

Zaza Skhirtladze

Early Medieval Georgian Monumental Painting: Establishment of the System of Church Decoration*

Notes concerning the peculiarities of the system of wall painting in Early Medieval Georgia are generally limited to the repetition of the statement that the incomplete, laconic decorations of the earlier period are replaced by complete decorations by the late 10th and early 11th cc.¹ This is partly due to the scanty and fragmentary nature of the surviving material and partly to the fact that it has not yet been fully studied. Individual notes concerning the problem are found in various publications, serving as a general indication of the character and peculiarities of the decorative system of Georgian murals in different chronological periods.² At the same time, the compilation of the whole material available at present and its examination in this respect reveals a distinct picture of the common process of establishment of the decorative system, testifying to the existence of a certain regularity and evolution of Early Medieval Georgian monumental art.

The oldest Christian monuments of mural painting, known today in Georgia, are ascribed to the 6th-7th cc. The decorative system of these murals, preconditioned to a great extent by the character of the contemporary national architecture, namely the interior of the churches, is distinguished by its laconism and

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1 T. B. Virsaladze, *Osnovnye etapy razvitiia gruzinskoi srednevekovoi monumentalnoi živopisi* [The Main Stages of the Development of the Medieval Georgian Mural Painting], II International Symposium on Georgian Art, Tbilisi, 1977, p. 6-7.

2 R. O. Šmerling was the first to pay attention to the existence of incomplete decorations in the early medieval Georgia, though she considered only Ateni and Erc'o murals, concerning the suppositional date of these monuments; see: R. O. Šmerling, *Sak'art'velos udzveles p'reskul mokhatulobata dat'arigebis sakit'khist'vis* [To the Dating of the Earliest Murals of Georgia]. Abstracts of the 8th Scientific Session of the Institute of History of Georgian Art, Tbilisi, 1954, p. 9-11; a remarkable material is collected in a small, but significant article by T. S. Ševjakova – *K voprosu o vzniknovenii i kharaktere freskovykh rospisei v Gruzii VIII-X vv.* [On the Problem of the Origin and the Character of Fresco painting in Georgia in the 8th-9th cc.], *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences (Series of History, Archaeology and Art)*, 1962, N1, p. 256-264; separate remarks on this problem see also in: T. S. Ševjakova, *Monumentalnaia živopis' rannego srednevekovja Gruzii* [Early Medieval Georgian Monumental Painting], Tbilisi, 1983; A. I. Volskaia, *Peintures anciennes de Garedja*, IV International Symposium on Georgian Art, Tbilisi, 1983.

tectonic character. Mosaic or fresco decoration, along with the sculptures of the capitals, organically fits the strict, laconic style of the earlier architecture. Besides, "the painting marks out only some parts of the church (namely the chancel), while the rest of the interior, generally adorned with excellent stone facing or more rarely covered with plain plaster, is left unpainted".³

In the small church of Jvari, built by Guaram Erismtavari (545-586) in the second half of the 6th c. on a mountain opposite Mtskheta, next to the Cross erected at the time of the conversion of the country, mosaics adorned the apse and its triumphal arch only. Insignificant remnants of the mosaic – golden, red, green, yellowish, blue, black and white tesserae – were collected as early as the first decade of this century, while fragments of the mosaic decoration were still preserved in the north corner of the triumphal arch up to the 1940s.⁴

Despite the scant evidence concerning the character of the mosaic, the assumption that a Cross inscribed in a frame existed here,⁵ similar to the 6th-8th cc. Syrian tradition seems quite acceptable, taking into consideration not only the place where the church was built, but also the great significance which the image of the Cross had acquired in the process of converting Georgia.⁶ In addition, the close, versatile contacts, traceable between the Georgian and Syro-Palestinian Churches throughout the Early Middle Ages,⁷ should definitely be taken into account. At any rate, a laconic aniconic decoration seems more probable for the chancel mosaics of the minor church of Jvari; indeed, the small dimensions of the conch actually preclude the existence of any kind of figurative composition. The existence of a mosaic composition has been assumed in the

3 T. B. Visaladze, op. cit., p. 2.

4 G. N. Tschubinaschvili, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der georgischen Baukunst*, Bd. I, Hf. 1: *Die kleine Kirche des Heiligen Kreuzes von Mzcheta*, Tiflis, 1921, S. 17-19, Taf. III; Id., *Pamjatniki tipa Džvari* [Monuments of the Type of Džvari], Tbilisi, 1948, p. 12.

5 G. Hermann, *Programme der georgischen Monumentalmalerei aus dem 6. bis 11. Jahrhundert*, *Acta Historiae Artium*, t. XVI, fasc. 1-2, 1970, S. 45.

6 G. N. Čubinašvili, *Pamjatniki tipa Džvari*, p. 18ff; J. Lafontaine-Dosogne points out that "La Glorification de la croix est attestée avec une telle constance dans des monuments géorgiens fort éloignés les uns des autres que ce thème peut-être considéré comme typiquement géorgien. Il faut sans doute en trouver l'origine dans le culte rendu à la croix que Ste Nino et le roi Mirian auraient plantée sur le rocher de Mckheta et que avait ensuite donnée lieu à l'érection de l'église de Dzvari, c'est-à-dire la croix, plutôt qu'à une tradition hiérusolymitaine" (J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Recherches sur les programmes décoratifs des églises médiévales en Géorgie en relation avec la peinture monumentale byzantine*, II International Symposium on Georgian Art, Tbilisi, 1977, p. 6).

7 K. S. Kekelidze, *Ierusalimskij Kanonar VII veka* [Jerusalem Lectionary of the 7th c.], Tbilisi, 1912, p. 33-39; Id., *K voprosu ob ierusalimskom proiskhoždenii gruzinskoi Cerkvi* [To the Jerusalem Origin of the Georgian Church], in: Id., *Etiudebi dzveli k'art'uli literaturis istoriidan* [Studies in Medieval Georgian Literature], VII, Tbilisi, 1957, p. 358-363. N. and M. Thierry explain the popularity of the Cross in Georgia by a close connection between Jerusalem and Georgian Churches. Cf.: N. et M. Thierry, *Peintures du Xe siècle en Géorgie Méridionale et leurs rapports avec la peinture byzantine d'Asie Mineure*, *Cahiers Archéologiques*, XXIV, 1975, p. 94.

chancel of the great church of Jvari (586/87-604/5),⁸ though nothing substantial in this respect is left there.

If now certain suppositions are to be made, concerning the churches of Jvari, the mosaic and fresco fragments preserved in C'romi, which were executed simultaneously with the erection of the church in the third decade of the 7th c., provide quite a clear picture of the character of the decorative system of mural painting in this period.

In C'romi, painting adorned the upper half of the chancel only. In the remaining, lower part of the apse, the plaster was left untouched. It was not even covered with paint and its white colour, no doubt, greatly contributed to the special accentuation of the mural decoration of the conch and the upper part of the chancel.

Examination of the fresco fragments preserved below the conch mosaics, has made it possible to shed light on the questions concerning the iconographic scheme and the programme of the composition placed in the chancel, which have been debated by scholars for some time.⁹ It has been ascertained that the conch mosaic (depicting Christ, standing on a dais, and Angels), and the fresco frieze below it (with the figures of the Virgin Orans and Apostles) form a single, integral composition, in its concept (fig. 1). It reflects a Theophanic idea and is connected with the Ascension in its scheme.¹⁰ The distribution of this kind of apse composition in two registers is characteristic of monuments in various parts of the Christian Orient for quite a long time, beginning from early period.¹¹

In C'romi the upper part of the apse window is painted as well. The window arch is adorned with an equal-armed Cross in a medallion, flanked by medallions bearing the half-figures of St Martyrs with Crosses in their right hand.

According to the concept of the chancel composition and taking into the consideration its separate iconographic elements, it may be assumed that, based on

8 G. N. Čubinašvili, *Pamjatniki tipa Džvari*, p. 41, 90. A. Natroev states the existence of the painting with the Deesis in the chancel of the church (A. Natroev, *Mekhet i ego sobor Sveti-Ckhoveli* [Mekhet and its Cathedral Svetitskhoveli], Tbilisi, 1900, p. 20]. These seem to be murals of a relatively later date, though not later than 14th c., as far as the contemporary graffiti were found on the plaster (G. N. Čubinašvili, *op. cit.* p. 37).

9 Ja. Smirnov, who had dedicated a special work to C'romi mosaics, thought that the apse conch bore "Christus legem dat". Cf.: Ja. Smirnov, *Cromskaja mozaika* [The Mosaics of C'romi], Tbilisi, 1935. This viewpoint was shared by a number of scholars (cf. Š. Ja. Amiranašvili, *Istorija gruzinskoj monumentalnoj živopisi* [The History of Georgian Monumental Painting], Tbilisi, 1957, p. 23-29; Id., *K'art'uli khelovnebis istoria* [the History of Georgian Art], Tbilisi, 1963, p. 141-142; T. B. Virsaladze, *op. cit.*, p. 2-3; T. S. Ševjakova, *Monumental'naja živopis*, p. 5-6; G. Hermann, *op. cit.*, p. 49-52; N. Thierry, *La peinture médiévale géorgienne, XX corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina*, Ravenna, 1973, p. 140).

