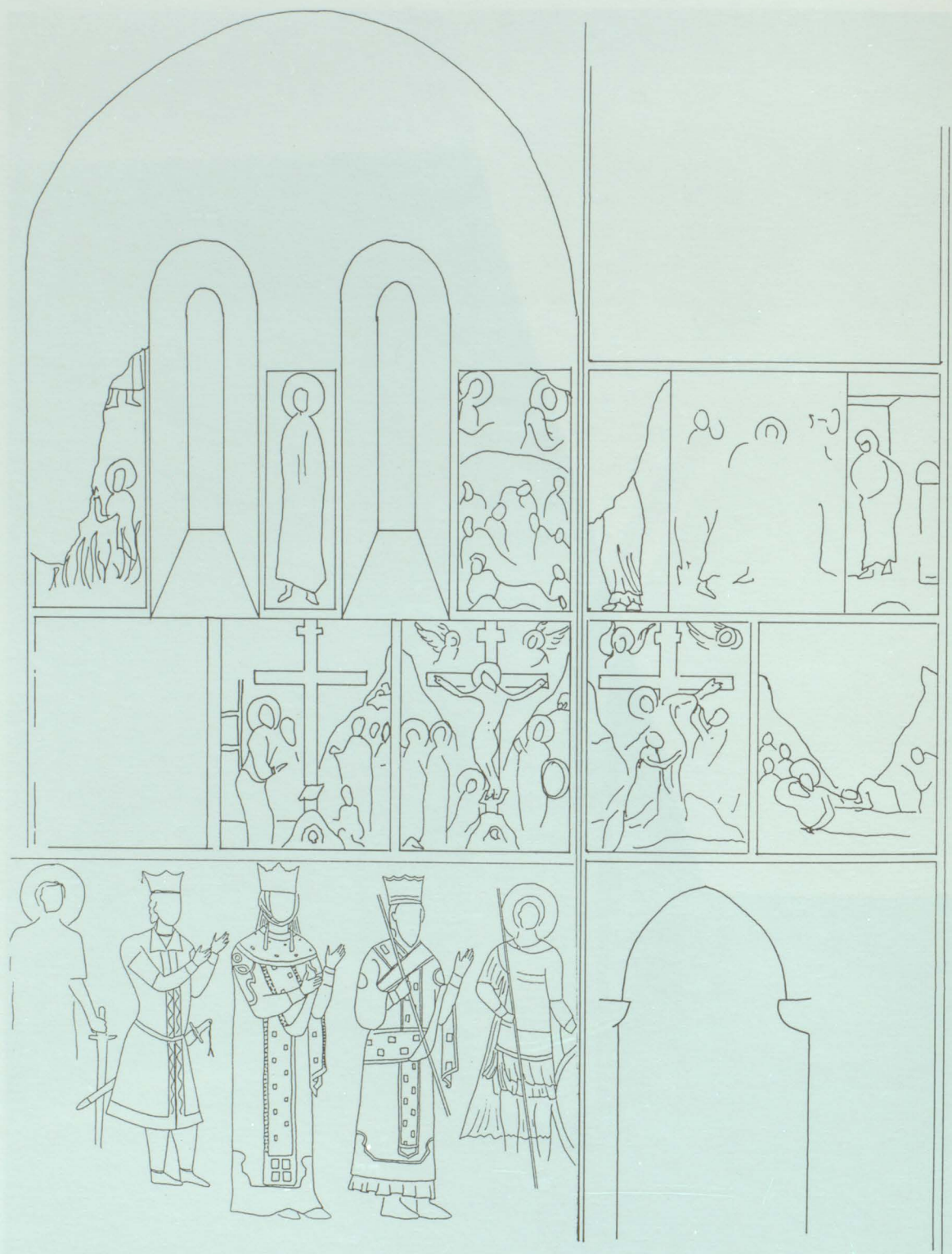


Fig. 75. Betania. Schema of north transept (redrawn after Alibegašvili).



Fig. 76. Engraving of Giorgi III, Tamar, and Giorgi IV Laša at Betania by G. Gagarin, 1843.



Fig. 77. Betania. Detail of Queen Tamar.



Fig. 78. Betania. South transept. Donor image of Sumbat' and Lip'arit' Orbeli before the Mother of God.

accordingly, Sumbat' I's son Lip'arit', and the other lost figures must have been his other sons.¹⁷⁵

This provides some explanation for the stylistic differences visible in the decoration, since it indicates that there were at least two phases of painting, one associated with the patronage of the Orbelis in the 1150s, and the second with the later addition of the royal panel in the early thirteenth century. The restorations of the church and the consequent overpainting of scenes makes the distinction between phases and the association of each phase with the donor images harder to establish.¹⁷⁶ However, it is clear from the background colors, scale of figures, and planar depictions that the image of Tamar is linked with the painting on the west wall. Of the rest of the painting, Privalova has noticed stylistic similarities between the Orbeli image and the scenes in the naos cycles.¹⁷⁷ This leaves the apse paintings, which Privalova has compellingly argued are earlier still.¹⁷⁸

It is, therefore, clear that the overall program in the church is not homogeneous, but represents the work of successive campaigns. Hence, the relationship between the various layers of painting is very complex. Scenes, even on the same wall, may not be directly linked, and the painters' and planners' attitude toward and use of the preexistent scenes must be taken into account when considering the later additions. Thus, the relationship between the royal image and the scenes around it, which proved to be a fruitful source of meanings at Vardzia and Q'inc'visi, must be treated with much greater caution here. The presence of the later scenes could also affect the interpretation of the earlier phases.

The Royal Panel

The choice of Bagrat'ionis for inclusion in the image at Betania is identical to that at Q'inc'visi. However, although Giorgi Laša is still shown as a beardless young man in Georgian court robes, he is now depicted with a crown and sword (Figs. 75 and 76; see Plate XVII). These attributes, the same as those highlighted as royal symbols in the coronation image at Macxvariši, suggest that Giorgi Laša is depicted as a young king after his co-coronation with his mother, which took place after the death of his father, Davit Soslan, in 1207. The painting is, therefore, slightly later than that at Q'inc'visi and helps to determine the date of that church. Having said that, the relationship between the two images is complex. There are some important differences between the two images, both in the details of iconography and, more important, in

175. Privalova, "Sur les peintures," 155.

176. I. Hilgendorf, "The Complex Investigation of the Fresco Portraits of Queen Tamar," *IV^e Symposium*, 4.

177. Privalova, "Sur les peintures," 155-56.

178. Privalova, "Nouvelles données," 4-7.

their contexts within the overall church programs, which would suggest that they were separately planned. It was noted above how carefully the royal panel at Q'inc'visi was integrated into a very sophisticated scheme that could be used to provide an elaborate evocation of royal power. In contrast, that at Betania stands apart from the imagery around it and appears to be simpler, perhaps even derivative.¹⁷⁹

The main problem with the image at Betania is that it seems to contain many inconsistencies and irregularities not seen in any other royal image, which appear to undermine the message of the image. The most obvious of these is that none of the secular figures at Betania has a halo. Haloes are signs of royal superiority and sanctity that are used to distinguish the Bagrat'ionis in every other painted portrait.¹⁸⁰ At Macxvariši, Vardzia, and Q'inc'visi haloes differentiate the Bagrat'ionis from their subjects, and this rule was carefully followed. Even in churches in which nonroyal donors appear alone, they are never nimbed.¹⁸¹ Haloes played a definite role in the hierarchical structuring of society through art and were certainly used to distinguish the royal family from the rest of society. The absence of haloes at Betania, then, appears to undermine this division and to reduce the status of the royal family.¹⁸² The presence of haloes in all other images of the Bagrat'ionis shows that this device had special importance in Georgia.

The second irregularity is the terminology used in the inscriptions in the royal panel. In every other church Tamar is described as *mepeta mepe*, "King of Kings," but at Betania she is instead called *mepe da dedopalt dedopali*, "King and Queen of Queens."¹⁸³ (The inscriptions accompanying Giorgi III and Giorgi Laša are unexceptional.) This change seems to go against the trend whereby Tamar was given the same titles and attributes as her male predecessors in order to show that, despite her sex, she was fundamentally the same as they. However, as we have seen, Tamar was given these longer and more elaborate titles on charters, which also go on to list all the peoples and lands that she ruled.

Recent scientific analysis by Igor Hilgendorf has shown that all the pigments used for the backgrounds and inscriptions of the royal portraits were only developed after the eighteenth century and that nineteenth-century photographs show that only three letters of Tamar's inscription then survived, surrounded by bare stonework (com-

179. It is for this reason that I have reversed the order of the churches in this book. Most texts—such as Amiranashvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 223–25; Alpago-Novello, *Art and Architecture*, 95–96; and Alibegashvili, *Svetskii Portret*, 22–23—place Betania before Q'inc'visi and regard it as the archetypal image of the queen and her family.

180. The Bagrat'ionis are also shown with haloes in the sculpted images at Ošk'i and T'beti, although the other sculpted images are not nimbed.

181. This is the case at Zemo-K'ixi, Pavnisi, and the main church at Udabno.

182. Haloes were not considered vital in the depiction of ruling figures elsewhere in the Byzantine world, and the Hauteville family on Sicily, for example, were not depicted with haloes despite their known imperial ambitions; see O. Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, London, 1949, pls. 58 (Roger II at the Martorana, Palermo) and 76 (William II at Monreale).

183. Privalova, "Betaniis moxat'uloba," 59. The inscription reads თამარ, მეფე და დედოფალთ დედოფალი.

pare Figs. 76 and 77).¹⁸⁴ It is therefore possible that this is an entirely nineteenth-century reconstruction of the inscriptions and is based on the charters.¹⁸⁵ The inscriptions at Betania cannot, thus, be used to argue against the idea set out above.¹⁸⁶

The final irregularity, which cannot be explained away as part of the nineteenth-century restoration, is the overall structure of the royal panel. This is normally regarded as unproblematic. Its repetition of the same figures, in the same poses, as at Q'inc'visi places it within the generally accepted form of such panels. However, there is one major iconographic difference, the absence of any divine figure to receive their prayers. In the place where one would expect to find Christ or the Virgin, who appear in all other images of Queen Tamar, stands Saint George. Saint George was greatly revered in Georgia,¹⁸⁷ and he is shown as the intercessory saint in the donor image in the twelfth-century church of Pavnisi.¹⁸⁸ He had, of course, appeared on the icon with Davit IV. It is therefore not inconceivable that he should be chosen as the intercessor through whom the royal family could pray, although this would make the panel a unique monumental image of the Bagrat'ionis. However, the unusual choice of Saint George as intercessor is highlighted by the other donor panel in the south transept, which shows the Orbelis presenting a model of the church to the Virgin and Child, who are shown framed in the form of a *hodegetria* icon. Regardless of the difference in date between the two donor scenes, this juxtaposition of the royal Bagrat'ionis in intercession with Saint George, opposite the nobleman Sumbat' in intercession with the Mother of God, suggests a very unusual hierarchical structure. To show Sumbat' Orbeli in communication with a more influential and holier inhabitant of Heaven undermines established convention by overturning the social order.¹⁸⁹ It is this social difference that suggests that the royal panel may have been planned without knowledge of the other scenes in the church, and was included regardless of its surroundings. The royal panel may have been merely a stock imported image copied from elsewhere, perhaps from Q'inc'visi.

The other problem regarding the inclusion of Saint George in the royal panel is his presentation. He is shown frontally, holding a lance, and makes no visual sign of recognition to the Bagrat'ionis beside him, who are shown in three-quarter profile looking toward him, with their hands raised in prayer. By failing to show the exchange between the intercessor and the intercessed, the panel defeats its own purpose, since it ignores the role played by saints in hearing and helping the prayers of

184. Hilgendorf, "Complex Investigation," 6.

185. This restoration theory might also explain the absence of haloes, but this cannot be certain.

186. This still leaves the interesting question of why the monumental inscriptions give titles different from those on the charters. This must be explained both by the lack of space and by the desire to highlight the "masculinity" of the queen's power.

187. I. Surguladze, "Saint Georges dans les croyances religieuses géorgiennes," *IV^e Symposium*, 10 pp.

188. Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 40; E. L. Privalova, *Pavnisi*, Tbilisi, 1977, fig. 14.

189. Compare Q'inc'visi, where the Bagrat'ionis pray to Christ, but Ant'on Č'q'ondideli stands before Saint Nicholas.

the living. It is possible that Saint George is not meant to be the intercessor and merely guards the Bagrat'ionis, who pray instead to the figure of Christ in the apse, although this too would be unique.

All these inconsistencies in the depiction of the royal figures (the lack of haloes, the choice of inscription, and the lack of reciprocal gestures) mean that the royal panel must be treated with great caution. The work of Hilgendorf has demonstrated that much of what is now visible was added in the nineteenth century and therefore cannot be trusted. In particular, the dense blue of Tamar's robes is clearly modern. He has also shown that some original fragments exist below the present surface. These show that the depiction of Queen Tamar was originally more linear and orientalized and provides close comparisons to the paintings at Natlismcemeli and Q'inc'visi,¹⁹⁰ thereby confirming the date suggested by Giorgi Laša's attributes. However, the inconsistencies and incoherent composition of the panel indicate that the image was added to the church with little consideration of location or meaning.

The Royal Panel in the Overall Decoration of the Church

The awkwardness of the Betania royal image contrasts markedly with the earliest two phases of decoration at Betania, the apse and the upper parts of the north and south transepts, which are intricate and theologically complex. It is clear that the original designs for Betania were thought out with greater care, and in greater detail, than those for many churches of this period in Georgia. The cycles do not reflect the standard pattern of the great feast cycle seen, for example, at Vardzia and Q'inc'visi, but rather display a more symbolic, intellectual design. The Old Testament scenes, showing prefigurations of the Virgin, have few parallels elsewhere in the Byzantine world at this early date.¹⁹¹ The main earlier example is in the apse of Hagia Sophia, Ohrid, but this is not as extensive as Betania's cycle. It is only at the end of the thirteenth century, at Hagia Sophia, Trebizond, and at the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos (now Sveti Kliment), Ohrid, that equally comprehensive cycles of types of

190. E. L. Privalova, "Sur les problèmes de conservation et de fixation de la peinture monumentale géorgienne médiévale," *REGC* 3, 1987, 128–32 and figs. 1–3.

191. For a summary of the history of Old Testament prefigurations of the Virgin, see S. Der Nersessian, "The Program and Iconography of the Frescoes of the Parecclesion," in *The Kariye Djami*, ed. P. A. Underwood, Princeton 1975, 4:311–18. On individual images, see G. Babić, "L'image symbolique de la 'Porte Fermée' à Saint-Clément d'Ohrid," in *Synthronon: Art et archéologie de la fin de l'antiquité et du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1968, 145–51; S. Der Nersessian, "Le lit de Salomon," in *Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'Études Byzantines*, vol. 8, pt. 1, *Mélanges G. Ostrogorsky*, Belgrade, 1963, 77–82; S. Dufrenne, "L'enrichissement du programme iconographique dans les églises byzantines du XIII^e siècle," in *L'art byzantin du XIII^e siècle: Symposium de Sopoćani* 1965, ed. V. J. Djurić, Belgrade, 1967, 35–46; N. Beliaev, "Le 'Tabernacle du Témoignage' dans la peinture balkanique du XIV^e siècle," in *L'art byzantin chez les Slaves*, vol. 4 of *Orient et Byzance*, Paris, 1930, 2: 315–24.

the Virgin do appear.¹⁹² A nonnarrative cycle such as this is rare in Georgian painting at this time. The planners of this phase, presumably including Sumbat' Orbeli, were theologically adept. The emphasis on Christ's Passion, which is portrayed in such detail in the north transept, rarely receives such attention elsewhere. The cycle must also reflect a deeper narrative intent than the usual iconic depiction of the Great Feast scenes alone.

The Old Testament sequence, in particular, suggests that the church decoration was aimed at an audience more conversant with the symbolic and dogmatic approach embodied in the choice of scenes. They require much deeper theological knowledge than do the programs of the other Tamar churches. Such a characterization must of necessity be very generalized, especially because so much painting has been lost, but Betania certainly has a more intellectual program than in most other contemporary Georgian churches. Given that the church was built as the mausoleum church of the Orbelis, the choice of decoration was clearly intended as a great symbol of prestige, displaying the family's education and theological erudition.

The one other crucial factor in determining the interpretation of the church at Betania is the fate of the Orbeli family. As mentioned above, it was this family that was the prime force behind the revolt of 1177 against Giorgi III. According to Vardan Arewelc'i's "Historical Compilation," it was Sumbat' II Orbeli who had been responsible for putting Giorgi III on the throne in 1156, but twenty years later, it seems, the kingmakers turned against their protégé after a dispute over control of the city of Ani and paid heavily for doing so.¹⁹³ Even Stepanos Orbeliani, writing in the 1290s, had to excuse accusations of kingly desires on the part of his family.¹⁹⁴ After Giorgi had suppressed the revolt, the family in Georgia was destroyed as a power base. The Orbelis were either killed or forced into exile or monasteries; the estates were divided up between the king and his allies. According to Stepanos Orbeliani, the destruction of the family was to be absolute: "The king [Giorgi III] ordered that the Orbeli race be effaced from the pages of the histories of every country, and [that his subjects should] write the history of this event, not according to true facts, but after fantasy, overloaded with calumnies and falsehoods against the Orbelis; he flung out anathemas, forbidding the speaking of their names."¹⁹⁵ It thus becomes possible to see this image as the most politicized of all the Bagrat'ioni images.¹⁹⁶ Its location in what was once the heartland of the Orbeli estates demonstrated how royal control could encroach to the core of all enemy lands. Royal dominance was absolute.

192. These cycles appear in the north porch at Hagia Sophia, Trebizond (D. Talbot Rice, *The Church of Hagia Sophia at Trebizond*, Edinburgh, 1968, 149–55) and in the narthex of the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos, Ohrid (C. Grozdnov, *Church of St. Kliment Ohrid*, Zagreb, 1988, 39).

193. Vardan Arewelc'i, "Historical Compilation," 205–7.

194. Stepanos Orbeliani, *History*, 212.

195. Stepanos Orbeliani, *History*, 221.

196. Privalova, "Sur les peintures," 156.

This case shows that donor portraits had great significance and that those at Betania were used as visual proof of local land ownership and authority. The change in image established and confirmed the new estate lord. However, there are problems even with this compelling argument. Most damaging is the discrepancy in dates. The Orbelis were extirpated in 1177/8 after the suppression of the Demna revolt, of which they were the chief architects. However, the iconography of the royal panel, as it stands, cannot date before 1207, some thirty years later. If Stepanos Orbeliani is correct when he writes that Giorgi III was determined to wipe out all record of the Orbelis, then why did Giorgi leave the execution of this portrait to his daughter? Although the continued presence of Giorgi III in these panels, twenty years after his death, shows that there was a continued need to deal with issues from Giorgi's reign in that of Tamar, it cannot be used to argue for such a direct political link. The connection between the destruction of the Orbelis and the installation of the royal panel cannot be that absolute. Moreover, if the Bagrat'ionis did desire to wipe out all memory of the Orbelis, then why were Sumbat' I Orbeli and his sons left in the south transept? Stepanos Orbeliani recorded that "in his hatred King Giorgi, who despised the Orbeli family in Georgia, had their names removed from history, from all written documents, and from churches."¹⁹⁷ Since Giorgi's censorship was applied to all media and, specifically, to church art, it seems most unusual that he should allow traces of the Orbelis to survive in one of their prime churches, especially opposite one of his own portraits.

A final piece of evidence comes from the inscriptions on the small church to the west of the main church. These proclaim that the chapel was erected in 1196 by Rusudan, the daughter-in-law of Sumbat' II Orbeli, in memory of her husband, Ivane, the leader of the revolt.¹⁹⁸ Given that Rusudan was the mother-in-law of the rebel Demna, this suggests that in Tamar's reign some form of reconciliation was effected between the two families that allowed the Orbelis to retain control of Betania. The royal images may have been the cost of the reconciliation: the rehabilitation of the Orbelis is explicitly shown as the result of their accepting submission to the Bagrat'ionis, including their old enemy Giorgi III. Thus, it seems that the royal image does represent an image of power, designed to subjugate the Orbelis both politically and visually through domination and ownership.

Is it possible, then, to include the royal panel as part of a larger, general interpretation of the church? While the positioning of the royal panel observes the customary rules for the location and organization of these scenes, it does not appear to have been designed with any regard for the painting cycles around it. The enormous change in scale between the royal family and all the figures in the scenes above them does not suggest that any comparisons should be made between them. There appears, in addition, to have been no attempt to highlight any particular scenes or

197. Stepanos Orbeliani, *History*, 212.

198. Silogava, *Betaniis c'arc'erebi*, 17-38.

draw links with the royal panel of the kind that are manifest in earlier Bagrat'ioni images.¹⁹⁹ There is a strong contrast between the planning here and that at Q'inc'visi, where, as we have seen, all the figures and scenes were carefully integrated. This must have been largely due to the fact that the paintings in the transepts at Betania were already in place when the royal panel was added. The later imposition of the panel and the discordance in scale has the effect of focusing attention on the portraits, and it is probable that this was the original intention.

A more profitable place to look is the west wall, the only other area of the church to be painted at the time the royal panel was added (perhaps because it had not been painted before). The bulk of this painting is taken up by the *Last Judgment*, which is commonly seen on the west wall of Georgian churches and shows no unusual emphases here.²⁰⁰ The inclusion of the *Communion of St. Mary of Egypt*, however, is more noticeable (Fig. 79). The scene is given a very prominent position on the west wall of the north aisle (an unusual position for this scene) and is depicted on a large scale. As has been shown, the saint seems to have been linked to Queen Tamar, and this implies that the commemoration of Tamar in the royal panel did influence the other painting executed at the same time. However, it was by no means a comprehensive system, and the choices could owe as much to the omissions elsewhere in the church as to the presence of the image of Tamar, especially in the decision to depict the *Miracles of Christ*.

Betania shows that the presence of an image of Queen Tamar did not necessarily mean that there was a large-scale campaign to impose a complex, highly developed view of the queen. There was no underlying concerted plan to change the public perception of the monarchy. Such a desire did undoubtedly exist and was put into practice at Vardzia, Q'inc'visi, and Bertubani; however, it was not universally applied. The example of Betania shows that to look for such a reading in every church is inappropriate and credits the Bagrat'ionis and their advisers with a more carefully thought-out plan than perhaps was the case. Betania does not form part of a consistent, homogeneous scheme with one set aim. It is the most politicized of all the images, but at the same time, it provides one of the simplest images of the Bagrat'ioni family.

This is not to say that the last painting layer at Betania was not designed to glorify the royal family. Clearly the very fact that they were shown in the company of saints marked them out from the rest of contemporary society. It forms part of the much larger tradition of royal images, which were included to maintain the visual presence

199. Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 223, believes that it is possible for a link to be made between the prophet David, because of his prominent position in the apse, and the Bagrat'ionis, since David was claimed as their ancestor (similar to the link at At'eni). Given Privalova's redating of the apse, this must be now reconsidered. It is, of course, possible that such a reading became possible in retrospect or was envisaged even without the royal panel.

200. See, for example, Privalova, *Rospis' Timotesubani*, pls. 26–39; A. Lidov, *The Mural Paintings of Akhtala*, Moscow, 1991, 59–67; N. Thierry, "Le Jugement dernier d'Axtala: Rapport préliminaire," *BK* 40, 1982, 147–85.



Fig. 79. Betania. West wall. St. Mary of Egypt receiving communion from St. Zosimus.

of the ruler throughout his or her kingdom. The prime intention was to keep an image of the queen before as many subjects as possible. Beyond this, any extra ideological input was an added bonus.

Betania, then, shows the presentation and commemoration of the royal family at its simplest level. It is in marked contrast to the complexity of the biblical cycles elsewhere on the walls. Betania seems to be the last survivor of what was, probably, originally a common scene: the unadorned portraits of the Bagrat'ionis. These, along with the inscriptions on coins, gave the royal family an all-pervasive presence that must have dominated life at the time. It was from this base that the more developed churches derived their meaning. Without the ubiquitous appearance of royal portraits in all settings, the complex depictions with their elaborate comparisons and analogies would have been too remote and elitist to have a lasting effect.

Bertubani

The final portrait of Tamar and her son, Giorgi Laša, occurs in the monastery of Bertubani.²⁰¹ It is the only church to show Tamar as the principal figure in the royal panel, not preceded by her father or other ancestors, and so, potentially, represents an approach to the depiction of the queen very different from that in the earlier churches. The monastery, part of the Davit Gareji complex, is located near the Monastery of Natlismcemeli in the Gareji Desert, in what is now Azerbaijan. It is a small monastery, with a church and refectory, both of which are rock-cut and painted. Much of the southern half of the church collapsed in 1929, but photographs of it in its complete state had been taken before this in 1913.²⁰² Vandalism has caused further damage (especially in the refectory), with the result that the royal portraits have been removed from the walls of the church and taken to the Tbilisi State Museum of Fine Arts for their protection.²⁰³

The church is a simple hall church, with a single apse at the east end and a large narthex to the west (Fig. 80; see Plate XIX). There is also a large, undecorated chamber, cut deeper into the rock, on the north side of the church. This arrangement conforms to that seen in the rock-cut churches of Vardzia and Natlismcemeli. The apse

201. Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 64–71; Z. Sxirt'ladze, "Die Besonderheiten des kompositionellen Aufbaus der Wandmalerei der Höhlenkirche in Bertubani," *IV^e Symposium*, 14 pp.; Z. Sxirt'ladze, *Rospis' peščernogo xrama Bertubani (issledovanie po istorii gruzinskoj monumental'noi živopisi načala XIII v.)*, Avtoreferat (abstract of dissertation for degree of kandidat), Tbilisi, 1987, 25 pp.; Vol'skaia, "Rospis' peščernyx monastyrei," 146–50.

202. Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, x and pls. 102–8.

203. The two portraits are now preserved in two separate panels: one showing the figure of Giorgi Laša (cut off at the knees), the other the bust of Tamar with the "icon" of the Virgin and Child.

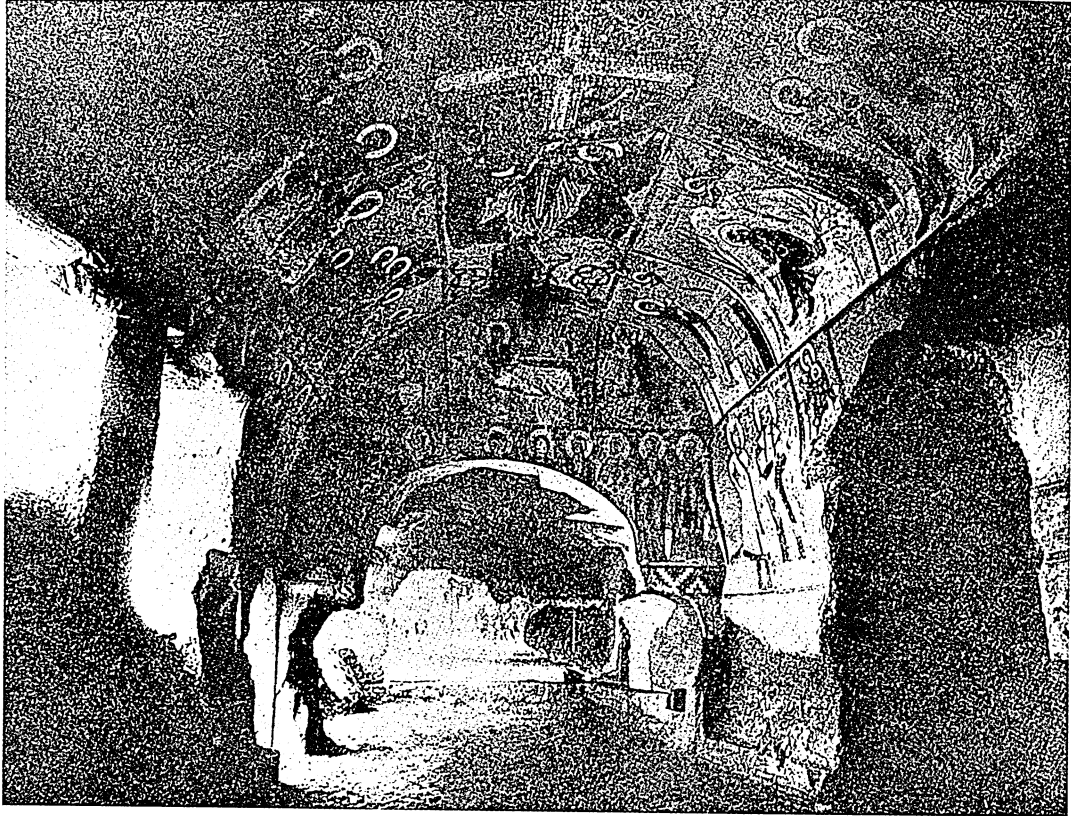


Fig. 80. Bertubani (1212–13). View to west inside church before collapse (after Čubinašvili).

