

ICONS AS SYMBOLS OF POWER IN MEDIEVAL GEORGIA

For centuries in the Byzantine world, miracle-working icons were one of the focal points of Christian piety with multiple religious, cultural and ideological meanings. Icons with the power to perform miracles concentrated in Constantinople were closely associated with ruling authorities and mainly housed in monasteries, churches and chapels linked to imperial families¹.

Among surviving Georgian medieval icons are numerous replicas of widely venerated miraculous images of Christ and the Virgin which were directly or indirectly associated with Byzantine emperors and their families. Medieval Georgian icons together with written sources give us significant testimonies concerning cult and importance of Constantinopolitan miracle-working images in spiritual and political life of medieval Georgia².

¹ Numerous publications discuss diverse aspects of miracle-working icons, among them must be noted: C. MANGO, *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople*, Copenhagen, 1959 (= MANGO, *The Brazen House*); K. WEITZMANN, *The Mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos* (*Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illuminations*), Chicago, 1971, p. 225-247 (= WEITZMANN, *The Mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos*); N. PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO, *Icons in Liturgy*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 45 (1991), p. 45-58 (= PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO, *Icons in Liturgy*); A. LIDOV (ed.), *Miracle-working Icon in Byzantium and Old Rus*, Moscow, 1996; H. BELTING, *Image et culte, une histoire de l'art avant l'époque de l'art*, Paris, 1998, esp. chapter 11 (= BELTING, *Image et culte*); A. WEYL CARR, *Court Culture and Cult Icons in Middle Byzantine Constantinople*, in H. MAGUIRE (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, Washington, DC, 1997, p. 81-100 (= WEYL CARR, *Court Culture and Cult Icons*); H. KESSLER, G. WOLF (ed.), *The Holy Face and Paradox of Representation, Papers from a Colloquium at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spelman*, Florence, 1996, Bologna, 1998 (= *The Holy Face*). M. VASSILAKI (ed.), *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Exhibition Catalogue, Benaki Museum), Athens, 2000, esp. A. LIDOV, *Miracle-Working Icons of the Mother of God*, p. 47-57 (= *Mother of God*); G. MORELLO – G. WOLF, (ed.), *Il Volto di Cristo*, Milano, 2000.

² On this subject see N. CHICHINADZE, კონსტანტინეპოლის სასწაულომოქმედი სახეები და XI-XIV სს. ქართული ბატონობა, I ნაკვეთი [Constantinopolitan Miracle-working Images and XI-XIV cc. Georgian Icon Painting, part 1], in საქართველოს სიძველენი [Georgian Antiquities], 4-5 (2003), p. 131-147, N. CHICHINADZE, კონსტანტინეპოლის სასწაულომოქმედი სახეები და XI-XIV სს. ქართული ბატონობა, ნაკვეთი II, [Constantinopolitan Miracle-working Images and XI-XIV cc. Georgian Icon Painting, part 2], in საქართველოს სიძველენი [Georgian Antiquities], 6 (2004), p. 73-89.

The icon of Ancha or Anchiskhati triptych (Pl. 1)

This article aims to demonstrate that Constantinopolitan “icon-relics”, especially those associated to imperial families, were viewed by Georgian rulers as instrumental religious and ideological devices for promoting their royal power and authority within and beyond the country. It seems quite logical to start the discussion with the Holy Face of Edessa, or Mandylion, image of Christ “not made by human hand” (*acheiropoietos*), cornerstone of Christian devotional images, as this was one of the most important relics for the whole Christendom. The icon of Ancha or Anchiskhati, a replica of the *acheiropoietos* image of Christ, one of the major relics of Georgian church, is the earliest preserved copy of sacred relic with the miraculously imprinted face of Christ during his earthly life. Anchiskhati is a complex icon constituting from parts of various historical periods: the painted image dates back to sixth and seventh centuries and its precious metal frame was ordered in the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth centuries, (more precisely between 1284-1207). A *repoussé* inscription executed in old Georgian uncial script *asomtavruli* states that Ioanne Rkinaeli, the bishop of Ancha, adorned the icon “by order of Queen Tamar and with her donations”³. The *repoussé* frame has vine-scroll foliate ornamentation with holy images inserted. In the central part of upper frame is a Hetoimasia accompanied by half-figures of the frontal lorate Archangels depicted in the corners with labarums in their hands, on the vertical frames the Virgin and St. John the Baptist are depicted in full-length in slightly $\frac{3}{4}$ views in attitudes of prayer. The lower border bears half-figures of St. Peter, St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist.

Later, about 1308-1334, a triptych had been created for the venerable image. The reverse of the wings were reveted in the seventeenth century, while in the eighteenth century the setting of the icon was renewed and precious stones added. The *repoussé* figure of Christ is a work of the nineteenth century⁴.

Unfortunately, the history of Ancha icon before Bishop Ioane embellished it is quite obscure, but it is significant that during the reign of Queen Tamar, when the Georgian kingdom reached its climax, the image gained a special importance and significant steps for promotion of its cult have been made. Apart from being one of the main relics of the

³ SH. AMIRANASHVILI, *ბეჟა ოპიზარი*, [Beqa Opizari], Tbilisi, 1956, p. 8.

