

# CONVIVIUM

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval  
Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean  
*Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova*



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Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean

*Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova*

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**Georgia as a Bridge  
Between Cultures**  
Dynamics of Artistic Exchange

edited by **Manuela Studer-Karlen,**  
**Natalia Chitishvili, Thomas Kaffenberger**  
with the collaboration of **Klára Doležalová**

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# Georgia as a Bridge Between Cultures Dynamics of Artistic Exchange

Manuela Studer-Karlen

For some years, the Chair of Medieval Art History at the University of Fribourg has taken a growing research interest in Georgia's role as an important agent in the wider network of cross-cultural exchange in the Middle Ages. This is documented by Prof. Michele Bacci in his introduction to the collective volume *Cultural Interactions in Medieval Georgia* which, as of 2018, was the first to address this issue in print<sup>1</sup>. It is a first step in re-evaluating Georgian material with an updated methodological framework. It is crucial to stress that these research projects always benefit from intensive partnerships which have already been honored<sup>2</sup>, and which will only be mentioned in passing here. The long-standing, intense collaboration with the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation in Tbilisi is particularly evident in our book, wherein four members of this Centre present their current research. Other permanent, productive collaborations have been established with the Kunsthistorisches Institut (Max-Planck-Institut) in Florence and with the Centre for Early Medieval Studies at the Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, as evidenced by the contributions to this book. The present volume of the *Convivium* series edited under the auspices of the Brno Centre completes the circle of these partnerships.

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1 Michele Bacci, "Georgia and the Outside World: An Introduction", in *Cultural Interactions in Medieval Georgia*, Michele Bacci, Thomas Kaffenberger, Manuela Studer-Karlen eds, Wiesbaden 2018, pp. 7–25.

2 *Ibidem*, pp. 8–10.

Following this current research tradition at Fribourg, a session proposal on this topic for the Forum Kunst des Mittelalters (Bern, 18–21 September 2019) was thus a logical consequence. In the double session entitled “Georgia as a Bridge Between Cultures: Dynamics of Artistic Exchange” the authors gathered in this book presented results of their most recent research<sup>3</sup>. Georgia has long been identified as a key region for studying medieval art between Occident and Orient. Situated between the mountain ranges of the Greater and the Lesser Caucasus, several important roads lead through the territory, forming a bridge between the Black and Caspian Seas, between the Don River and the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>4</sup>. In spite of being characterized as a remote and isolated land, Georgia was constantly exposed to contacts with both nearby cultures as well as distant settings such as Palestine<sup>5</sup> (where Georgians owned several important holy sites), Mount Athos<sup>6</sup>, Sinai<sup>7</sup>, Cyprus<sup>8</sup>, and Western Europe<sup>9</sup>. Constant political changes, including relations to and occupations by the neighboring empires of Byzantium<sup>10</sup> and the Seljuks<sup>11</sup>, make the region a prime example for investigating the dynamics of artistic interchange during the Middle Ages. Furthermore, the country of Georgia housed a number of linguistic and religious minorities who played an important role as cultural intermediaries and developed their own cultural and artistic traditions<sup>12</sup>.

As Ivan Foletti and Stefano Riccioni correctly noted, a broader theoretical and historiographical context is needed now more than ever in order to understand the political influences on historiography. This viewpoint allows us to deconstruct certain founding myths<sup>13</sup>. The few available publications covering Georgia from an art-historical viewpoint laid emphasis on connections with Constantinople and described Georgia inadequately as a reflection of the “Byzantine ecumene”<sup>14</sup>. The role played by Georgia as a site of cultural interaction and as a multicultural society has only attracted a more profound interest recently<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, the country is part of a transcultural, dynamic region with multiple agents.

Hans Belting was one of the first to emphasize the transcultural exchanges between Georgia and Byzantium with an in-depth iconographic study from 1979 in the *Cahiers archéologiques*: “Le peintre Manuel Eugenikos de Constantinople, en Géorgie”<sup>16</sup>. It is a great honor that an English translation of this exemplary study is now republished in this volume and equipped with new visual material<sup>17</sup>. In his introduction to this text, Ivan Foletti rightly recognizes Hans Belting as a bridge builder. Even the formal analysis of the paintings in Ts’alenjikhka [Fig. 1] was examined and perceived in the context of a twentieth-century intellectual framework – Belting already had in mind a vision of a Byzantine world without borders.