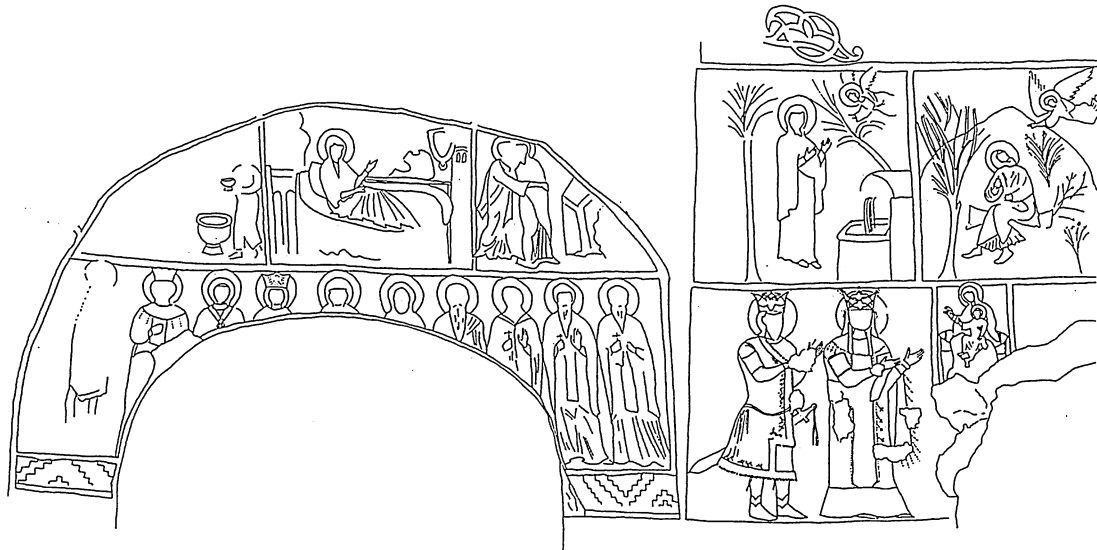


Fig. 81. Bertubani. Schema of northwest corner.



Fig. 82. Bertubani. West wall before collapse (after Čubinašvili).

contains a monumental depiction of the Virgin and Child enthroned between two archangels. Below them is a representation of sixteen church fathers, led by Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Basil of Caesarea, celebrating the eucharist, the *Hagia Trapeza*. The vault of the naos contains the *Glorification of the Cross* (see Plate XX). The church is dominated by eleven scenes from the *Life of the Virgin*, from the *Rejection of the Gifts* to the *Annunciation to Mary* and the *Nativity* (Figs. 80–82). The scenes are shown in a single register around the north, west, and south walls. On the register below are depicted individual figures. The north wall shows Queen Tamar and Giorgi Laša, their hands raised in prayer to an iconlike depiction of the Virgin and Child, who both have their right hands raised in a gesture of benediction. The west wall, over the arch into the narthex, depicts five women saints and five early monastic saints (a composition that is comparable to that on the west wall at Q'inc'visi).²⁰⁴ The south wall, opposite the royal panel, shows three warrior

204. From south to north, the saints are Mary of Egypt, Marina, Barbara, Katherine, Nino, Antony, Euthemios, Sabas, Arsenios, and Maximus Confessor.

saints.²⁰⁵ The narthex was to have depicted the *Last Judgment*, the *Lamentation of Christ*, and a number of ascetic saints, but they were never completed; only the preliminary outline drawings were ever executed. There is also evidence that the paintings in the main church were never completely finished, suggesting that the whole commission was for some reason abandoned.

The refectory, which is situated just to the east of the church in the cliff face, is a rectangular chamber with altar niches in the north and east walls (the northern niche is at the head of the rock-cut refectory table). The scenes all share a eucharistic theme: on the west wall, *Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well* and the *Marriage Feast at Cana*; on the north (main) wall, the *Feeding of the Five Thousand* and the *Hospitality of Abraham*; and on the east wall, the *Last Supper* and *St. Lukian Milks a Doe*. This last scene is from the *Life of St. Davit Garejeli* and tells how Saint Davit's disciple, Saint Lukian, milked wild does sent by God to support the hermits in the desert.²⁰⁶

The Royal Panel

The only evidence for the date of the church comes from the royal panel (Figs. 83–85). This shows Queen Tamar, followed by her son, Giorgi Laša, in prayer before the Mother of God, enthroned with the Christ Child.²⁰⁷ Giorgi Laša is shown crowned and girded with a sword. He is shown as a mature, bearded man, certainly much older than in his depictions at Q'inc'visi and Betania. As a result of this, writers have reached a consensus for the date at 1212/13, at the time Tamar died and Giorgi succeeded her.

The question of the date of the church, particularly whether it was painted before or after the death of Tamar, is very important for the interpretation of the royal panel, since it has a direct bearing on how Tamar's position should be understood. If Tamar was already dead, then Giorgi would become the principal living focus of the panel. If, on the other hand, it was painted during Tamar's lifetime, then the fact that she is portrayed as the subject of the image suggests that, toward the end of her reign, it became acceptable to portray her as the main, dominant ruler, rather than just one among others. This second option assumes that the panel was instigated by Tamar, or in her interests, whereas the former indicates that her image was being used by Giorgi IV Laša for his own ends. Both alternatives can be supported, and I deal with each argument and its resultant interpretation in turn.

205. The warrior saints are George, Theodore, and Demetrios.

206. A. I. Vol'skaia, *Rospisi srednevekovykh trapeznykh Gruzii*, Tbilisi, 1974, 98–151.

207. J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Recherches sur les programmes décoratifs des églises médiévales en Géorgie en relation avec la peinture monumentale byzantine," *II^e Symposium*, 17, mistakenly asserts that "ils offrent la maquette de l'église à la Vierge."



Fig. 83. Bertubani. North wall. Portraits of Tamar and Giorgi IV Laša before removal (after Čubinašvili).

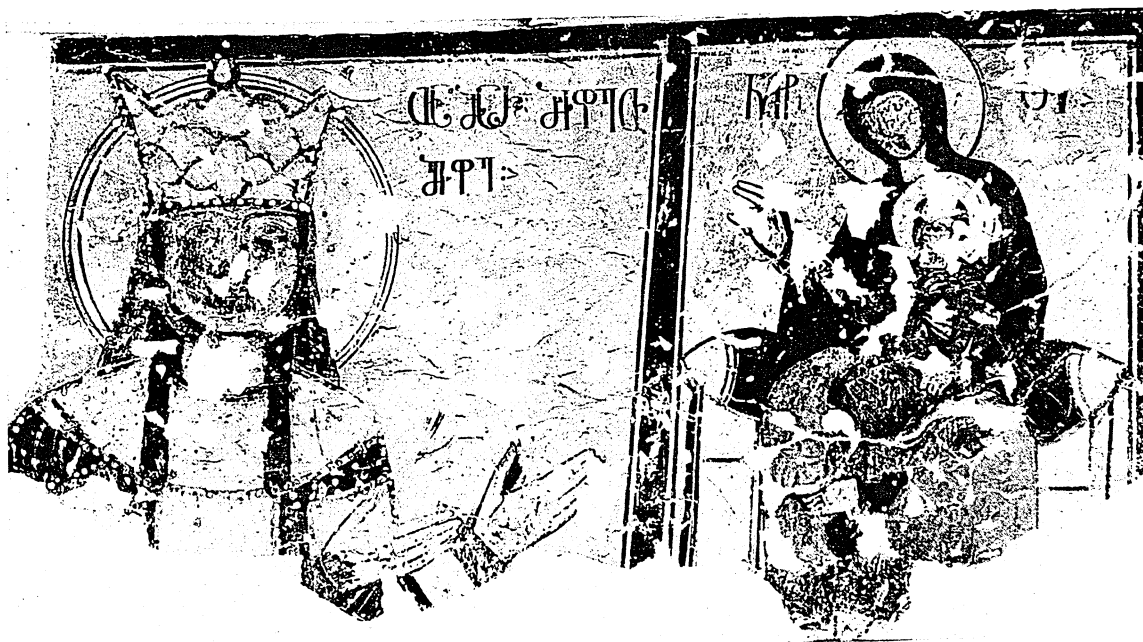


Fig. 84. Bertubani. Detail of Queen Tamar (present condition in State Museum of Fine Arts, Tbilisi).



Fig. 85. Bertubani. Detail of Giorgi IV Laša (present condition in State Museum of Fine Arts, Tbilisi).

1. *The posthumous representation of Queen Tamar.* The main proponent of a date for the paintings of Bertubani after Tamar's death is Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne. She argues that, since Giorgi Laša is shown wearing a crown, he is ruling.²⁰⁸ This reasoning is flawed, since Giorgi Laša is shown wearing a crown at both Natlismcemeli and Betania; but the dating can be supported on other grounds. In particular, the wall paintings at Bertubani share very close iconographic and compositional similarities to the image of Tamar and Giorgi III at Vardzia. There, the recently crowned Tamar was shown following her dead predecessor in prayer to an image of the Mother of God, enthroned with the Christ Child. Indeed, the precedent of all the Tamar churches suggests that it was now customary to portray the immediate ancestry of the ruler. It seems that Giorgi Laša was following the iconographic precedent of Vardzia, and so the church can be dated to 1213, immediately after Tamar's death. This implies that Giorgi Laša was keen to be seen to adopt the visual language of his mother from the beginning of his reign. The royal panel at Bertubani

208. Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Recherches," 17; Alpaogo-Novello, *Art and Architecture*, 97.

thus provides testimony to the success of the iconographic vocabulary of power developed in Tamar's reign. These multigenerational images, with their emphases on legitimacy, succession, and continuing family strength must have been a remarkably effective means of displaying royal power. The repetition of this iconography also demonstrates how successfully it could accommodate the differing circumstances in which the monarchy found itself. I argued above that the imagery chosen at Vardzia was intended to overcome Tamar's insecurity and weakness. The image of strength was an act of bravura to counteract very real deficiencies. Bertubani shows the success of this image: now Giorgi Laša is using the same format to make a statement of intent about maintaining the ruling traditions of Tamar. He is portraying himself as the perpetuator of his mother's policies.

The iconography must have altered its meaning during Tamar's reign from one of legitimacy to one of triumph and memorial. Its having undergone such a radical shift in interpretation implies that the position of the ruler in Tamar's reign had undergone a great change. Tamar had developed from an vulnerable queen, who was treated with much suspicion and faced open hostility, to a positive figurehead to whom later rulers could appeal. This shows that iconography in itself is a flexible force whose meaning depends to a great extent on context.

This argument has important repercussions for the development of the imagery of the queen, since it is essentially an objectifying "male" reading. A belief that Tamar was dead and Giorgi Laša alive at the time of painting implies that her presence was for the purposes of commemoration and memorial. Giorgi Laša is shown commending his mother to the Mother of God, but at the same time, her image is being used by her son for his own ends. More important, it allows us to explain her unique prime position in the panel, a position she had been unable to assume while alive.

The overall readings of the earlier images of Tamar have all stressed the need, on the one hand, to give Tamar the appearance of a credible and strong leader and, on the other, to explain the ability of a woman to rule as king. The royal imagery achieved this by separating the acceptable notion of the queen as source of power from the less acceptable notion of female execution of power. Tamar was always shown as either a subsidiary to her father, who seemed to act as the legitimating factor for her—she rules through and because of him—or as an equal with her husband (at Natlismcemeli). Since her power is always mediated through a man, the direct problem of rule by a woman is avoided. If she is shown dead at Bertubani, then this problem no longer exists, and she can be shown without any male intermediaries.

This is a fundamentally different perception of Tamar. She is no longer a living figure whose presentation must be circumscribed to make her acceptable, but a historical one whose image can be completely reconstituted to fit prevailing wishes. Thus, at Bertubani she is no longer the ruling queen, whose power and position must be explained, but a dead figure, subject to myth and legend, whose reign can be glorified. The image of Giorgi III at Vardzia and at Natlismcemeli had also been

used to rewrite the past, showing the king's divine legitimacy, but the case of Tamar at Bertubani allowed for a rewriting on a far grander scale. In this view, the image of Tamar at Bertubani does not come at the end of the visual process from Vardzia to Betania witnessed above, which had to define and personify the power of the queen, but at the beginning of the textual process. This is seen mainly in *Kartlis Cxovreba*, which created the perfect female ruler and in which the queen is presented as a quasi-saint overflowing with virtues and "female" qualities, not so acceptable or expedient during her life, when they were regarded by contemporaries as tending to undermine her ability to rule.

2. *Queen Tamar represented during her lifetime.* The alternative interpretation is based on the assumption that Tamar was still alive when Bertubani was painted. This produces a very different reading. This view, which dates the church to c.1212, just before Tamar's death, has been proposed by Giorgi Čubinašvili and Gaiane Alibegašvili.²⁰⁹

The previous interpretation relies on the similarities between Bertubani and Vardzia, but there is one crucial difference. At Vardzia, the only evidence for the death of Giorgi III is the inscription by Tamar, which wishes her, but not her father, long life. At Bertubani no such additional comments are added to the inscriptions; instead, only the two names and their relationship are recorded: "Tamar, king of kings" and "Giorgi, king of kings, son of Tamar."²¹⁰ There is thus no textual evidence to indicate whether either figure was alive or dead at the time of painting, nor are there any visual distinctions between the two figures. The appearance of Giorgi Laša in Georgian court robes, rather than Byzantine ceremonial robes, might indicate that he had not yet been crowned sole ruler and was still subordinate to his mother, although, as has been seen in the way the robes of Giorgi III changed from Byzantine to Georgian and back between Vardzia, Natlismcemeli, and Q'inc'visi, it is impossible to ascribe any definite hierarchical value to these robes. It is, therefore, possible to assume that both rulers were alive. This must change the interpretation placed on the royal panel by its first viewers in Tamar's reign. The queen must remain as the central point of the composition. The inscriptions imply that the stress *is* on Tamar, not as the mother of Giorgi Laša, that is, as a figure subsidiary to her son, but as queen in her own right. Giorgi Laša is the secondary figure: Tamar is not the king's mother; he is the queen's son. Tamar is therefore the subject of this image.

Here Queen Tamar is shown, for the first time, as the prime intercessor for the Bagrat'ionis with Heaven. There is no intermediary figure; Giorgi III is not present. This allows us to make a new appraisal of Tamar. She, at last, appears as a ruler in her own right, moving out from the shadow of her father, which dominated her in all the previous images of her reign. Tamar's independence here, "liberated" from her father,

209. Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 60; Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 27.

210. Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 68: Tamar: თამარ, მეფეთ მეფე; Giorgi IV Laša: გიორგი, მეფეთ მეფე, ძე თამარისი.

shows that her status has changed. Essentially it demonstrates that Giorgi III was no longer important; he was no longer required to mediate between Tamar and Heaven. Was this because he had now been dead too long to be significant, or had there been a definite shift in Tamar's position?

The investigation of the absence of Giorgi III leads us to the heart of the question of the ultimate purpose of the royal panel. It forces us to consider whether it was a political or commemorative object. If the final determining factor of the panel is deemed to be its theological reading, that is, if it is seen as a visual prayer for the depicted figures to be accepted into Heaven, as is indicated by its iconography and setting, then Giorgi III's absence should be relevant. This would mean that, by 1212, the planners of the church no longer considered it necessary to include him, which, presumably, means that they thought that he had been accepted into the divine presence. If, on the other hand, these panels are to be interpreted as largely political, then Giorgi's omission must be linked to a change in Tamar's status. Of course, no single interpretation may be solely correct, but since the emphasis in all earlier royal panels was on their political and social aspects, on the presentation of the royal family to the public and of the hierarchy of society, then it is this consideration that would seem to be paramount. To place the emphasis on the omission of Giorgi III, rather than the primacy of Tamar, is dangerous in that it involves a reading of the panel not necessarily adopted by, or even accessible to, its first viewers, who may not all have known of the earlier panels at Vardzia, Q'inc'visi, and Betania. However, knowledge of his absence does accentuate the emphasis on Tamar.

Thus, Tamar does appear to be the subject of the image. This shows that the queen was perceived in a different way by the end of her reign. Her sole rule was acceptable and could be openly displayed. This is a great contrast with the images in the early churches and their very ambivalent portrayal of Tamar's exercise of power. Such an image would not have been set up if its composition challenged general preconceptions about the role of women, and of the queen in particular, in public life. Thus the nature of royal imagery had reached its final refinement, showing the queen as the ultimate source, rather than executor, of power. This lay with Giorgi Laša, who is shown wearing the sword of state. Now depicted as a grown man, he has clearly taken over from Giorgi III as the male mediator of Tamar's reign and the royal executor of her policies. Tamar has retained her male title of მეფე (king) and has not adopted the female დედოფალი (queen), but otherwise there are few of the "male" indicators seen at Vardzia. So, it seems that Bertubani does represent the final acceptance of female rule, especially since the cycle that engulfs the walls of the church reflects the triumph and salvation of women, as exemplified by the Mother of God.

However, is it possible to derive from the above any conclusions about the extent to which the status of a woman ruler and attitudes toward her had changed in Georgia by the beginning of the thirteenth century? The appearance of a seemingly woman-centered image at the end of Tamar's reign is not necessarily conclusive

evidence for a reversal in her status. The development of the cult of the queen—her portrayal in *Kartlis Cxovreba* and the epic poems dedicated to her, such as Č'axruxadze's *Tamariani* and Ioane Šavteli's *Abdul-Mesia*²¹¹—indicates that her idealized representation in literature (and at Bertubani?) was bought at the cost of divorcing her persona from any historical basis. By making her an exceptional woman, her rule could be explained. Whether this process is reflected in Bertubani is difficult to determine.

The reign of Queen Rusudan, Tamar's daughter (1223–45), shows that Tamar had failed to establish a workable precedent for future women rulers. It seems that Tamar had not substantially affected attitudes toward women and their “female” abilities and limitations. Rusudan again had to adopt the male title *mepe*, but, unlike her mother, her reign has been portrayed in *Kartlis Cxovreba* and by later historians as being undermined by the “inherent” characteristics of her gender, particularly by her sexuality.²¹² This provides a strong contrast to the depiction of Tamar at Bertubani, which emphasizes ideas of chastity and the saintly qualities of women, inspired by the Mother of God.

It is, thus, possible to interpret the royal panel at Bertubani in two very different ways. The problem remains which reading is the more probable. As noted above, the wall paintings themselves contain no internal evidence regarding which is more feasible.²¹³ However, this is to ignore the possible long-term meanings of the panel. While particular interpretations could have been discerned by immediate viewers, as outlined above, in accordance with particular circumstances, the image also had to give an acceptable long-term reading, after both Tamar and Giorgi Laša had died. After all, this image was about preserving the rulers for posterity as much as about politics. In such circumstances, interpretation could not be made contingent on historical knowledge about Tamar or her son. The evidence of *Kartlis Cxovreba* (and the theories advanced by many modern scholars) inclines toward the mythologizing side: that the image of Tamar creates and confirms the legends of her beauty, power, and uniqueness. Whether this had been considered by the planners and painters of the image is now impossible to judge.

The Overall Program

The overall program in the church does not argue conclusively in favor of either option. As has been pointed out above, the cycle of the *Birth and Infancy of the Virgin*,

211. Marr, *Drevnegruzinskie odopiscy*; Rayfield, *Literature*, 82–85.

212. These are best summed up by Allen, *History*, 111: “The adored sister of the splendid Lasha, she [Rusudan] shared his carnal tastes, but lacked his swash-buckling courage. She was fearless only in her lusts, and her polity was confined within the cruel and lurid meanness of an erotic woman.” Men, it seems, are permitted a sexual appetite denied to women. On Islamic views of Queen Rusudan, see Canard, “Les reines,” 12–20.

213. The unfinished state of the paintings might indicate that the program was planned under Tamar but abandoned on her death, but this is by no means conclusive evidence for the dating.

which dominates the church, has overtones of triumph and glory that suit the possible triumphant nature of the royal panel. The cycle could be seen as a parallel or confirmation of Tamar's almost saintly status: its emphasis on women and divine selection give Tamar these qualities by association. To suggest that this is the prime purpose of the cycle would be greatly to exaggerate the royal reading of the church, but nevertheless it can be seen to have these implications.

The link between Queen Tamar and the Mother of God is established in the royal panel itself. The presence of the Virgin and Child in the panel mirrors that of Tamar and Giorgi Laša. Both show the mother as protector and introducer of the next (and greater?) generation.

The inscription that runs around the border of the apse can also be seen in this light. It reads "From the rising of the sun in the East to the going down of the same in the West is the Lord's name to be praised."²¹⁴ This echoes the conclusion to Tamar's own titles, which are given on her charters as "King and Queen of Queens of the Abxazetians, Kartlians, Ranians, K'axetians, and Armenians and *Ruler of all the East and West*," and the supposed extent of her kingdom.²¹⁵ The glory of Tamar's kingdom was its geographical fulfillment of the command of the psalmist.

Individual Saints

The choice of individual saints in the church reflects many of the precedents in the earlier Tamar churches, as well as the specific circumstances of Bertubani. The five women saints, Katherine, Marina, Barbara, Mary of Egypt, and Nino (Fig. 82), are all associated with Tamar from Vardzia. It was argued above that all these saints were probably chosen specifically for the queen, and their recurrence here must confirm that. It is proved by the case of Saint Mary of Egypt. In all her earlier appearances the saint was shown receiving communion from Saint Zosimus, giving the image strong eucharistic overtones, which confused the issue of her links with Queen Tamar. At Bertubani she is shown alone, which transfers her significance from the Eucharist to her sex.²¹⁶ Not only does her ascetic appearance make her fit for a desert location, but her solitude proclaims her triumph.

Saint Nino appears as the central figure on the arch into the narthex and is the principal saint among the thirteen depicted in the church. She has, as has been noted before, an important place in the ideology of Tamar's reign. As a woman and as the

214. Sxirt'ladze, *Rospis' peščernogo xrama v Bertubani*, 12. The inscription is from Psalm 113:3. The same inscription appears around the drum of the dome in other contemporary churches, including Timotesubani and Axtala, as part of a longer series of four texts.

215. I. Dolidze, *Kartuli samartlis dzeglebi* (Monuments of Georgian law), Tbilisi, 1970, 2:30; trans. Kakabadze, *Gruzinskie dokumenty*, 62 (italics mine).

216. This itself is unique, since elsewhere in the Byzantine world she is always shown receiving communion from Saint Zosimus.

evangelist of Georgia, she represents the Christian heritage of the country and is therefore a prime model and parallel for Tamar. Her case is similar to that of Constantine the Great in Byzantium, as a model of supreme early Christian leadership.

The male saints on the northern half of the arch are all connected with monasticism and asceticism. They include Saint Antony, the founder of monasticism, and Saint Euthemios the Hagiorite, the great Georgian monk and translator at the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos. They show a distinct bias toward Eastern monks, reflecting Georgian interest in Eastern Christianity. The inclusion of Saint Sabas reflects an additional concern: the control of Georgia's many new Monophysite Armenian subjects. Saint Sabas was a champion of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and was surely invoked to support Georgian claims to religious truth. The monks also had the overt purpose of acting as good examples for the monks. They show that this church was not entirely dominated by royal concerns, but was equally concerned with the spiritual welfare of its monks.

The decoration of the refectory, with its eucharistic emphasis, again confirms this, providing the monks with the prototypical examples of Christ and the first monk in the region, Saint Lukian. The *Hagia Trapeza* depicted in the apse demonstrates that the monks were fully abreast of the latest liturgical advances of the time. This shows the theological modernity both of the desert community and of the donors and planners.

Purpose and Patronage

The final problem to be raised in relation to Bertubani is similar to that raised in relation to Natlismcemeli, the question of the purpose that a royal panel served in a remote desert monastery. To a certain extent, this is easy to answer: it again demonstrates both the monastery's loyalty to the crown and the Bagrat'ionis' support of this important religious center.

However, this also raises the question of patronage, which I deal with at some length later. Čubinašvili and Privalova have both characterized the decoration of the church, and especially the refectory, as "lay," basing their arguments on the rich use of color and emphasis on narrative.²¹⁷ The use of such a term, which must have been influenced to some extent by the presence of the royal panel, seems very dubious applied to a monastery. It raises the same arguments and problems as Vol'skaia's arguments about the style of the Natlismcemeli paintings. Once again, it suggests that the decoration was dominated by court interests and taste, but this must be doubted in an institution so far removed from court circles. Q'inc'visi, as has been seen, was

217. Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, 64–71; E. L. Privalova, "La peinture monumentale géorgienne à la limite des XII^e–XIII^e siècles," *II^e Symposium*, 15–16.

very closely linked with the royal court, especially since Ant'on Č'q'ondideli, the effective prime minister, was its founder, and so the design there may be taken to embody court concerns. It is, therefore, possible to argue convincingly that the program there was controlled by the court.

Bertubani, in contrast, shows no signs of royal or court control other than the royal panel. This suggests that it was perhaps left to the ecclesiastical authorities to plan the program. This may imply that different planning processes took place in the two churches, and so the royal panel may have a fundamentally different role: it may not have been politically motivated in the same way as that at Q'inc'visi. This explanation would provide a further reason for the absence of Giorgi III. Rather than see Giorgi's absence as following from a conscious decision (which would require knowledge of his appearances elsewhere), it becomes possible to see that absence in simpler terms. The monastic authorities may simply have recorded the present state of the royal family, showing Tamar as a widow (and therefore ruling alone) with her son and heir. This view serves both to minimize the explicit politicization of the image and to support the interpretation, outlined above, according to which Tamar's sole rule was politically and publicly acceptable by the end of her reign. Thus, Bertubani may, perhaps, be read as a more "independent" image of the public perception of the queen toward the end of her reign.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the ways in which Queen Tamar was represented in monumental church art throughout the course of her reign. It has charted the ways in which her image developed according to both the changing political circumstances of her reign and the nature and location of the churches in which her image appears. It has demonstrated that the depictions broadly adhere to certain similar patterns, although with many minor variations. In particular, the question of Queen Tamar's gender has been seen to have had a major influence on the circumstances in which she was depicted. The constant presence of King Giorgi III was certainly due much more to the possible weakness of Tamar's position and her dubious status in the kingdom than to Giorgi's own arguable legality (although that did influence the way in which he was depicted).