10 Z. Skhirtladze, *A propos du décor absidal de C'romi*, *Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes*, N6-7, 1990-1991, p. 163-183.

11 Cf. Ch. Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden, 1960, p. 100-104.

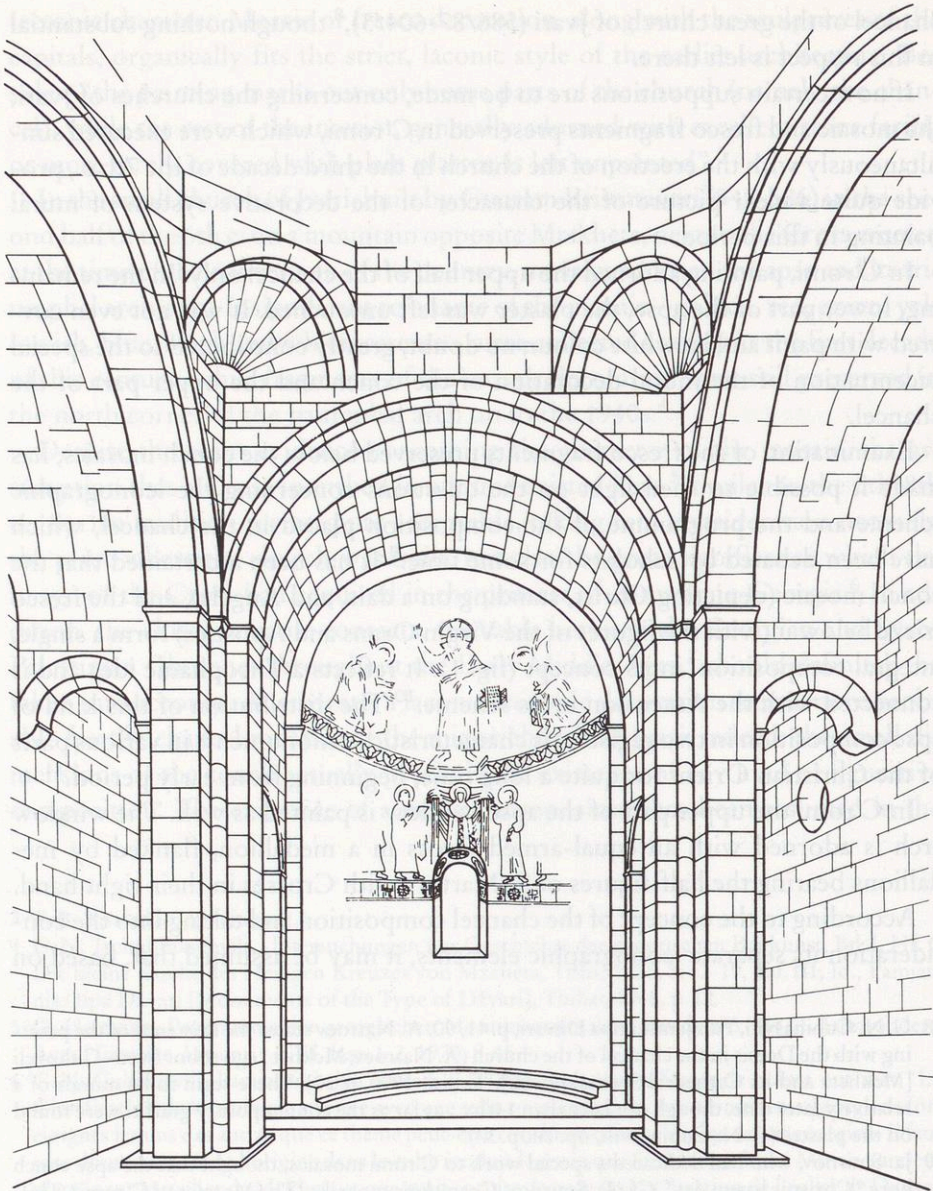


Fig. 1: C'romi. Interior. Looking east.

the tradition widespread in Early Medieval Georgia, a relief Cross adorned the dome of C'romi (no longer extant) – as was the case of Jvari, Ateni (7th c.), Samc'evrisi (7th c.), Q'ančaeti (8th c.), Telovani (8th c.) and Sabereebi (9th–10th cc.). This image, together with the apse decoration, revealed the idea of the eschatological coming of the Lord, as cosmic triumpher.¹²

The fragments of the sanctuary composition of C'romi church enable us to propose that the mosaic and fresco, adorning the apse, organically fitted the church interior. The air of grandeur, imparted by the architect to the building, was greatly enhanced by the fascinating composition adorning the chancel which had occupied its upper part, distinctly marking it out in the interior of the church.

Due to the mode of chancel decoration (combination of mosaics and frescoes) C'romi stands somewhat apart from other Early Christian and Byzantine monuments; this should not, naturally, be comprehended in the direct context of a complete lack of such monuments in the Christian Orient, though the material known today greatly differs in its character, which gives no possibility of drawing any conclusions with definite certainty.¹³ A certain colouristic unity of the

12 G. Hermann, *op. cit.*, p.51. According to the iconography of C'romi apse decoration it is hard to share the opinion of the author that the dome sphere sheltered an Ascension scene.

13 Indeed, in connection with C'romi of certain interest should be the apse decoration of the main church of St Catherine's monastery on Mount Sinai, where beneath the conch mosaic two Old Testament scenes connected with the sacrificial theme were discovered (K. Weitzmann, *The Jephthah Panel in the Bema of the Church of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai*, in: *Id.*, *Studies in the Arts of Sinai*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1982, p.341–352, fig.3–6). At the same time, it should also be taken into account that the compositions are executed in encaustic technique on the marble faced walls, i.e. they are made not simultaneously with the conch mosaic but somewhat later. Besides, the compositions are represented separately, as a kind of painted icons, being not an immediate part of the conch composition. Likewise, a case somewhat different from C'romi can be seen in Thessaloniki church of St Sophia. It is difficult to define the interrelation of the three layers of mosaics (8th, 9th, and 13th cc.), preserved in different parts of the church, and the 8th c. frescoes in the forechoir, namely the flourished crosses with the mention of Sts Constantine and Helen (R. Cormack, *The Apse Mosaics of S. Sophia at Thessaloniki*, *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας*, Περ. Δ, Τομ. I (1980–1981), p.114–126). As for the decoration of Thessaloniki church of St George, here the mosaic and fresco not only belong to different periods (respectively to 5th and 9th cc.), but adorn different parts of the building, namely the dome and chancel (specially on this see M. Panayotidi, *Les monuments de Grece depuis la fin de la crise iconoclaste jusqu'à l'an mille*, Paris, 1969, p.8–13). Analogous is the case in Thessaloniki church of St David, where besides the well-known 5th c. conch mosaic, the fragments of the murals executed ca. 1200 are preserved in the south and north crossarms (D. Mouriki, *Stylistic Trends in Monumental Painting of Greece During the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 34–35, 1982, p.119–123, fig.88–91, 93–96; on an earlier dating of the frescoes cf: E. Τσιγαρίδας, *Οι τοιχογραφίες της μονῆς Λατόμου Θεσσαλονίκης και η Βυζαντινὴ ζωγραφικὴ του 12ου αἰώνα*, *Θεσσαλονίκη*, 1986, p.33ff). The rest of the material known today can, tentatively, be divided into two groups. First of all these are the monuments (St Luke of Phokide, Chora monastery and St Mary Pammakaristos at Constantinople) where mosaic and fresco decorations adorn architecturally separated, different parts of the church (Th. Chatzidakis, *Questions sur la chronologie des peintures murales de Hosios-Loukas*, *Actes du XVe Congrès International d'études byzantines*, t.II-A, Athènes, 1981, p.143–162; *Id.*, *Les*

mosaics and frescoes and their organic interrelation with the whole interior of the church has been achieved, preconditioning an artistic effect of the juxtaposition of the perfectly hewn stone on the one hand, and a flickering mosaic and relatively dim fresco on the other. All this, as well as the monumental and representative character of the composition, reveal the creative power and great compositional skill of a progressive craftsman of the epoch.