3 The sessions were organized and moderated by Thomas Kaffenberger and Manuela Studer-Karlen. We would like to thank the organizers of the conference for accepting the double session.

4 Annegret Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien. Die Entwicklung des christlichen Sakralbaus in Lazika, Iberien, Armenien, Albanien und den Grenzregionen vom 4. bis zum 7. Jh.*, Vienna 2007, Karte 1; Ivan Foletti, Erik Thunø, “The Artistic Cultures of the Medieval South Caucasus. Historiography, Myths and Objects”, in *The Medieval South Caucasus: Artistic Cultures of Albania, Armenia and Georgia*, Ivan Foletti, Erik Thunø eds, Brno/Turnhout 2016 (= *Convivium*, supplementum [2016]), pp. 11–16, sp. pp. 10–12, Map 1.

5 Giorgi Gagoshidze, “Mtskheta – Georgian Jerusalem, Svetitskhoveli”, in *Jerusalem as Narrative Space / Erzählraum Jerusalem*, Annette Hoffmann, Gerhard Wolf eds, Leiden 2012, pp. 47–62; *Georgians in the Holy Land. The Rediscovery of a Long-Lost Christian Legacy*, Tamila Mgaloblishvili ed., London 2013; Bacci, “Georgia and the Outside World” (n. 1), pp. 20–21.

6 *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos. Two Eleventh-Century Lives of the Hegoumenoi of Iviron*, Tamara Grdzeldidze ed. and trans., London 2009; *Georgian Athonites and Christian Civilization*, Papers of the Fourth International Symposium organized by the International Centre for Christian Studies (Tbilisi, 10–11 May 2011), David Muskhelishvili ed., Tbilisi 2012.

7 Zaza Skhirtladze, “The Image of the Virgin on the Sinai Hexptych and the Apse Mosaic of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, LXVIII (2014), pp. 369–385.



- 8 Bas Snelders, Mat Immerzeel, "From Cyprus to Syria and Back Again: Artistic Interaction in the Medieval Levant", *Eastern Christian Art*, IX (2012), pp. 79–106, sp. p. 95; Iulon Gagoshidze, David Mindorashvili, Giorgi Gagoshidze, *Gialia. Georgian Monastery on Cyprus*, Tbilisi 2014.
- 9 Bernard Hamilton, "Latins and Georgians and the Crusader Kingdom", *Al-Masāq*, XXIII/2 (2011), pp. 117–124; Rafal Quirini-Poplowski, *The Art of the Genoese Colonies in the Black Sea Basin (1261–1475). Research on Intercultural Exchange in Late Medieval Art*, Krakow 2017; Bacci, "Georgia and the Outside World" (n. 1), pp. 23–25.
- 10 Antony Eastmond, *Art and Identity in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium. Hagia Sophia and the Empire of Trebizond*, Aldershot 2004; Giorgi Ch'eishvili, "Georgian Perceptions of Byzantium in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries", in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, Papers from the Thirty-Third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies (University of Warwick, Coventry, March 1999), Antony Eastmond ed., Aldershot 2001, pp. 199–209; Stephen H. Rapp, "Caucasia and Byzantine Culture", in *Byzantine Culture*, Papers from the conference "Byzantine Days of Istanbul" (Istanbul, 21–23 May 2010), Dean Sakel ed., Ankara 2014, pp. 217–234; *Medieval Painting in Georgia. Local Stylistic Expression and Participation to Byzantine Oecumenicity*, Maria Panayotidi-Kesisoglou, Sophia Kalopissi-Verti eds, Athens 2014.
- 11 Finbarr B. Flood, "A Turk in the Dukhang? Comparative Perspectives on Elite Dress in Medieval Ladakh and the Caucasus", in *Interaction in the Himalayas and Central Asia. Processes of Transfer, Translation and Transformation in Art, Archaeology, Religion and Polity*, Eva Allinger, Frantz Grenet, Christian Jahoda eds, Vienna 2017, pp. 227–254.
- 12 *The Greek Colonisation of the Black Sea Area: Historical Interpretation of Archaeology*, Gocha R. Tsetskhladze ed., Stuttgart 1998; Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires. A History of Georgia*, London 2012.
- 13 Ivan Foletti, Stefano Riccioni, "Inventing, Transforming and Discovering Southern Caucasus. Some Introductory Observations", in *Discovering the Art of Medieval Caucasus (1801–1945)*, Ivan Foletti, Stefano Riccioni eds, Venice 2018 (= *Venezia Arti*, XXVII [2018]), pp. 7–14, sp. p. 12. For an overview of the historiography: Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien* (n. 4), pp. 67–73; Bacci, "Georgia and the Outside World" (n. 1), pp. 12–17; all contributions in *Discovering the Art* (see above).
- 14 For one study that exaggerates this topos: *Medieval Painting in Georgia* (n. 10).
- 15 *The Medieval South Caucasus* (n. 4); *Cultural Interactions in Medieval Georgia* (n. 1); *Discovering the Art* (n. 13).
- 16 Hans Belting, "Le peintre Manuel Eugenikos de Constantinople, en Géorgie", *Cahiers archéologiques*, XXVIII (1979), pp. 103–114.
- 17 The article was translated by Adrien Palladino, the new photographic material was mainly prepared by Thomas Kaffenberger.