It is possible to draw from the combined information of all the churches some general conclusions about the effect of Tamar's gender on her depiction. The most notable of these concerns the apparent limitations imposed upon the way in which her rule and authority could be convincingly portrayed. It is here that the main break with the earlier depictions of the Bagrat'ionis becomes clear. The image of the

Coronation of King Demet're I at Macxvariši (see Plate XI) showed the established attributes of power of the Bagrat'ionis. Demet're's authority was seen to derive from his crown, which symbolized divine support, and from his sword, which demonstrated not only his terrestrial power over his subjects but also their support for him. While the depictions of Tamar all show her wearing the royal crown, none shows her carrying the sword, even though the *Life of Tamar, Queen of Queens* explicitly states that when she was recrowned after Giorgi's death in 1184 to reestablish her authority, "all by one consent joined in raising to Tamar her father's sword, bestowed on her at the same time as her father's throne."²¹⁸ The sword was a central characteristic of the Georgian monarchy. The coins of Demet're I and Giorgi III both describe the ruler as the "Sword of the Messiah" in the Arabic inscriptions on their reverse.²¹⁹ However, on the coins of Tamar, this has been changed to the less martial "Champion of the Messiah" (Fig. 66).²²⁰ In the reign of Giorgi IV Laša, the original terminology was adopted again.²²¹ It is the fact that Giorgi Laša reverts to the image of the monarchy adopted by his male predecessors that demonstrates the restrictions to which the public representation of Queen Tamar was subjected. In the churches of Tamar, Giorgi IV is also able to demonstrate this "male" version of the monarchy. At Betania and Bertubani he is proudly displayed carrying a sword, the one attribute denied his mother (Fig. 83; see Plate XVII). Since he is shown thus in the churches ostensibly devoted to Tamar and painted during her reign, he shows how acutely these distinctions were observed. *Kartlis Cxovreba*, of course, makes the most of these circumstances by stressing Tamar's hatred of violence.²²² Even if this aversion was consciously promoted through the church depictions during Tamar's reign, the desire, at the same time, to depict Giorgi Laša as a traditional warrior king suggests that it was not considered a suitable or effective long-term manifestation of the monarchy. However, I have argued above that even this apparent limitation could have been given a positive interpretation by contemporaries. The churches of Tamar established a distinction between the source and executor of power. The gender-based restrictions imposed on Tamar, notably with regard to the army, required these elaborate façades to be erected so that the control of power would rest with Tamar, even when the reins had to be passed on, either to her husband, her son, or her generals.

Tamar's gender also had a profound influence on the way in which the Bagrat'ionis were depicted. It was her gender, I propose, that forced a major rethinking of the very terms in which the Bagrat'ioni dynasty was constructed. The way in which

218. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 116₂; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 56.

219. Lang, *Numismatic History of Georgia*, 20 and 21. This was a standard Islamic description for rulers; see R. Amitai, "Notes on the Ayyubid Inscriptions at al-Subayba (Qal'at Nimrud)," *DOP* 43, 1989, 114.

220. Lang, *Numismatic History of Georgia*, 24 and 26.

221. J. Karst, *Précis de numismatique géorgienne*, Paris, 1938, 51, notes that Queen Rusudan (1223–45) used both sets of Arabic inscriptions on her coins.

222. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 141_{12–20}; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 85.

Byzantine influences determined the dominant mode of expression of royal power has been demonstrated in Chapter II. Byzantine modes did not become the exclusive means of presentation (as is shown by Macxvariši), but clearly underlay many of the values inherent in the developing ideals of the Bagrat'ionis. Gelati was perhaps the high point of this "Byzantinizing" tendency.

Tamar's reign could not be depicted in a similar way. While Constantine the Great acted as a role model for Davit Aḡmašenebeli in his attempt to cast himself as one of the universal emperors of the late Roman Empire, ruling over both church and state affairs, such parallels seem not to have been considered suitable for Tamar, even though she too presided over church councils.²²³ Instead, Tamar's rule was explicated more in terms of Georgian parallels. Byzantine ideals still underpinned much of her rule, as can be seen in her continued exploitation of Byzantine imperial dress and ecclesiastical and liturgical developments, but her reign was increasingly interpreted through Georgian examples. The widespread appearance of Saint Nino during Tamar's reign is the best example of this. As I have explained above, Saint Nino was the ideal personification both of Georgia and its values and of the potential abilities of a woman leader. Saint Nino could act in the same way as Constantine the Great, but had the additional advantage of being a much closer parallel for Tamar than was any Byzantine emperor. The increased interest in the depiction of Saint Davit Garejeli, outside his desert monasteries, was another area in which Georgian exemplars were exploited to reflect a more independent Georgian identity on the churches and the queen.

It could be argued that Macxvariši adopted the same approach in its evocation of the monarchy of Demet're I. However, I would argue that there were two crucial differences between Demet're's reign and that of Tamar. Macxvariši's image of royalty came from its use of local Svanetian imagery, whereas the imagery adopted in Tamar's reign was employed on a national scale. Demet're I was also able to vary the manner of the royal depiction, as his completion of Gelati according to Byzantine models shows. The general coherence of Tamar's churches to one set of models indicates that the queen did not have the same choice.

I have explained these changes in the way the Bagrat'ioni family was represented during Tamar's reign as being a means of countering possible objections to the queen on account of her gender. This emphasis on gender as a crucial factor in the depiction of Tamar needs a few final words of justification. I do not propose that concerns about gender were the sole catalyst of change in this period. As Chapter II showed, the representation of the Bagrat'ionis underwent enormous changes for numerous other reasons. These clearly did not diminish during Tamar's reign: the territorial

223. However, the *Life of Tamar, Queen of Queens* is prepared to adopt a similar comparison, calling her a "second Constantine" in her religious works: *KC 2 (Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa)*, 117¹⁰; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 57.

expansion of Georgia at the beginning of the thirteenth century brought with it the consequent need to provide an acceptable image of rule to the newly conquered subjects, especially to the Armenians and Seljuks.²²⁴ Equally, internal developments in the methods of government in Georgia demanded a visual response to the way in which Tamar and her family were shown. However, attitudes toward gender had a significant influence on the direction in which these various responses tended to be made. It was the need to satisfy the objections to Tamar on account of her gender that established the framework within which her image was constructed. The final representation of Queen Tamar at Bertubani, where the queen at last appeared as the prime ruler without any male mediation, shows the triumph of this campaign to justify her rule.

224. It is in this light that the Arabic inscriptions on Tamar's coins and the use of Georgian imagery in Armenia should be seen. The latter is best demonstrated by the presence of a narrative scene from the *Life of St. Nino* and bilingual inscriptions in the Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator of Tigran Honentc' at Ani. See Kakovkin, "Scena Čudesnoe iavlennie životvoriasčego stolpa," 30–32; Thierry, *L'église Saint-Grégoire*, 60–62.

PART 2

THEMES

THE FUNCTIONS OF ROYAL IMAGERY

Whoever venerates the image also honours the emperor in it.
—Athanasius, "Oratio III"

In the preceding chapters of this book I have discussed the history of royal imagery in Georgia in terms of the political and social implications of the images in the context of the churches they adorn. I have looked at the images chronologically and examined the ways in which they developed and changed in response to social and political pressures. In the final chapters I reinterpret these same monuments thematically, in terms of their function and workings within the church and the information they reveal about patronage in Georgia in this period.

The question of the function of secular images, at first sight, seems very straightforward: the images depict acts of donation or commemoration; they provide records of the royal family's piety, philanthropy, and generosity to the church, as well as that of the secondary donors who appear in so many of the churches.¹ They are

1. I use the term "secondary donor" to differentiate nonroyal from royal donors. It is not meant to impute any hierarchical structure to the secular images (although this may also be included in the differences between the two types of images).

visual prayers, seeking (or claiming) acceptance from Heaven in return for the donors' good deeds on earth. Articulating this spiritual desire was the images' prime purpose and the chief motivation for their appearance. Yet, behind this lie more complex questions about the ways in which these images convey the power and prestige of the royal family and the ways in which they function within the environment of the church to achieve this. It is also necessary to ask what part these royal and secular images played in the process of worship in the church. Were they regarded in the same way as other images of saints in the church; and was there a distinction made between the veneration paid to the Bagrat'ionis and that paid to the nobles who sometimes accompany them? The lack of textual evidence and the paucity of surviving medieval Georgian liturgies mean that it will only be possible to offer some speculations in response to these questions. However, the parallel evidence from Byzantium and the repetition of particular arrangements of motifs in the Georgian churches enable tentative conclusions to be drawn and establish an approach to the subject.

Evidence

All the surviving evidence can, of course, only provide a partial answer to the question of the ways in which portraits of members of the royal family affected perceptions of the Bagrat'ionis, since so few images still exist. Insofar as much of the visual language of power in Georgia has been seen to have derived from Byzantium, this derivation provides a probable model for the quantity and variety of images in Georgia. We know from Byzantine texts that images of emperors were far more common than the number of those that survive suggests: in particular, decorations in palaces and public spaces (such as in town squares or on city walls) have been lost.² Only a few examples of these secular decorations survive, such as the Theodosian relief sculptures around the base of the Egyptian obelisk in the Hippodrome in Constantinople or the imperial statue in Barletta.³ These both date from the early centuries of Byzantium and so can give only the most general guide to the variety of forms they might have taken in the twelfth century. The main later examples of royal, secular decorations, such as the relief panels of emperors preserved in Dumbarton Oaks and Venice, and the hunting and hippodrome scenes in Hagia Sophia, Kiev, are considered below.

Although the Georgian court was more mobile than the Byzantine court, the impressive remains of the twelfth-century royal palace at Geguti certainly furnish a

2. A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Paris, 1936; P. Magdalino and R. Nelson, "The Emperor in Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century," *ByzForsch* 8, 1982, 123-83.

3. Grabar, *L'empereur*, pls. 1 and 11-12.

more-than-adequate location for secular royal art in Georgia, on a scale comparable with Byzantium.⁴ The *Histories and Eulogies of Sovereigns* includes a description of the Bagrat'ioni palace at Isani, on the outskirts of Tbilisi, of which nothing now survives. The chronicler describes the palace thus: "We saw the walls of the palace, likewise covered with battle scenes, with divisions, an army and troops of slaves, with towns and fortresses abandoned and devastated; and we saw the king himself in a posture like Gorgasali, his right hand raised like Achilles, his countenance radiant—a man truly worthy to be seen as a hero."⁵ The description concentrates on the military prowess of the king, and its offhand description of the iconographic pose of Vaxtang Gorgasali, the great Georgian king who ruled c. 447–522, suggests that visual depictions of this king were well established and easily recognizable in Georgia. The description of the palace of Isani suggests that it followed Byzantine models quite closely. Byzantine writers have left clear descriptions of the type of royalist, palace art either seen or expected to be seen in such surroundings. Kinnamos, commenting on an aberrant example of this decoration, describes what should have been painted—a clear case of the exception proving the rule.⁶ He believes that a suitable decoration should include "any ancient deeds of the Hellenes . . . and, as is the custom among men placed in authority, the emperor's achievements both in war and in the slaying of wild beasts."⁷

The poem *Digenes Akrites*, which is perhaps a better record of palaces in eastern Anatolia, also describes the noble's palace as having fighting scenes drawn from Old Testament and mythological sources.⁸ The decoration of the palace at Isani goes one step further than that described in *Digenes Akrites* by invoking great Georgian heroes as part of its program. It is unfortunately impossible to date the description of the palace described in the *Histories and Eulogies of Sovereigns*: it could be a record of Giorgi III's victories and his image of royalty or of the successes of Queen Tamar. Vaxtang Gorgasali is mentioned in the chronicles as a parallel for the queen, but it is less certain that such a male construction of the queen was acceptable during her reign.

The description of Isani, reflected in the Byzantine examples of palace decoration, concentrates on military prowess and physical strength, seen against a background

4. V. Cincadze, "Der Königspalast in Geguti," in Calo' Mariani, *L'arte georgiana*, 105–10.

5. KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šaravandedtani*), 25_{6–10}; trans. R. Mepisašvili and V. Cincadze, *The Arts of Ancient Georgia*, London, 1979, 49–50.

6. On Kinnamos's evidence on palace decoration, see L.-A. Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decorations: Descriptions and Islamic Connections," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX–XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold, B.A.R. International Series, no. 221, Oxford, 1984, 138–57, esp. 139.

7. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972, 224–25.

8. The palace description in *Digenes Akrites* comes in book 7 of the Grottaferrata text; see J. Mavrogordato, ed. and trans., *Digenes Akrites*, Oxford, 1956, 7:42–105, and A.A.M. Bryer, "Achthamar and *Digenes Akrites*," and trans., *Digenes Akrites*, Oxford, 1956, 7:42–105, and A.A.M. Bryer, "The Historian's *Digenes Akrites*," in *Antiquity* 34, 1960, 295–97, now supplemented by A.A.M. Bryer, "The Historian's *Digenes Akrites*," in *Digenes Akrites: New Approaches to Byzantine Heroic Poetry*, ed. R. Beaton and D. Ricks, Aldershot, 1993, 93–102. The relevance of *Digenes Akrites* depends on whether the poem is of eastern Anatolian origin or merely a Constantinopolitan view of life in the border area.

of the increasing fortunes of the country. It was perhaps this (self-)characterization of the monarchy as an essentially military institution that enabled Tamar's first husband, Iurii Bogoliubskii, to retain so much support among the nobility after his divorce from Tamar. His attempt to recapture the throne in 1191 centered all its ceremonial of legitimation (his coronation as sole king) on the palace at Geguti, rather than on the cathedral of Bagrat' III in Kutaisi or even on Gelati, both of which are close to Geguti.⁹ The choice perhaps reflects Iurii Bogoliubskii's strength: his proven military ability, rather than any dynastic, governmental, or spiritual legitimacy.

The scant evidence to be drawn from this material requires that we concentrate instead on the surviving ecclesiastical material. This shows the royal family in a distinctly less martial light than that in the palace decorations described in the texts. However, the loss of the palace decorations is potentially less important than it might at first appear. Their decorative schemes were not for public consumption in the same way as the church depictions. Their audience must have been the narrowly circumscribed aristocratic court, rather than any wider circle. Although the poetic descriptions of these palace decorations, such as that in *Digenes Akrites*, would have given such schemes a wider circulation, their exact audience and influence cannot be judged.¹⁰

A more serious loss is the destruction of images in public places. These certainly existed in Byzantium and probably also existed in Georgia.¹¹ Here the only evidence for a profusion of images is the icon of King Davit IV Aḡmašenebeli at St. Katherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai (see Fig. 43). This shows that portable images of the Bagrat'ionis were made and distributed among Georgian communities at home and abroad.¹² The surviving monumental images in their ecclesiastical settings were just another facet of the public face of the royal family.

The evidence of the surviving Byzantine descriptions of the non-church-based images suggests that ecclesiastical links were, nevertheless, always stressed. Even images of military prowess were shown in conjunction with Old Testament prototypes. In *Digenes Akrites*, the palace is decorated with Old Testament and also mythological battle scenes, which took the place of the wanderer's own exploits. Thus the emphasis on the religious nature and superhuman descent of the monarchy seems to have been ever present in the art, regardless of its supposedly secular context. The comparison with Achilles at Isani suggests that similar mythological or biblical parallels were present or implied in Georgian palace decorations as well.

9. KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šaravandedtani*,) 49¹³; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 118.

10. R. Beaton, "Was *Digenes Akrites* an Oral Poem?" *BMGS* 7, 1981, 7–28.

11. On Byzantine palaces, see, for example, Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, in *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, ed. J. L. van Dieten, Series Berolinensis, Berlin, 1975, vol. 11, pt. 1, 332; trans. H. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: The Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Detroit, 1984, 183.

12. D. K'ldiašvili, "L'icône de saint Georges du Mont Sinai avec le portrait de Davit Aḡmašenebeli," *REGC* 5, 1989, 107–28. This was probably not a public image, or used in procession, but nevertheless proves the wider circulation of royal portraits.

The ritual role of the palace in court ceremonial confirms that there was no truly secular, public space in which the ruler could be displayed. Geguti may have been a private palace, but its use to crown Iurii Bogoliubskii during his attempted coup shows that it must have played a leading role in royal ritual and the promotion of the crown. The palace cannot be considered an entirely secular building.¹³ The Bagrat'ionis' claim to descent from the prophet-king David makes the use of Old Testament comparisons all the more likely.

Therefore, the surviving church-based images may not be as unrepresentative as at first suggested. They do not, of course, show the variety of fighting or hunting models that were present in palaces, but since it seems that even these were usually shown in a religious context, the mode of depiction used for the royal family seems to have remained constant. The surviving example of Hagia Sophia, Kiev, where hunting and hippodrome scenes with no apparent religious associations are shown in the southwest stair tower of the cathedral, shows that the secular and religious aspects of the royal person were inseparable.¹⁴

Since so much of the justification for royal power came from biblical and ecclesiastical sources, it was impossible for any division between the aspects of the monarchy to be made. Their main strength and justification came from religious sources. It can, therefore, be argued that the surviving images of the Bagrat'ionis do provide a representative view of the public image of the monarchy. The martial aspects of rulership, which have been seen in the hunting and fighting scenes in palaces, are equally apparent in the military aspects of the many warrior saints present in all the decorative schemes discussed, and the triumphal nature has associations in some Christological scenes (such as the *Entry into Jerusalem*, with its links to the Byzantine royal *adventus*).

Royal Images as Social Indicators

Georgian donor and royal images played a central role in the maintenance of the structure of society. The images' main advantage was their exclusivity, both in terms of production and location. The commissioning of secular images could only be afforded by, and therefore only depict, the highest ranks of society; this primarily meant the senior members of the royal family and those few wealthy landowners

13. The ritual importance of the palace to the Byzantine emperors is well known; see C. Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople*, Copenhagen, 1959.

14. A. Grabar, "Les fresques des escaliers à Sainte-Sophie de Kiev et l'iconographie impériale byzantine," *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 7, 1935, 103–17; G. Logvin, *Kiev's Hagia Sophia*, Kiev, 1971, 38–41; V. Lazarev, *Old Russian Murals and Mosaics*, London, 1966, 56–59 and 236–41. None of these interpretations of the hunting images have found "religious" interpretations for them, despite their location.

and court officials who could afford it. Of the fourteen churches discussed above, the nonroyal donors all held high, official ranks: *mc'ignobartuxucesi*, *mandat'urtuxucesi*, and *eristav*.¹⁵ They were thus from the highest elite in Georgian society. The only exception is the donor at Macxvariši, K'virik'e, who holds the title of *mamasaxlisi*, but there is some confusion about the exact meaning and status of this title.¹⁶ Its literal translation, "father of the household," indicates that it was a secular, clan-based title,¹⁷ and this is supported by a donor inscription in another Svanetian church, Čvabiani, which denotes it as an administrative post.¹⁸ Yet at Macxvariši, K'virik'e is dressed as a cleric, indicating his ecclesiastical position.¹⁹ Tinatin Virsaladze argues that K'virik'e was the local abbot and is depicted as the executor of the painting, working on a commission of the *eristavs*; yet his ability to be so prominently commemorated in the church suggests that he was more influential than this might suppose.²⁰ This may reflect the different social structures that prevailed in Svaneti and enabled the churches to be commissioned by other classes of society.

Thus, even before being added to the walls of the church, the figures had to be well established in society. Given the feudal nature of Georgian society, with power concentrated among the wealthiest families and top court and ecclesiastical positions, this is understandable. However, the example of *mamasaxlisi* K'virik'e at Macxvariši shows that it was possible to aspire to this prominence. The evidence of Zemo-K'rixi in Rač'a demonstrates the lengths donors were prepared to go to to achieve this honor.²¹ The Tevdore churches in Svaneti show how limited this honor was. These churches were erected, as we are told in inscriptions, by "the *aznaurs* [lower nobility] of the valley."²² However, none contains a donor portrait, suggesting that these people were not considered able to depict themselves in the church. More particularly, these examples, in which costs must have been shared, put the wealth needed by the individual donors at the other larger and more ambitious churches into context.

The visual depiction of donors, dressed in their court finery and accompanied by inscriptions declaring their official titles, emphasized, at the very crudest, their wealth and social position. The fact that no one lower in the social scale could emulate these feats further strengthened the donors' position. It also helped to widen the gulf between the classes, which was to the incumbents' advantage. The wall paintings helped to stress the permanent nature of the depicted figures' status. Court titles

15. On Georgian court titles, see Allen, *History*, 257–65.

16. A. Šanidze, "Mamasaxlisi XI sauk'unis sakartveloši" (The *mamasaxlisi* in eleventh-century Georgia), *Macne* 1971, pt. 1, 105–14.

17. Allen, *History*, 221.

18. Aladašvili, *Živopisnaia škola Svaneti*, 28.

19. T. Virsaladze, "Freskovaia rospis' xudožnika Mikaela Maglakeli v Macxvariši," *AG* 4, 1955, 186, and Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 46, both argue that *mamasaxlisi* should be translated as "abbot."

20. Virsaladze, "Macxvariši," 186.

21. T. Virsaladze, "Freskovaia rospis' v cerkvi arxangelov sela Zemo-Krixi," *AG* 6A, 1963, figs. 42–45.

22. Aladašvili, *Živopisnaia škola Svaneti*, 28–32.

figure very prominently in inscriptions, indicating their importance in the definition and maintenance of power. No doubt in some areas the family name and estates were more important than any court title (for example, in the Orbeli strongholds in Kartli, from which the unsuccessful revolt of 1177 was launched), but, in general, it seems that authority came with court position. This suggests that the constant war waged by the Bagrat'ionis to make these posts and titles dependent on royal appointment, rather on than family inheritance, was having some effect: the inscriptions stress the donors' court, and not their family, background. Inevitably, they also established these men as the ruling class and so made any attempt to introduce men "of low birth" to these ranks harder. The expulsion of the new men introduced by Giorgi III at the beginning of Queen Tamar's reign was easily arranged by the established aristocracy.²³ The visual depictions of this vested class must have played its part in reducing full social mobility, which the Bagrat'ionis tried so often to establish.

There is a definite secular emphasis among the donors. Ecclesiastical figures are very rarely depicted, and when they are, their status is ambiguous. The case of *masaxlisi* K'virik'e has already been discussed, and to it may be added the ecclesiastical figure wearing the *omophorion* in the donor panel over the south door at Ošk'i. He clearly played some role in the images added in 1036, but, since the accompanying inscription names only the layman Jojik' as patron, it is hard to know exactly what part he played in the act of patronage.²⁴ The other principal example, Ant'on Č'q'ondideli at Q'inc'visi, is also confusing. His rank as archbishop of Č'q'ondidi is listed, but along with his two secular titles, *mc'ignobartuxucesi* and *protohypertimos*.²⁵ The customary combination of the posts of archbishop of Č'q'ondidi and *mc'ignobartuxucesi* suggests that Ant'on's dual nature made him an exceptional figure in the Georgian church and state administration. The virtual destruction of his image means that the manner of his depiction cannot now be reconstructed, but his distinctive hat has comparisons with that worn by Sumbat' Orbeli at Betania.

There is a definite secular purpose to the images. The depicted figures, especially in this religious setting, are making the most of their social and court ranks. Why contemporary ecclesiastical donors, such as the catholicos or bishops without court posts, should be so frequently missing is unclear. They certainly did not lack power or money, as the catholicos Mikael IV Mirianisdze showed when he defied all attempts by Queen Tamar and her supporters to oust him even from some of his illegal collection of bishoprics and court titles.²⁶ Ecclesiastical figures are recorded in inscriptions from around the year 1000 as being prominent builders and patrons. The most famous such example is catholicos Melkisedek', who rebuilt Svet'icxoveli

23. KC 2 (*Ist'oriani da Azmani Šaravandedtani*), 25; Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 407; Allen, *History*, 104.

24. N. Thierry, "Peintures historiques d'Ošk'i (T'ao)," *REGC* 2, 1986, 135–71; Appendix I, G.

25. K'. Vačeišvili, "Q'incvisi mšeneblis gamosaxulebis šesaxeb" (On the representation of the builder of Q'inc'visi), *Soob AN GSSR* 32/3, 1963, 745–52.

26. KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 118₂₃–119₃; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 58–59.

in Mxeta between 1010 and 1029 and also commissioned many works of art from Georgia and Byzantium.²⁷ However, when Melkisedek' looked for funds to rebuild this central cathedral of Georgia, he had to rely on foreign sources. At the time, no funding was forthcoming from the Georgian monarchy, and eventually he had to turn to the Byzantine emperors for aid, receiving money from Basil II and Constantine VIII.²⁸ However, despite this, he acknowledged only himself on the inscription on the north façade.²⁹ The activities of bishops Ant'on at Iṣxani and Ioane at K'umurdo provide more cases, but in these the dedicatory inscriptions stress that the work is being carried out for the benefit of the king.³⁰ Again, the main beneficiary is the secular authority.

The emphasis in the inscriptions on the glorification of secular power is reflected in the dress of all the figures, an issue often raised above where distinctive patterns of secular dress were noted. This dress can be divided into two main groups. The first is the Byzantine or pseudo-Byzantine imperial dress, first seen at Ošk'i (see Figs. 12 and 13, Plate II), then sporadically in the reign of Davit IV Aḡmašenebeli (see Fig. 43), and then adopted by Giorgi III and Tamar (see Figs. 63 and 83, Plates XIII, XV, and XVII). The political and social importance of this choice of dress is unambiguous: it places the rulers on a par with the Byzantine rulers and demonstrates their political aspirations and the dominance of the model of power espoused by the Byzantine emperors. At times, it even seems to hint at political rivalry. The Bagrat'ionis' explicit imitation of the visual splendor of Byzantine power and, by association, the ruler cult promoted within the empire, stands in marked contrast to the replacement of Byzantine titles and terms in the twelfth century with ones such as Šarvanšah, Šahanšah, or the court title of *atabag*, drawn from the East.

The importance of Byzantine dress must also be counterbalanced by the "court" dress worn by Davit IV Aḡmašenebeli at At'eni (see Fig. 28), Demet're I at Macxvariši (see Plate XI), and then by Giorgi IV Laša (see Fig. 83, Plates XV and XVII). The frequency of its appearance in royal images suggests that it was some form of national dress.³¹ It is seen throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries in nonroyal donor images, such as at Zemo-K'rixi (see Figs. 31 and 32), in the main church at Udabno (see Figs. 35–37), and at Pavnisi.³² Given the symbolism and history of

27. On Svet'icxoveli, see Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 195–97; Alpaḡo-Novello, *Art and Architecture*, 397 (with bibliography).

28. KC 1 (*Mat'iane Kartlisa*), 282_{8–28}; Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 301: "Since no one offered to repair it, because no one was in a state to do so, Melkisedek' went to show the emperor all the impotence of the Georgians and ask him. Basil gave him the monastery of Kest'oria, rich with one hundred and five villages, as well as silver, church ornaments, icons, crosses, and vestments for prelates and priests."

29. M. F. Brosset, *Rapports sur un voyage archéologique dans la Géorgie et dans l'Arménie exécuté en 1847–48*, St. Petersburg, 1849–50, premier rapport, 20.

30. Appendix I, D and F.

31. N. Čopikašvili, *Kartuli kostium (VI–XIV ss)* (Georgian costume [6th–14th centuries]), Tbilisi, 1964, was unavailable to me.

32. Virsaladze, "Zemo-K'rixi," figs. 42–45; Čubinašvili, *Peščernye monastyri*, pls. 19 and 82b; Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 42.

Byzantine imperial dress in Georgia, this might be seen as a lowering of expectations, but this cannot be correct. Davit IV Aḡmašenebeli is shown in both types of dress, as are Giorgi III and Giorgi IV Laša, and the appearance of Demet're in this "court" dress in his coronation image must refute the idea. The mixing of types of costume at At'eni also suggests that they were seen as equal. It is possible that this was due to the growing self-confidence of the Bagrat'ionis from the reign of Davit IV on, which encouraged them to display their own court ceremonial, rather than rely on that imported from Byzantium.