⁴ T. SAKVARELIDZE, *XIV-XIX საუკუნეების ქართული ოქრომჭედლობა* [Georgian Repoussé of the 14th-19th c.], v. 1, Tbilisi 1987, p. 9-25.

whole Christendom, the Mandyliion of Edessa has a special meaning for Georgians. The enhancement of the cult of the Mandyliion lies in local tradition. The veneration of the Holy Face of Edessa has a long history in Georgia and, according to the tradition, it goes back to Apostolic times (see Ioanne of Ancha “Hymn of Anchiskhati”, Paraclesis of the Holy Icon of Ancha)⁵. Another version claims that a *keramion* – a tile with a miraculously imprinted Mandyliion – was brought to Georgia in the sixth century by one of the so-called 13 Syrian fathers, Anton of Martkopi⁶.

A recently discovered tenth century Georgian manuscript from Sinai (“The Deeds of St. Ioane of Zedazeni”, N/Sin. 50) is an additional textual document connecting the appearance of *acheiropoitos* images of Christ with disciples accompanying another Syrian Father, Ioane of Zedazeni⁷. At first sight this information contradicts the version relating the appearance of the Holy Face in Georgia to the Apostle Andrew, but from the historical perspective of the Georgian church such version it quite understandable. The Georgian Church in the early stage of its history was closely linked to the Eastern Christian world, while from the ninth or tenth century it turned towards Byzantium. It is not surprising that the establishment of cult of the Mandyliion in Georgia is ascribed to Syrian Fathers who introduced eastern monasticism in the country and thus, the direct link with Syria becomes strongly pronounced. The date of the Sinaitic text is quite important as well as it corresponds to the

⁵ S. KUBANEISHVILI (ed.), *ძველი ქართული ლიტერატურის ქრესტომათია* [Ancient Georgian Literature Reader], v.1, Tbilisi, 1964, p. 382-283 (= *Ancient Georgian Literature Reader*); *ქართულ ხელნაწერთა აღწერილობა* [Description of Georgian manuscripts], Coll. A.II, Tbilisi, 1986, p. 80; see also Z. SKHIRTADZE, *Canonizing the Apocrypha: The Abgar Cycle in the Alaverdi and Gelati Gospels*, in *The Holy Face*, p. 71 (= SKHIRTADZE, *Canonizing the Apocrypha*).

⁶ This version could be found in the following Georgian written sources: interpolation of uncertain date in the eleventh century Georgian chronicle of historian Juansher; “Chant on Christ’s Incarnation” of Saba Synkelos, second half of the twelfth century (?); “Canticle on the Icon not-made by Human Hand” of Arseni Bulmaisimisdze, second quarter of thirteenth century; sixteenth century “Historian”; seventeenth century “Vita of St. Anton” of Martkopi; cfr S. KAUKHCHISHVILI (ed.), *ქართლის ცხოვრება* [Life of Kartli], v. 1, Tbilisi, 1955, p. 212-214; *Ancient Georgian Literature Reader*, p. 392. See also Z. ALEKSIDZE, *მანდილიონი და კერამიონი ძველ ქართულ მწერლობაში* [The Mandyliion and the Keramion in Ancient Georgian Literature], in *Academia*, 1 (2001), p. 10-11 (= ALEKSIDZE, *The Mandyliion and the Keramion*).

⁷ The text refers to “Theodosios of Urhai (Edessa) – a servant-monk and deacon of the Mandyliion” and “Ezderios of Nabuk (Hierapolis), servant of Keramion”. We read that they decided to decorate their churches in Samthavisi and Rekha with the *acheiropoietos* image, but images miraculously appeared through Divine intervention (ALEKSIDZE, *The Mandyliion and the Keramion*, p. 13).

transfer of the Mandyllion to Constantinople. This event renewed the interest in the relic and served as an important stimulus for the Georgian author to claim that the cult of the Mandyllion has deep historical roots in Georgia. The “Deeds” could also be perceived as a reflection of increasing national self-consciousness of Georgians coinciding to the process of unification of the country starting by the end of the tenth century.