The above-mentioned tendency continues its existence in the mural painting of the following period, 8th-10th cc. In some of the monuments of this period, the painting is still left within the limits of the sanctuary. Indeed, sometimes the apse programme is limited to the conch composition only (C'amebuli,¹⁴ Čvabi-

peintures murales de Hosios Loukas, Athènes, 1982; P. A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1, New York, 1966; H. Belting, C. Mango, D. Mouriki, *The Mosaics and Frescoes of St Mary Pammakaristos at Istanbul*, Washington, 1978). In other cases the mosaic and fresco fragments were discovered simultaneously during the archaeological excavations (St Ephemias and Kalenderhane in Constantinople), and that is why it is possible to determine their original place and their interrelation. An interesting example, however a bit later in date, is the history of the creation of the decoration of Thessaloniki church of St Apostles. The work, begun in 1310 by the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Nikon, ceased after his resignation (the mosaics were executed in the dome only). In the posterior period the main part of the church was adorned with frescoes, though the conch was left undecorated, maybe due to the lack of means of purchasing the precious mosaics (S. Kissas, *La datation des fresques des Saint-Apôtres à Thessalonique*, *Zograf*, N 7, 1977, p. 52-57; new arguments on the chronology of the monument see: Ch. Stephan, *Ein byzantinisches Bildensemble. Die Mosaiken und Fresken der Apostelkirche zu Thessaloniki*, Baden-Baden, 1986, S. 9-25). This case, though for centuries separated from the epoch of the creation of the C'romi apse composition, must by all means be taken into consideration; it could reflect a certain age-old practice connected with various possibilities of creation of mosaic and fresco decorations. The same should be said of the late, 13th c. decoration of Porta Panagia church in Thessalie, where large mosaic images of Christ and the Virgin with the Child were executed on the chancel barrier only, simultaneously with the frescoes (Α. Ὁρλανδος, Ἡ Πόρτα-Παναγία τῆς Θεσσαλίας, *Αρχαίον τῶν βυζαντινῶν μνημείων τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, Τόμος Α, 1935, σελ. 26-40, εικ. 14, 20, 21 and also with the corrected date of the painting – Α. Τσιτουρίδου, *Les fresques du XIIIe siècle dans l'église de la Porta-Panagia en Thessalie*, *Actes du XVe Congrès International d'études byzantines*, t. II-B, Athènes, 1981, p. 863-878). At the same time, it seems that with certain confidence one can speak of the existence of an artistic tradition of simultaneous use of mosaic and fresco for the decoration of some parts of the church in Byzantium, as far as it is revealed in the 11th c. decoration of St Sophia church in Kiev (V. Lazarev, *Storia de l'arte bizantina*, Torino, 1967, p. 152ff). To a certain extent Georgian material also seems noteworthy, though neither it gives a firm foundation in this respect – the murals, executed below the 12th c. mosaic in the apse conch of the main church of Gelati monastery were repainted in the 16th c. and the date of their original execution is still left unknown (R. Mepisašvili, T. Virsaladze, *Gelati*, Tbilisi, 1986, p. 14-15, fig. 66-67). The same should be said of the apse decoration in Ackuri church which, according to the 19th c. brief descriptions, was adorned with both mosaic and fresco images of the Saviour, the Virgin, Apostles and Church Fathers. Due to the complete effacement of the decoration the date of the execution as well as the chronology of these images are unknown (Cf. N. Pokrovskij, *Kratkij očerk cerkovno-istoričeskoj žizni pravoslavnoj Gruzii* [A Brief Essay on the Ecclesiastical and Historical Life of Georgia], *Dukhovnij vestnik gruzinskogo ekzarkhata*, 1903, N19, p. 37).

- 14 G. Gaprindašvili, 1089 c'lis c'arc'era mic'isdzvis šesakheb garejis c'amebulis udabnos khari-tonis kuabidan [The 1089 Inscription on the Earthquake from Khariton Cave in the C'amebuli Monastery at Gareja Desert], *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences* (Series of His-

ani,¹⁵ Pkhotreri¹⁶ – all ascribed to the 10th c.) (fig. 2), while in other cases, murals cover the greater part of the apse (Telovani¹⁷ – 8th-9th cc., Nezguni¹⁸ – 9th-10th cc.). The iconography of the apse composition is distinguished by a certain stability in the selection of the theme: the Theophanic composition of Christ in Majesty, which on the whole follows the schemes of the various versions of old East Christian murals. The laconic character of the decoration had preconditioned special saturation of the compositions as far as their concept is concerned: most of them, alongside a relatively small number of images, are distinguished by a complicated conceptual context, combining separate accents within the limits of the general idea.

tory, *Archaeology and Art*), 1976, N2, p. 178, fig. 2; A. I. Volskaia, op. cit., p. 5; Id., *Rospisi peščernykh monasteyri David Garedji*, in: "Garedji", Tbilisi, 1988, p. 138-139.

- 15 R. O. Šmerling was the first to determine the date of execution of the painting to the 10th c. (cf. her – *Malye formy v arkhitekture srednevekovoi Gruzii* [Minor Forms in the Architecture of Medieval Georgia], Tbilisi, 1962, p. 234). In the first publication of the church donor inscriptions the date of execution of the murals was determined to the reign of king Bagrat IV (1027-1072) (V. Silogava, *Ktitort'a preskuli c'arc'erebi Svanet'si* [Dedicatory Inscriptions in Svaneti], in: "Svaneti", vol. I, Tbilisi, 1977, p. 46-47. This dating was immediately disputed and the execution of the painting in the last quarter of the 10th c. was proved (Z. Aleksidze, *Čvabianis mackhovris eklesiis preskuli c'arc'erebis t'arigisatvis* [Concerning the Date of the Mural Inscriptions of the Church of the Saviour in Čvabiani], *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences (Series of History, Archaeology and Art)*, 1978, N3, p. 175-176). On this highly artistic, not properly studied monument see also: T. Velmans, *L'Image de la Deisis dans les églises de Géorgie*, *Cahiers Archéologiques*, XXIX, 1980-1981, p. 75; T. S. Ševjakova, *Monumentaljnaja živopis*, scheme on p. 16; N. A. Aladašvili, *Altarkonchen-Kompositionen in den Kirchen Svane-tiens*, IV International Symposium on Georgian Art, Tbilisi, 1983, p. 4-5; N. A. Aladašvili, G. V. Alibegašvili, A. I. Volskaia, *Živopisnaja škola Svaneti* [School of Mural Painting of Svaneti], Tbilisi, 1983, p. 27-29.
- 16 In Pkhotreri murals the Archangel figures, traditional for the extended version of Deesis, are moved to the east sections of the vault next to the apse (cf.: N. Aladašvili, op. cit., p. 5). The monument has not yet been the subject of special study; certain notes can be found in: R. O. Šmerling, *Malye formy*, p. 260; N. Thierry, *Notes d'un voyage archéologique en Haute-Svanetie*, *Bedi Kartlisa*, *Revue de kartvélogie*, vol. XXXVIII, 1979, p. 148; T. Velmans, *Deisis*, p. 71, 76.
- 17 W. Cincadze, *Telovani's Jvarpatiosani* [The Church of Jvarpatiosani in Telovani], *Ars Georgica*, 5, 1959, p. 73-89; T. S. Ševjakova, *Data rospisi pervogo sloja khrama Telovani* [The Date of the Original Painting of Telovaini Church], *Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR*, t. XXXIV, N1, 1964, p. 235-242; the results of the research work undertaken during the restoration of the monument were presented my read at the VI International Symposium on Georgian Art. Cf. also – Z. Skhirtladze, *The Mandyion in Medieval Georgian Literature and Art*, 16th Annual Byzantine Studies Conference, Abstracts of Papers, Baltimore, 1990, p. 22.
- 18 T. S. Ševjakova, *K datirovke rospisi cerkvi Nesgun* [Concerning the Date of Nesgun Church Wall Painting], *Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR*, t. XXIII, N1, 1959, p. 115-120 (the murals are dated to the first half of the 10th c.).

The original painting of Nezguni church, based on an inexact interpretation of the dedicatory inscription placed at the lower edge of the apse composition, was dated to the late 11th-12th cc. (V. Silogava, op. cit., p. 50-52). This dating was lately revised and changed by the author (*Svanetis c'erilobiti dzeglebi* [Literary Monuments of Svaneti], II, Tbilisi, 1988, p. 67-68, fig. 4); cf. T. S. Ševjakova, *Monumentaljnaj živopis*, p. 17-18; N. A. Aladašvili, G. V. Alibegašvili, A. I. Volskaja, op. cit., p. 13-16.