This discussion of the types of dress worn and their possible ceremonial or hierarchical significance raises another more fundamental question about the social and ritual functioning of these images: their realism. The apparent inconsistency of the robes in which Davit IV or Giorgi IV, for example, are portrayed has parallels in other areas. Thus, the crown worn by Queen Tamar seems to undergo quite radical modifications between the solid, bejeweled crown at Vardzia and the more intricate metalwork crown at Bertubani; and these in turn bear little resemblance to the grid-like crown worn by Demet're at Macxvariši or the Byzantine crown with *pendilia* seen at Ošk'i. It is highly improbable that the design of the crown underwent so many changes both between and within reigns, so how should the changes be explained? The constant emphasis, in all the images, on continuity and legitimacy and on a justification of Bagrat'ioni rule based on past precedent, even stretching back to the prophet David, suggests that innovation and apparent instability would have been avoided.

I have argued so far that these portraits were designed to project images of power, rather than reflect the actual status of the government. Their importance lies in the construction of the images and what it can tell us about the self-perception of the Bagrat'ionis and their aristocracy. Thus, any explanation of these changes in apparel and attributes must be seen in this light. They are changes in symbolism, not necessarily status. There was no need, or desire, to be "accurate," since it was the impression of power, not its details, that mattered. Each image had to be coherent within itself, rather than comparable with what came before or after it. There was no overall consistent policy of royal promotion, but rather a series of policies designed for different audiences, locations, or purposes, each of which required its own formulation of power.

The Mechanics of the Image

The preceding discussion has shown the importance of royal images in the maintenance of the exclusivity, permanence, and authority of the Bagrat'ionis. However, it is also possible to ask whether the images had a more complex role and acted as a

significant focus in the cult of the ruler. If this can be established, it would again show the debt of the Bagrat'ionis to Byzantine theory and practice of royal imagery. In Byzantium, the central importance of art in the promotion of the personal power of the ruler had been established by Athanasius in the fourth century: "The emperor's image bears such perfect resemblance to him that . . . if anyone wished to see the emperor after seeing his image, it [the image] would rightly exclaim: 'I and the emperor are one; for I am in him and he is in me: whatever you see in me you see in him, and what you have seen in him you see in me.' Hence whoever venerates the image also honours the emperor in it. The image is therefore his species and his form."³³ Anything addressed to the emperor could be addressed equally to his image, thus enabling the emperor to maintain a physical presence throughout his realm, regardless of his personal whereabouts.

The proliferation of secular images in Georgia and the long history of their use there suggest that this image theory had some resonance in Georgia.³⁴ Their appearance in churches where they are unconnected with acts of donation strengthens this case. Here, the evidence of imperial imagery in contemporary Byzantium, especially during the reign of Queen Tamar, points to many parallels in their appearance, perception, and use. The clearest way to comprehend the power invested in images is through the cases of their destruction. The story related by Stepanos Orbeliani about the annihilation of all textual and visual references to his family after their failed coup against Giorgi III in 1177 shows just how much the king feared the influence and power of their continued visual presence.³⁵ This was not just the political or financial destruction of the Orbelis, but their complete spiritual and earthly eradication.³⁶ With no images, all access to the family was lost.

This has a very close parallel in the manipulation of images in the reign of Andronikos I Komnenos (1183–85) in Constantinople, which involved the alteration, mutilation, destruction, and replacement of portraits of his imperial predecessors, with the aim of negating the power of the images either to harm him or to attract sympathy and political support.³⁷ The importance Andronikos attached to imperial images was reflected by the populace of Constantinople, who destroyed and abused the images of the emperor after his murder by the mob in 1185, in direct imitation

33. Athanasius, "Oratio III Contra Arianos," PG 26:332; trans. F. Dvornik, in *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background*, Washington, D.C., 1966, 2:733–34.

34. The history of royal imagery in Georgia can, of course, be traced back to the sixth century and the panels of the Church of Jvari at Mxeta; W. Djobadze, "The Sculptures on the Eastern Façade of the Holy Cross of Mtkheta," *OrChr* 44, 1960, 112–35; *OrChr* 45, 1961, 70–77.

35. Stepanos Orbeliani, *History*, in *Histoire de la Siounie par Stéphane Orbélian*, trans. M. Brosset, St. Petersburg, 1864, 1:212 and 221.

36. C. A. Bourdara, "Quelques cas de *damnatio memoriae* à l'époque de la dynastie macédonienne," *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress* 2, pt. 2 (= *JÖB* 32/2), 1982, 337–42.

37. See A. Eastmond, "An Intentional Error? Imperial Art and 'Mis'-Interpretation Under Andronikos I Komnenos," *Art Bulletin* 73, 1994, 502–10; the source is Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, 332–33; trans. Magoulias, *Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 183–84.

of their treatment of the emperor's own body.³⁸ The presence of the emperor in images, and the reactions to that presence, acted as a central facet of the imperial cult. The power of the image helped extend the power of the emperor, and, conversely, destruction of the image diminished his power. Images provided a coherent focus for the imperial cult, and their removal played an important part in the change of regime. The case of the Orbeli images and the careful selection of only "good" Bagrat'ionis for inclusion in the dynastic portrait at Natlismcemeli suggests that a similar process was at work in Georgia.

The Function of Secular Images in the Church Decorative Program

Since all the painted secular portraits that have been considered have formed part of the overall programs of the churches they adorn, they must have had some function within those programs. It is here that they differ from the images in palaces, which, because of their narrative nature and more secular location, cannot have been regarded in the same way. Similarly, the carved reliefs produced by the first Bagrat'ionis in T'ao-K'larjeti on the exteriors of their churches must have had a different function. It is conceivable that the external image of Bagrat' and Davit at Ošk'i could have acted as a focus for worship, given its location close to ground level, by the apse, but this certainly could not have been true of the image of Sumbat' at Dolisq'ana. This can only have been commemorative, and it is probable that the other early reliefs were also limited in purpose. However, the question remains of the extent to which the painted images could act as focuses of worship in the church. First, we must ask whether the images of the other, nonroyal figures, especially those of the *eristavs*, were regarded in a way similar to that in which those of their Bagrat'ioni overlords were regarded.

In every case that has been considered, the royal images are placed on the north wall of the church, while the secondary donor portraits are in a clearly inferior position, either on the south wall of the church or, in the case of Vardzia, tucked away behind the Bagrat'ionis on the north wall. This fact has often been noted, but has normally been given only a social, hierarchical interpretation.³⁹ Their position on the north wall has been viewed relative only to that of the secondary donors: the royal figures are better lit than the others; they are sited on the right hand of Christ

38. Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, 352; Magoulias, *Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 194.

39. Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 12–29; Thierry, "Le souverain," 151–55.

or the Virgin in the apse (or, as in the case of Vardzia, closer to it); and they are generally larger. However, I propose that these relative positions were of greater significance than just social demarcation and that this positioning was influenced by the location of the main entrance to the church and its possible liturgical and processional uses.

A fact of great importance about Georgian churches, which is often underemphasized, is the primacy of the southern entrance over the western entrance. It is normally marked out by an elaborately decorated porch or an important scheme of painting, and it is often the location of the major dedicatory inscription of the church. The decorated narthex at Gelati is one of the few exceptions to this, hence its importance. This emphasis within the architectural and pictorial scheme on the southern entrance must have reflected some form of processional or liturgical importance for this entrance, which must have affected the way in which the royal portraits on the north wall were viewed.

The royal portraits on the north wall would have been the first element of the decorative scheme to be seen on entering the church, before the viewer turned to the apse or dome. The royal images were therefore in a prime position in the churches. The importance of this location can be seen by comparing it to treatments elsewhere in the Byzantine world. At the Church of Sv. Nikita, Čučer, in Macedonia, for example, the site opposite the main entrance is given over to the patron saint of the church, who is displayed in a painted architectural surround, similar to the arrangement seen at Q'inc'visi.⁴⁰ It could, therefore, act as the principal focus of a church.

Equally, an image of the ruler could clearly play some part in the liturgical cycle, which pictures of the other members of society, with no religious dimension to their status, could not. The royal family was divinely chosen and had a quasi-priestly status, proven in Georgia by the fact that the new ruler was taken into the sanctuary during the coronation.⁴¹ This, combined with their supposed descent from the royal house of David, gave them a holy status denied to the rest of society. In art this was proved by the use of haloes to maintain a distinction. Nonroyal donors are never shown with haloes, even in churches where no Bagrat'ioni is depicted.⁴² This sets the Bagrat'ionis apart from their subjects and places them firmly in the ranks of the saints around them and suggests that they might have been regarded in a way similar to that in which the saints around them were regarded. To some extent, the secondary donors appear as intruders in the scheme of paintings, since they are so determinedly terrestrial, whereas the Bagrat'ionis are more suited to their surroundings. The difference in status between the two groups, one shown as living saints, the

40. R. Hamann-MacLean and H. Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien*, Gießen, 1963, vol. 1, pl. 222.

41. See the coronation service in Appendix III.

42. The only exception to this is at Betania, where neither group is shown with haloes, but this may be explained by the restoration of the church in the nineteenth century.

other performing deeds of generosity in order to gain an equivalent status after their deaths, must have reflected a difference in the way their images could be used in the church ritual.

Pictorial Devices

The argument in favor of the Bagrat'ioni images' acting as a focus of worship is supported by the use of artistic devices to mark them out, which are not used for other figures in these churches. Primarily they are on a larger scale than the other figures, comparable only with the figures of Christ, the Virgin, and the angels accompanying the *Glorification of the Cross* in the other centers of focus in the church: the apse, dome, or vaults. They are also given much more space. Vardzia and Bertubani provide the best examples of this, in that the broad, monumental images of the Bagrat'ionis contrast markedly with the small and cramped rows of saints around them. The other main device is the use of some sort of architectural or painted frame: either a physical niche in the wall, some form of painted niche or arcade, or a well-defined painted border. Again, these act to focus attention on the royal figures and away from the other parts of the church. They are certainly more prominent than the other saints.

These devices have parallels elsewhere in the Byzantine world. As noted above, the Church of Sv. Nikita, Čučer, places the patron saint of the church in just such a painted frame on the north wall of the church, and at Nerezi the image of Saint Panteleimon is placed in a sculpted frame by the templon screen in the twelfth-century church dedicated to him.⁴³ The adoption of these devices to highlight the Bagrat'ionis, rather than the patron saint of each church, shows how significant royal imagery had become in the pictorial program. At Natlismcemeli the framing of the royal figures takes up much of the north and west walls and certainly supports the idea of a well-developed form of royal cult. The various surviving documents relating to the Bagrat'ionis' attempts to link themselves with the divine add weight to such an idea. The legend of the origin of the Bagrat'ionis, expounded from the earliest years of the dynasty under Ašot' I Kuropalates, and all the later poems in praise of Davit IV Ağmašenebeli and Queen Tamar show how sophisticated these cults could become.⁴⁴ However, while many of the texts, especially the histories, are posthumous creations, the visual evidence shows that the cults originated much earlier, in the reigns of each ruler. This can be seen most clearly at Macxvariši, where Demet're's

43. V. J. Djurić, *Vizantijske freske u Jugoslaviji*, Belgrade, 1974, pl. V.

44. N. A. Marr, *Drevnegruzinskie odopiscy*, vol. 4 of *Teksty i razyskaniia po armiano-gruzinskoj filologii*, St. Petersburg, 1902. Salia, *History*, 197, even claims that Tamar was regarded as the fourth person of the Holy Trinity.

pose linked him unambiguously with Saint Katherine and so developed the royal cult alongside that of a locally venerated saint.

The Location of the Image

One further element of the royal image to be considered is the status and location of the image itself. This is to go beyond Athanasius's statement about images (quoted earlier in this chapter), which sought to deny the distinction between ruler and image and, thereby, to imbue the ruler with a symbolic omnipresence, and ask instead whether the structure of the image played a part in the cult of the ruler. Is the ruler shown in this world or in the next or as a medium between the two?

Christ, the Virgin, and the saints were all shown in the next world, Heaven, watching over and indeed influencing actions in this; and nonroyal donors were clearly still on earth. The Bagrat'ionis, on the other hand, with their haloes and quasi-saintly status appeared in between. Saints could act as a focus of prayer and intercession for worshipers, but the royal figures (and to an extent the other donors as well) acted in reverse. They were in this world, but had direct links with the other, which were made manifest by the wall paintings: these showed that their prayers would be guaranteed a hearing. However, although they are definitely "of this world," they are depicted on the walls as being in the next world and as part of God's army of saints. To some extent, this can be explained as the visual depiction of the fulfillment of prayer, in that, after all, the rulers were predestined to go to Heaven after death; but the images still retain much ambiguity.

This is made more apparent by the variety of ways in which the donors are depicted. In some cases, such as Vardzia, the scale of all the figures in the donor scenes suggests that the donors are shown in the actual presence of holy figures: Giorgi III and Tamar and Rat'i Surameli literally appear before the throne of the Virgin and Christ. The implication is that they have transcended this world to be present at the divine court.

Other churches created an illusionistic framework to root the royal figures in this world, away from the divine. Thus, at Natlismcemeli and Q'inc'visi the rulers are placed in a painted arcade that separates them and their space from that of all other wall paintings in the church. This is extended at Q'inc'visi by the reduction of the figure of Christ to that of a framed icon, a device that is repeated in the image of Ant'on Glonistavidze on the south wall and in those of the royal figures at Bertubani: all are approximately life-size and pray to what appear to be painted imitations of framed panel icons. The question whether these representations were meant to be regarded as "icons" is problematic, since it is now impossible to establish whether they were recognized specifically as pictures of pictures at the time, and so accorded

any special veneration, or were merely accepted as being on a par with the other images in the church. They interrupt the dissolution of terrestrial and universal space that the church otherwise represents.⁴⁵

Depictions of "icons" from elsewhere in the Byzantine world can help to clarify the situation. Some examples, such as the depictions of icons of the Virgin and Child in the scene of the *Translation of the Body of St. Stefan Nemanja* at Studenica and at Sopoćani⁴⁶ or in the depictions of the Akathistos hymn at Markov Manastir,⁴⁷ are clearly parts of narrative compositions in which the icon is not meant to act as a visual focus of prayer for the viewer. In these cases they are merely illustrative.

However, other forms of depiction of icons do seem to have had more significance. Among the representations of saints at Hagia Sophia, Ohrid, and at Bačkovo are extra saints within pictorial frames.⁴⁸ These use illusionistic devices to imitate the appearance of a panel icon: thus, at Bačkovo these saints are shown only bust length and are placed in a painted brown frame with a ring "hanging" from a nail in the wall, while other saints stand beside them.⁴⁹ These saints become icons in their own right, and it seems as if the Q'inc'visi *Christ* and the Bertubani *Virgin and Child* are less elaborate examples of this type. The difference between Bačkovo and the examples in Georgia is the lack of "realism" in the latter cases, but it can be argued that the "icons" here are given a similar symbolic status by their relationship to the donors, with whom they share space in the same images. Their use in a donor panel has a parallel at Psača in Macedonia, where the patrons offer a model of their church to an "icon" of Saint Nicholas.⁵⁰

These issues of realism and illusionism, and of the status of an image of an icon, as opposed to an icon, are very complex and cannot be fully addressed here. What is important for this discussion is to note the way in which such a depiction seeks to break down the distinction between the world of the worshiper and that of the painted donor while retaining a separate visual plane for other images in the church. The secular figures now appear in our space and not as part of the cycle of saints, and their gestures demonstrate this: they are praying to the "icon." At At'eni a similar device is used, whereby Christ and the Virgin are shown appearing to the donors from behind clouds in *this* world. This should be contrasted with Vardzia, where the

45. This issue is discussed, but not resolved, by H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, Chicago, 1994, 172–79.

46. Djurić, *Vizantijske freske*, pl. 24; T. Velmans, *La peinture murale byzantine à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Bibliothèque des Cahiers Archéologiques, no. 11, Paris, 1978, pl. 40.

47. A. Grabar, "L'Hodigitria et L'Eléousa," *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti* 10, 1974, 3–14. Velmans, *Peinture murale*, pls. 41 and 43.

48. On Hagia Sophia, Ohrid, see Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 173, and Hamann-MacLean and Hal-lensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei*, Gießen, 1976, 2:168–71. On Bačkovo, see E. Bakalova, *Bačkouškata Kost-nica*, Sofia, 1977, fig. 39.

49. The example of Bačkovo is especially important, since it provides evidence that these illusionistic tricks were known and appreciated in a Georgian monastery and so available in Georgia itself.

50. Velmans, *Peinture murale*, fig. 1.

donors are definitely shown in the next world, in the presence of Christ and the Virgin. One system attempts to distance donors from the next world and root them in this; the other attempts to show them among the celestial hierarchy.

The function of the distancing device is to reinforce the ideas of presence and royal devotion outlined above. The donors are shown in the process of undertaking the activities of the worshipers in the church, venerating icons. They thus manage to act in two ways: they are both images themselves and figures worshiping images. Their presence on the wall indicates their devotion to God and their destined place in Heaven; and their action, the veneration of icons, portrays them as model worshipers providing a lead for the congregation in the church. The ambiguity of the images demonstrates the many virtues of the Bagrat'ionis denied to other, ordinary worshipers in the church. The royal figures could, of course, still act as a focus of worship in their own right, but they now have the additional capacity to act as model demonstrations of the worship and veneration of images.

The complete corpus of surviving royal images shows the variety of ways in which the relationship between the ruler and Heaven could be depicted, from Dolisq'ana, where Heaven is effectively omitted, to the churches of Tamar, where the meeting of worlds is shown in much more sophisticated ways. There were no proscriptions or standard rules about the portrayal of royal figures and no uniform depiction of the world to which they belonged. Their ability to appear either in this world, in Heaven, or somewhere in between created a deliberate ambiguity that must have added to the mystique of the monarchy by showing how the Bagrat'ionis could move from one world to the other with apparent ease.

The Inclusion of Living and Dead Figures in the Same Image

The ambiguity of the boundary between the two worlds must have been more apparent to the first congregations in these churches than it is today. In particular, the combinations of living and dead figures among the donors meant that it would have been impossible to draw the line as clearly as I have suggested above. This is certainly seen at Iṣxani, At'eni, Natlismcemeli, Betania, and Q'inc'visi, and quite probably also occurs at Vardzia and Bertubani. The intermingling of the living and the dead argues against any interpretation of these royal portraits as being literal or realistic portrayals of the ruling dynasty in this world. Thus any attempts—for example, at Q'inc'visi—to make the royal figures appear in a “real” space apart from that of the saints around them was immediately undermined by the contradiction in the simultaneous presence of the dead Giorgi III and the living Tamar and Giorgi IV

Laša in the same architectural framework. This must have been explicit in the construction of the panels.

The confusion arising today in so many of the examples from Georgia, such as the question whether Tamar was alive or dead when Bertubani was painted, must have been taken into account when the panels were painted. The question here is one of planning: did the designers of the royal panel consider only their short-term influence (to display the power of the current ruler) or also their long-term significance, as memorials to the Bagrat'ionis after their deaths? Since churches were considered to be the embodiment of heaven on earth, and since much of the meaning of the royal panels is drawn from the location of the royal figures in celestial company, the eventual mortality of the royal figures must have been apparent to the planners and artists of the churches, and so any distinction between the living and the dead would have had only limited validity. I have argued above that the royal panels deliberately blurred the divide between this world and the next as a means of enhancing the sanctity of the Bagrat'ionis. Thus, the apparent confusion of Q'inc'visi or Betania, where no difference is made between the living Tamar and Giorgi IV and the dead Giorgi III, would never have been visible to its first audience in such a literal form. The scenes are not concerned with realism but with images of power. This supports the view that the main purpose of these panels was commemorative and very much idealized. They are concerned with rulers and with no one else. Every visual and compositional device, as well as every choice for inclusion, was designed to promote the ruler. The absence of spouses and nonreigning or younger children further reinforces this emphasis. The reasons for the unique presence of Davit Soslan, Tamar's second husband, at Natlismcemeli have been outlined above, but while the church also includes the infant Giorgi IV Laša, it ignores his younger sister Rusudan. This, I have argued, was probably because it was thought that Rusudan, who was both younger and female, would not likely rule in her own right in Georgia and so was not considered an integral part of the royal power structure, which suggests that Queen Tamar's position was thought to be unique even during her lifetime. Rusudan was presumably destined to be married off to forge a foreign alliance, in the same way as younger sisters in the past.⁵¹ The fact that Rusudan did eventually reign in Georgia (1223–45) could not, of course, be included in the church in retrospect. Apart from Davit Soslan at Natlismcemeli, no nonreigning members of the royal family are shown, however important or influential they may have been. The various Bagrat'ioni marriage alliances with Byzantium, the exploitation of which might have been useful to bolster the family's international and imperialist credibility, are not

51. Indeed Rusudan married the son of Toghri, the sultan of Erzurum. She therefore fits into the standard structure of diplomatic marriage alliances practiced in Georgia. Other examples include Giorgi II's sister, Maria of Alania, who was married to two Byzantine emperors, and Davit IV Aḡmašenebeli's two daughters, of whom Kata was married to Alexios, son of Nikephoros IV Bryennios and Anna Komnena, and Tamar to Manushahr II Shirvanshah.

shown in any surviving monument.⁵² The only other women depicted are Guran-duxt' and Isduxt', neither of whose roles in their images is clear.

Thus, it seems that the combination of living and dead figures was an important part of the presentation of the royal family. The Bagrat'ioni portraits are purely images of royalty. Their aim is to present the Bagrat'ioni reigning dynasty to the church congregation in as imposing and complete a manner as possible. It is for this reason, I believe, that the images are so closely linked with the rest of the church program, since the meanings of the royal images can thereby be enlarged and deepened. The choice of royal figures is part of the same process. Nonessential members are excluded because they do not enhance the royal image. Therefore, similarly, Giorgi III and other dead figures are included because they are in some way important. In the cases of At'eni and Natlismcemeli the dead kings provide a dynastic context for the living donors. At the other Tamar churches, Giorgi III fulfills the same purposes. As Tamar's father, he also plays a part in the management of Tamar's gender, which, as I have argued above, is to a great extent subsumed by the stress on the male descent of the family and on its martial and imperial aspects.

The panels seem rarely to refer to or to commemorate "real" events. Only the panels that explicitly show the Bagrat'ionis as donors (at At'eni, Gelati, and Vardzia) can be linked to definite events, the construction or decoration of that particular church, but even this has proved to be very complicated. Otherwise the royal panels seem to be very generalized references to the monarchy. Even the case of Macxvariši, for which it should be easy to establish links to a "real" event (since it appears to depict one), cannot be said to be a direct visual response to any particular happening, for it was painted fifteen years after the event it depicts. Instead, Macxvariši and the other churches appear to be attempts to create events and demand responses. They create an image of the monarchy, as a quasi-saintly focus of worship. Thus, the way that Tamar and Giorgi III are shown praying at Q'inc'visi, through the "icon" of Christ to the doctrine of the death and resurrection of Christ on the east wall of the north transept, creates an image of the Bagrat'ionis as the embodiment and teacher of divine wisdom.

52. The only possible exception to this is the 1036 "Bana" scene at Ošk'i, which may have shown the marriage of Bagrat' IV to Helena, niece of Romanos III Argyros.

PATRONAGE AND THE CREATION OF ROYAL IMAGERY

The final question to be investigated concerns the patronage of the churches and the mechanics of the creation of imagery. The principal subject of this book has been the relationship between the donors of each church and the proposed interpretations of their churches. I have assumed that the programs of the churches were carefully planned with the royal images in mind and that specific images were chosen and placed in certain locations to affect the interpretation of these panels. Thus, the choice of individual saints and even the juxtaposition of particular scenes have been seen as devices used to promote associative “meanings” and implications for the royal figures depicted. This has been shown to have been particularly important for the reign of Queen Tamar, when there was increased need to present a positive and strong image of the queen.

This concentration on the possible royal interpretations of church programs is only one of many that could have been adopted to analyze the churches, and provides only a partial analysis of them. In some cases, such as Betania, this interpretive strategy has not been very fruitful. Here, alternative approaches that exploited the

many liturgical or iconographic meanings of the dense Passion or Old Testament scenes might have been more profitable. However, from the point of view of the development of royal imagery, even the absence of meaning has produced its own information. In general, it has been possible to characterize most of the churches as "royal" foundations and to analyze them in this light, since they do reflect royal preoccupations so clearly. Yet, as we have seen, many of the churches have secondary, nonroyal donors, and this approach has tended to reduce their importance and even to confuse or play down their part in the execution of the commission. It is now necessary to investigate the mechanics of patronage and the relationship both between the patron and the church and between royal and nonroyal donors. How did the aristocratic donors accommodate their royal overlords? How free were they to design the churches in their own interests? Were the royal panels and associations in their churches imposed?

This chapter is about the control of the design of churches and imagery and hence the influences behind their interpretation. Did being the donor, and so having financial control, automatically bring with it artistic control? Or should we distinguish between the "donor" and the "patron," that is, between the person who paid for the monument and the person who devised and controlled the imagery that went into it? This raises broader questions about the creation of imagery in Georgia. Were the Bagrat'ionis able to determine their appearance and the context in which they appeared on every occasion, or was it a more ad hoc process, often organized by local bodies to suit their own needs?¹ The preceding chapters have argued for a fragmentary and diverse notion of the control of patronage, but it is still necessary to look for underlying patterns and themes. Every church does generally cohere to quite a restricted system of royal representation: what determined this, and what prevented a much wider range of royal images from being formulated in churches?

However, before it is possible to consider these questions of the creation and control of imagery, it is necessary to assess the evidence we have about patronage and the possible ways it could influence the church decoration.

Evidence About Patronage

Evidence about the patronage of Georgian churches and the act of donation is very scarce. It can be found in the images and inscriptions on the churches themselves, in references in the chronicles, and in a few other documentary sources. Normally, textual references to patronage in *Kartlis Cxovreba* are very cursory and uninforma-

1. For a model for this kind of investigation into the nonroyal nature of royal art (in Imperial Rome), see P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, Michigan, 1988.

tive. They note various rulers' and other nobles' connections with a number of establishments, but never in any detail.² They give no clues to the aims of each foundation or, more important, to the involvement of the founder. Thus, typically we learn only that Ašot' II "built T'beti in Šavšeti and completed it with all care."³ The other information given in *Kartlis Cxovreba* about patronage is even more formulaic. This concerns the long lists of monasteries throughout the Christian world from Mount Athos to Jerusalem, Cyprus to Sinai, Bulgaria to Libya, that the Bagrat'ionis, but especially Davit IV and Tamar, supported.⁴ Here again, detail is very limited and is more concerned with fitting Davit and Tamar into the idealized image of the great Georgian ruler than with describing the nature and extent of each act of patronage. International patronage is established in *Kartlis Cxovreba* as principally a royal activity, although the evidence of the *Synodikon* of the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos shows that nonroyal figures, such as the *mc'ignobartuxucesi* (head of the royal chancellory) Ioane, whom it numbers among its benefactors, were also able to organize these complex donations.⁵

The only case in which the purposes of a foundation and the aims and motives of the donor are explained in *Kartlis Cxovreba* is in the description of Davit IV Ağmašenebeli's foundation of Gelati.⁶ We are told of the desire of Davit that his mausoleum monastery should be a new Jerusalem and a new Athens. The magnificence of the complex and the manifest links between the decorative program and Davit's political aims support this claim, but even so, it is impossible to establish the degree to which these hyperboles are the embellishments of the chronicler on seeing the complex and the degree to which they reflect Davit's original plans.

Inscriptions in churches provide rather more information, both about the extent of the resources provided by the donors and their ultimate goal in supporting the foundation. At Ošk'i, for example, alongside the sumptuous images of the patrons Davit III and Bagrat', who are depicted in the act of making their donation to Christ, is an extraordinarily detailed account of their financial input. It appears in the main dedicatory inscription of the church, located over the south door, and enumerates many seemingly trivial details: "The annual expenditures and wages for the masons

2. An example of this brevity is the foundation of the monastery of Tiğvi by Tamar, the aunt of Davit IV: KC 1 (*Laša Giorgis-droindeli Memat'iane*), 366₁₄₋₁₅; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 50.