1/ Ts'alenjikha Church, view from the northeast, 14<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century (photo of the present state)



The other contributions in this volume have the same intention. On the one hand, they emphasize the complexity of Georgian culture while on the other hand investigating the political, cultural, and liturgical dialogue with the neighboring territories, understanding that this dialogue always works in both directions.

Ekaterine Gedevanishvili's study "The Khakhuli Dome Decoration. Eschatological and Historical Contexts" underlines how important the Georgian Church history was for the country. By analyzing the decorative program of the dome of the Khakhuli Monastery (second half of the tenth to the beginning of the eleventh centuries), located in the historical region of T'ao-K'larjeti, Gedevanishvili brings the "dual" significance of the Glorification of the Cross – a long-known theme in medieval Georgian art – into our focus. Aside from its eschatological relevance, it describes the theme of the Ascension of the Prophet Elijah and the context of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The Ascension of the Prophet Elijah alludes to one of the most precious relics kept in Georgia – Elijah's Mantle in Svet'itskhoveli. The mantle symbolizes an important pillar in the Christianization of Georgia, as the Jews driven out of Jerusalem had brought it to Mtskheta. This relic in turn refers to Byzantium, where the cult of the Prophet Elijah was actively promoted from the ninth century on. The decoration in Khakhuli attempts to stress the possession of this precious relic as well to flaunt the political aspirations of the Georgian ruler *vis-à-vis* his counterpart in the neighboring Byzantine Empire.

Irene Giviashvili provides an essential overview of the Georgian history of liturgy related to Jerusalem and Constantinople with her article "Liturgy and Architecture. Constantinopolitan Rite and Changes in the Architectural Planning of Georgian Churches". According to the literary evidence the shift from the Hagiopolite tradition to the Constantinopolitan Liturgical Rite in the tenth and eleventh centuries was gradual and it was related to the presence of Georgians on Mount Athos, culminating in the foundation of the Iviron Monastery (980). In the Monastery of Zarzma in the historic district of Samtskhe, a long inscription in uncials can be found on a lintel. Dated to 980, it was carved by Iovane-Tornike Chordvaneli who helped suppressing the revolt of the Magistros Bardas Skleros against the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (976–1025) in the battle of Pankalia (March 979). Basil II granted generous gifts in territory and money and actively supported the foundation and construction of a Georgian monastery on Mount Athos, the Monastery of Iviron (980). The extensive impact of the work of Euthymios (955/960–1028) and the other erudite Georgian monks at Iviron during the tenth and eleventh centuries resulted in Georgia using the liturgical calendar of Constantinople rather than the rites of Jerusalem. Irene Giviashvili argues that it is reasonable to assume that Georgian monks and builders from T'ao-K'larjeti, where the family of Chordvaneli came from, shared their experience gained from Oshk'i Monastery (963–973), when creating their ideal monastic buildings on Mount Athos. The Chordvaneli used for their monasteries in T'ao-K'larjeti certain typika which they took with them to Mount Athos and further facilitated its establishment. Therefore, it seems that Georgians were first to apply the Studite Typikon on Mount Athos, which they have used before for the monasteries in T'ao-K'larjeti. With the Athonite edition, the Constantinopolitan typika returned to Georgia and served as the main liturgical manual for all churches, and subsequently architectural evidence indicates a similar gradual process of transformation of sanctuaries. From the beginning of the eleventh century, almost all churches met this requirement. In her study, Irene Giviashvili presents church plans that concretize these liturgical changes, especially looking at the apse arrangement system of cathedrals, parish or monastic churches of Georgia.