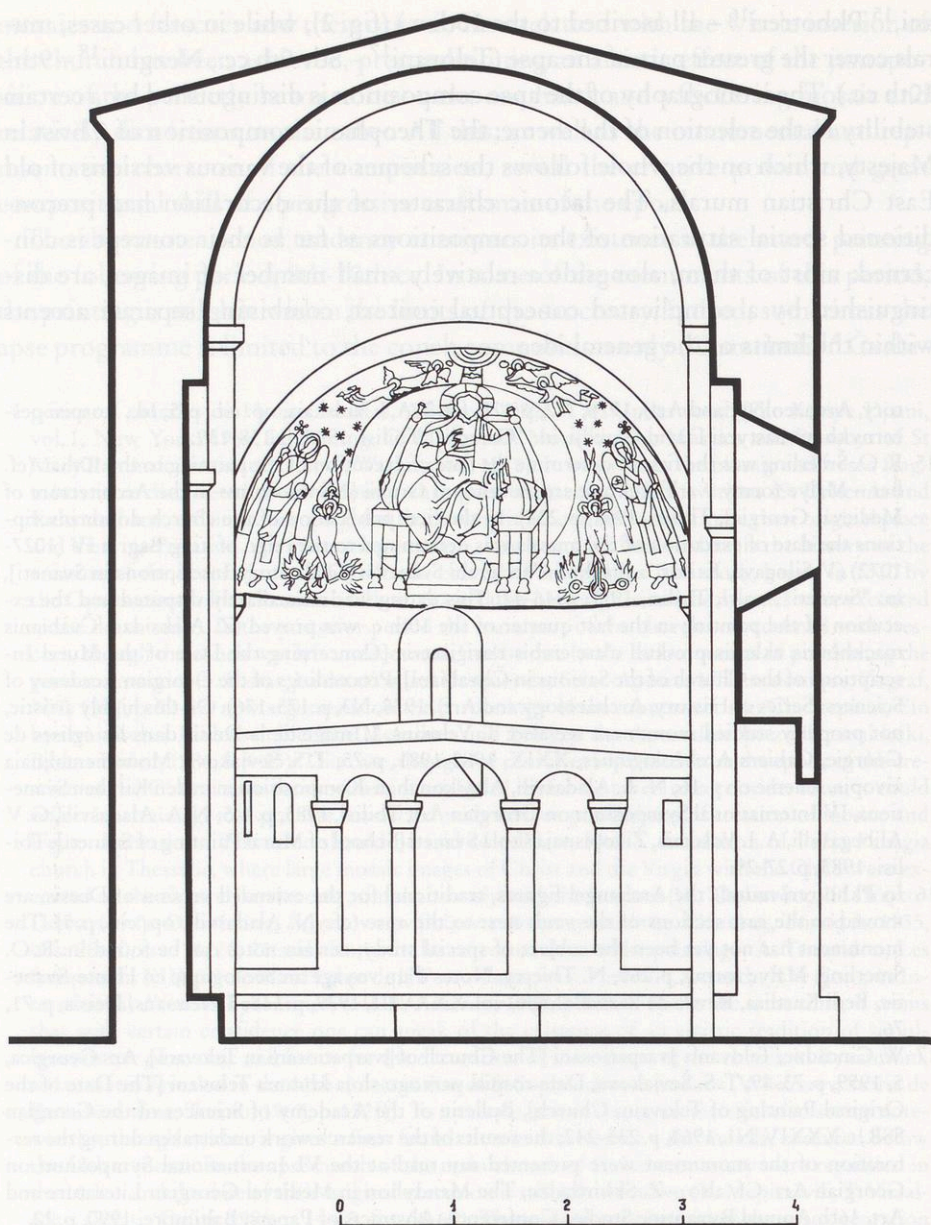


Fig. 2: Čvabiani. Transverse section looking east.

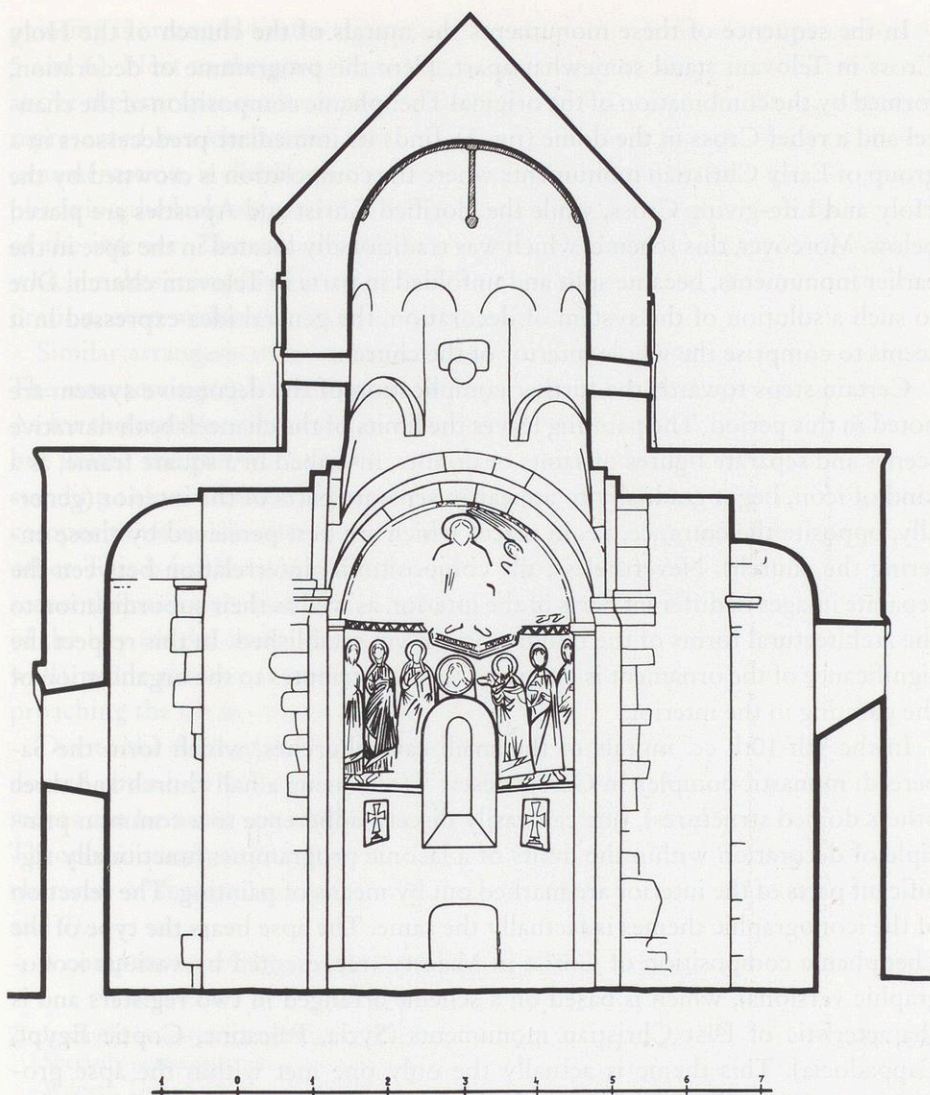


Fig. 3: Telovani. Transverse section looking east.

In the sequence of these monuments the murals of the church of the Holy Cross in Telovani stand somewhat apart. Here the programme of decoration, formed by the combination of the original Theophanic composition of the chancel and a relief Cross in the dome (fig. 3), finds its immediate predecessors in a group of Early Christian monuments where the composition is crowned by the Holy and Life-giving Cross, while the glorified Christ and Apostles are placed below. Moreover, this scheme, which was traditionally located in the apse in the earlier monuments, became split and unfolded in parts in Telovani church. Due to such a solution of the system of decoration, the general idea expressed in it seems to comprise the whole interior of the church.

Certain steps towards the further complication of the decorative system are noted in this period. The painting leaves the limits of the chancel: both narrative scenes and separate figures of saints or donors, inscribed in a square frame, as a kind of icon, begin gradually to appear in separate parts of the interior (generally, opposite the entrance, i.e. in places which are best perceived by those entering the church). Nevertheless, the compositional interrelation between the separate images in different parts of the interior, as well as their subordination to the architectural forms of the building is not yet established. In this respect the significance of the ornament is increased, as it contributes to the organization of the painting in the interior.

In the 9th-10th cc. murals of the small cave churches, which form the Sabereedi monastic complex in Gareja desert¹⁹ (one being a hall church and three others domed structures), one can easily discern adherence to a common principle of decoration within the limits of a laconic programme; functionally significant parts of the interior are marked out by means of painting. The selection of the iconographic themes is factually the same. The apse bears the type of the Theophanic composition of Christ in Majesty (represented by various iconographic versions), which is based on a scheme arranged in two registers and is characteristic of East Christian monuments (Syria, Palestine, Coptic Egypt, Cappadocia). This theme is actually the only one met within the apse programmes of Georgian murals up to the late 10th c. (though it must be noted, that in the murals of the lateral chapel of Sabereebi, the theme of the Glorification of the Virgin, which later on was to become one of the main apse compositions of Georgian churches, including those of Gareja as well, is found as early as the 9th-10th cc.). The Crucifixion, or a heraldic composition depicting the Warrior Saints, St George and St Theodore on horseback, is placed on the north wall.

In the 9th c. murals of the hall church N5 in the rock-cut complex, the apse

19 On the painting of the complex see: A. I. Volskaja, *Peintures anciennes de Garedja*, p. 3-13; T. S. Ševjakova, *Monumental'naja živopis*, p. 9-16; Z. Skhirtladze, *Sabereebis p'reskuli c'arc'erebi* [The Mural Inscriptions of Sabereebi], Tbilisi, 1985; G. Gaprindašvili, *Gareji*, Tbilisi, 1987.

painting is arranged in two registers, being subjected to the architecture (figs. 4, 5 and 6). Next to the apse, in the upper part of a blind arch in the north wall, above the entrance to the annex, a composition, depicting two Warrior Saints is represented as a kind of big "icon".²⁰ The scene, framed by a simple geometric ornamentation, is distributed unevenly on the walls of the bay, once more emphasizing the lack of interrelation between the painting and architectural forms of the interior. The scene is perceived independently from the apse painting, which makes it impossible to speak of a unity between the two parts of the decoration, even within the limits of an incomplete system.