3. KC 1 (*Cxovreba da Uc'q'eba Bagrat'onianta*), 380₁₋₁₁; Pätsch, *Das Leben*, 470-71.

4. About Davit IV, *Kartlis Cxovreba* says: "He filled the lavras, meeting-places and monasteries, not only in his own realm, but also in the lands of the Greeks, the Holy Mountain and Borğaleti and again in Assyria and Cyprus, the Black Mountain and Palestine, with plenty, and still more the tomb of Our Lord Jesus Christ, while he enriched the monasteries of Jerusalem with a variety of gifts. His beneficence extended even further: for on Mount Sinai . . . he built a monastery and donated many thousand pieces of gold, hangings of brocaded velvet, a complete set of ecclesiastical books and choice gold vessels for divine service." Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 36; KC 1 (*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 352₂₃₋₃₅₃₇. The generosity of Queen Tamar is similarly described in KC 2 (*Cxovreba Mepet-mepisa Tamarisa*), 141₂₄₋₁₄₂₇; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 85-86.

5. J. Lefort, N. Oikonomides, D. Papachryssanthou, V. Kravari, and H. Métrévéli, *Actes d'Iviron*, vol. 2, *Du milieu du XI^e siècle à 1204*, Paris, 1990, 10 (no. 155).

6. On Gelati, see KC 1 (*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 329₂₀₋₃₃₁₃; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 13-14.

and hired workers and for the ox carts carrying the sand was 20,000 *dramas*, the wine 5,000 *phisos*, the iron 50 litres, the grain 250 *grivi*. The number of regular working masons, carpenters and blacksmiths was 70, the number of oxen carrying the stone was 30, the number of mules and other pack animals which were transporting the *spondiki* from the environs of the monastery of St Grigol was 30.”⁷ Clearly the two donors believed that the extent of the resources committed to Ošk'i demonstrated their faith and so would aid them at the Last Judgment, although no picture of their interest in the design of the monument or its imagery comes across. Most other dedicatory inscriptions are substantially shorter than this and concentrate instead on the ultimate purpose of the gift: the salvation of the donors' souls.

The only other source of information about patronage comes from the relatively small collection of charters listing donations given to certain Georgian monasteries. The majority are royal charters to the monastery of Šio-Mğvime and cover the period from Bagrat' IV to Giorgi IV Laša, although some earlier nonroyal charters also survive.⁸ The monastery is located in the hills to the west of Mcxeta and so is in the very center of the Georgian kingdom. It was built around the cult site of Saint Šio-Mğvimeli, one of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers, and was, therefore, a major focus for religious activity. It is impossible to ascertain how typical these charters are, especially since so few other documents survive. The monastery seems to have been greatly favored by the Bagrat'ionis, with many additions by them, including a large brick basilica church, built next to the original sixth-century church by Davit IV Ağmašenebeli.⁹ The documents are mainly concerned with privileges, services, and land granted to the monastery. They give lists of territories, of cattle, and of immunities granted to the monasteries, and their prime interest to historians is economic and topographic. Since the charters are solely concerned with these transactions, they give the impression that the Bagrat'ionis willingly supported the life of the monastery, but left its administration up to its own authorities. They make no reference to the use to which these gifts should be put, or to the way in which the gift should be commemorated, except by prayer.

Patronage appears from these sources almost solely as an impersonal affair. The *Synodikon* of the Iviron Monastery on Athos, which lists the donors to be commem-

7. Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 132–34.

8. The Georgian texts are in *KISK'*, 35–111. The royal charters to Šio-Mğvime comprise nos. 4, Bagrat' IV (1057/8); 6, Giorgi II (1073); 8, Davit IV (1123); 11, Giorgi III (1170); 20, Tamar (1195); 23, Giorgi IV Laša. These have been analyzed and partially translated by B. Martin-Hisard, “Les biens d'un monastère géorgien (IX^e–XIII^e siècle): Le témoignage des actes du monastère Saint-Šio de Mğhvime,” in *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantin*, ed. V. Kravari, J. Lefort, and C. Morrisson, Paris, 1991, 2:113–52. Other charters survive from nonroyal donors, as well as from royal donors to other sites, including Gelati. Most have been translated into Russian by S. S. Kakabadze, *Gruzinskie dokumenty IX–XV vv*, Moscow, 1982, 47–68. (The Georgian texts can also be found in I. Dolidze, *Kartuli samartlis dzeglebi* (Monuments of Georgian law) Tbilisi, 1965, 2:12–35).

9. See Alpagò-Novello, *Art and Architecture*, 437–38, for further references to the architecture and history of the monastery.

orated, confirms this. It suggests that the support given by Queen Tamar to the monastery was responsive, not active: she gave money to repair the monastery when approached by the monks after some undisclosed disaster.¹⁰ It is an act only of economic support. There is no information about the extent to which the Bagrat'ionis were actually involved in the life of the monastery, or about whether they determined the use to which their gifts were put.

This information is not without its value, however. It demonstrates the social importance and prestige attached to patronage and the particular value of royal donations. It also shows that the donors could have wielded great influence because of their wealth. Moreover, it is possible to see the way secular patrons did, in a less specific way, determine the nature of the foundations they supported. Here we are aided by Byzantine foundation *typika*, which record how pervasive this influence was, even without any active interference by donors in the decoration of the church.¹¹ They show that the life of the monastery revolved around the salvation of the donors' souls and that everything was designed with that end in mind. Patronage was not just the starting point for a foundation, which then evolved in accordance with its own needs, but its end point as well. If the monastery did not pray for its founder or commemorate him properly, it was not fulfilling its duties.¹² As a result, everything was arranged around the donor's wishes. The timing and frequency of services, as well as part of their content, was explicitly determined in advance. The majority of the space in Byzantine *typika* is taken up with these details. The *typikon* of the Pantokrator monastery in Constantinople, built by John II Komnenos by 1136, determined every aspect of the life of the monastery, including the numbers of monks, their daily routine, and their food. It also determined the number of lights to be placed before individual icons during the liturgy in the founder's honor and the holy images to be brought before his tomb.¹³ It shows the importance of everything in the monastery, but especially the visual environment of the church, to the well-being of the donor. Every donation was, in effect, an exchange: a gift in return for prayer and a greater hope of eternal life.¹⁴

Thus, by definition, the act of patronage did have an enormous impact on the working of a monastery. It provided it with its *raison d'être*. However, the textual

10. Lefort et al., *Actes d'Iviron*, 2:10. The sixth-century *Life of St. Sabas* suggests that patronage in the Holy Land followed a similar form: the Byzantine emperor's gifts were always in response to requests from the monks, and his interest did not extend beyond the actual donation; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, trans. R. M. Price, ed. J. Binns, Kalamazoo, 1991, 125, 152, 184–87.

11. C. Galatariotou, "Byzantine Ktetorika Typika: A Comparative Study," *REB* 45, 1987, 89–107.

12. On the power of monks' prayers for laymen, see R. Morris, "The Byzantine Aristocracy and the Monasteries," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX–XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold, B.A.R. International Series, no. 221, Oxford, 1984, 113–16.

13. P. Gautier, "Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator," *REB* 32, 1974, 1–145. The section on lighting is on pages 36–37. The other scenes similarly permanently lit are the *Last Supper*, *Christ Washing the Apostles' Feet*, and the *Koimesis*. These scenes also feature prominently in some of the Tamar churches, notably Vardzia.

14. On this issue, see H. Franses, *Symbols, Meaning, Belief: Donor Portraits in Byzantine Art*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1992.

evidence concentrates only on the general effects of patronage. It shows the way in which the patron used the foundation to promote his eternal salvation. I have argued in this book that patrons also used their foundations to promote their well-being in this world, by displaying themselves in images. It is here, in the possible influence of the patron over the details of the church decoration, that questions about the control of imagery begin to arise more concretely.

The Donor Image

The actual image of the patron is the first obvious place to look for evidence of patronal influence. Here, if anywhere, the donors would have been most interested in determining the nature of the imagery, if only to guard their appearance for posterity and promote their self-image. The long-term appearance of all the images was an important aspect in their creation, as we are reminded by the note in Macxvariši: “To whomever shall become *mamasaxlisi* of this church: protect the colors from dirt and smoke.”¹⁵

As might be expected, the donors appeared in all their finery, and they looked as magnificent as possible. The images did not aim at naturalistic or realistic depictions of the donors, as can be seen most clearly in the model Persian image of beauty in Queen Tamar’s portrait at Vardzia. Here, we do see the ideal self-image of the donors.

Another factor that is apparent is that, in every case, the identity of the donor should be obvious. The problems in identifying figures encountered in this study have all arisen from damage to the images. The desire for individual identity has come across very clearly from all the Georgian images. Even the early sculptural reliefs at Op’iza and Dolisq’ana, which did not concentrate on visual likeness, had achieved this through inscriptions. Elsewhere, however, every Bagrat’ioni ruler has been given specific items of dress or attributes to aid identification. Even the ranks and social positions of nonroyal donors have been made clear and their dress carefully depicted. The details of these “portraits” clearly owed as much to court protocols and hierarchies as to the self-aggrandizement of each donor. Even in the one case, Macxvariši, where I have argued that the image of the king was used most clearly by the nobility to their own ends, it was in their own interests to portray Demet’re in all his glory.

15. T. Virsaladze, “Freskovaia rospis' xudožnika Mikaela Maglakeli v Macxvariši,” AG 4, 1955, 186:

[ვინცამ]ას ეკლესია[სა] ...ან მამასახლისი: აყო[ს] კვამლისაგნ შვი [კ]რძალეთ
[ხატუ]ლი რ ~ ლ [ფე]რი არ [და] აკლოს

The Overall Scheme of the Decoration

The locations of the images also generally adhere to a common pattern (on the north wall of the church), indicating that this was the preferred position for such images. This must have had an important influence on the design of the rest of the program, especially in the churches such as Vardzia or Natlismcemeli, where the donor images take up so much of the available wall space. Of course, much of the decoration must have been determined by the theological and liturgical needs of the clergy who would use the church. This would affect the apse decorations in particular. Regional interests also had to be taken into account, such as the Georgian cult of the glorification of the cross, or the Svanetian interest in certain saints. These elements cannot be described as reflecting patronal interests in anything other than the most general sense. However, within that broad interpretation, it is possible to see some correlations between donors and certain scenes. I have noted the frequency with which the images of the *Crucifixion* and the *Anastasis* appear in juxtaposition with the donor images and believe that it reflects in a general way the donors' need to be seen in the presence of the ultimate truths of Christianity, Christ's death as a man and his resurrection. Nicole Thierry, conversely, has argued that this may be largely coincidental and that limited space and the restricted choice and order of scenes made such visual links almost unavoidable.¹⁶ However, I think that this again shows the general influence that the presence of a donor image had on a church. Since the choice and location of images varies so much between churches, it becomes impossible to analyze these changes with any degree of certainty. There are no hard-and-fast rules concerning the organization of a church decorative program. Moreover, there are very few churches without donor images that could act as controls. The most complete example in the Tamar period is Timotesubani, but, even here, losses leave the complete program unclear.¹⁷ I believe that the conjunction of certain scenes or themes and secular figures was deliberately designed. This is not to say that it was always consistent, but that it was done with deliberation and planning. It need not be seen as an individual request or even a specific element in the planning, but rather it should be seen as a fundamental expression or explanation of patronage itself. It is the presence of

16. Thierry, "Le souverain," 153.

17. E. L. Privalova, *Rospis' Timotesubani*, Tbilisi, 1980, figs. 5 and 6. The anonymity of Timotesubani has encouraged many authors to try to establish the identity of its patron, but with no convincing success or supporting evidence. The possibility that such a church could have had a royal donor must be borne in mind, as the salutary example of the monastery of Nea Moni on Chios shows. This monastery was founded by the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos, but the only link with the emperor comes from the extant chrysobulls describing the foundation, there being no visual or written evidence in the church itself. See D. Mouriki, *The Mosaics of Nea Moni on Chios*, Athens, 1985, 1:37, who argues that the image of Solomon in the *Anastasis* may be a crypto-portrait of Constantine IX.

any donor image, rather than the influence of a particular patron, that affected the design. This again returns us to the long-term, eternal influence of patronage.

More specifically, it is possible to examine individual elements in the design, especially individual saints, to find more concrete examples of patronal influence. Here, if anywhere, it has always been assumed that the patrons should have had the widest freedom to intervene and include their own "favorites" among the selection: those best able to protect and intercede on their behalf in the next world, as well as the best role models for them, their families, and those under them in this world. Again, Nicole Thierry has counseled caution here, arguing that the saints should not be used to comment on donor figures. She sees the choice and placement of saints as part of a separate "religious" organization of the church quite apart from the "secular" aspect of the donor portraits. This is made clear in her description of the saints accompanying the secondary donor image in Vardzia, who she does not believe can be linked with Rat'i Surameli himself.¹⁸ Since none of the five men in the panel is identifiable, this cannot be investigated further, although, as I have noted above, my preference is that some link should be assumed. Thierry's position presents a minimal view of the aims of patronage and its influence over the church program.

I believe that in some cases a link between the patron and the choice of saints can be proved, especially in the cases where the imagery is striking or new. Thus, the appearance of the ecumenical councils at Gelati, of Saints Constantine and Helena at Boč'orma, of Saint Katherine at Macxvariši, and of Saint Nino at Vardzia have all been linked to specific historical or political circumstances that show that these examples were determined to suit immediate royal needs, as well as more general, eternal goals. However, there is an area of ambiguity in this matter. My arguments have fixed upon selected elements within the church program. If one saint is used to argue in such a way, must every saint or scene in the church be open to a similar interpretation? Can we explain Saint Katherine or Saint Nino only if we can similarly explain Saint Barbara or Saint Marina as well? Is it possible to pick and choose the "royal" imagery from the church program and discard the rest?

I would argue that it would be impossible to find comprehensive readings of these churches. The royal interpretations are, after all, only secondary ones. Every saint or scene already had a prime reason for being there, as a model of Christian virtue or narrative. The church fathers in the apse, for example, appear in every church, and simply because of their ubiquity it would be hard to provide a convincing "royal" interpretation of them. It is, therefore, only in the unusual that these links can, at first, be made. However, their meanings could change and develop. Thus, in the case of Saint Mary of Egypt, her first appearance at Vardzia may have been because of the growing interest in the visual depiction of the liturgy and in eucharistic decoration.

18. Thierry, "Le souverain," 145. She does, however, accept that there was clearly a link between King Demet're and Saint Katherine at Macxvariši, and later between Queen Tamar and Saint Nino at Bertubani.

Yet she also had a second possible relevance, in promoting female virtues, which could benefit Queen Tamar. As Tamar's reign progressed and the same juxtaposition recurred, this parallel would have become more prominent and so would have gradually become an expected part of the visual accompaniments of the queen. Thus, it is conceivable that she was required to be included with Queen Tamar, since the imagery would have been incomplete without her. Perhaps her royal interpretation, then, emerged rather than was created.

This idea of the meaning of images developing and changing in a rather informal way leads to the more fundamental question of the control of imagery. All the discussion above about the patrons' influence has assumed direct control, but as the preceding chapters have shown, one of the problems about royal imagery has been that, in the majority of cases, it was commissioned by nonroyal donors. The analyses of the churches have shown that valid royal interpretations can be found, but the question remains whether they were determined by a central, royal authority and imposed on the churches or developed in a much more independent way. What follows will not undermine the validity of the royal interpretations proposed, but it will establish more clearly the mechanics of the creation of imagery.

The involvement of the secondary donors seems to have varied. I argued that at Macxvariši the royal imagery was adapted to fit the *eristavs* into the hierarchy of power and so ultimately aided them,¹⁹ but at Q'inc'visi the scheme seems entirely to adulate the Bagrat'ioni rulers. Were the Bagrat'ionis involved in the same way in each church? In neither case are they shown making any act of donation (offering their churches or a legal deed), as they are at Vardzia or At'eni. Equally, the Bagrat'ionis at Bertubani show no indication of donation. Are these purely commemorative panels, acknowledging the power of the rulers, or do they provide evidence of royal involvement?

Perhaps these royal images are linked to patronage in only the most "propagandizing" way. But whether they were involved in these churches or not, their public image required them to be seen as generous and ubiquitous donors. It was, therefore, in the interests of the Bagrat'ionis and was the expectation of their subjects that they should be depicted wherever possible. This is not meant to be a cynical view, suggesting that a manipulative central authority imposed the images on the churches in order to promote the Bagrat'ionis. It was, rather, a way of expressing the nature of the monarchy and was as much in the interests of the actual donor and users of the churches as of the Bagrat'ionis. A modern analogy in the United Kingdom is the opening of newly built public buildings by the queen or royal family. The royal family

19. Additionally, it seems that the scheme was also used by *mamasaxlisi* K'virik'e to promote himself as well. If, as has been argued, he was merely the executor, rather than the commissioner of the design (Virsaladze, "Macxvariši," 186; Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 46), then he used his position to include himself in the program. A similar interpretation has been placed on the praying figure who appears on the carved column in the southwest vestibule at Ošk'i, who is normally identified as Grigol, the supervisor of construction mentioned in the main dedicatory inscription of the church (see Figs. 16 and 17).

usually has no involvement in the design, construction, or use of the buildings, but by opening them (and leaving a permanent reminder of this act in the form of a plaque or photograph), they confer on the building the legality and respectability of their position. This is beneficial to both sides, since it expands the profile of the royal family and shows its interest in its subjects and, at the same time, confers on the building and its patrons the exclusive approbation of this social elite. This has its parallel in the inscriptions carved into many nonroyal churches. Thus at Iṣxani, rebuilt by Archbishop Ant'on in 1032, Ant'on claims that the work was carried out for the glorification of Giorgi I, Bagrat' IV, and his children.²⁰ In this case there seems to be no reason, other than loyalty, that has made the bishop acknowledge his rulers. Byzantine chronicles and others attest to the large number of such commemorative panels installed in churches, although very few survive today.²¹

The only contemporary monumental example similar to the Georgian combination of royal commemoration panel with other donor scene is in the Martorana church in Sicily. Although the church has undergone many restorations, it seems that the two panels, one showing the coronation of King Roger II by Christ, and the other the admiral George of Antioch in proskynesis before the Virgin, were designed as a pair and were probably placed opposite each other, perhaps in the narthex of the church.²² As in the Georgian examples, the royal panel makes no reference to any act of donation. Indeed, the image of coronation shows Roger II partaking in a different ceremony, with a possible counterpart only in Macxvariṣi. In the case of the Martorana, the original foundation document for the church survives. This indicates that, although the church was under the patronage of George of Antioch, Roger did grant the church some privileges and allowed his seal to be attached to the charter. In this way he facilitated and guaranteed the legality of the foundation. Ernst Kitzinger argues that, as a result, the king could have been regarded as co-founder of the monastery, or at the very least the protector of the foundation. He, therefore, appears to give the church royal legitimacy. The same could well apply to the two-donor churches of Georgia, with the Bagrat'ioni portraits acting as the visual guarantors of each church, to give it added protection from any possible encroachments on its rights. Rather than indicate a specific one-off donation of an actual monetary gift or some other, the panels seem to refer to the gift of legitimacy and guarantee of security provided by the recognition of a nonroyal establishment by the Bagrat'ionis. It is thus possible to argue that it is the *image* of the Bagrat'ionis

20. Appendix I, D.

21. An example is the record of all the Byzantine emperors and patriarchs in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, made by the pilgrim Antony of Novgorod in 1200. See C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972, 237.

22. E. Kitzinger, *The Mosaics of St. Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies*, no. 27, Washington, D.C., 1990, 206-11. Although Kitzinger looks for comparable examples for the juxtaposition of royal and other portraits, he does not use the plentiful number of comparisons available in Georgia, which provide excellent contemporary evidence for his argument.

that is the donation. Much like Roger II's seal on George of Antioch's charter, the royal images in the church provide a permanent visual reminder of the authority behind the foundation, to ensure that it should not be challenged, at least during the depicted figures' lifetimes.²³

However, my argument in the previous chapters has gone further. It has seen the royal panels as being at the center of various networks of meaning, whose significance derives from the juxtaposition of the scenes around them. In this case, they are not simply images of legitimacy, but images that derive and create their own legitimacy within the space of the church: they are not present just to serve the interests of the other patron. There is, therefore, an apparent contradiction between the idea of the church and its decoration being designed to serve the patron's interests and to ensure his salvation and the idea that, in fact, much of the decoration is designed to serve the interests of the royal figures depicted. Thus, at Q'inc'visi, Ant'on Č'q'on-dideli seems to have built the church to aid his own salvation, but the imagery on the north and west walls establishes an important framework of meanings and connotations for Queen Tamar; and similarly, at Vardzia, Tamar and Giorgi III act as the focus for much of the imagery in a way that Rat'i Surameli cannot. Can a church serve two masters?

The Creation and Control of Imagery

The question, especially with reference to such issues as who chose the individual saints, is nothing less than who designed the church. Did the nonroyal patron have to subsume all his ideas under a prescribed royal plan? Was it a price he had to pay for permission to build a church? How much royal control was exercised over royal imagery?

The evidence of the programs of all the churches detailed in the preceding chapters, I propose, argues that royal control, if it existed, was very limited. The differences in the way royal power is presented, for example, is too great for any overall consistency. Gelati and Macxvariši, probably painted within a decade of each other, displayed fundamentally different views of royal power. Gelati showed the ruler as the sole holder of Christ's power on earth: he was the prime and principal judge, even in ecclesiastical affairs. Macxvariši showed the king, not as the sole wielder of divine power, but as the conduit through which power is channeled to the lower orders of the ruling elite. Equally, there are great differences in the ways in which Tamar's rule is depicted: at Vardzia, it was shown mediated through her father; yet

23. In Sicily, many of the Hauteville establishments went into rapid decline after the death of their founders, notably Monreale, which lost many of its privileges after William II's death; see O. Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, London, 1949, 94.

at Natlismcemeli, she was shown ruling conjointly with her husband. At Betania and Q'inc'visi, Tamar's role seemed to be to transmit power between her father and her son; and finally, at Bertubani she appeared to rule alone, but with the support of her son. Her power was sometimes promoted through male parallels, but also through female ones. The early churches showed that a conflict existed even in the overall view of the monarchy as it moved between local, Byzantine, and Islamic modes of presentation. These differences all suggest that the Bagrat'ionis had no single, central policy regarding what their power and they themselves represented. This is not to say that they had no concept of their power, only that they had no individual mode of appearance to which they had to adhere. Of course, they wanted and expected to be shown in the best possible light, but they had no clear blueprint to impose upon the patrons of the churches. The churches of Queen Tamar, in particular, seem to explore new ways of presenting and molding the royal image, which seem, at times, to contradict each other. This suggests that a variety of approaches was being tried. It is here that more information about the creation of Georgian coins would be invaluable: were the Islamic inscriptions and imagery incorporated by the (presumably Islamic) minters, or consciously cultivated by the Bagrat'ionis?

The secondary donors, whose presence in the churches widens the social base from which the images are derived, provide one way of explaining these discrepancies. There was certainly no central "ministry of propaganda" with overall control of royal imagery and an ability to force the new church decorations into line. Instead, royal power appears as a fragmentary notion that could quickly be adapted to suit each new audience or patron. However, between these many images there are many links that may be explained by the rank and position of these donors. The social position of the known donors has been mentioned above, but not their possible cohesion. These were all men intimately involved in the court life of Georgia, such as it was. If they were not central court officials, such as Ant'on Č'q'ondideli, they were local military lords, who must have come together with the Bagrat'ionis for that *de facto* royal court, the army on its summer campaigns. Their power and position largely depended on the personal appointment of the Bagrat'ionis, and so they would all have been concerned to maintain their rulers. Their own power, as was clearly seen at Macxvariši, was defined by their rulers'. They all shared similar notions of the nature and purposes of the monarchy. These would emerge in the process of designing the program of a church.

The overall messages might have been determined by individuals, but much of the language used to evoke it was part of a perhaps less consciously realized system. Some areas, I accept, must have been deliberately organized. The company in which Tamar was placed (whether with her long-dead father, with her husband, or with her son, but never with her daughter) and the choice of her dress and pose were all factors that must have been decided with care. Here it is difficult to envisage the way in which the decisions were made and by whom. Was it national, political require-

ments that compelled the inclusion of Giorgi III after his death, either because of his policies or because of Tamar's perceived weakness? Or was it a personal desire of Queen Tamar to honor her father, or of the secondary donors to honor a king who had in some way helped them? It would be possible to come up with any number of these personal, political, or other explanations, and I have discussed them with reference to each of the churches above. These parts of the decoration must, I believe, have had some identifiable, if elusive, origin (although the repetition of the same royal iconography at Q'inc'visi and Betania suggests that a dominant and copiable, "standard" manner of depiction could perhaps evolve).

Elsewhere in the decorative schemes, this less conscious development is more apparent. The lack of consistency between the churches and the accompanying threads that can nevertheless be traced in many of them suggest that the various themes were developed in a more ad hoc way. The importance of patronage here lies in the social links established between the churches, which tie them together in a way that strengthens their similarities. All the churches were initiated within the same social milieu, and the cultural uniformity behind their creation would encourage similar responses to the problems raised by the decoration.

We do not, therefore, need to propose a central "ministry of propaganda" for the emergence of the undoubtedly complex way in which the Bagrat'ionis were represented to their subjects by the beginning of the thirteenth century. It is possible, instead, to envisage a much more effective system that enlisted all the patrons and planners in its operation in a less conscious way. The underlying ethos of the court and the conformity it must have encouraged among its members would have ensured that all the churches were designed on broadly similar lines. It also enabled the motifs and images that appear repeatedly to be disseminated throughout the court and so be copied. There are, of course, many differences between the churches in matters of detail, but the overall similarities in approach are much greater. The royal portraits and the network of readings at whose center they lie reflect this approach very well. They were clearly not conceived according to one line, as noted above, and so cannot be described as being "royal" products. Instead, it is better to look at them as having been conceived within a much broader court system that encompassed a much greater variety of views and interpretations of the Georgian monarchy. The problems inherent in the depiction of Tamar and her gender brought these differences to the fore, although they were apparent at the beginning of the twelfth century in the differences between Gelati and Macxvariši.

CONCLUSION

The end of the reign of Queen Tamar marked the high point in the development of royal imagery and so represents a logical place to end this book. It did not, however, mark the end of the need to promote the Bagrat'ionis, and royal imagery continued to be produced by Tamar's heirs and successors throughout the thirteenth century and beyond. The Mongol invasions, which crushed the Bagrat'ioni kingdom, did not lessen the need for such images. The portraits of Davit VI Narin (1245–92) in the south chapel at Gelati and of Demet're II (1270–88) in the Church of the Annunciation at Udabno in the Gareji Desert show that the promotion of the king remained an important feature of royal life and art.

However, these later kings built on the artistic heritage that had been developed in the preceding three hundred years. Their images were based on a structure of meanings that had reached its most elaborate state under Queen Tamar. Moreover, the new political circumstances of Mongol vassalship and divided rule meant that these later images had to develop new meanings in reaction to a very different state system, and they are better studied elsewhere. The period that has been studied in this book established the frameworks that governed the creation and development of royal imagery. I have shown the ways in which royal imagery could be used to provide new interpretations of royal power, and the ways in which it could be manipulated to suit different audiences and purposes.

In the book, I have sought to demolish the monolithic image of the Bagrat'ionis in *Kartlis Cxovreba* and replace it with a more complex set of fragmentary images. At times these have seemed to be inconsistent and even contradictory. However, I have shown that this is because they were designed either for different audiences or to suit different political circumstances. The Bagrat'ionis have been seen to have had many different faces, and to have been careful to show the correct one on each occasion. Thus, what I have described elsewhere as inconsistency was, in fact, evidence of the careful structuring of royal imagery. These images were designed to be exclusive of

each other. There was no one image of a Bagrat'ioni king. Even in the reign of Davit IV Aǧmšaenebeli, when a careful Byzantine image of power seems to have been most consistently cultivated, it is possible to see that it could still be tailored to meet particular needs. The complex relationship between the Bagrat'ionis and their nobles, which was reflected in the patronage and meaning of so many of the images that have been studied, also played an important role in determining how many different images were presented.