The following two articles demonstrate also the impact of liturgical changes of the eleventh century on the inner arrangement of sacred spaces and, consequently, on the latter's experience and material use. Natalia Chitishvili deals with archaeological material as well as with liturgical texts such as the rite of the consecration of altars: "Altars in Medieval Georgian Churches. Preliminary Notes on Their Arrangement, Decoration, and the Rite of Consecration". She analyzes several types of altars widespread in medieval Georgia and compares this material with surviving euchologia which describe the rite of consecration of the altar table and the ritual of placing holy relics within it. These rules follow the Constantinopolitan Rite, which was first translated by Euthymios the Athosite and George Hagiorites on Mount Athos in the early eleventh century. Interestingly enough, Georgia uses the general Christian liturgical practice of consecrating altar tables from at least the eleventh century on, as determined by the Constantinopolitan Rite, even though the country also evolved its own local artistically elaborated altars.

The contribution of Thomas Kaffenberger "Liminal Spaces of Memory, Devotion and Feasting? Porch-Chapels in Eleventh-Century Georgia" is concerned with the important question of porch-chapels in the eleventh century, specifically their functional reading and visibility. The liminal and subsidiary spaces surrounding the churches which provide access to the sacred space play an important role in the architectural development that occurred between Late Antiquity and the medieval period. In this regard, the porch-chapels are of special interest due to one of their supposed functions, the reading of *agape*. This memorial practice was closely linked to Jerusalemite Liturgy and at times of semi-secular character. The appearance of liminal spaces for the purpose of such celebrations in the tenth/eleventh century might be necessitated by the adoption of Constantinopolitan liturgy and the different spatial requirements and restrictions associated with this.

The relevance of shifting the liturgy to the Constantinopolitan Rite is also shown by the article of Manuela Studer-Karlen "The Monastery of the Transfiguration in Zarzma. At the Intersection of Biblical Narration and Liturgical Relevance". As indicated above, the investigation of a sculptural inscription in the Monastery of the Transfiguration in Zarzma reveals close contacts between Georgia and Mount Athos since the tenth century. These interactions are reflected also in the paintings in Zarzma (second half of the fourteenth century). The program of Zarzma presents an extensive Passion cycle characterized by its dramatic character. It includes rare compositions that emerged innovatively in the early fourteenth century in churches on Mount Athos; they all belong to the repertoire of Michael Astrapas and Eutykhios. Furthermore, the liturgical reading of the *Eothina* cycle was possible, which has the Codex 40 from the Georgian Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem as source. In addition, it is worth noting that the veneration of the Virgin is highlighted in the bema depicting the Theotokos and the four Mariological prefigurations. Furthermore, the large Mariological cycle in the naos is the most extensive cycle of the life of the Virgin in any Georgian church, thus emphasizing the extraordinary local cult of the Virgin. According to literary tradition, the country was under the protection of the Mother of God. The development of these iconographical themes reflects the desire to insist on the role of Mary which was known from the liturgy. The compositions depicted in the church are characterized on the one hand by a strong interaction with the iconography known from Mount Athos, and on the other hand by a strong local preference. Both have liturgical relevance in common.

Finally, Irma Mamasakhlisi's contribution "The Last Judgment in Medieval Georgian Art (Tenth–Thirteenth Centuries)" shows the important place of the theme of the Last Judgment in Christian art, underlining the pertinence of Georgian painting in this respect.

Mamasakhlisi mainly focuses on the images from the tenth–thirteenth centuries which are particularly idiosyncratic. In the context of the Last Judgment, the themes of the Virgin, the Ancient of Days, and the Glorification of the Cross emerge and reflect current concepts of eschatology.

The most important result of the contributions briefly presented here is that the liturgical texts translated in the Ivron Monastery since the late tenth century were directly involved in principal changes to Georgian liturgical practices, namely the transition from the Jerusalemite Liturgical Rite to the Constantinopolitan one<sup>18</sup>. Here the key role played by monasticism in both appropriating and disseminating forms is particularly noteworthy. Consequently, parts of the architecture as well the iconographic peculiarities point to the liturgical reality. Medieval Georgian art comprises its own traditional understanding which was then being combined with and integrated into contemporary liturgies.