Similar arrangement is found in the next, N6 domed church of the complex. The same iconographic version of the Theophany had been chosen for the apse. As for the north wall, it was also adorned by the same "icon"-like composition, but unlike the previous church, here the Crucifixion was depicted. Notwithstanding a close conceptual interrelation of these two parts of the decoration, the compositions in the apse and on the north wall still remain unrelated to each other. This is further emphasized by the unusual disposition of the Crucifixion scene: the main part of this oblonged composition is depicted on the north wall of the bay (at the same time, its right edge does not reach the west part of the wall), while the rest is unfolded on the east wall of the bay, immediately approaching the Orans figure of a donor (fig. 7).

Due to the damaged state of the painting of the late 9th c. murals in the small domed church of St Dodo rock-cut monastery in Gareja²¹ only general statements can be made concerning its decorative system. A peculiar version of the Theophanic composition (the so-called Liturgical Maestas) had determined the character of the apse painting, where murals adorn the apse conch only (figs. 8 and 9).

A comparison of the old sketches and descriptions, made before the painting

20 It should be noted that similar examples are found in the mural painting for quite a long spell. Specially noteworthy among them could have been considered Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome (J. Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert*, Bd. IV, Freiburg, 1917, Taf. 159, 160, 163, 167, 168, 179-180, 196), Panagia Drosiani on Naxos (N. Δρανδάκης, *Οι παλαιοχριστιανικές τοιχογραφίες στη Δροσιανή της Νάξου*, Αθήνα, 1988, εικ. 7, 9-11, 14), St Demetrios in Thessaloniki (Γ. και Μ. Σοτηρίου, *Ἡ βασιλική τοῦ Ἀγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης*, Αθήνα, 1952, I, σελ. 187-99, II, πιν. 60-71), chapelle N4 of Zelve, Ilanli Kilise and St Barbre of Göreme in Cappadoce (C. Jolivet-Levy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l'abside et de ses abords*, Paris, 1991, pl. 18; M. Restle, *Die byzantinische Wandmalerei in Kleinasien*, Bd. II, Recklinghausen, 1967, Abb. 245; N. Thierry, *L'église Saint-Barbre*, *Dossiers d'histoire et archéologie*, N121, 1987, p. 56-58), as well as Faras cathedral, in connection with which K. Weitzmann remarked that the examples of the icon painting served as models for this kind of images; this viewpoint is most likely to be extended on other cases as well (K. Weitzmann, *Some Remarks on the Sources of the Fresco Painting of the Cathedral of Faras*, in: "Kunst und Geschichte Nubiens in christlicher Zeit", Recklinghausen, 1970, p. 335-339).

21 Š. Ja. Amiranašvili, *Istoria*, p. 30-35.



Fig. 4: Sabereebi. N5 church. The apse wall painting.



Fig. 5: Sabereebi. N5 church. The apse. South wall.

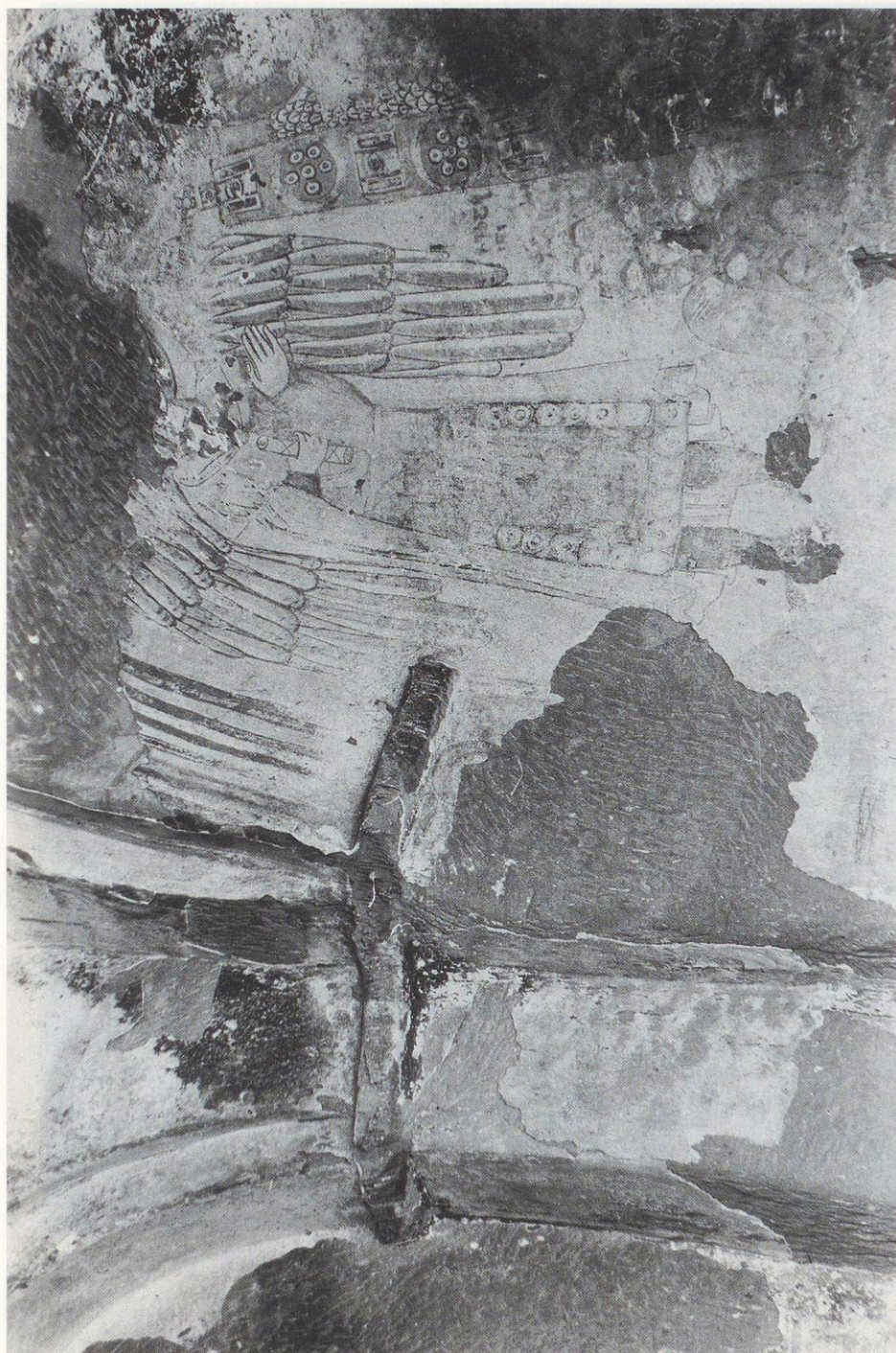


Fig. 6: Sabereebi. N5 church. The apse. North wall.