The Anchiskhati *repoussé* frame’s design gives us some additional clues for the interpretation of the embellished image. The message of the Anchiskhati frame becomes more explicit if we compare it with the frame of the Genoa icon, where ten *repoussé* narrative scenes reproduce the history of the Mandyllion. On the much earlier tenth century lateral wings of the painted triptych from St. Catherine’s monastery at Mount Sinai with the now lost central image of the Mandyllion we see again story of this relic: King Abgar with the Mandyllion on the right wing and the apostle Thaddaeus on the left one⁸. The Anchiskhati frame as well as other metalwork parts – top and lateral wings of the triptych – does not contain any visual references to the story of the Edessa relic. Instead, the frame displays an imagery that usually accompanies the images of Christ Pantocrator⁹, while on the inner parts of the lateral wings seven scenes from the *Dodecaorthon* are executed in *repoussé*: the Ascension on the semicircular top, the Annunciation, Nativity and Baptism on the left wing and the Transfiguration, Crucifixion and Anastasis on the right. Such diversity in programs could be explained by different approaches to the interpretation of the image. The Genoa icon frame, like the Sinai triptych wings, refers to the history of a concrete relic, while the Ancha icon revetment gives to this image more general meaning and broadens its significance. The icon of Ancha could be perceived as an icon of Incarnation and a manifestation of the Orthodox teaching. Such interpretation is in accord with the text of the “Hymn of Anchiskhati” written by Bishop Ioanne of Ancha. A liturgical canon in acrostic (saying: “The horrible Ancha Icon is praised by Ioane of Ancha”) eloquently praises

⁸ WEITZMANN, *The Mandyllion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos*, figs. 211-212, p. 242-246.

⁹ See image of Christ from Mgvimevi, late 10th c., enframed with Hetoimasia flanked by the Virgin and St. John the Baptist on the upper frame and Apostles, Evangelists on vertical frames, on the lower border are Saint Warriors; Tzageri icon, early 11th c., frame imagery consist from the Archangels, the Virgin and St. John; on Tzalenjikha icon, early 11th c., the central image of Christ is accompanied by enamel medallions constituting a Deesis on the upper border, enamel medallions with Sts. Peter and Paul and St. Warriors are also preserved on the vertical and lower borders. Г.Н. ЧУБИНАШВИЛИ, *Грузинское чеканное искусство* [G.N. CHUBINASHVILI, *Georgian Metalwork*], Tbilisi, 1959, p. 592-598, 182-190, 579-584 (= ЧУБИНАШВИЛИ, *Грузинское чеканное искусство*).

Anchiskhati and its miraculous power. Ioane claims that the Apostle Andrew brought the image from Hieropolis to Klarjeti (a southern Georgian province)¹⁰. According to the text the Anchiskhati performs innumerable miracles and is a strong defense against enemies, who “like ferocious lions menace us, horrible icon defeat them ...as you are our power and strength”¹¹. Anchiskhati is called “an icon of the Incarnation”. The whole text is based on the orthodox teaching about images. The Hymn comprises doctrinal meaning of veneration of images and quotes words of Basil the Great that veneration offered to an image goes to its prototype¹².

The enhancement of the Holy Face from Ancha with precious *repoussé* framing by royal order, as well as the creation of the hymn dedicated to it, were significant steps acknowledging the icon’s privileged status. The special role reserved to Anchiskhati will be understandable if we cast our glance to the history of its prototype: the Holy Face of Edessa. The image of Christ “not made by human hands” miraculously created by the incarnated Logos for curing King Abgar, the ruler of the kingdom of Osroene, and its miraculous imprint on the tile – *keramion* – were kept in Edessa and Hierapolis respectively. The Holy Mandylion, re-discovered in 544 thanks to the efforts of the Byzantine Emperor Romanos I, was in the palace chapel of the Virgin of the Pharos from 944 until 1267. Then, after the Fourth Crusades, King Luis IX took it as booty to Paris and placed it in Saint Chapel, a specially built royal chapel for relics brought from East Christian centers. As further manifestation of royal patronage is a fact that for the celebration of the anniversary of the transfer of the relic to Constantinople

¹⁰ *Ancient Georgian Literature Reader*, p. 382-283.

¹¹ Apart from literary sources Georgian medieval art gives striking examples of a highly developed cult of the Holy Face of Edessa – one of the earliest preserved images is the fresco in the Telovani church, 8th c., extended cycle of miniatures illustrating Abgarus’ Epistle apocryphal text in the 11th c. Alaverdi and Gelati Gospels. From the late 12th-early 13th cc. the Mandylion is placed in semantically important places in church interiors – in the lunette of the main entrance in Vardzia, in apses, above altars – in the Ascension church in Ozaani, in the murals of Qobair, both dated back to late 12th-early 13th cc., Dmanisi Sion, 1213-1223, church in Kazreti, Sts. Archangels’ church, Tangili, both early 13th c. etc. SKHIRTADZE, *Canonizing the Apocrypha*, p. 73-74; Е. ПРИВАЛОВА, *Роспись Тимотеубани* [Е. PRIVALOVA, *Timotesubani Murals*], Tbilisi, 1984, p. 95, fig. 39; IDEM, *Роспись церкви Вознесения в Озаани* [*Murals of Ascension church in Ozaani*], in *Ars Georgica*, 9 (1987), p.126, fig. 1; T. VELMANS, *L’art médiéval de l’orient chrétien*, Sofia, 2002, pls. 115, 177; K. MIKELADZE, *დმანისის სიონის მონეტულობა* [*The Murals of Sioni Church in Dmanisi*], in *საქართველოს სიძველეები* [*Georgian Antiquities*], 7-8 (2005), fig. 1.

¹² The same idea is revealed in Arseni Bulmaisimisdze’s canticle, see SKHIRTADZE, *Canonizing the Apocrypha*, p. 74, note 17.

Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos ordered, or composed, a special sermon praising this event. In 968, the *keramion* also appeared in Constantinople and were placed in the Pharos Chapel with the Mandy-lion. These relics were *palladia* of Constantinople protecting both the city and the ruling dynasty¹³.

While talking about association of the Mandylion to royal authority one should also take into consideration the important visual evidence of the before mentioned the tenth century triptych lateral wing from Sinai's St. Catherine's monastery depicting the story of the Mandylion. King Abgar is dressed as a Byzantine emperor and as K. Weitzmann illustrates he has the clearly pronounced facial features of Constantine Porphyrogenetos¹⁴.

Starting from King Abgar, certain inheritance in royal patronage can traced in the history of the veneration of Mandylion. To the Byzantine Emperors Romanus I and Constantine Porphyrogennetos, who greatly contributed to the cult of Mandylion, should be also added the Georgian ruler Queen Tamar. The embellishment of the Mandylion icon of Ancha by her order continues this "tradition" and at the same time acquires additional locally rooted significance. It is notable that on August 16, when the Orthodox Church commemorates the transfer of this relic to the Byzantine capital, the Georgian Church celebrates the Anchiskhati Feast.

The Tzageri icon (Pl. 2)

Another icon evoking Byzantine miracle-working image is the Tzageri icon of Christ. The precious metal *repoussé* revetment of Christ "Pantocrator" with a supplicatory inscription bearing the name of the Georgian ruler King Bagrat dates to the early eleventh century (87 × 57 cm, gilt silver, Georgian National Museum, Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, original painted parts are missing, while an inserted painted face is of the nineteenth century). The inscription executed in *repoussé* on the right inner strap connecting the frame and the "field" of the icon says: "Saviour of all [born] creatures, glorify with your glory the divinely crowned powerful Bagrat king of the Abkhazians and Kouro-palat of the entire East. Amen"¹⁵. King Bagrat is identified with Bagrat

¹³ A. CAMERON, *The Mandylion and Byzantine Iconoclasm*, in *The Holy Face*, p. 34-35.

¹⁴ WEITZMANN, *The Mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogennetos*, fig. 227-229, p. 242-246.

¹⁵ ЧУБИНАШВИЛИ, *Грузинское чеканное искусство*, p. 189.

III (975-1074) who received the title Kouropalat in 1001¹⁶. The carpet-like ornamental field and the frame with additional images inserted in the ornamental pattern (three medallions with frontal busts of angels are placed in the centre and corners of the upper border; the Virgin and John the Baptist depicted in three-quarter view are placed on the left and right vertical borders respectively; the lower border is missing), a double rowed foliate motive, give a restricted splendour to the Tzageri icon.

Representational image of Christ Pantocrator perceived as manifestation of Chalcedonian doctrine was closely associated with Byzantine rulers. Conceptual reading of this image gives space for various interpretations. The idea of Byzantine emperor's ruling as reflection of Christ Almighty power was one of them. Thus, it is quite understandable that icons of Christ were often in the possession of imperial families and their monastic foundations¹⁷.

As it is well illustrated in numerous publications, archetypes for the iconography of blessing Christ with the Gospel in his left hand were Constantinopolitan images of Christ, Chalkites and Antiphonites associated with the Byzantine court. Christ Almighty, the visual formula of rulership, was in accord with Byzantine imperial ideology. Taking into consideration the specific orientation of Byzantine political theory claiming that the authority of emperor derives from Christ, choosing of the image of blessing Christ for the icon associated to Georgian ruler becomes more understandable. The image of Christ decorating the imperial palace gate, or vestibule, of Chalke has a particular meaning in Byzantine history and functioned as a symbol of victory of Orthodoxy.

A miraculous icon of Christ Antiphonites from the Chalkoprateia church of the Virgin is another image with an imperial connotation. The history of the miracle-working icon of Christ Antiphonites, placed in

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 182-190, figs. 99, 100, and p. 579-584, figs. 80, 81.

¹⁷ Christ Pantocrator is often displayed on Byzantine coins (gold *solidi* of Justinian II after 691, gold *nomisma* of Michael III, between 843-856, gold *histamenon* of Basil II and Constantine VII, between 1001-1005, gold *hyperpyron* of Manuel I, 1143-1180, etc.) and objects of Constantinopolitan provenance commissioned or possessed by rulers (i.e. metal cross of Justin I, encaustic icon of Christ from Sinai St. Catherine's monastery, 6th-7th cc., which is suggested to be Justinian II donation to the monastery, Leon VI jasper cameo, etc.). Ph. GRIERSON, *Byzantine Coinage*, Washington DC, 1999, p. 34-35, 9, 10, figs. 9, 11, 14-15, 62-64; K. WEITZMANN, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai. The icons, v. I: From the 6th to the 10th Century*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1973, p. 15; H. EVANS (ed.), *Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, *Exhibition Catalogue*, New York, 1997, cat. N, 126, p. 175-176; Icon of Christ was venerated in Pantocrator monastery founded by John Comnenos (1118-1143), Alexios I was miraculously cured by Christ Chalkites, see WEYL CARR, *Court Culture and Cult Icons*, p. 83, note 17.