This must have some repercussions for discussions of the nature of power in medieval Georgia. In any examination of the state or government this diffused image of power must be noted. It is not possible to characterize or describe the workings of the government in any one simple way, such as "feudal" or "Byzantine." Instead, its ability to change rapidly must be noted, as must the many sources from which the power derived. By the end of the twelfth century, the Bagrat'ionis ruled over many different ethnic and religious groups, and they could only retain their authority over them by presenting different images of power to each one. The Bagrat'ionis' image of power could not comprise just one form of imagery, but had to incorporate many, whether Georgian, Byzantine, or Islamic, and it is only the cumulative total of these images that can give a full picture. Of course, it is the Christian, Byzantine image of power that predominates in the self-perception of the Bagrat'ionis, but it is interesting that the Islamic image, which at times seems at variance with the Christian, is also promoted very carefully. Indeed, there was no single self-perception of power in Georgia; rather, there were many such perceptions, each of which took over when necessary. Perhaps it is here that the true image of power in Georgia lies, in the Bagrat'ionis' ability to appear as true and devout rulers to all their subjects.

A P P E N D I X I

ROYAL IMAGERY BEFORE 1050

The details contained here provide all the available evidence about the known royal images and relevant supplementary information about the dating of the churches. The inscriptions and translations are reproduced in expanded form from their most recent editions. The entries about each building are not meant to be exhaustive.

A. T'beti (Figs. 1–3)

Church

The cathedral of T'beti is in the region of Šavšeti (now in eastern Turkey), but it partially collapsed in 1961.¹ The building measures 23 × 23 m and was originally dedicated to the Mother of God. It is a cruciform church with a domed crossing and dates from the early tenth century, but it shows evidence of later rebuildings of the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.²

Date

The church is dated by references in *Mat'iane Kartlisa* and Sumbat' Davitisdze's *Cxovreba da Uc'q'eba Bagrat'onianta*, which state that it was built in the reign of Ašot' II K'uxi, *eristav of eristavs* of T'ao, who reigned 891–918.³

Image

The donor image is now in the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts, having been removed there by a Georgian expedition after the First World War.⁴ It was discovered on the north side of the nave in 1911 by

1. The village has been renamed Cevizli. On the current condition of the cathedral, see J.-M. Thierry, "Topographie et état actuel des monuments géorgiens de Turquie orientale," *REGC* 5, 1989, 142–43.

2. On the architectural history of the cathedral, see Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 218–32; V. Beridze, *Architecture de Tao-Klardjéti*, Tbilisi, 1981, 309–10.

3. *KC* 1 (*Mat'iane Kartlisa*), 260_{1–2}; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 264; *KC* 1 (*Cxovreba da Uc'q'eba Bagrat'onianta*), 380_{1–11}; Pätsch, *Das Leben*, 470–71.

4. K. Mačabeli, "Ašot' k'uxis reliepi t'betidan" (The relief of Ašot' K'uxi from T'beti), *Macne* 5, 1968, 150–62; W. Djobadze, "The Georgian Churches of Tao-Klarjeti: Construction Methods and Materials (IX to XI Century)," *OrChr* 62, 1978, 132; N. A. Aladašvili, *Monumental'naia skul'ptura Gruzii*, Moscow, 1977, 87–88;

Nikolai Marr, who concluded that it had been moved there from the exterior during one of the reconstructions of the cathedral.⁵ The chronicle records indicate that the image represents Ašot' II K'uxi.

The image, which is 113 cm tall, is carved in high relief. It shows Ašot' wearing a belted tunic decorated with a lozenge pattern and jewels (?). Over this a surcoat embroidered with lions hangs from his shoulders. It has exceptionally long sleeves and a prominent, wide collar. Ašot's face and hands are lost, but it can be seen that he was bearded and wore some sort of turbanlike headdress; fragments of a halo survive behind his head. He holds his arms out in front of himself and must originally have been offering his church as a gift to Heaven. The detailing of the costume is very finely carved. No inscriptions or other reliefs are recorded as having been found with this image. It must, therefore, be examined in isolation.

Discussion

Giorgi Merčule's *Life of St. Grigol of Xandzta* records that Ašot' also began the construction of a new, larger church at Xandzta, the center of monasticism in the region.⁶ Both foundations were finished by Ašot's nephew, Gurgen II the Great, *magistros* of T'ao. Ašot's two foundations and his regnal dates are the only recorded facts known about this rather shadowy figure. Thus, apart from his patronage, nothing can be ascertained about the nature of Ašot's rule, except by examining the image he presented of himself at T'beti. The most significant aspect of this, the delicate and accurate depiction of Ašot's dress, is examined in the main text (pages 11–17).

B. Op'iza (Figs. 7–8)

Church

The church of Op'iza is in K'larjeti (now in Turkey), and measures 28 × 12 m.⁷ The monastery is dedicated to Saint John the Baptist and was the first to be rebuilt during the repopulation of T'ao-K'larjeti after the Arab raids and epidemics of the eighth century.⁸ It underwent rebuilding campaigns in the tenth century, but it is now almost entirely destroyed.⁹

Inscriptions

Three inscriptions, all in *asomtavruli* (majuscule) letters, named the principal patron of the church as Ašot' IV *kuropalates*; all are now lost:

Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 177; R. Mepisašvili and V. Cincadze, *The Arts of Ancient Georgia*, London, 1979, 223.

5. N. A. Marr, *Dnevnik' poezdki v' Šavšetiiu i Klardžetiiu*, St. Petersburg, 1911, 15–16. Beridze, *Architecture*, 309, has also suggested that the relief may have been moved to this location from the exterior of the cathedral when it was remodeled in the eleventh century.

6. Merčule, *Life of St. Grigol Xandzteli*, 276₃₅–277₂; Latin trans. in P. Peeters, "Histoires monastiques géorgiennes," *Analecta Bollandiana* 36, 1917, 254₁₋₅.

7. The village has been renamed Bağcılar. On the architectural history and reconstruction of the church, see Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 10–13; Beridze, *Architecture*, 299–301.

8. D. M. Lang, *The Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, London, 1956, 138–40; K. Salia, "La Tao-Klardjéti et ses monastères," *BK* 11–12, 1961, 47.

9. The church was still standing in 1955 (J.-M. and N. Thierry, "Notes d'un voyage en Géorgie Turque," *BK* 8–9, 1960, 28); the dome had been pulled down by 1965 (D. Winfield, "Some Early Medieval Figure Sculpture from North East Turkey," *JWCI* 31, 1968, 35 n. 5); but by 1989 only the south wall of the south transept and north wall of the north transept survived (Thierry, "Topographie," 141; and personal inspection, 9/1991).

1. A painted inscription on the west wall of the church (which accompanied a portrait of the ruler) read
 აშოტ კურაპალატი, მეორედ მაშენებელი ოფიზისა და წმიდისა ამის საყდრისა
 "Ašot' *kuropalates*, the second builder of Op'iza and this holy church."¹⁰
2. A painted inscription in the refectory read
 ესე მე, აშოტმან, დ ~ წელსა გავაშენებინე
 "I, Ašot', carried out the work of reconstruction in four years."¹¹ The two painted inscriptions were recorded by Nikolai Marr in 1904, but even then the image of the ruler was too fragmentary to be analyzed.
3. On the donor image the four main elements are named as (from left to right): ჯამოტ აშოტ'; ჯეკლესისა church; ჯეესუ ქრისტე Jesus Christ; ჯდავით Davit.¹²

Image

The relief was removed from its location on the south façade of Op'iza after the First World War and is now preserved in the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts.¹³ The image is carved in low relief across two panels (64 × 57 × 9 cm and 68 × 58 × 8.5 cm). It shows a man presenting a church to Christ, who sits enthroned. A third figure stands to Christ's left, raising his hands in a gesture of supplication.

Ašot', on the left, wears a garment with a broad, plain collar and belt. On his feet he appears to have heavy boots. He wears no sort of crown or distinguishing insignia and lacks a halo. Details can be made out, including disks attached to the sides of the collar and the distinct beadlike shape of the belt. Nevertheless, all such details are lost in the overall abstract patterning of the drapery folds, with its dense arrangement of parallel incisions. The figure of Davit, to the right, wears identical clothes; he is also bare-headed and has no halo. Christ is similar in appearance, although there has been no attempt to replicate the details of Ašot' and Davit's dress. Christ is distinguished by his halo, the book he holds in his left hand, and his throne, which is situated above six concentric semicircles, probably representing the six celestial spheres below heaven. There is great emphasis in the sculpture on the elongated hands and frontally depicted faces of all the figures, although there has been little attempt to give each man a distinct physiognomy.

Date

Traditionally, the image has been thought to show the first Bagrat'ioni patron of the church, Ašot' I the Great *kuropalates* (786–826), who helped build/restore the church. In this interpretation the figure of Davit, who stands to the right of Christ, is thought to refer to the prophet David, from whom the Bagrat'ionis claimed descent.¹⁴ More recently Nodar Šošiašvili has argued that the relief shows Ašot' IV *kuropalates* (923–54), the only other ruler named Ašot' to hold the title of *kuropalates*. It can be argued

10. Marr, *Dnevnik' poezdki*, 160. Unfortunately, Marr left no description of the image, which is now lost. The inscriptions here, and in all later cases, have been transcribed into modern *mxedruli* letters.

11. Marr, *Dnevnik' poezdki*, 163.

12. The inscriptions are expanded and explained by N. Šošiašvili, *Kartuli c'arc'erebis k'orp'usi: Lap'idaruli c'arc'erebi 1: Aḡmosavlet da samxret sakartvelo (V–X ss.)* (Corpus of Georgian inscriptions: Stone inscriptions 1: West and South Georgia [V–X centuries]) (= *KIC* 19), Tbilisi, 1980, 286.

13. N. A. Aladašvili, "Rel'ef iz Opizy s izobraženiem Ašot kurapalata," *Soob AN GSSR* 15/7, 1954, 473–78; Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 176–77; Aladašvili, *Monumental'naia skul'ptura*, 68–74; Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 79–80.

14. For the earliest references to the Bagrat'ioni's claim to descent from the prophet David, see C. Toumanoff, "Iberia on the Eve of Bagratid Rule: An Enquiry into the Political History of Eastern Georgia Between the VIth and the IXth Century," *Le Muséon* 65, 1952, 224–30; Salia, *History*, 129–31. On the historical origin of the Bagrat'ioni family, see K. Salia, "La Tao-Klardjéti et ses monastères," pt. 2, "L'origine de la dynastie des Bagrat'ioni," *BK* 13–14, 1962, 40–46. On the Byzantine side, see Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando imperio*, ed. and trans. G. Moravcsik and R.J.H. Jenkins, Washington, D.C., 1967, chap. 45_{1–8}.

from this that the third figure depicts Ašot's eldest brother, Davit, who held the titles of *magistros* and king of the Kartlians (Georgians) (923–37), and that the relief dates to the years 923–37.¹⁵ This argument is supported by Davit's appearance in robes and style identical with those of Ašot'. These similarities and the absence of a halo argue against his identification as the prophet. The new identification has been convincingly supported by Wachtang Djobadze on the grounds of a major expansion of the monastic church that can be dated to the mid-tenth century.¹⁶

Discussion

Ašot' and Davit were two of the four sons of Adarnase II who between them ruled in T'ao from 923 to 958. All four sons were involved in the government of T'ao-K'larjeti and in the patronage of the church, and images of the two other brothers, Sumbat' I and Bagrat' I, survive (or have been recorded) at Dolisq'ana and Išxani.

The emphasis in the reliefs on the figures' hands and faces, rather than their drapery, establishes the importance of the acts of donation and blessing as the overriding criteria in the design of the panel, rather than any political concern with the presentation of the brothers' earthly wealth and position. The few discernible details of Ašot' IV and Davit's dress show that this element was not ignored at Op'iza, but it was certainly not considered an important function of the panel. The absence of either ruler's titles further emphasizes this.

The main problem raised by the new dating is the confusion it adds to the question of stylistic progression in Georgian art and the use of donor images as political devices, since it moves the Op'iza panels between the apparent realism and sophistication of the Bagrat'ioni images at T'beti and Ošk'i. This is addressed in the main text (pages 17–19).

C. Dolisq'ana (Figs. 9–11)

Church

The church of Dolisq'ana is in Šavšeti (now in Turkey) and measures 16 × 12 m.¹⁷ It is the earliest church in which the royal donor image survives *in situ* and the smallest of the royal foundations in the Bagrat'ioni heartlands.¹⁸

Inscriptions

The patronage of the church is announced in three inscriptions:

1. The image of the donor on the southeast side of the drum of the dome is accompanied by the inscription

ქრისტე აღიდენ მეფე ჩოვენის სოკმატ

“Christ exalt our King Sumbat'.”¹⁹

15. Šošiašvili, *Kartuli c'arc'erebis k'orp'usi*, 286.

16. Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 9–15.

17. The village is now called Dolishane.

18. On the architectural history of Dolisq'ana, see Beridze, *Architecture*, 285–86, and Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 57–61, who both argue that Sumbat' only rebuilt an earlier church.

19. Marr, *Dnevnik' poezdki*, 184.

2. An inscription around the window on the south transept repeats the exhortation:

ქრისტე ადიდე მეფე ჩოვენის სოკუმბატ მზეგრძელობით

"Christ exalt our King Sumbat' and grant him long life."²⁰

3. A third royal inscription in the east niche of the south porch, which centers on a bust image of Christ, pleads:

იესოჲ ქრისტე წმიდაჲ ესე ეკლესიაჲ წე დღესა აღაშენეს მეფეთა ჩუნეთა ...
ქრისტე შეიწყალე

"Jesus Christ [help] our kings . . . the builders of this holy church at the Last Judgment. Christ have mercy on them."²¹ The use of the plural suggests that Sumbat's building campaign was supported by one of his brothers, but both names are now missing.

A further two inscriptions mention a deacon, Gabriel, who seems to have been either the sculptor or designer of Sumbat's church:

4. The first, on the south transept, accompanies a small bust portrait of a man with his arms raised in prayer (now badly defaced),²² and reads:

შეიქმნეს კელითა გაბრიელ დეკანოზისაჲთა

"[This] was created by the hand of Gabriel, the deacon."²³

5. The other confirms this:

წმიდაო სტეფანე შეიწყალე მოძღუარი გაბრიელ

"St. Stephen have mercy on the priest Gabriel."²⁴

Image

Sumbat' appears on the southeast side of the drum of the dome and is shown holding a model of the church.²⁵ The figure is now badly damaged, having been used for target practice, but the style of depiction can still be made out. Although the figure is in much higher relief than that at Op'iza, there is much less modeling, and the detailing is more crudely carved, the form of Sumbat's robes indicated only by shallow grooves, with alternate lines accentuated by diagonal shading. The beard, which radiates like a halo, is similarly depicted. The composition of the relief is also somewhat awkward, most noticeably in the position of Sumbat's left hand under the church.

Date

Sumbat' became king of Kartli after the death of his brother Davit in 937 and was granted the title *kuropalates* after Ašot' IV's death in 954, so the evidence of the titles given in the inscriptions suggests that the image was carved 937–54, very shortly after the Op'iza relief.

20. Marr, *Dnevnik' poezdki*, 185.

21. Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 69–70. I have followed Djobadze's reconstruction of this inscription.

22. Winfield, "Sculpture from North East Turkey," 38, who did not have access to the inscription, argued that the bust may have represented the prophet David, in allusion to the descent of the Bagrat'ionis. He linked this with the six-pointed star below the medallion, but there is no evidence that this symbol had any Davidic associations in Georgia in this period.

23. Djobadze, "The Georgian Churches of Tao-Klarjeti," 129; Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 68.

24. Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 68.

25. Winfield, "Sculpture from North East Turkey," 35–38; Aladašvili, *Monumental'naia skul'ptura*, 140–41; Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 81.

Discussion

The relief is curiously abbreviated, in that no divine figure is shown receiving the gift of the church or blessing Sumbat'. The king is shown as a generous donor but not in direct contact with Heaven. This is implied by his pose, since he holds the church out in front of himself, but no recipient is shown. The royal image also appears very isolated. It is not linked in any way to the other sculptural elements on the south transept. There, the two archangels, the small bust figure of the deacon Gabriel in a medallion, and the six-pointed star form a separate grouping, linked to the royal donation only by the repetition of the royal inscription exalting King Sumbat'.²⁶

D. Iṣxani

Church

The cathedral of Iṣxani is in T'ao (now in Turkey) and measures 37 × 24 m.²⁷ The present building dates from the eleventh century, but it incorporates many earlier elements, including the apse of the original seventh-century Armenian church and elements of a tenth-century rebuilding.²⁸

Inscriptions and Images

1. An inscription on the south wall of the room adjoining the north side of the nave describes the part played by the four sons of Adarnase II in the selection and consecration of a new archbishop of Iṣxani in 936–37. This demonstrates the joint nature of the rule of the four brothers:

ქრონიკონსა რლზ-სა, თუესა სეკტენბერსა ზ-სა შეწევნითა ქრისტესითა და მადლითა წმიდისა კათოლიკე ეკლესიისადათა ადარნერსე ქართველთა მეფისა ბრძანებითა დაადგინა ნეტარი მამამ ჩუენი ბასილი ეპისკოპოზი და ჰმსახურა ამას წმიდასა ეკლესიასა წელი ით: კეთილითა მოლოჯაწებითა და სროვლითა სარწმუნოვებითა და შეჰვედრა სოვლი თვისი ოვჯალსა: თოჯესა დეკემბერსა კვ დღესა პარასკევსა ქრისტე სოვლსა მათსა განოვსოვენე ამინ. და შემდგომად მათსა ბრძანებითა დიდებოვლთა ღირსთა მეფეთა აცხოვენე ღმერთმან მეფენი ჩოვენნი დავით ქართველთა მეფე და აშოტ კოვრაპალატი, ბაგრატ მაგისტროსი [და სუმბატ ანთი]პატრიკი: აღიდენ ღმერთმან წარავლინეს საბერძნეთს ტრაპეზონთა და მოვნი აკოვრთხეს მდღელთ მთავრად [იშხანისა] სტეფანე პატიოსანი და ღირსი მამამ ჩუენი კელითა ბასილი ღმერთ შემოსილისა და პატიოსნისა ბერძენთა პატრიარქისადათა თუესა მარტსა ა-სა დღესა კვრიაკვსა. ღმერთმან წერუმართენ ამინ. რამეთუ მას ჟამსა ოდენ ქერთლისა კათალიკოსი ნეტარი...

"In 'kronik'on 137 [917] in the month of September, [on the] 7th, with the help of Christ and the grace of the holy catholic church, by the order of Adarnase, king of the Kartlians, our blessed Father, Basil, was appointed as bishop and he served this holy church for 19 years with outstanding dedication and in complete faith and he entrusted his soul to God in the month of December [on the] 26th, a Friday. May God rest his

26. It is possible that the six-pointed star was included to allude to the descent of the Bagrat'ionis from the prophet-king David, but there is no evidence that the six-pointed star was yet recognized as the Star of David in the tenth century.

27. The village is now called Işhan.

28. On the complex architectural history of the cathedral, see Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 191–217; M. Kadiroğlu, *The Architecture of the Georgian Church at Işhan*, Frankfurt, 1991; D. Piguët-Panayatova, "L'église d'Işkhan: Patrimoine culturel et création architecturale," *OrChr* 75, 1991, 198–253; Beridze, *Architecture*, 289–91.

soul, Amen. After him, by the order of our glorious, worthy kings, may they be exalted by God, Davit, king of the Kartlians, Ašot' *kuropalates*, Bagrat' *magistros*, [and Sumbat' *anti*]p[at]rik[ios], our honorable, worthy Father Stepane was dispatched to Trebizond in Greece and he was consecrated as archbishop by the hand of the honorable and God-imbued Greek patriarch Basil, in the month of March, [on the] 1st, a Sunday. May God endow him benevolently with success, Amen. Because at that time [the catholicos] of Kartli blessed . . ." ²⁹

2. A group of three royal images was seen on the west wall of the cathedral at Išxani by Ekvtime Taq'aišvili in 1917, but is now lost.³⁰ The images took the form of monumental painted portraits, which were fragmentary and unreadable even when discovered. However, the inscriptions accompanying the images could be made out. From left to right they read:

ადრნესე კურატვალატი ძე ბაგრატ მაგისტროსისაა

"Adarnase *kuropalates*, son of Bagrat' *magistros*";

ბაგრატ მაგისტროსი ქართველთა მეფე

"Bagrat' *magistros*, king of the Kartlians"; and

ბაგრატ ერისთავთა ერისთავი: ძე ადრნესე კურატვალატისაა

"Bagrat', *eristav of eristavs*, son of Adarnase *kuropalates*."

The paintings must have shown Bagrat' I *magistros* and titular king of Kartli (937–45), the third son of Adarnase II, standing between his son Adarnase III (958–61) and his grandson Bagrat', *eristav of eristavs* (961–66).

Date

Since Adarnase III only received the title of *kuropalates* in 958, after the death of his uncle Sumbat', the paintings must have been executed after that date, at least eighteen years after the death of Bagrat' I.

Discussion

The loss of the portraits limits any analysis of them, but it is clear that they provided a more complex, dynastic image of the Bagrat'ioni family than seen before this date. Since Bagrat' seized power from his father in 961 by forcing him into a monastery (where he soon died),³¹ it is possible that this image was produced to emphasize the legitimacy of Bagrat's descent in the Bagrat'ioni family. However, in this case it is interesting that Bagrat's brother, Davit III *kuropalates* was not depicted, since he acted in concert with his brother. Given that the brothers are shown together twice at Ošk'i and that Davit III became the dominant ruler in Georgia at this time, his absence from Išxani is notable.

Later Inscriptions

Two later *asomtavruli* inscriptions added to the cathedral by bishop Ant'on in 1032 provide further information about the link between the royal family and the nonroyal donors of the church:

29. Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 209–11. (Note: of the three locations Djobadze gives for the inscription, only the first is correct.) Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 30–32. (The book is a Georgian reprint, with transcriptions of the inscriptions, of E. Takaišvili, *Arxeologičeskaia ekspediciia 1917-go goda v iužnye provincii Gruzii*, Tbilisi, 1952.)

30. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 7–31, esp. 21.

31. KC 1 (*Cxovreba da Uc'q'eba Bagrat'onianta*), 381_{16–20}; Pätsch, *Das Leben*, 472.

1. ქ. იესოჲ ქრისტე ადიდე ორთავე შინა ცხორებათა გიორგი მეფე და შვილინი მათნი ამენ. ქ. სახელითა ღმრთისა მთა მე გლახაკმა ანტონი ებისკოპოსმან იშხნელმან განვაახლე ესე კარისა ბჭე წმიდისა კათოლიკე ეკლესიისაი სადიდებელად მეფეთა გიორგი მეფისა და შვილთა მათთა სალოცველად სულისა ბაგრატ კურაპალატისაი, შენდობისათჳს ცოდვათა ჩუნთაი. წმიდაო კათოლიკე ეკლესიაო შემწე და მ ფარველ გოჲყავე წინაშე ღმრთისა და ნავთსაყუდელ ყვექმენ საშინელისა მას დღესა მისაგებელისაა წინაშე მსაჯოჲლისა ყოველთასა ღირს ვიქმნეთ მოტევებასა ცოდვათასა და წყალობასა ღმრთისასა გვედრები ყოველთა შემავალთა ლოცვასა მომიკსენე

“Jesus Christ, glorify in both lives the King Giorgi and his children. Amen. In the name of God I, miserable Ant'on, bishop of Iṣxani, have renovated this holy porch of the catholic church for the glorification of kings: the King Giorgi and his children, for the salvation of the soul of Bagrat' *kuropalates*, for the remission of our sins. Holy catholic church aid and protect us before God and be our abode during the awful day of retribution before the universal judge so that we may be worthy of forgiveness for our sins and of the benevolence of God. I beseech all entering through this door to commemorate me in your prayers.”³²

2. ქ. სახელითა ღმრთისაი მთა მე, ანტონი იშხნელ მთავარ ეპისკოპოსმან, განვაახლე და განვასრულე წმიდაი ესე ტაძარი ღმრთისაი, კათოლიკე ეკლესიაი, სადიდებელად ბაგრატ კურაპალატისა, სალოცველად და საკსენებლად სულისა ჩემისა და ცოდვათა ჩემთა შენდობისათჳს ქრონიკონსა სნბ და ვაშენე კელითა იოვანე მორჩაის ძისაი

“In the name of God I, Ant'on, archbishop of Iṣxani, have renovated and completed the holy catholic church of God for the glorification of Bagrat' *kuropalates*, for the salvation of my soul and the remission of my sins in kronik'on 252 [= 1032], and it was built by the hand of Iovane Morčaisdze.”³³

E. Ošk'i (Figs. 12–17, 21–22; Plates I and II)

Church

The church at Ošk'i is the largest in T'ao (now in Turkey) and measures 47 × 31 m. Its design is of great complexity, combining a longitudinal, latin-cross plan with a domed, centralized triconch church.³⁴ The apse and transepts terminate in conches with side chapels in two storeys. This arrangement must reflect a liturgical practice of some sophistication, which finds no parallel outside Georgia.

Inscriptions and Date

More than twenty inscriptions survive from Ošk'i.³⁵ Of these, the principal foundation inscription is to be found painted over the main entrance to the church in the south transept. This extensive text states that the church was built by Bagrat', *eristav of eristavs*, and his brother Davit III *magistros*, the two sons of Adarnase III; it goes on to detail the costs and construction methods of the building.³⁶ Bagrat' and Davit are mentioned together or individually in at least six other inscriptions (excluding those to be discussed below), and a further two commemorate the Byzantine emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII. These

32. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 12; Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 211–13.

33. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 13–14; Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 214–15.

34. On the architecture of the church, see Beridze, *Architecture*, 297–99; Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 92–141.

35. For all the inscriptions, see Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 46–57; Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 131–41.

36. The most recent edition and translation of this inscription is to be found in Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 132–35. Also, see pages 207–8 above.

date from the 1020s, when Ošk'i was in the Byzantine-controlled *theme* of Iberia. All the inscriptions indicate the importance of Ošk'i to the rulers of this region.

The exact dates of the building can be established from two other inscriptions.³⁷ The first of these, on a stone reused in a later building, states that the church was begun on the Feast of the Annunciation, 963,³⁸ and the second, on the east façade of the church, claims that it was completed within ten years.³⁹ The first inscription also gives the date of Bagrat's death as October 2, 966, indicating that much of the work must have been carried out by Davit alone.

Images

The two Georgian rulers appear together twice at Ošk'i, once on the exterior and once inside the church.⁴⁰

1. *The external relief* (Figs. 12–14; Plate II). The larger relief appears on the south façade of the church, to the east of the south transept. This composition shows the two kings each presenting their new church (in model form) to Christ. They stand to either side of a Deesis, with the Mother of God interceding with Christ for Davit and with John the Baptist for Bagrat'. The inscription over the ruler to the left of the composition reads:

ქ. იესოჲ ქრისტე ადიდე ორთავე შინა ცხოვრებათა გიორგი მეფე და შვილნი მათნი
ამენ. ქ. სახელითა ღმრთისა მთა მე გლახაკმა ანტონი ებისკოპოსმან იშხნელმან
განვაახლე ესე კარისა ზჳე წმიდისა კათოლიკე ეკლესიისაჲ სადიდებულად მეფეთა

"The slave of God, our king Davit *magistros*. May God exalt him in both lives; builder of this holy church. Amen." And that to the right reads:

წ. მონაჲ ღმრთისაჲ მეფეჲ ჩუენი ბაგრატ ერისთავთ ერისთავი ადიდენი
ღმერთმან ორთავე ცხოვრებათა მამენებელი ამის წმიდისა ეკლესიისაჲ. ამენ

"The slave of God, our king Bagrat', *eristav of eristavs*. May God exalt him in both lives; builder of this holy church. Amen." A further inscription over the reliefs emphasizes the meaning of the panel:

წმიდაო ღმრთისმშობელო და წმიდაო ნათლისმცემელო ადიდენ მეფენი ჩუენნი
გლახაკნი შენნი მამენებელნი ამის წმიდისა ეკლესიისანი და კუალად
წარუმართენ მეფეთა ჩუენთა ბაგრატს და დავითს

"O Holy Mother of God and Holy [John the] Baptist glorify our kings, your humble slaves, builders of this holy church; and also make our kings Bagrat' and Davit successful."⁴¹

The kings both have square haloes, indicating that this part of the church was completed before Bagrat's death in 966. Both rulers wear richly embroidered tunics, covered by equally elaborate *chlamydes*. The images were originally painted, which would have made their appearance more imposing and impressive.⁴² They also wear low rectangular crowns, from which hang *pendilia* (which are still visible on either side of Bagrat's face).