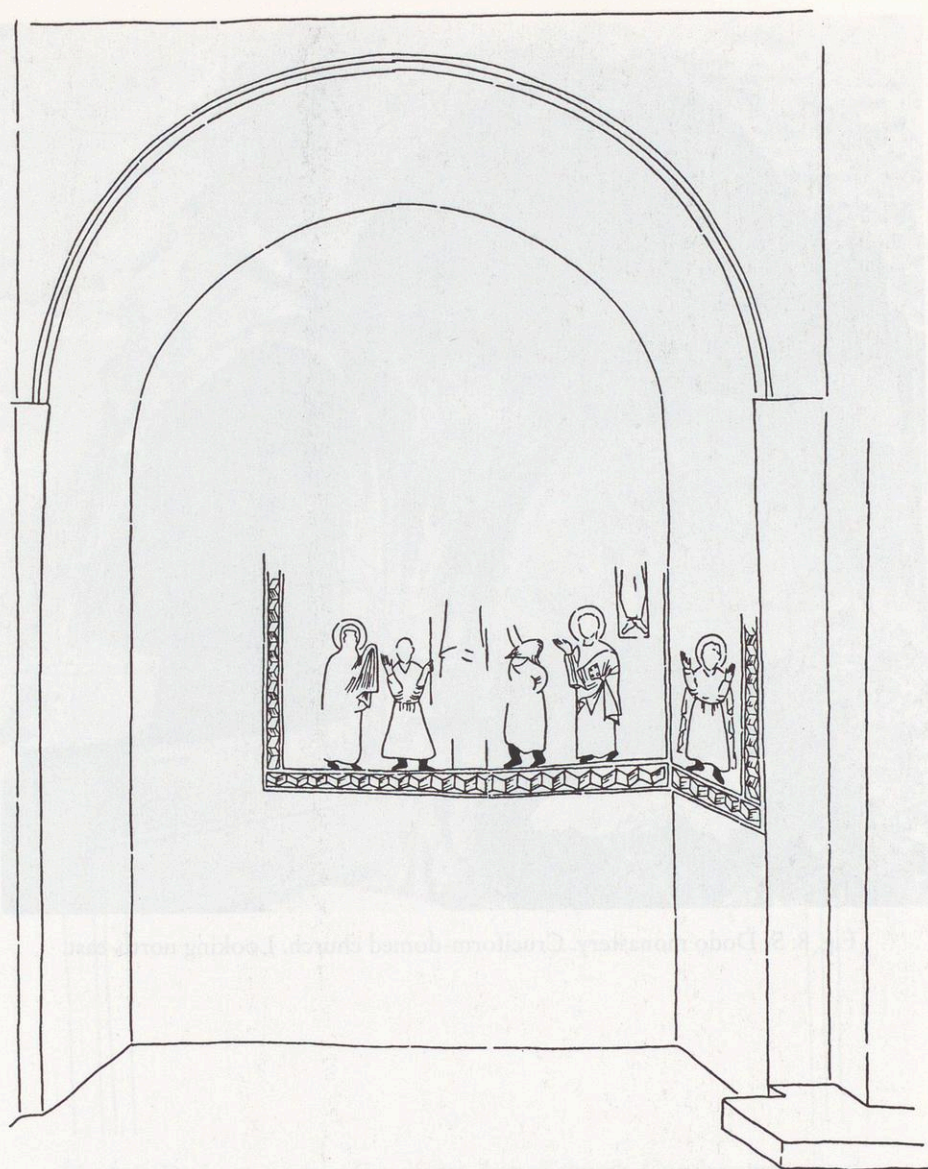


Fig. 7: Sabereebi. N6 church. North crossarm. Crucifixion and the donor portrait.

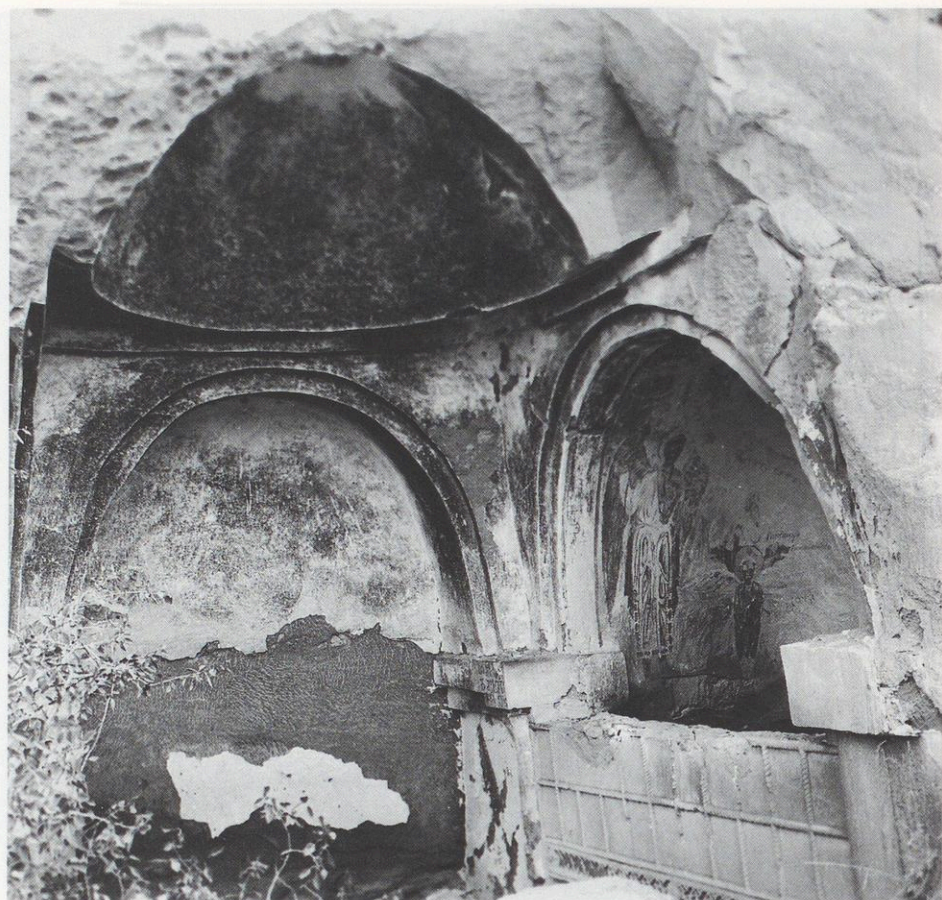


Fig. 8: St Dodo monastery. Cruciform-domed church. Looking north-east.



Fig. 9: St Dodo monastery. Cruciform-domed church. Conch composition.

had suffered serious damage, make it possible to conclude that, alongside the apse conch, the north bay was also partially painted, depicting three Warrior Saints on its north wall.²² Thus, we are most probably dealing with the same stage of the development of the system of decoration which is reflected in the murals of the Sabereebi complex considered above. It is now actually impossible to examine the particular peculiarities of the decorative system in this rock-cut church; the only essential observation acceptable in this respect, is that according to old graphical material, the level of the registers in the apse conch and the north bay did not coincide with each other. This, in its turn, must be indicative of the fact that the tendency towards the compositional unity of these two parts of the painting must not yet have been established.

A similar solution of the decorative system is characteristic of the original painting in the diaconicon of the main church of Udabno rock-cut monastery in Gareja, executed probably in the late 9th or 10th cc.²³ A Deesis composition, formed by three figures according to an archaic iconographic scheme (with the image of standing Christ), occupies only the central part of the wide and deep apse of the chapel. Quite far from it, in the upper part of the west portion of the north wall of the apse, the Ascension of Elijah is represented (fig. 10). The aisle of the diaconicon is partially painted as well. Six life-scenes of the founder of the Gareja monastic centre, St David Garejeli, are unfolded here on the west wall and the west part on the north wall (fig. 11). The cycle depicted in the upper part of the wall is arranged as a kind of painted band on each wall. This is emphasized by the fact, that the different episodes are not separated from each other by means of a frame (fig. 12). Notwithstanding such a solution, the cycle can hardly be perceived as a continuous frieze from the compositional point of view, as far as the sequence of episodes entering it is placed on different levels on the west and north walls. The ceiling of the diaconicon was partially painted as well, with tetramorphs, depicted in its west part. This points to a certain tendency towards

22 Z. Skhirtladze, On the System of the Mural Painting of the domed Church of Monastery of St Dodo in Gareja, *Bulletin of the Georgian Academy of Sciences*, t. 144, N1, 1991, p. 109ff.

23 Š. Amiranašvili was the first to propose the date of execution of the original painting in the diaconicon, which he determined to the 9th c. (Š. Ja. Amiranašvili, *Istoria*, p. 43-47). Lately this dating was shared by G. Abramišvili and S. Tomeković (cf. G. Abramišvili, *Davit garejeli's cikli kartul kedlis mkhatvrobaši* [The Cycle of David Garejeli in Georgian Monumental Painting], Tbilisi, 1972, p. 21-60; S. Tomeković, *Les particularités du cycle peint de la Vie de David Garejeli*, *Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes*, N2, 1986, p. 113-134). According to T. B. Virsaladze the murals of the central part and diaconicon of the church are executed at the same time – in the 10th-11th cc. (T. B. Virsaladze, *K voprosy o datirovke pervonachal'noi rospisi severnogo pridela glavnogo khrama monastyrja Udabno* [On the Problem of Dating the Original Frescoes of the Northern Annexe of the Main Church of Udabno Monastery], *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences*, 1968, N4, p. 238-239). The same date is found in: A. Vol'skaja, *Rospisi srednevekovykh trapeznykh Gruzii* [Mural Paintings of Medieval Refectories in Georgia], Tbilisi, 1974, p. 87-96.



Fig. 10: Udabno monastery. North annex of the main church. Looking east.

Fig. 10: North annex of the main church, looking east.



Fig. 11: Udabno monastery. North annex of the main church. Looking west.

time – in the 10th–11th cc. (L.N. Viorshadze, *K voprosu o datirovke perevachivshisya resplish zvestnykh predela glavnogo khrama monastyra Udabno* [On the Problem of Dating the Original Frescoes of the Northern Annex of the Main Church of Udabno Monastery], *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences*, 1963, N4, p.238–239). The same date is found in: A. Volokh, *A. Rasplish srednevekovykh mprernykh Cerkvi* [Medieval Paintings of Medieval Refectories in Georgia], *Iskustvo*, 1974, p.47–48.



Fig. 12: Udabno monastery. North annex of the main church.
The cycle of St David Gerejeli.

the further complication of the programme and system of decoration but at the same time, from the compositional point of view, the tetramorphs are perceived independently from the images of the apse and the near walls, thus placing the murals of this chapel among the monuments definitely inclined towards the establishment of complete decoration, though not yet fully completed in this respect.

Beginning from the 10th c. the principle of the arrangement of the painting is gradually altered in Georgia: the compositions, distributed in the various parts of the interior are now organically fitted to the architecture of the church. The dome is also adorned with frescoes, completing the painting. The significance of the ornamentation in the organization of the painted decoration is greatly enhanced.