Tetrapyllon, goes back to Constantine's time and is linked with the Empress Zoe (1041-1042)¹⁸.

Although these images of Christ have not survived to our days, Byzantine coins and church murals give us an idea about their appearance. Apart from general typological similarities, the Tzageri icon displays some iconographic elements characteristic to these Constantinopolitan images. The wearing of the *himation*, the blessing hand held in front of the chest, the manner of holding of the closed Gospels find parallels with Christ Chalketes depicted on the lead seal of John Penteknes from the Dumbarton Oaks collection, eleventh and twelfth centuries, and with the silver scyphate medallion from the Photiades Bei collection, twelfth and thirteenth centuries¹⁹. Arms clasped to the body, a gesture of the blessing right hand raised in front of the breast depicted with palm facing viewers, the closed Gospel book supported by its lower edge, are also seen on Christ Antiphonites depicted on coins of Zoe, Anonymous Folles, Nicephoros Folli, the now lost mosaic of the Dormition church, Nicea, eleventh century, and the Virgin tou Arakou church fresco, Lagoudera, Cyprus, 1192²⁰.

The Byzantine title of the Georgian king stressed in the inscription indicates that the chosen iconographic type of Christ Pantocrator could have a special meaning correlated to the Byzantine idea of sovereignty. The mentioned iconographic details of the Tzageri icon support this suggestion and allow us to suppose that its prototype was the venerable miraculous Byzantine court icon of Christ.

¹⁸ This icon was an object of particular devotion of the Empress Zoe – she had an icon foretelling the future –, this image is depicted on her coins. She also founded a church of Christ Antiphonites, which later served as her burial place. From the typicon of the Empress Irina Doukaina Komnena for the convent of the Mother of God Kecharitoumene (1110-1116) we know that the convent possessed an icon of Christ Antiphonetes. Further testimonies of the involvement of Constantinople icons of Christ in “royal realm” and in miraculous curing are performed by Christ Chalketes. The veil hanging in front of Christ Chalketes cured Alexios I and Alexius Comnenos, grandson of John II. MANGO, *Brazen House*, p. 132-133, 142-146; A. KAZHDAN (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, New York – Oxford, 1991, v. I, p. 439; J. THOMAS – A. CONSTANTINIDES HERO (ed.), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents. A complete translation of the Surviving Founders' Typicas and testaments (Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 35)*, Washington, D.C., 2000, v. 2, p. 715 (= *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*).

¹⁹ MANGO, *Brazen House*, p. 132, 137, figs. 17, 22.

²⁰ A. BELLINGER – PH. GRIERSON, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks and the Whitteore Collection*, v. III, part I, Washington, D.C., 1973, p. 162, table 16, pl. LVIII, 1, pl. LX, pl. LXX, 9; C. MANGO, *Brazen House*, p. 147, fig. 24; A. KATZONIS, *The Responding Icon*, in L. SAFRAN (ed.), *Heaven on Earth: Art and Church in Byzantium*, Pennsylvania, 1998, fig. 3.19. See also the Episkopi church mural in Mani, around 1200, N. DRANDAKI, *Byzantine Churches of Mani*, Athens, 1995, p. 182, ph. 35, pl. 36.

The Khakhuli triptych (Pl. 3)

The miraculous tenth century Khakhuli enamel image of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa also has a special ideological meaning²¹. Only the enameled face and palms survive. Scholars suggested that the rest of the icon was executed in *repoussé*. The Virgin was depicted slightly turned to her left with her hands in the gesture of supplication (the reconstruction of their position is still disputable). In the early twelfth century, the image was moved from Khakhuli monastery in South Georgia to Gelati – the royal monastery founded in 1106 by the illustrious King David IV called the “Builder” (1189-1125). According to the anonymous historian of the chronicle of David the Builder, the king donated to monastery lands, holy relics, icons, liturgical objects. Among the royal donations were “thrones of the great Khosroan kings, candlesticks and colorful chandeliers, and also crowns and vessels captured from Arab kings”²². According to the will of David IV, we read, he donated to the Khakhuli icon of the Virgin “golden coins of Constantine Cvatas, rubies, precious stones and pearls”²³. After the death of David the “Builder” his son Demetre I (1125-1154) created a lavishly adorned mount-case for the icon: a triptych sheathed in gilt silver and gold *repoussé* revetment encrusted with numerous enamels, precious stones and gems supplied with extensive inscription. The importance of this image is underlined in the dedicatory *repoussé* inscription executed in Georgian *Asomtavruli* script. The creation of the precious mount-case for the Virgin icon is compared to the workmanship of the Biblical Bezaleel, who embellished the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 31)²⁴. An inscription also refers to the common descent of the Virgin and the Bagratids from the Prophet David (the Georgian royal dynasty of Bagratids claimed that they descended from Biblical house of David). Thus, the inscription gives new dimension to the image and establishes additional links between Georgian rulers and the Theotokos.