The meaning of these panels is relatively straightforward: they show the dedication of the church to Christ through the intercession of the Mother of God and John the Baptist. The donors offer their gift to the celestial in return for blessing and salvation. The image copies the format of most other Georgian and Byzantine donor images, but the scale and quality is more impressive. The location of the panel is close to the main entrance in the south transept and easily visible. It is located just above head height, and each figure is almost life-size, at over 165 cm tall.

37. For a detailed discussion of the dating of Ošk'i, see W. Djobadze, "The Donor Reliefs and the Date of the Church at Oški," *BZ* 69, 1976, 39–62.

38. Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 136–37.

39. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 55, inscription X.

40. Djobadze, "Donor Reliefs," 39–62; Winfield, "Sculpture from North East Turkey," 38–56; Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 32–58; Aladašvili, *Monumental'naia skul'ptura*, 117–35, esp. 120–33; Alibegašvili, *Svetkii portet*, 82; Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 178; Thierry, "Le souverain," 131–34.

41. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 52–53.

42. Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 113–19.

The image is one of a number of figural carvings on the exterior of the church, but does not appear to form part of an overall program of decoration. The other reliefs depict angels (high up on the south façade) and the stylite Saint Symeon the Younger (above the west window).⁴³ Above the south, main entrance there is also a relief of an eagle catching a hare in its talons (Fig. 15). This image is seen again in a similar location at Xaxuli and may have represented some form of royal heraldic device or symbol.⁴⁴

2. *The internal relief* (Figs. 21–22). Inside the church Davit and Bagrat¹ appear as small bust figures flanking a niche in the east side of the southwestern pillar supporting the dome. The niche is about 3.5 m tall, but only 0.8 m wide. It is large enough to frame one man; and the reliefs appear at just above head height. Again the Mother of God and John the Baptist are linked with the two kings, although this time only in the form of painted inscriptions on the sides of the two blocks. By the relief of Davit, who is on the south side of the niche, are the following two inscriptions:

წ. მონაღ ღმრთისაღ დავით მაგისტროსი მაშენებელი წმიდისა ამის საყდრისა
ადიდენ ღმერთმან. ამენ

“May God exalt the slave of God, Davit *magistros*, builder of this holy church. Amen.” And
ღმრთისმშობელი

“The Mother of God.” By that of Bagrat¹:

მეფე ჰუენი ბაგრატ ერისთავთა ერისთავი მაშენებელი წმიდისა ამის საყდრის
ქრისტე ადიდენ. ამენ

“May Christ exalt our King Bagrat¹, *eristav of eristavs*, builder of this holy church. Amen.” And
წმიდა ნათლისმცემელი

“Holy [John the] Baptist.”⁴⁵

In both sets of reliefs the kings again wear highly ornate costumes. Given the scale of the reliefs, it is hard to establish the exact nature of these robes, but one may note that they have broad collars and are elaborately decorated with rosettes. They are akin to the tunics worn on the exterior reliefs under the *chlamydes*. The kings are again shown with the same low rectangular crowns as on the exterior, but this time they also hold cross-headed scepters in their right hands. Such royal attributes are often seen held by the Byzantine emperor in tenth-century images.⁴⁶

These reliefs are the earliest surviving Georgian royal images not to be directly concerned with the act of donation. The array of royal paraphernalia shown with the two rulers, and their location around a niche in the center of the church beneath the dome, indicate that their presence is solely concerned with royal symbolism and the presentation of power. Possible interpretations of these bust images are discussed in the main text (pages 30–34).

3. *Other reliefs*. A third figure is depicted on the west face of the octagonal column in the southwest vestibule (Figs. 16 and 17).⁴⁷ He is shown kneeling below a Deesis with his hands raised in prayer. He has no halo and wears a simple tunic with elaborate belt and cuffs. He is identified in an inscription:

ქრისტე, შეიწყალე მონაღ შენი გრიგოლ

“Christ have mercy on your slave Grigol.”⁴⁸ This must be Grigol, the supervisor of construction, who is mentioned in the main inscription over the south door. The two adjacent sides of the column have broken busts of Saints Cosmas and Damian, and that to the north also has a small orant bust of Saint Nino, the earliest known appearance of this saint in art.

43. Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, figs. 160–62, 166. There are also low-relief scenes of animal fights on the cornices of the windows.

44. Compare Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, figs. 160 and 201. However, this image does not appear at any of the other royal churches of the 960s.

45. Djobadze, “Donor Reliefs,” 53–54; Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 135.

46. See, for example, the ivory of an emperor at Dumbarton Oaks: K. Weitzmann, *Byzantine and Early Medieval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, III: Ivorys and Steatites*, Washington, D.C., 1972, no. 25.

47. Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 105–8; Winfield, “Sculpture from North East Turkey,” 45–57; N. A. Aladašvili, “Vos' migrannaia kolonna iužnoi galerei xrama Oški,” AG 10, 1991, 69–80.

48. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 40.

F. K'umurdo (Figs. 23–25)

Church

The church of K'umurdo stands in Javaxeti. In architectural terms, the church is very similar to those built by Bagrat' and Davit III *kuropalates*, matching Ošk'i both in scale and complexity. It measures 35 × 26 m and, in plan, is a combination of a longitudinal church with transepts and a centralized, domed hexa-conch.⁴⁹ It has five conches: two in each transept and one in the main east apse. The western part of the church has a rectangular nave.

Inscriptions

The main, south door of the church is surrounded by a medley of at least eight inscriptions.⁵⁰ Of these, three with the *asomtavruli* letters carved in relief, rather than merely incised, testify to the foundation of the church. The principal inscription reads:

შეწევნითა ღმრთისადათა, იოვანე ებისკოპოსმან დაღვა საძირკველი ამის
ეკლესიისაჲ კელითა ჩემ ცოდვილისა საკოცარისადათა, ლეონ მეფისა ზმ - ადიდენ
ღმერთმან, ქრონიკონსა რჰდ, თთლესა მამსა ა, დღესა შაფათსა, ა მთუარისასა,
ერისთვობასა ზვიასსა; ესე ბალაჰვარი მან დიდვა; ქრისტე, შეეწიე მონასა შენსა,
ამენ

“By the grace of God, the bishop Iovane laid the foundations of this church, by the hand of me, the sinner Sok'ocari, in the time of King Leon, may God glorify him, in *kronik'on* 184 [= 964] in the month of May, on the first, a Saturday, at the new moon, when Zviad was *eristav*. This foundation was laid by him. Christ help your slave. Amen.”⁵¹

A second inscription commemorates the builders of the church:

წმიდაო ეკლესიაო, შენნი მუშაკნი და ყოველნი მამშენებელნი შენნი, დღესა მას
სამჯელისსა დაიფარენ და შეიწყალე; გლახაკი გიორგი ლოცვასა მომიკსენეთ

“Holy church, protect and take pity on your servants and all those who constructed you on the Day of Judgment. Remember poor Giorgi in your prayers.”⁵²

Image

Two relief carvings showing royal images survive in the squinches over the arches at the crossing, although the dome itself has now collapsed.⁵³ They are the only figural images to appear in these squinches, and there is no evidence to suggest that they are not original. They appear over the eastern arch, which opens onto the main apse. The northern relief shows a woman, who is named in an accompanying inscription as გ-ნდ-ტ: “GuraNDuxT'.”⁵⁴ She stands with her head slightly bowed and her hands held out in a gesture of supplication. A pattern of roundels can be seen on the cloth where it falls from her arms. The southern relief displays an unnamed bearded figure, who wears a long-sleeved overcoat draped over his shoulders. No ornament is shown on the dress, except around the hems. The man's arms are crossed over his chest.

49. On the architecture of the church, see N. Severov and G. Čubinašvili, *Kumurdo i Nikorcinda*, Moscow, 1947, 1–16, pls. I–XVI; Beridze, *Architecture*, 295–96; M. F. Brosset, *Rapports sur un voyage archéologique dans la Géorgie et dans l'Arménie exécuté en 1847–48*, St. Petersburg, 1849, 2eme rapport: 1:168–72.

50. V. Silogava, *K'umurdo t'adzris ep'igrapik'a* (Epigraphy in the church of K'umurdo), Tbilisi, 1994.

51. Silogava, *K'umurdo*, 39–41. See also MAK, 1909, 12:37–38; Brosset, *Rapports*, 1:167–68; Beridze, *Architecture*, 295.

52. Silogava, *K'umurdo*, 42–43.

53. Aladašvili, *Monumental'naia skulptura*, 80a–83 and 94–96.

54. Silogava, *K'umurdo*, 48–49; Severov and Čubinašvili, *Kumurdo*, 6.

Both images are carved in very low relief, and details of drapery folds and decoration are indicated sparingly. Neither figure has a halo.

The reliefs make no hint at donation. Guranduxt's gesture is one of prayer, but that of the man has no parallels.

Date and Discussion

From the main inscription we know that the church was built under the patronage (direct or otherwise) of Leon III, king of Abxazeti (957–67), who was also de facto ruler of Javaxeti and Kartli, although the title of king of Kartli was still held at this time by Bagrat' II (958–94). Guranduxt' was the sister of Leon III and Tevdos the Blind (976–78), who were both childless, and it was through her that Abxazeti passed to Bagrat' III of Kartli, the first king of unified Georgia, on her death in 978. It is interesting that Guranduxt' is given no title here. The man must be either Guranduxt's brother, King Leon III,⁵⁵ or her husband, Gurgen, king of Kartli (975–1008), who was the grandson of Sumbat' I.⁵⁶ The date of the church, its location in Abxazetian controlled territory, and the reference to Leon in the main inscription all indicate that the second figure must be the king of Abxazeti.

The church thus provides the only evidence of the royal imagery of the kings of Abxazeti. The relationship between this sculpture and the contemporary imagery at Ošk'i is discussed in the main text (pages 34–38).

G. Ošk'i (Fig. 26; Plate III)

A possible third royal image also survives from Ošk'i, in a wall painting that dates to 1036.

Inscription and Date

The date and patron of the paintings are given in a painted inscription among the images of church fathers in the main apse:

...ნ... განვაშუენე და შევამკვე ტაძარი წმიდისა წინამორბედისაჲ საფასათა
სულკურთხელისა ჯოჯიკ პატრიკისათა, აკურთხენ ღმერთმან და აღიდენ
ქრონიკონსა :სნვ [= 1036], ბერძენთა...

“... I have restored to grandeur and have painted the church of the blessed Forerunner, at the expense of Jojik' *patrikios*, of charitable soul. May God bless and protect him. *Kronik'on* was 256, [which is equivalent to 1036] of the Greeks . . .”⁵⁷

Images

Of Jojik's decoration little survives, some still partially covered in Turkish whitewash. Some church fathers stand in the apse, and some fragmentary scenes exist in the south conch. It is among these that the royal

55. This has been suggested by Amiranašvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 177–78; N. P. Severov, *Pamiatniki gruzinskogo zodčestva*, Moscow, 1947, 187; Alibegašvili, *Svetskii portret*, 80; MAK, 1909, 12:36.

56. This identification has been proposed by R. Mepisašvili and V. Cincadze, *The Arts of Ancient Georgia*, London, 1979, 109–10. Severov and Čubinašvili, *Kumurdo*, identify the figure as Gurgen in the text (6), but as Leon in the plates (XII).

57. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 56–57; Djobadze, *Georgian Monasteries*, 140. On the history of Jojik' and his family, see N. Thierry, “Peintures historiques d'Ošk'i (T'ao),” *REGC* 2, 1986, 150–52.

image is to be found. The east side of the conch contains the remains of the *Crucifixion*,⁵⁸ and the central section, over the main door, contains a composition similar to a Deesis. The heads and shoulders of all three figures are now lost, but their identities can be established from the surviving fragments, as well as Taq'aišvili's photographs of 1917. John the Baptist stood in the center, holding a scroll, with an unidentifiable bishop wearing an *omophorion* to his right and a secular figure to his left, who wears a mantle clasped at the breast and a tall turban.⁵⁹ This, presumably, represents the donor, Jojik' *patrikos*. The possible royal scene appears in the west section of the conch. The left-hand part of a composition survives, showing two groups of secular figures approaching the cathedral of Bana in T'ao, which is identified in an inscription.⁶⁰ Behind Bana is Davit *kuropalates*' foundation of Otxta Ek'lesia (now Dört Kilise in Turkey), which is also named in an inscription.⁶¹ The window jambs between the three scenes contain the remains of images of two women saints, Marina and Thekla.⁶²

Discussion

Although nothing survives to link this scene with the Bagrat'ionis, a royal scene remains the most likely subject for such a contemporary secular depiction. The cathedral of Bana was one of the principal royal churches of T'ao-K'larjeti. It was used for the coronation of Bagrat' IV in 1027 and his marriage to Helena, a niece of the Byzantine emperor Romanos III Argyros in 1032.⁶³ Since the wall paintings were added to Ošk'i in 1036, it is reasonable to assume that the scene commemorates one of these important royal events.⁶⁴

To place such a royal scene level with a Christological scene suggests that it was designed to carry great weight in the overall scheme, extolling the grandeur of the Bagrat'ionis and their alliance with the Byzantine throne. Its location by the main entrance to the church only adds to its prominence.

Narrative depictions of a royal event are very unusual in Byzantine ecclesiastical monumental art.⁶⁵ The church of Macxvariši (pages 73–83) contains a hieratic coronation image, as do many Byzantine manuscripts and ivories. The only other narrative depictions are found in the Madrid *Skylitzes*, but the coronation scenes in this manuscript form part of a continuing sequence and so cannot easily be compared with that at Ošk'i.⁶⁶ Given the state of the wall painting, it is impossible to come to any firm conclusion about

58. W. Djbadze, "Four Deësis Themes in the Church of Oški," *OrChr* 72, 1988, 180, misreads this scene as *Christ on the Way to Golgotha*. However, it is clear that the fragment shows Saint John lamenting, the centurion who recognized Christ, and a crowd of Jews, and not an image of a youthful Christ, as Djbadze supposes. This is confirmed by Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, pls. 68 and 69, which show an angel (now lost) above the centurion, and the left hand of Christ, nailed to the cross, is clearly visible to the left of the angel (pl. 68a).

59. Djbadze, "Four Deësis Themes," 177, proposes that this is an ordinary Deesis, with Christ, John the Baptist, and the Virgin. However, Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, pl. 68b, shows the torso and face of the right-hand figure as it survived in 1917, in which it is clearly a man in secular dress. Moreover, the inscription on the scroll held by the central figure is a prayer of John the Baptist addressed in the first person. It is unnecessarily complex to argue, as Djbadze does, that this supplication is held by Christ. For a fuller rebuttal of Djbadze's errors, see N. Thierry, "A propos des Deësis d'Ošk'i," *OrChr* 76, 1992, 227–34.

60. Djbadze, "Four Deësis Themes," 182: ბანას ეკლესია დაბ... "In Bana, the church was . . ." For the most recent work on the church of Bana (now Penek in Turkey), see R. Mepisašvili and D. Tumanišvili, *The Church of Bana: Problems of Research and Reconstruction*, Tbilisi, 1989.

61. I am very grateful to Zaza Sxirt'ladze for bringing this to my attention.

62. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 56 and pl. 69.

63. KC 1 (*Mat'iane Kartlisa*), 295₂; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 288.

64. Djbadze, "Four Deësis Themes," 182, and Thierry, "Peintures historiques," 141–43, have each proposed one of these identifications.

65. Such images are, of course, recorded in secular settings; see, for example, C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972, 184, 215–16, 224–25.

66. A. Grabar and M. Manoussacas, *L'illustration du manuscrit de Skylitzès de Madrid*, Venice, 1979: for example, figs. 1, 140, 164, 269. Since the Madrid *Skylitzes* was probably produced on Sicily in the twelfth century, it may also reflect different, Norman views of coronation.

its content. However, the location and size of the scene shows that in the 1030s the promotion of the Bagrat'ionis could dominate the decorative scheme of a church. Since Ošk'i had been under Byzantine control from the 1020s until 1034, as two surviving inscriptions in the church show,⁶⁷ this image could have played an important role in the reassertion of Bagrat'ioni rule in the region and in the propagation of its links with the Byzantine imperial family.

The nonroyal patronage of the paintings and the prominence of the image of Jojik' *patrikios* demonstrate the importance of members of the aristocracy in the promotion of the royal family at this time.

67. Taq'aišvili, *Eksp'edicia*, 57.

APPENDIX II

THE DATING AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE DONOR PORTRAITS IN THE SIONI CHURCH AT AT'ENI

As stated in the main text, seven donors appear on the north side of the west conch of the Sioni Church at At'eni (Figs. 28 and 29). The evidence for identifying the figures is given here.¹

The inscriptions and figures survive as follows.²

First group, who raise their hands in prayer to Christ:

1. An elderly man in monkish robes: ...*ჲ დედობს...*: "... son of the great ..." ³

2. A young, unbearded man wearing Georgian court robes in red, with an elaborate golden trim:⁴ no inscription survives.

Second group, who raise their hands in prayer to the Mother of God:

3. A bearded man, wearing the Byzantine imperial *loros* and a crown:

...*მამა გიორგი მეფისა შემოწირველი ჯუარმეწამულისა*

"... the father of King Giorgi, who gave the red cross."⁵ I. A. Džavaxišvili [Javaxišvili] also read the name "King Bagrat" to the right hand side of the figure.⁶ This is universally accepted to be Bagrat' IV (1027-72), who had been involved in the building of At'eni town.⁷

4. A bearded man, wearing elaborately decorated robes and a diadem:

სუმბატ ძე აშოტისი. ... სუმბატ შემოწირა [ბოტი[ნატი]...

"Sumbat', son of Ašot'. . . Sumbat' gave . . . [b]oti[nats]."⁸

5. A young boy, who is held by the hand by Sumbat' (no. 4 above):

[აშოტ უფლისწული ძე სუმბატისი

"Prince [Ašo]t', son of Sumbat'."⁹

1. The standard work on the church is T. Virsaladze, *Rospisi atenskogo Siona*, Tbilisi, 1984. Amiranāšvili, *Istoriia gruzinskogo iskusstva*, 160-65, which dates At'eni to the early tenth century, is now no longer accepted.

2. All my transcriptions are taken from: KC'K, vol. 3, *Presk'uli c'arc'erebi I: At'enis Sioni* (Fresco inscriptions I: Sioni Church at At'eni), ed. G. Abramišvili and Z. N. Aleksidze, Tbilisi, 1989, 158-64: inscriptions 27-32.

3. KC'K, 3:164, inscription 32.

4. The assessment of age comes from the copy made by Prince Grégoire Gagarine (plates) and Count E. Stackelberg (text), *Le Caucase pittoresque*, Paris, 1849, pl. 57. Gagarin's copy accurately follows the surviving fragments, which suggests that his depiction is reliable, although it allows no room for the sixth (entirely missing) donor; he shows no break in the plaster surface between the child and the final female figure (see Fig. 30).

5. KC'K, 3:163, inscription 31.

6. I. A. Džavaxišvili, *Materialy po istorii veščestvennoi kul'tury gruzinskogo naroda*, Tbilisi, 1962, 3:16-17.

7. R. O. Šmerling, "K voprosu o datirovke atenskogo rospisi," *Soob AN GSSR* 8/4, 1947, 261-68.

8. KC'K, 3:161-62, inscription 30. "Botinats" must refer to the coins minted by emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078-81); see P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. 3, pt. 1, Washington, 1973, 61, and vol. 3, pt. 2, 821-32.

9. KC'K, 3:160-61, inscription 29.

6. No identifiable fragment of this figure now survives,¹⁰ but a small portion of an inscription has been found above the head of Ašot' (no. 5 above):

...ს შემოწირნა ...ს შეუალნი გიორგი მეფემან

"... gave an offering of inaccessible fortresses, King Giorgi."¹¹

7. A queen, wearing the Byzantine kite-shaped *loros*, facing frontally:

ისდუხტ დედოფალი შემომწირველი ...ის დეგეულისაჲ

"Queen Isduxt', who gave the vines belonging to the village of Degeuli."¹²

There is general agreement that the style of the paintings should be dated to the second half of the eleventh century, but it is not possible to be more precise than that.¹³ All work has, therefore, concentrated on identifying the donors. Here, the controversy surrounds the identity of the first two figures, who are clearly the most important men in the row. In 1982, Guaram Abramišvili identified them as the *mc'ignobartuxucesi* (head of the royal chancellor) Giorgi, who wears monastic robes because he was also bishop of Č'q'ondidi, and Davit IV Ağmašenebeli.¹⁴ He, therefore, dates the church to 1089–90, in the immediate aftermath of the coup in which Davit IV replaced Giorgi II. More recently, in 1991, Tinatin Virsaladze argued that they represent Saint Giorgi Mtac'mindeli and Giorgi II and that the church was painted in c.1067, while Giorgi was still heir to Bagrat' IV, as part of the growing cult of the Athonite saint.¹⁵

Thus both writers identify the second figure as a youthful member of the Bagrat'ioni family (based on Gagarin's drawing of the 1840s [Fig. 30]) and determine the date of the wall paintings in accordance with this. However, both interpretations suffer from the same problem of having to explain the presence of a non-Bagrat'ioni figure at the head of this row of royal donors, which goes against normal expectations of a donor panel. Here, Virsaladze provides the more convincing explanation, basing her argument on the importance Saint Giorgi Mtac'mindeli held in Georgian society both during and after his death. The almost instant visualization of the man as a saint after his death has a parallel in the north tympanum at Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, where Saint Ignatios of Constantinople was depicted among other church fathers soon after his death in 877.¹⁶ However, the conversion of a saint into a *royal* figure, as at At'eni, has no parallels. Moreover, since the first figure holds a scroll, it is more probable that he is a donor than a "normal" saint.

In Abramišvili's interpretation, this problem is far more acute, since it suggests that a living government official was given the privilege of appearing before kings. He justifies this by arguing that Giorgi Č'q'ondideli was the organizer of Davit IV's coup and that he was the spiritual father of the new king.¹⁷ Even if Giorgi did effectively wield power on behalf of the new, young king, it is inconceivable that he would convert this power into such unambiguous, visual terms, thereby overturning the accepted representation of terrestrial hierarchy. In no other church is a nonroyal figure shown with a halo.

However, Abramišvili's historical context is convincing: Giorgi II had been unable to control the Seljuks who invaded Georgia and had been forced by them to pay tribute. He was ousted in an attempt to revitalize the army.¹⁸ This would, of course, have placed a great pressure on the new ruler to legitimize his au-

10. Gagarin's illustration of the donors did not make room for this sixth figure: Gagarin and Stackelberg, *Le Caucase pittoresque*, pl. 57.

11. KC'K, 3:159–60, inscription 28.

12. KC'K, 3:158–59, inscription 27.

13. On the style of the At'eni paintings, see D. Mouriki, "Observations on the Style of the Wall Paintings of the Sioni Church at Ateni, Georgia," in Calo' Mariani, *L'arte georgiana*, 173–85.

14. G. Abramišvili, "At'enis sionis moxat'ulobis k't'it'orta ident'ipik'acia" (The identification of the donors in the paintings at the Sioni Church at At'eni), *SabXel* 1982, pt. 5, 86–100; available as "La datation des fresques de la cathédrale d'Aténi," *Zograf* 14, 1983, 17–21.

15. T. Virsaladze, "At'enis mxat'vrobis datariḡebisa da k't'it'orta p'ort'ret'ebis ident'ipik'acis sak'itxisatvis" (On the question of the identification of the donor portraits and the date of the painting at the Sioni Church at At'eni), *AG* 10, 1991, 103–42 (French summary, 202–5); also published in *SabXel* 1988, pt. 4, 129–44.

16. C. Mango and E.J.W. Hawkins, "The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: The Church Fathers in the North Tympanum," *DOP* 26, 1972, 3–41, esp. 38.

17. For example: KC 1 (*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 337_{3–4}; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 20: "He [Giorgi] was mourned as a father, and even more deeply, by the whole kingdom and by the king himself, who wore black for forty days." And he was buried at Gelati, "newly built by the king."

18. KC 1 [(*Davit Ağmašeneblis Ist'orik'osi*), 319_{3–323}₅; Vivian, *Georgian Chronicle*, 4–6.

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thority, especially since Davit was so young at the time. Abramišvili supports his date by reconstructing the end of the inscription by figure 4 to read "botinat," referring to coins produced in the reign of Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–81). This provides a *terminus post quem* of 1078 for the donor images, but the reconstruction must remain tentative.

Virsaladze's reconstruction of the donor row raises problems about the presentation of the social hierarchy. Her analysis of the image as showing the young Giorgi II between temporal and spiritual authority is very persuasive, but it further upsets our knowledge of the conventions of royal imagery throughout the eastern Christian world by showing the heir before his father, the king. Elsewhere, seniority is always respected in donor images, with elder members of the ruling family shown nearer the apse. While this could be explained at At'eni by the break in the wall and the appearance of the second divine figure before Bagrat' IV, it must raise doubts about the interpretation.

The alternative explanation that I put forward in the main text makes use of the valuable research and ideas produced by both these scholars. My solution must also remain tentative, but its proposal that the first figures are Davit IV and Giorgi II, now shown as a monk after his abdication in 1089, resolves many of the possible problems.

APPENDIX III

THE RULE AND ORDER FOR THE BLESSING OF KINGS

This short text is taken from I. Dolidze, *Kartuli samartlis dzeglebi*, Tbilisi, 1965, 2:50–54.¹ It is a mid-thirteenth-century text that describes the order of the coronation service of the Georgian kings. The church was given increased privileges in Georgia after the Mongol invasions, and this account was clearly written to confirm the position of the catholicos within the court hierarchy. However, it may be assumed that it provides a fair account of the coronation service. As Virsaladze has pointed out, there are important differences between the personnel listed here and those depicted in the coronation image at Macxvariši, but this may be explained by changes the service underwent in the century between the two pieces of evidence.²

Georgian Text

წესი და განგება მეფეთ კურთხევისა³

წესი და განგება მეფეთ კურთხევისა ესრეთ არს:

წინა დღით მწუხრსა, რომელსა დღესა ეგულუმბოდის კურთხევა, შეიმოსოს მთავარეპისკოპოსი. და უკეთუ მთავარეპისკოპოსი არ იყოს, დამთხუელთა ეპისკოპოსთაგანი, ვისიცა სათნო უჩნდეს კათალიკოსსა, წარუძღუნ მგალობელნი, მღვდელნი და დიაკონნი შემოსილნი, საკუმეველითა და კეროვნითა. ხოლო მგალობელნი მგზავრ იტყოდიან ჯუარი ქ~დგანთაჲ.

და ვითა მიიწინენ პალატა შინა და დადვან ფეშუმსა ზედა გვრგვნი, სკიპტრა, პორფირი და ბისონი, დაჰბურონ წმიდათა და ეპისკოპოსმან კელთა მიერ ტვრთვთ შეიღოს ეკლესიად და დადვას ტრაპეზსა ზედა.