Two churches at Sabereebi (N7 and N8), the murals of which were executed in the 10th c., reveal a somewhat different artistic principle of the arrangement of the system of decoration: the murals are again distributed in two registers in the apse, while the composition of the north bay covers the whole surface of the wall (thus, it is not marked out as a kind of painted icon). Ornamental bands follow the architectural articulation of the church interior; they run along the triumphal arches of the apse and the north bay, the portions of the adjacent walls, semicolumns etc. In its turn, the growing significance of the ornament, and the adoption of varied motifs from the Early Christian repertoire, increases the general decorative effect of the murals.

In the murals of church N7 of the rock-cut complex, a multipartite Crucifixion composition is depicted in the north bay, next to the Theophanic composition in the apse (figs. 13 and 14). It is spread all over the northern part of the interior and is subordinated to the articulation of the architecture. The complicated version of the composition, which abounds in Oriental elements, and a certain narrative tendency in the depiction of the details, makes it possible to suppose the use of a prototype coming from a Syro-Palestinian tradition. It is hard to say to what extent this tradition is reflected in the peculiarities of the church decoration, although it is significant that here one can definitely see a particular stage in the formation of complete decoration, when the dome is also included in the painting system: a relief Cross, serving as a kind of intermediate between the separate parts of the painting, was represented here, while the squinches, which have a complicated moulding, were covered with a linear decoration (fig. 15). The sight is caught by the abundance of ornamental motifs, which serve to the distinct articulation of the painting and its architectonic character.

The murals of the last church of Sabereebi, N8, which are absolutely distinguished by their original manner of execution, follow the decoration of the earliest church of the complex, N5, in the selection of the images and their ar-



Fig. 13: Sabereebi. N7 church. Apse wall painting.



Fig. 14: Sabereebi. N7 church. North crossarm. Crucifixion.

The murals of the last church of Sabereebi, N8, which are absolutely distinguished by their original manner of execution, follow the decoration of the earliest church of the complex, N5, in the selection of the images and their ar-

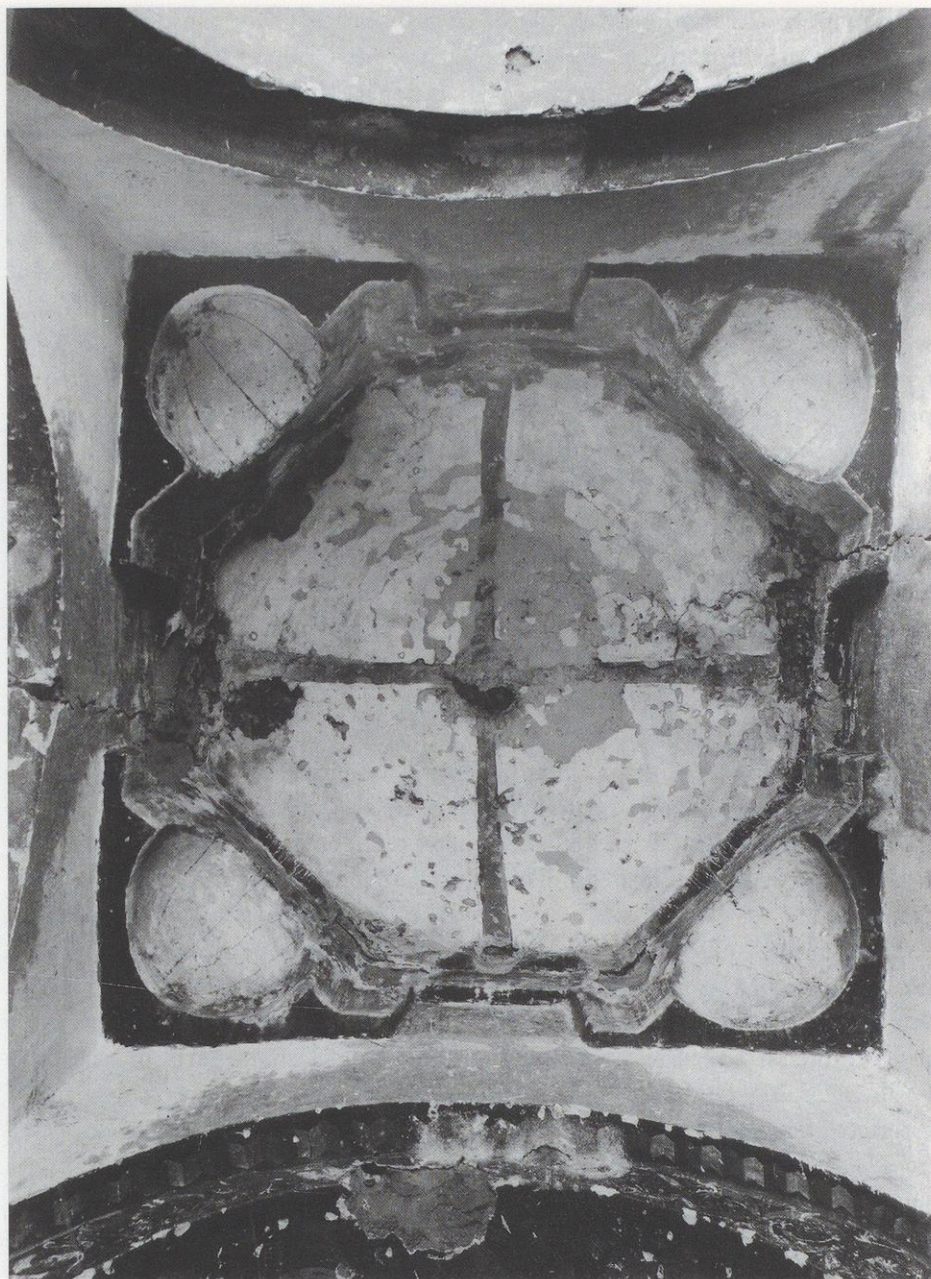


Fig. 15: Sabereebi. N7 church. Dome.

rangement in the interior: the apse bears a bizonate Theophanic composition (fig. 16), while the north bay has a heraldic representation of two Warrior Saints; figures of the Prophets flanking the medallion with the Cross are depicted in the arch of the same bay. The painted decoration of the church was terminated by the representation of a Cross in the dome, depicted against the background of starred sky (fig. 17). Thus, the dome decoration was not only marked by a relief Cross, but also became a homogeneous part of the painting, organically included in the system of decoration of the church. In this case, the tendency towards a more organic integration of the separate parts of the ensemble into a single whole, which is revealed in this, still incomplete, painting, as well as its closer interrelation with the architecture points to a further development of the system of painted decoration.

A logical result of the tendency, traced in the murals of the complex, is manifested by the frescoes in the southern chapel of the church, executed by the same craftsman. It should be noted beforehand, that this rock-cut chapel is distinguished by an unusual architectural solution: it is open on two sides, south and north, serving at the same time as a kind of entrance to the main church (fig. 18). Accordingly, the vault is thrown from east to west and the chancel is not higher than 160 cm. However, the most significant point is that the murals cover the whole interior of the chapel. Due to its small dimensions the painting comprises only the apse composition (the Glorification of the Virgin) (fig. 19), two scenes (the Annunciation and Visitation), and a donor figure. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the chapel decoration was created taking the practice of complete painting into account, as well as the general tendency to the gradual establishment of the decorative system, distinctly manifested in the murals of the same complex.

The painting of Dört Kilise, executed in the late 10th c. in the historical southern province of Georgia, Tao-Klarjeti,²⁴ has no rivals among the other known 9th-10th cc. Georgian monuments, as far as the arrangement of its iconographic programme is concerned. Frescoes adorned only certain parts of this large basilica (fig. 20). The murals are distributed in four registers in the chancel, in addition to the conch composition of Christ in Majesty. They contain the following images: a choir of hovering Angels with the Hetoimasia in the centre; a sequence of the Apostles with the Virgin and the Prodromos; images of the Prophets and Holy Bishops, arranged on both sides of the window, which is adorned by the personification of the Sion and the figures of Moses and Melchisedek; and finally, a series of feast cycle scenes, beginning with the Annunciation

24 E.S. Taqaišvili, *Arkheologičeskaja ekspeditsija 1917 goda v iužnye provintsii Gruzii* [The Archaeological Expedition of 1917 in the Southern provinces of Georgia], Tbilisi, 1952, p. 85-86; Š. Ja. Amiranašvili, *Istorija*, p. 105; N. et M. Thierry, *Peintures du Xe siècle*, p. 78-86, fig. 49.



Fig. 16: Sabereebi. N8 church. Looking east.



Fig. 17: Sabereebi. N8 church. The view of the dome.

sedek; and finally, a series of feast cycle scenes, beginning with the Annunciation

24. I. S. Tagašvili, *Archeologičeskaja ekspeditsija 1917 goda v severnuyu provinciju Gruzii* [The Archaeological Expedition of 1917 in the Southern province of Georgia], Tbilisi, 1952, p. 85–86; S. Ja. Amiranashvili, *Intoreja*, p. 100; N. et M. Tamar, *Palais des X^e siècles*, p. 78–86, fig. 49.



Fig. 18: Sabereebi. South chapel of N8 church. Looking north-east.