²¹ Sh. AMIRANASHVILI, *ბახულის კარელი [Khakhuli Triptych]*, Tbilisi, 1972; T. PAPAMASTORAKIS, *Re-deconstructing the Khakhuli Triptych*, in *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaiologikes Hetaireias*, 23 (2002), p. 225-255 (= PAPAMASTORAKIS, *Re-deconstructing the Khakhuli Triptych*); for a complete bibliography see L. KHUSKIVADZE, *Medieval cloisonné Enamels at Georgian State museum of Fine Arts*, Tbilisi, 1984, p. 30 (= KHUSKIVADZE, *Medieval cloisonné Enamels*).

²² David the Builder’s Historian, *ცხოვრება მეფეთ-მეფისა დავითისი*, (*The Life of the King of Kings David*), in S. KAUKHCHISHVILI (ed.), *Life of Kartli*, Tbilisi, 1955, p. 330 (= *David the Builder’s Historian*),

²³ A. BAQRADZE – R. TVARADZE (ed.), *Georgian Literature*, v. 2, Tbilisi, 1987, p.214

²⁴ AMIRANASHVILI, *Beqa Opizari*, p. 39. For the inscription see also PAPAMASTORAKIS, *Redeconstructing the Khakhuli Triptych*, p. 226.

Iconographic features of the Khakhuli Virgin demonstrate close affinities to the highly venerated Constantinople Mariological icon of Hagiosoritissa, housed in the Hagia Soros (Holy Reliquary) of Chalkoprateia in Constantinople, where the precious Christian relic, a girdle of the Virgin, was housed. There was an attempt to identify the Khakhuli Virgin as a replica of another Constantinopolitan icon, Khemeutissa (*khemeute* has various meanings – cast, enamelled, etc.), which slightly differs from the Hagiosoritissa²⁵. This title accompanies an image of the Virgin – one of the five miracle-working images of Constantinople on the painted icon from Sinai²⁶. It is important to know that the painter and donor of the Sinai icon was a Georgian monk-priest Ioane Tokhabi. The icon of the Virgin Chemeutissa is mentioned only once in Constantine Porphyrogenetos' *De Ceremoniis*. Constantine mentions that Chemeutissa was in Constantinople, in the church of St. Demetrios, next to the Theotokos Pharos Great Palace chapel. We do not have enough material in order to support this version. Whatever was an archetype of the icon, it is undeniable that the Khakhuli Virgin is a replica of a highly venerated miraculous icon kept in the Byzantine capital.

Richly decorated mount-case for icon displays numerous enamels, jewellery from wide span of time from the eighth and ninth centuries until the eighteenth century. The Khakhuli triptych is an excellent example of gift-giving practice to the miracle-working images widespread in the Eastern Christian world. Among the donations to the icon are splendid Byzantine and Georgian medieval enamels with a wide range of iconographic repertoire. Here we see images of Christ, various types of the Virgin, Holy Apostles, Saints, symbolic images, ornamental embellishment, historical persons, etc. Treasures displayed on the icon include dissembled precious objects: crosses, reliquaries, crowns and so on. Taken from their original context these objects are transformed and re-arranged on the central part and wings of triptych. The splendour of the sophisticated and refined golden *repoussé* vegetal ornamentation together with multicoloured glittering enamels creates mystical setting for the main image, which could be conceived as a radiation of heavenly grace and divine glory.

²⁵ For this subject and related bibliography see *Mother of God*, p. 147-149, pl. 90.

²⁶ G. SOTIRIOU – M. SOTIRIOU, *Ikônes du Mont Sinai*, 2 v., Athens, 1956-1958, v. I, fig. 125, II, 146-47; G. GALAVARIS – D. MOURIKI, *Icons*, in M. MANAFIS (ed.), *Sinai. Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, Athens, 1990, p. 384, note 23; CH. BALTOYANNI, *The Mother of God in Portable Icons*, in *Mother of God*, p. 144, 147, pls. 85, 87, 88 (= BALTOYANNI, *The Mother of God in Portable Icons*); A. WEYL CARR, *Icons as Objects of Pilgrimage in Middle Byzantine Constantinople*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 56, 2002, 76-93, fig. 1, 2, 6;

Spiritual and ideological message of the icon could be interpreted in variety of ways, but the main idea is the glorification of the central image of the Mother of God supplicating for mankind. If we turn to local church tradition, we will see that in the tenth century Georgian church started promoting the idea that Georgia was an *appanage* of the Virgin and the country was under her special protection. The idea of special patronage of the Virgin synchronizes to the unification of Georgian kingdom and the construction of a strong consolidated political unit. David the IV established the monastery of Gelati as “a second Jerusalem and a new Athens” claiming its leading political and cultural role²⁷. Transferring the Virgin’s miracle-working image from the Khakhuli monastery to Gelati gave additional grace and spiritual importance to the monastery. The exceptional status of the icon is illustrated by the further practice of royal donations. After the victory in the battle of Shamkori in 1195, queen Tamar “donated the banner of the Chaliph to the great monastery for the Khakhuli icon of the Virgin as her grand-grandfather did”²⁸. This act acknowledged heavenly assistance and support for royal deeds, and divine intervention in the battle of the Georgian kings against the enemies.