და აღიკადოს შესამოსელი და იწყონ მწუხრისასა. და ღამე იგი უძილად განათიონ ლოცვითა და ვედრებითა ღმრთისა მიმართ, თვთ მეფედ განმზადებულმან და ყოველთა პალატა შინა და ყოველმან სავეებამან ეკლესიისამან.

და ვითარ განთენდეს და ლოცვა აღასრულონ, წარვიდენ ყოველნი სახიდ თვსად და განისუენონ.

და ვითარ მოიწიოს ჟამი წირვისაჲ, სამჟამ ჰრეკონ ძელსა და შეკრბენ ეკლესიად.

1. A Russian translation and commentary has been published by S. S. Kakabadze, *Gruzinskie dokumenty IX–XV vv.*, Moscow, 1967, 74–77.

2. T. Virsaladze, "Freskovaia rospis' xudožnika Mikaela Maglakeli v Macxvariši," *AG* 4, 1955, 179–83.

3. I am very grateful to Dr. George Hewitt for all his help and advice in translating this text.

და შეიმოსნენ კათალიკოზი და ეპისკოპოსნი, მდღელნი და დიაკონნი.
ჯუარის-მტვრთველმან აასუენოს ძელი ცხორებისა და წარძღუანნეს წინა
მთავარდიაკონნი სანთლებითა და საკუმეველითა.

და ვითარ მიიწინნენ პალატად, თავმოდრეკილმან ჰრქუას მეფესა:
«გუაკურთხენ, წმიდაო და თვთმპყრობელო მეფეო, მრავალმცა არიან წელნი
მეფობისა თქუენისანი». და მერმე სრულიად ლაშქართა თქუან.

კულად თავის მომდრეკელმან ჰრქუას ლაშქართა: «და თქუენცა
გიხაროდენ ძალნო უძლეველნო და დამამკობელნო მტერთა სამეფოთანო, ჟამი
არს წინამდებარისა საქმისა აღსრულებად».

და წარმოემართნენ ესრეთ სახედ: წინათ ზარი მეფეთა და შემდგომად
დროშა და შუბი, და შემდგომად მთავარდიაკონი და ჯუარის-მტვრთველი, მეფე
და ლაშქარნი.

ამირსპასალარი, კრმალ-შემორტყმული, მარჯუენით კერძო ჰყვებოდეს და
სამეფო კრმალი ორთავე კელთა ზედა ეტვრთოს.

ეგრეთვე ამილახორი და მეაბჯრეთ-უხუცესი, კრმალ-შემორტყმულივე,
ამირსპასალარის კერძო ვიდოდენ.

ხოლო ჭყონდიდელი და ათაბაგი მარცხენით მეფისა ვიდოდენ და სხვანი
მთავარნი.

ხოლო მანდატურთ-უხუცესი, სამანდატუროსა არგნისა კელითა
მქონებელი, შემდგომად ჯუარის-მტვრთველისა, წინა უვიდოდეს მეფესა.

ეზოთ-უხუცესსა, ჩუხჩარებსა, მეაბჯრეთ-უხუცესსა სამეფო ფარი და
ლახტი ჰქონდეს და ქარქაში; უკანა უდგეს მეფესა.

ამით წესითა ვითარცა მიიწინნენ კართა ეკლესიისათა, კათალიკოზი და
ეპისკოპოსნი წინა მოეგებნენ; კათალიკოზმან თავმოდრეკილმან ჰრქუას მეფესა
მადლად: «კურთხეულ არს მოსლვა თქუენი და დამტკიცება მეფეთ-მეფედ
სამეფოსა ამას თქუენსა ზედა, და განმტკიცენს ღმერთმან შიშსა და
სარწმუნოებასა მისსა ზედა, და დაგამორჩილნეს ყოველნი მტერნი და
წინააღმდეგომნი სამეფოსა ამის თქუენისანი, ქუეშე ფერკთა თქუენთა». და
თქუას ყოველმან ერმან: «ამინ».

და თაყუანი-[ს]ცეს მეფემან მდაბლად კათალიკოზსა, დაუპყრას კელი
მარჯუენე კათალიკოზმან; ხოლო უკეთუ აფხაზეთისა კათალიკოზი არა იყოს, -
იშხნელმან ანუ მთავარეპისკოპოსმან; და წარიყუანონ და სამეფოსა ადგილსა
დააყენონ, და იწყონ აღმოკუეთად სეფესა.

ხოლო აფხაზეთის კათალიკოზმან დაჰბუროს, ანუ მთავარეპისკოპოსმან.
და ვითარ დაჰბუროს, უწინარეს დაწყებისა, გამოუდოს ჯვარის-მტვრთველმან
ამირსპასალარს სამეფო კრმალი და საკურთხეველსა შინა ძელსა ცხორებისასა
მიყრდნობილი დადვას.

და დროშა და შუბი საკურთხეველისა კარს ემჭირნენ იმიერ და ამიერ.

უწინარეს კათალიკოზთა თქმისა და მთავარდიაკონისა გამოსლვისა.
რომელსა მდღელთ-მოდღუარსა დაებუროს, წინაშე წმიდისა საკურთხეველისა
მდგ[ო]მარეობდეს, აღიღოს საკურთხეველისაგან ბისონი, გამოვიდეს და მეფეს
თავი მოუდრიკოს, და ორთავე მუკლთა ზედა დაფენით დაუდვას, და
წარმოიყუანოს სადა კათალიკოზი მდგომარე იყოს. თავი მოუდრიკოს მეფემან
კათალიკოზსა და ჰრქუას: «მაკურთხეო მე[ს]ეფეო».

კათალიკოზმან ჯუარი დასწეროს და თქუას: «კურთხეულმცა არს მეფობა
თქუენი დასასრულამდე ჟამთა, და განმტკიცენ სარწმუნოებასა მისსა ზედა
მიუდრეკელად». გამოუდოს ბისონი და შთააცვას თავის კელითა და ჯუარი
დასწეროს.

და წარუძღუეს იგივე მდღელთ-მოდღუარი, რომელსა მიეყვანოს, და
და[ა]დგინოს ადგილსავე თუსსა, და ეგრეთ შევიდეს საკურთხეველად.

და გამოვიდეს მთავარდიაკონი და იწყოს კურეგქსი თქუამად. და ვითარ
სახარება წარიკითხონ, გამოვიდეს აფხაზეთის კათალიკოზი და
მთავარეპისკოპოსი. და თუ აფხაზეთის კათალიკოზი არ იყოს, - იშხნელი. და
იშხნელი და მთავარეპისკოპოსი მოეკიდნენ კელსა: ერთი მარჯუენით და ერთ[ი]

მარცხენით, წისისაებრ მღვდელთ-მოდღუართასა, და წარადგინონ შუა ეკლესიასა საწაქრდგომესა ადგილსა, და სამგზის ათაყვანონ წმიდასა საკურთხეველსა. და წარადგინონ საკურთხეველისა კართა. და კუალად მოიყარონ მუკლნი და თაყუანი-სცენ.

და ვითარ შეიყვანონ ერთგზის წმიდასა ტრაპეზსა, თაყუანისცეს და დაუყარნეს მუკლნი კათალიკოზსა და მოაკრფენ გარემოს ყოველნი ებისკოპოსნი და ყოველთავე ომფორი თავსა ზედა დასდვან.

ჯუარი დასწეროს კათალიკოზმან, და იწყოს თქმად მაღლად სასმენლად ყოველთა: «საღმრთო მადლი, რომელი ყოველადვე უძლურებათა ჩუენთა ჰკურნებს და ნაკლულებასა, ჩუენს[ა] აღავსებს და განაჩინებს ღმრთის მოშიშსა სახელით ერსა და სამეფოსა ამას ზედა მეფეთ-მეფედ და გარე შეარტყამს საღმრთოსა ძალსა მისსა, ვილოცოთ ყოველთა, რათა დაიმკვდროს მის თანა მადლმან ყოველად წმიდისა სულისამან».

და ვითარ დაესრულოს, კმა-ყოს [სა]ვსებამან ეკლესიისამან თანა ერთ-ურთ მაღლითა კმითა: «კირიელეისონ!» «კირიელეისონ!» «კირიელეისონ!»

იწყოს კათალიკოზმან იგივე: «საღმრთო მადლი, რომელი ყოველად...» და ერმან ყოველმან «კირიელეისონი» 3 [გზის]; კუალად იგივე «საღმრთო მადლი» და «კირიელეისონი» 3 [გზის].

და ვითარ დასრულდეს, კათალიკოზმან ჯუარი დასწეროს 3 [გზის] და[ა] ყოველთა მღვდელმოდღუართა.

და იწყოს კათალიკოზმან ლოცვა წარკითხვად სასმენლად ყოველთა. და ვითარ სრულ იქმნას ლოცვად წარკითხვად, დასწერონ ჯუარი და აღადგინონ.

და აღიღოს კათალიკოზმან საკურთხეველით გვრგვნი და დაარქუას თავსა მეფეს და იტყოდეს ავჯითა კმითა: «დაადგ თავსა მისსა გვრგვნი ქვსა მისგან პატიოსნისა, ცხორება გთხოვა შენ, და მიეც მას განგრძობა დღეთა უკუნისი უკუნისამდე».

მერმე აღიღოს პორფირი, ჯუარი დასწეროს და შთააცვას.

ამის შემდგომად აღიღოს სკიპ[ტ]რა, ჯუარი დასწეროს და მისცეს მარჯუენესა კელსა მისსა. და ტრაპეზსა მარჯუენით კერძო ორხაო დაუფინონ და ზედა დაადგინონ. მგალობელთა იწყონ: «მრავალ-ჟამეულ ჰყვენ ღმერთო მეფეთ-მეფე ჩუენი სახელით, მრავალ-ჟამეულ ჰყვენ». ხოლო მეფე დგეს წინაშე წირვისა აღსრულებამდე.

და ვითარ ეზიარნენ მღვდელთ-მოდღუარნი, თვთ მეფეცა აზიარონ უწინარეს მღვდელთა.

და ვითარ ჩამოვიდენ საკურთხეველით კართთ, ამირსპასალარმან კრმალი შეარტყას და წარმოემართნეს მითვე სახით, რომელი პირველ მოვიკსენე:

მარჯუენე კელი კათალიკოზსა ეჭიროს, ხოლო მარცხენე კელი აფხაზეთისა კათალიკოზსა, ანუ ცყონდიდელსა, ანუ იშხნელსა, და ვგრეთ შეჰყვენ პალატსა შინა.

და ვითარ ტახტსა მი[ე]ახლნენ, კათალიკოზი და ცყონდიდელ[ი] თანა შეჰყვენ, ტახტსა ზედა დასვან მეფე, და იგინი შთამოვიდენ.

ჯვარის-მტვრთველი შემოსილი ძელი ცხორებისა ეტვრთოს, მარჯუენით მეფის[ა] დგეს ტახტსა წინათ, ვიდრე ლაშქართა თაყუანისცემადმდე და ძღუნისა შეწირვამდე.

პირველად დედოფალმან თაყუანი-სცეს, მერმე-და კათალიკოზმან, ცყო[ნ]დიდელმან, ათაბაგმან, მანდატურთ-უხუცესმან, ამირსპასალარმან, მეჭურჭლეთუხუცესმან, მსახურთ-უხუცესმან და შემდგომად კელოსანთა და უკელთა დარბაზისერთა სრულიადთა.

და ვითარ სრულქმნან ძღნობა, შთამოვიდეს ჯუარის-მტვრთველი და შესამოსელი აღიკადოს.

ხოლო ყოველთა დღეთა სამ დღემდის მეფე ტახტსა ზედა ჯდის გვრგვნითა და პორფირითა.

ხოლო ესე საცნაურ იყავნ, რომელ თვნიერ კათალიკოზისა არა ვისგან ჯერ-არს კურთხევა.

English Translation

The Rule and Order for the Blessing of Kings

The Rule and Order for the Blessing of Kings is as follows:

On the evening of the day before the day on which the blessing is to take place the archbishop shall be robed. And if the archbishop should not be [available], then one of the available bishops, whose virtue is apparent to the catholicos, shall be led by the enrobed choristers, priests, and deacons with incense and large candles. And, while moving, the choristers shall say the *jvari k'dgaintay*.⁴

And when they arrive in the palace, they shall place the crown, scepter, purple [robe], and cloth on a paten and cover these holy objects, and the bishop shall take them into the church, held in his [own] hands, and place them on the altar.

And he shall take off his robes and begin at vespers. And they shall pass the night without sleep in prayer and supplication to God: the man preparing himself to be king and everyone in the palace and all the congregation of the church.

And when dawn comes and prayer has been performed, each shall go to his own house and rest.

And when the time of the service comes, the wooden plank⁵ shall be struck three times, and they shall gather together at the church.

And the catholicos and the bishops, priests, and deacons shall be robed.

The cross-bearer shall hold up with reverence the Tree of Life [Cross] and shall be led by the archdeacons with candles and incense.

And when they reach the palace, [the cross-bearer], with his head bowed, shall call out to the king: "Bless us, O holy and autocratic king; may your reign last many years." And then the whole host shall say it.

Again, bowing his head he shall say to the host: "And you too rejoice, you who are the invincible power and casters-down of the enemies of the king, it is time to perform the deed before us."

And they shall set off like this: in front the kings' bell, and then the banner and lance, and then the archdeacon and cross-bearer, the king and the host.

The *amirsp'asalari*,⁶ girded with a sword, shall follow on the right-hand side; he shall hold the king's sword in his two hands.

Likewise, the *amilaxori*⁷ and *meabjretuxucesi*,⁸ girded too with a sword, shall go at the side of the *amirsp'asalari*.

Next the Č'q'ondideli⁹ and the *atabagi*¹⁰ and the other *mtavari*¹¹ shall go on the left-hand side of the king.

And the *mandat'urtuxucesi*,¹² holding the staff of office of the mandat'ur in his hands, following the cross-bearer, shall go in front of the king.

The *ezotuxucesi*, *čuxčarexi*,¹³ and *meabjretuxucesi*, holding the royal shield and scourge and the scabbard, shall stand behind the king.

In this way, as they reach the doors of the church, the catholicos and bishops shall come forward to meet them; the catholicos, with his head bowed, shall call out loudly to the king: "Blessed is your coming and

4. The meaning of this phrase is unclear. It probably refers to a hymn in praise of the Cross.

5. This is probably equivalent to the Byzantine *semantron*.

6. War minister. These and all other definitions of the Georgian court titles are taken from Allen, *History*, 257-65.

7. Grand equerry and assistant minister of war.

8. Chief armorer.

9. The bishop of Č'q'ondidi traditionally also held the title of *mc'ignobartuxucesi*, or chief vaziri, that is, prime minister.

10. A Persian term meaning "father-lord," probably the guardian of the heir to the throne.

11. Minor ranks of nobles.

12. High marshal of ceremonies, equivalent of the Byzantine *dromos-logothete*.

13. These two titles are unclear.

confirmation as king of kings in this, your kingdom, and may God confirm you in His fear and faith, and may He make all enemies and opposition to this, your kingdom, obedient to you beneath your feet." And the whole people shall say: "Amen."

And the king shall humbly pay homage to the catholicos. The catholicos shall take hold of him by his right hand. And if the catholicos of Abxazeti should not be present, then the [bishop of] Iṣxani or the archbishop [shall take hold of him by his right hand], and they shall lead him [the king] and set him at the royal place and shall begin the investiture of the king.

And the catholicos of Abxazeti or the archbishop shall cover him. And when he is covered, but before beginning, the cross-bearer shall take the king's sword [from] the *amirsp'asalari* and place it in the sanctuary, leaning on the Tree of Life.

And the banner and lance shall be placed to either side of the sanctuary doors.

Before the katholikos speaks and the archdeacon emerges, that priest-teacher, who will be covered and will be positioned in front of the holy altar place, shall lift up the cloth from the sanctuary, come out, and bow to the king and shall place it, spread out on his knees, and lead him to where the catholicos shall be standing. The king shall bow his head to the catholicos and say: "Bless me, O king."

The katholikos shall make the sign of the cross over him and say: "May your rule be blessed until the end of time, and may [Christ] confirm you unswervingly in His faith." He shall take off him the *bisoni* and clothe him with his own hands and make the sign of the cross over him.

And the same priest-teacher who led him [forward] shall lead him back and place him in his place and thus enter into the chancel.

And the archdeacon shall emerge and begin to say the *kyrie eleison*. And when he shall read from the Gospels, the catholicos of Abxazeti and the archbishop shall emerge. And if the catholicos of Abxazeti should not be present—the [bishop of] Iṣxani. And the [bishop of] Iṣxani and the archbishop shall lay their hand on him: one on the right and one on the left, according to the rules of the priest-teachers, and they shall show him to the center of the church [from] the displaying place, and three times they shall make him pay homage to the holy sanctuary. And they shall show him from the doors of the altar place. And again they shall bend down on their knees and pay homage.

And when they lead him once to the holy altar, he shall worship and bend his knees before the catholicos, and all the bishops shall gather around, and they shall all place the *omophorion* around his head.

The catholicos shall make the sign of the cross and begin to say loudly so that all may hear: "May the grace of God, which cures all our weaknesses and makes up all our defects and appoints a God-fearing person as king of kings in His name over this people and kingdom, gird him with divine power. Let us pray that the grace of the all-holy spirit reside in him [the king]."

And when this has been completed, the whole congregation of the church shout out in a loud voice together with the people, "*Kyrie eleison!*" "*Kyrie eleison!*" "*Kyrie eleison!*"

The catholicos shall begin the same: "The grace of God, which cures . . .," and all the people: "*Kyrie eleison*" three times; and again the same: "The grace of God . . ." and "*Kyrie eleison*" three times.

And when this has been completed, the catholicos shall make the sign of the cross three times, as do all the priest-teachers.

And the catholicos shall begin to pray and to read so that all may hear. And when all the praying and reading has been done, he shall make the sign of the cross, and they shall stand up.

And the catholicos shall take up the crown from the altar and place it on the head of the king, and shall say in an intoning voice: "Place this crown, made of precious gems, on his head—he who has sought of you life—and give him a continuity of days from now until eternity."

Then he shall take up the purple [robe], make the sign of the cross over it, and shall dress him in it.

After this he shall take up the scepter, make the sign of the cross over it, and give it to [the king's] right hand. And he shall unfurl the *orxao* on the altar from the right side and place it on it. The choristers shall begin: "O God, in our name grant the king long life, grant him long life." And the king shall remain standing at the front until the end of the service.

And when the priest-teachers have partaken of Holy Communion, they shall allow the king himself to partake of Holy Communion before the priests.

And when they come down from the altar gates, the *amirsp'asalari* shall gird him with the sword, and they shall process [back] in the same order that I first described:

The catholicos shall hold his right hand, and the catholicos of Abxazeti or the Č'q'ondideli or the [bishop of] Išxani, his left hand, and so they follow him back to the palace.

And when they approach the throne, the catholicos and the Č'q'ondideli shall follow him in and shall place the king on the throne, and they shall come down.

The cross-bearer, enrobed and carrying the Tree of Life, shall stand to the right-hand side of the king in front of the throne for as long as the host shall pay homage and offer tributes.

First the queen shall pay homage, and only then the catholicos, the Č'q'ondideli, the *atabagi*, the *mandat'urtuxucesi*, the *amirsp'asalari*, the *meč'urč'letuxucesi*,¹⁴ *msaxurtuxucesi*,¹⁵ and after them the noblemen and all the people of the court.

And when everyone has offered tributes, the cross-bearer shall come down and remove his robes. And all day for three days the king shall sit on his throne wearing the crown and purple.

Let this be known to all, that the Blessing can be carried out by none but the catholicos.

14. Chancellor of the exchequer.

15. Chief of the privy purse.

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Kartlis Cxovreba

The main source for medieval Georgian history is *Kartlis Cxovreba*, literally the *Life of Kartli* (but effectively the *Annals of Georgia*). It is made up of a number of separate chronicles, of which those relevant to this work were compiled between the tenth and fourteenth centuries. All the Georgian texts are collected together in *Kartlis Cxovreba*, ed. S. Q'auxčišvili, 2 vols., Tbilisi, 1955/59.

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- C. *Laša Giorgis-droindeli Memat'iane* (Chronicle of the time of Giorgi Laša): KC 1:365–71;
- D. *Cxovreba da Uc'q'eba Bagrat'onianta* (Life and history of the Bagrat'ionis), by Sumbat' Davitisdze: KC 1:372–86;
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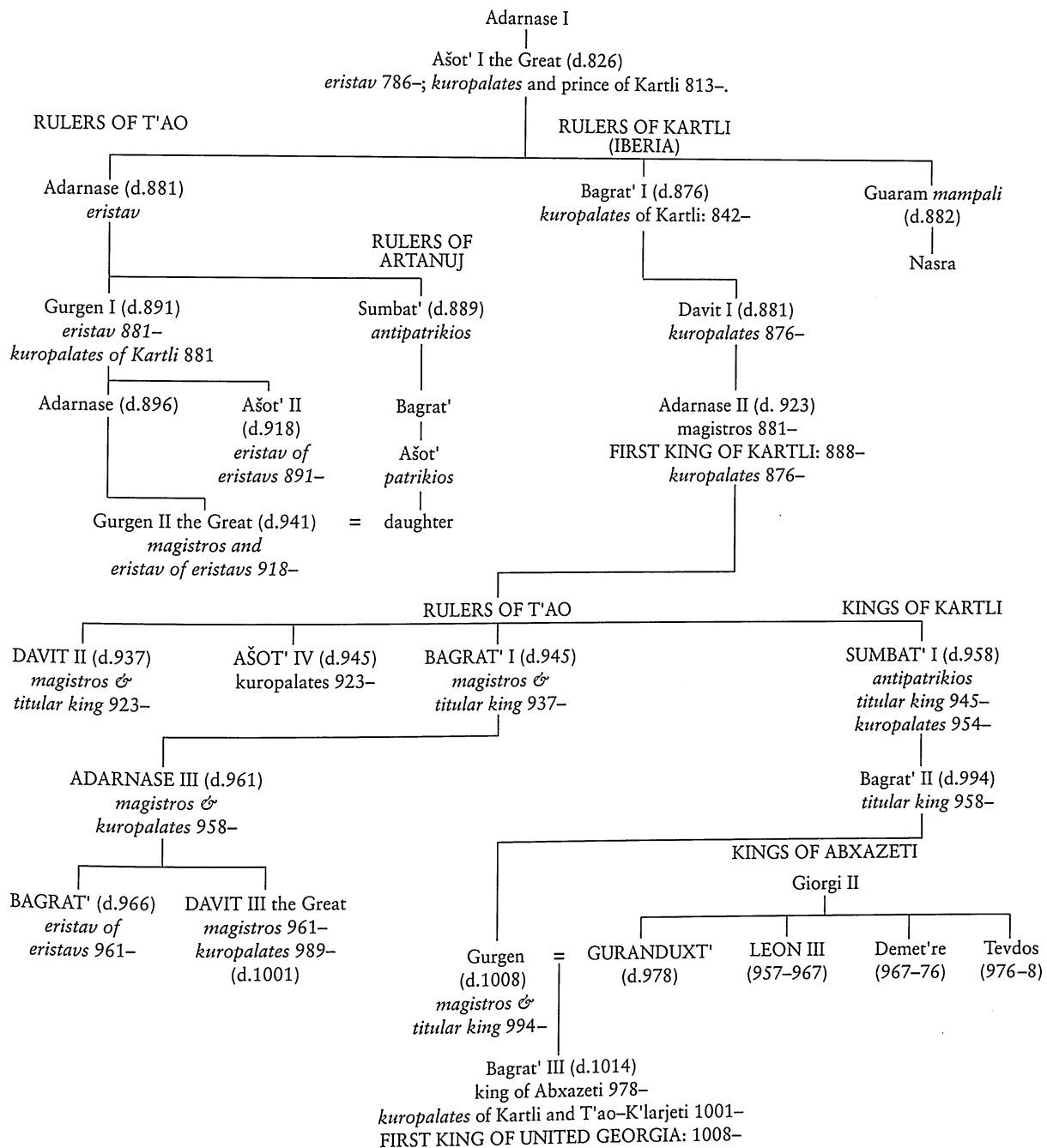
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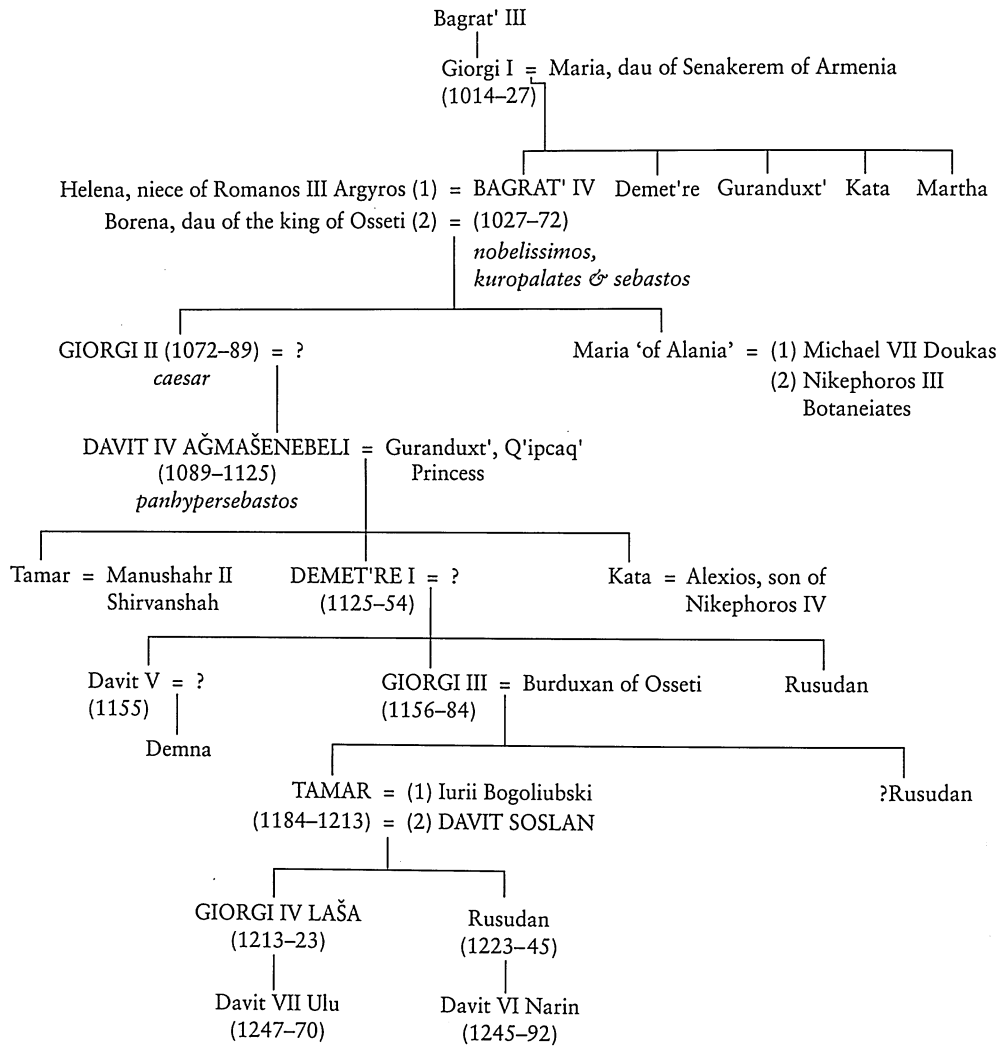
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ABBREVIATED GENEALOGY OF THE BAGRATIONI FAMILY

1. Georgia Before Unification



2. The Kings of United Georgia



Note: Rulers of whom images are known are highlighted thus: AŠOT' II.

The numbering of successive rulers in the early period is very confused in that it moves between the different branches of the Bagrat'ioni family. The numbering used here adheres to that most commonly adopted elsewhere.

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