An impressive concluding example of this can be found in the Church of Ts'alenjikha. The depiction of the Anapeson, in a bad state of preservation at present, appears in the lunette above the door of the south wall [Fig. 2], which is an important passage<sup>19</sup>. It was the Constantinopolitan painter Manuel Eugenikos who was responsible for the execution of this painting, in Georgia, in the years 1384–1396. Serving as a visual equivalent for the contemporary rite of the *Epitaphios Threnos*, the iconographic topic was known in Georgia as well as in Byzantium<sup>20</sup>. Georgia is the only place where the picture replaces the Melismos in the lower register of the apse in two churches, which presupposes a profound liturgical conception<sup>21</sup>. This is the case in the Church of Transfiguration in Zarzma and in the Church of the Dormition in Mart'vili (second half of the fourteenth century)<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, one should speak less about medieval Georgian art as a simple adaptation of the Byzantine compositional and iconographic conventions. Rather, it should be presented as a rendering of currently relevant liturgical changes which, due to the constant exchange and dialogue, had similar approaches to those of the Byzantine Empire – it is a Byzantium without borders.

In various respects, the ongoing lack of knowledge about the rich Georgian material evidence constitutes a basic obstacle to our deeper understanding of many cultural phenomena whose importance goes far beyond their specific local manifestations. Consequently, the main objective of a new joint project between the University of Fribourg and the Centre for Early Medieval Studies at the Masaryk University in Brno is to investigate exchanges and interactions between medieval cultures of the Southern Caucasus as a place where cultures came together in constant dialogue<sup>23</sup>. The project will give a decisive impetus to an already important, but still largely marginalized region in the field of art history, to contribute to the protection of outstanding medieval monuments, and to promote an alternative perspective on European, Mediterranean, and West Asian cultural histories.

My deepest thanks go to my colleagues and co-editors Natalia Chitishvili and Thomas Kaffenberger for their support and friendly collaboration. We wish to thank Ivan Foletti for the inclusion of this volume in the *Convivium Supplementum* series; to Klára Doležalová we are deeply grateful for her tireless help. Furthermore we thank the University of Fribourg for the financial support and the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for the manifold collaborations.



2/ Manuel Eugenikos, Christ Anapeson, fresco painting,  
Ts'alenjikha Church, 1384–1396 (photo from around 1980)

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- 18 Enriko Gabidzashvili, *Dzveli kartuli mts'erlobis natargmni dzeglebi* [Translated works of ancient Georgian literature], vol. v: *Lit'urgika, Himmograpia* [Liturgy, hymnography], Tbilisi 2011.
- 19 Inga Lordkipanidzé, "Emmanuel dormant dans certaines peintures murales géorgiennes (xive–xvte s.)", in *Atti del primo simposio internazionale sull'arte georgiana (Bergamo, 28–30 giugno 1974)*, Milan 1977, pp. 175–180; Manuela Studer-Karlen, *Bild und Liturgie: Untersuchung zum Christus Anapeson*, (forthcoming).
- 20 The first appearance of Christ Anapeson at the Protaton on Mount Athos around 1300 is not a coincidence. It is directly connected with liturgical changes in the *Epitaphios Threnos* rite.
- 21 Tania Velmans, "Interférences sémantiques entre l'Amnos et d'autres images apparentées dans la peinture murale byzantin", in *Αρμός. Τιμητικός τόμος στον καθηγητή Ν. Κ. Μουτσόπουλο για τα 25 χρόνια πνευματικής του προσφοράς στο Πανεπιστήμιο*, Thessaloniki 1991, pp. 1905–1928.
- 22 Nino Chikhladze, "Mart'vilis ek'lesiis ts'sinaistoriisatvis" [On the prehistory of Mart'vili Church], *Spektri*, 1–II (2008), pp. 40–53; *eadem*, "Martvili Cathedral: Fragments of Murals in the Palaeologan Artistic Style", in *Georgian Art in the Context of European and Asian Cultures*, Proceedings of the Vakhtang Beridze First International Symposium of Georgian Culture (Georgia, 21–29 June 2008), Peter Skinner, Dimiti Tumanishvili, Anna Shanshiashvili eds, Tbilisi 2009, pp. 277–280.
- 23 "Cultural Interactions in the Medieval Subcaucasian Region: Historiographical and Art-Historical Perspectives" (GF21-01706L). The project, starting in January 2021, is supported by the Swiss National Foundation as well as the Czech Science Foundation. The collaborators are Michele Bacci, Ivan Foletti, Ruben Campini, Natalia Chitishvili, Klára Doležalová, Alžběta Filipová, Gohar Grigoryan Savary, Veronika Hermanová, Thomas Kaffenberger, Katarína Kravčíková, Annalisa Moraschi, Adrien Palladino, and Manuela Studer-Karlen.