The Khobi icon of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa (Pl. 4)

An icon with supplicatory inscription of the Georgian king Leon from Khobi displays the same iconographic type of the Virgin (55 × 43 cm, painting of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, gilt silver, *cloisonné* enamel, Georgian National Museum, Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts)²⁹. Unluckily the original painting of the icon is lost – the *repoussé* covering depicts the Virgin in half-length, turned to the right, with her head slightly inclined and with her hands in traditional gesture of prayer. A Georgian inscription beneath the figure of the Virgin, executed in *Asomtavruli*, says: “Christ, most-holy Mother of God, intercede before Christ for the soul of King Leon”³⁰. The person mentioned in the inscription is identified as Leon III (957-967) and it is assumed that the icon created for the salvation of the king’s soul must have been executed after his death, about 970. The features of the metal relief of this icon, which should be considered as an example of the court art, reveal

²⁷ *David the Builder’s Historian*, p. 330-331.

²⁸ ისტორიანი და აზმანი შარავანდედთანი [*Historian of queen Tamar, Life of Kartli*], v. 2, Tbilisi, 1959, p. 74-75.

²⁹ CHUBINASHVILI, *Грузинское чеканное искусство*, p. 573-79, ph. 63-65, 425.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 575.

advanced artistic tendencies of its time. The character of the embossing demonstrates the important achievements in the depiction of the plasticity of the figure. At the same time, the icon attracts by the particular decorative effect of the ornamental frame, where ten enamel medallions with holy images (Deesis on the upper border is accompanied by images of the apostles Peter, Paul, Andrew, Evangelists Mathew, Mark and Luke, St. Gregory the Theologian) are inserted³¹. The reverse of the icon is covered with silver revetment. The decoration of this side of the icon constitutes the cross of Golgotha erected on a four-stepped base with the sigla IC XC NIKA. The inscription on the reverse of the icon states that the back was revetted with silver during the reign of David Narin (1245-1293) by Bedan Dadiani, Eristavi and Mandartukhutesi (a high dignitary in the Medieval Georgia responsible for internal affairs) and his wife Khvashak³².

The depiction of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa on the icon, which is linked with the eschatological theme of the Deesis, created (or revetted) for the redemption of the soul of the Georgian king might be explained by the special relationship between this popular icon and services connected to the dead. As it has been suggested, the icon of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa had a funerary character. Moreover, there is a theory, which identifies *signon tes presbeias* mentioned in the description of the memorial service in the typicon of the Pantocrator monastery (1136) with the Hagiosoritissa icon³³. This suggestion is strengthened by the frescoes of Sopočani (1260-1265) where the funeral procession of the first Serbian king Stefan Nemanja is accompanied by an icon of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa³⁴. It seems quite likely that the lavishly adorned icon of Khobi with the supplication for the soul of King Leon had certain connection with specific funerary or commemorative services. Another document, the typicon of the Kosmosoteira Monastery (1152), indirectly supports this hypothesis. The founder of the monastery, Sebastokrator Isaac Komnenos, "framed with ornament of gold and silver" the icon of the Virgin Kosmosoteira from Rhaidestos. According to Isaac's will he wished this icon, which was sent to him down from heaven, together with the icon of Christ, to be set on his tomb, where "... it should remain resting throughout all times... to mediate for my wretched soul"³⁵. It is true that we do not know what iconographic type of the

³¹ KHUSKIVADZE, *Medieval cloisonné Enamels*, N112-121, p. 84-85.

³² CHUBINASHVILI, *Грузинское чеканное искусство*, p. 576.

³³ BALTOYANNI, *The Mother of God in Portable Icons*, p. 148-149.

³⁴ PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO, *Icons in Liturgy*, p. 55, fig. 24.

³⁵ *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, v. 2, p. 839.

Virgin was depicted on Isaac's icon, but the above-mentioned association between these two icons seems quite plausible as both images, belonging to the imperial family, were decorated with precious metal and were regarded as icons with special functions. In the light of above, the Khobi icon might be considered as an icon with emphasized spiritual need evoking a Constantinople cult-icons. Its importance is revealed as well by an additional adornment, a reverse clad in *repoussé* revetment, ordered almost three centuries later by a high dignitary.

As it has been demonstrated, Byzantine miraculous icons and their functions were not unknown to the rulers of Medieval Georgia. Surviving material leads us to suppose that the adoption of iconographic themes of miraculous Constantinople icons together with their ritual context could be retraced at least from tenth century onward. Georgian rulers by their "intervention" changed and enriched the spiritual and symbolic meaning of the venerated miraculous images. Being the objects of veneration and piety throughout the centuries, the Anchiskhati and Khakhuli icons bearing witness of royal patronage acquired an exceptional importance for the religious and political life of the nation. Certain ideological messages of the Tzageri and Khobi icons alluding to the Byzantine imperial court could be perceived as manifestation of royal ideology as well.

Enhancement of the famous miracle-working images by Georgian sovereigns contributed to the authority of the country in times of its power. The process of unification of the country that began at the end of the tenth century was successfully completed with the creation of a powerful state dominating the whole region by David the Builder. During the reign of David's inherits Georg III and Tamar, from the late twelfth to early thirteenth centuries, Georgia's authority extended far beyond its borders.

It is no accident that Georgian kings greatly contributed to the establishment of the cult of the images linked to the Byzantine capital. The process of the unification of Georgia finds its reflection in earliest replicas of Constantinople miraculous icons with its complex religious and ideological meaning. The embellishment of the icon of Anchiskhati by the queen Tamar is of particular interest as the Mandyion could be attributed to Byzantine "court images". Her reign (1189-1213) coincided with the epoch when the Fourth Crusades defeated Constantinople and on international political scene, a unified Georgia came to the fore. By linking Anchiskhati with the Apostle Andrew, Georgian ruler and church hierarchs intended to stress the power and spiritual value of the image in order to have more reasons for proclaiming Georgia's right and authority of defender of Orthodox Christianity.

The powerful country, considered itself as the main Orthodox power in the region, assumed a role as protector of Christians and main bearer of Orthodox culture. In order to “legitimize” the status of Georgia as a stronghold of Orthodox Christianity and its faithful defender, it was necessary to design an appropriate “sacral setting” for this concept. Sacred images, especially miracle-working icons, were the most powerful arguments in this policy. Famous miracle-working images – icon-relics – from the Constantinople palace chapel were most appropriate sacred objects as they had both political and religious significance and served as icons of power, linking together earthly and heavenly rulers, spiritual and political authority.

Even from this brief survey, it is clear that in Medieval Georgia, like in Byzantium, sacred images, objects of special veneration and reverence contributed to the reinforcement of royal authority and power. Rulers having the privilege to intervene in the sacred fabric of public images by embellishing them aimed to assure a strong Heavenly support of their kingship.

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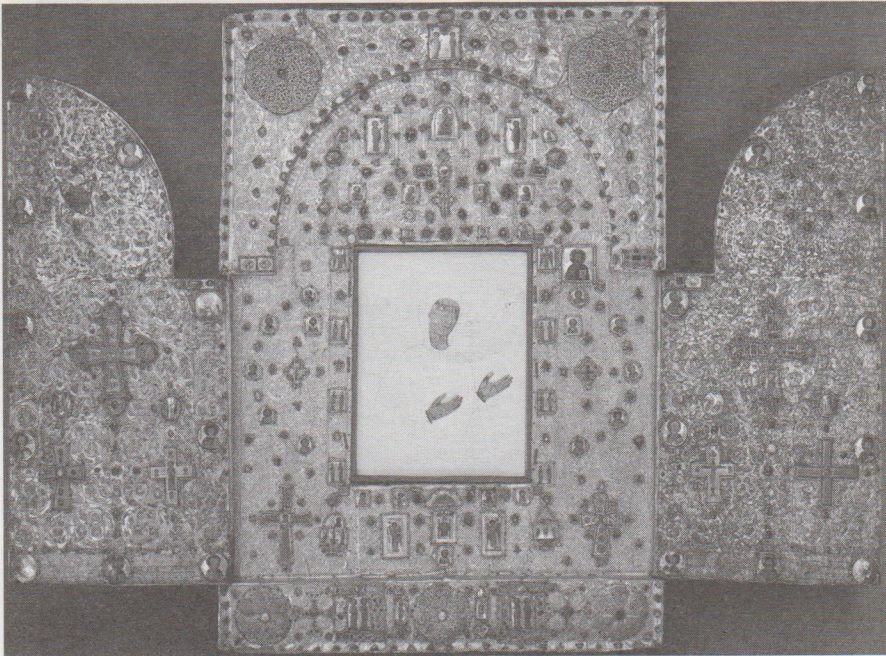
Abstract — The article discusses ideological aspects of the veneration of major cult icons in Medieval Georgia as miracle-working icons of Christ and the Virgin associated with Constantinople and the Byzantine Imperial Court. Considered as symbols of royal power they were actively involved in the political and spiritual life of Medieval Georgia. The increasing cult of Constantinopolitan “icon-relics” corresponds to the idea of apostolicity of Christianity in Georgia and the messianic role of Georgian language occurring in the hymnographic and historiographic literature of the 10th -12th cc. The commissioning as well as the embellishment of replicas of Constantinople miraculous icons with precious metal *repoussé* covers and/or the creation of lavish icon-cases by the Georgian kings had not only a religious purpose but also a strong political background. The relic-icons were actively involved in creating of a model of a strong unified country, with the special mission of defending the Orthodox faith.



Pl. 1: The Anchiskhati triptych



Pl. 2: The Tzageri icon of Christ



Pl. 3: The Khakhuli triptych