Fig. 30: Dār Kilisā. View of the right gate. © V. Khachatryan



Fig. 19: Saberebi. South chapel of N8 church. The apse wall painting.

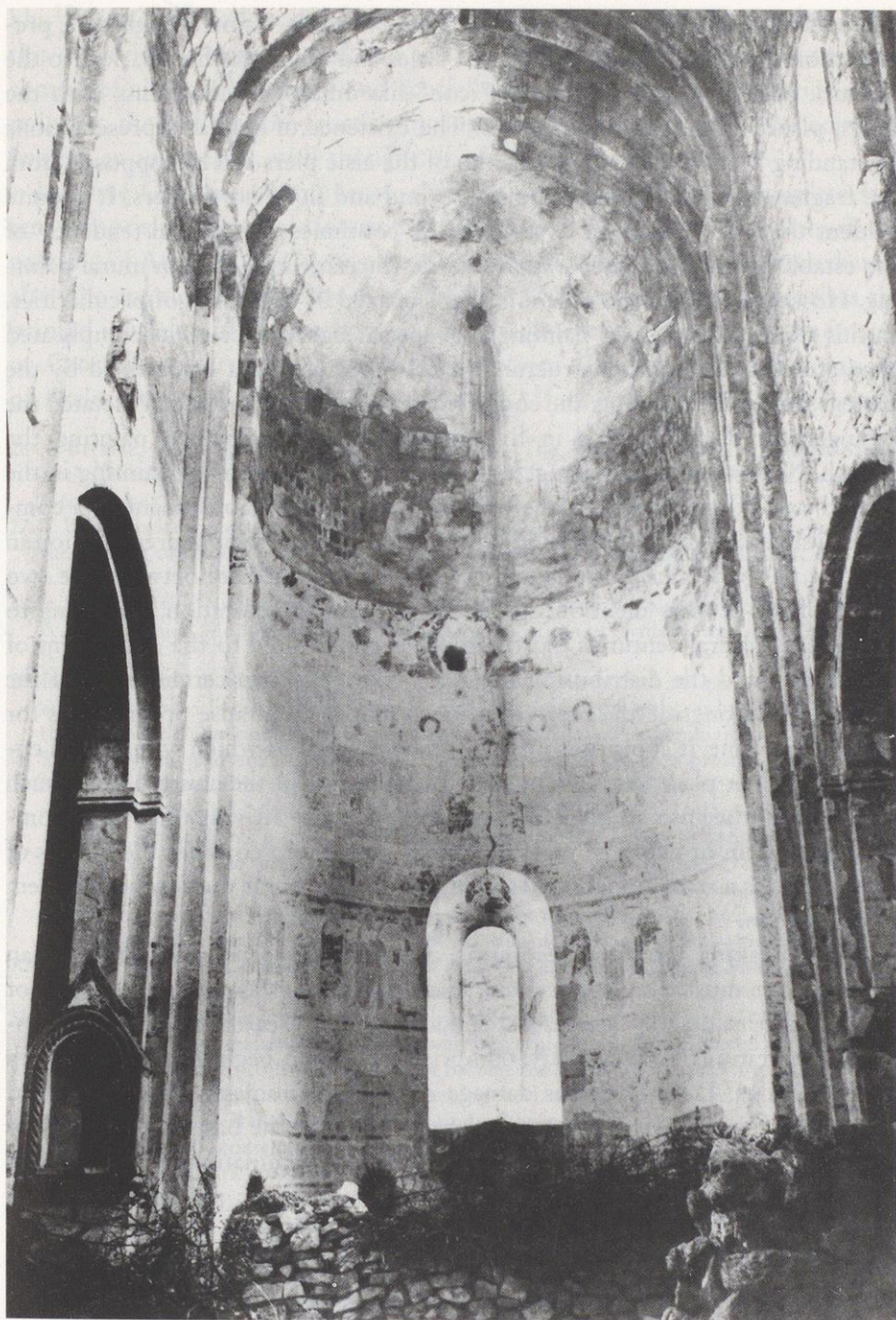


Fig. 20: Dört Kilise. View of the apse (photo W. Djobadze).

and ending with Christ appearing to the holy women. Painted fragments, preserved on the walls, which separate the aisles and the pastophories, next to the chancel, point to the existence of "icon"-like images of the saints with the busts, placed in quadrilateral frames. The existence of similar representations of standing Warrior Saints on the sides of the aisle piers can be supposed from the fragments, still discernible on the second and third north piers. It is quite evident that the decoration of Dört Kilise continues the general tendency of the establishment of the decorative system, traceable in Georgian mural painting. However, at the same time it is characterized by a number of peculiarities. In this respect, the chancel painting is of special significance, as its complicated character and multipartite structure are to a certain extent determined by the dimensions of the building: the considerable height of the apse had dictated the arrangement of the murals in five registers to the craftsman painting the church. Nevertheless, the changes, traceable in Georgian mural painting in the second half of the 10th c., in the process of the final establishment of a complete system of decoration should be considered as a principal precondition in the case of Dört Kilise. The latter serves as an intermediate between the two stages of the process mentioned above – its painted decoration, according to an ancient, several centuries old tradition, is still limited to the adornment of the chancel and the distribution of "icon"-like images in certain parts of the interior, but alongside the representations established in apse programmes for quite a long time, it comprises images and compositions which would soon enough take their place throughout the whole interior of the church. Thus, such a solution of the apse decoration distinctly reveals the striving for a more complicated system of painting, which makes it possible to consider the murals of Dört Kilise as a transitional stage to the final formation of the complete system of decoration.

When speaking about the decoration system of the early medieval Georgian churches one must take into account aniconic paintings as well, the number of which has considerably increased thanks to recent research. A number of aniconic decorations known today, comprise the period beginning from the 6th to the 10th cc. Due to serious damage of these monuments, the system and programme of their murals can only be discussed on the basis of a number of examples preserved in a relatively complete state. Examination of these murals clearly shows that in a great majority of cases aniconic murals adorn only some parts of the interior – apse conchs, the chancel or its conch only, or the triumphal arch of the chancel – and thus, here we are dealing with the incomplete system of decoration (Dumeila²⁵ – 8th c., Uraveli triconch,²⁶ Zemo Kri-

25 Notes on the existence of an aniconic decoration in the church are found in: N. Mirijanašvili, *Sop. Dumeilas eklesia* [The Church in the Village of Dumeila], Dzeglis Megobari, 1987, N3, p. 32.

khi,²⁷ Gostibe²⁸ – all ascribed to the 10th c.). It must be noted beforehand that this definition is conventional to a certain extent, – the decision to adorn only some, definitely accentuated and specially selected parts of the interior, itself points to the fact that the artistic physiognomy of the monument was comprehended as an integral, well thought of system of decoration.

In some Georgian monuments, aniconic decorations form a complete system comprising the whole interior. In this respect especially noteworthy is the painting of Ateni Sion, which is most likely to have been executed immediately after the erection of the church in the 7th c.²⁹ This decoration comprises the painted imitation of the masonry in the tetraconch dome and bays, the images of Crosses and artistically treated inscriptions (fig. 21).³⁰ The decorations of Erc'o Sion (8th c.),³¹ Žaleti (8th-9th cc.),³² Benisi (9th c.)³³ and Armazi

26 V. Beridze, *Samtskhis khurotmodzgvuli dzeglebi* [The Architectural Monuments of Samtskhe], Tbilisi, 1970, p. 41; Id., *Monuments de Tao-Klardjetie dans l'histoire de l'architecture Géorgienne*, Tbilisi, 1981, p. 302-303.

27 T. B. Virsaladze, *Freskovaja rospis v tserkvi Arkhangelov sela Zemo-Krikhi* [Fresco Painting in the Church of the Holy Archangels of the Village of Zemo-Krikhi], *Ars Georgica*, 6, 1963, p. 158-160.

28 R. S. Mepisašvili, *Pamjatniki architektury X-XI vekov v selenijakh Kaberi i Gostibe*, [10th-11th cc. Architectural Monuments in the Villages of Kaberi and Gostibe], *Ars Georgica*, 8, 1979, p. 57.

29 In the first study of the monument by G. N. Čubinašvili one can find just a mention of the existence of plaster, earlier than the 11th c. painting layer; though the author is only concerned with the existence of numerous inscriptions on it (G. N. Čubinašvili, *Pamjatniki tipa Džvari*, p. 48). T. S. Ševjakova has paid attention to this layer of painting in her article – *K voprosu*, p. 259; a more extensive discussion of the decoration is found in: T. B. Virsaladze, *Pervonačal'naja rospis Atenskogo Siona* [Original Painting of Ateni Sion], *Abstracts of the 7th All-Union Conference of Byzantinists*, Tbilisi, 1965, p. 64-66; Id., *Deux peintures murales de l'église de Sion dans le village d'Ateni*, *Atti del primo simposio internazionale sull'arte georgiana*, Milano, 1977, p. 301-303; Id., *Nekotorye voprosy obščej kompozicii rospisi Atenskogo Siona* [Some Aspects of the General Composition of Ateni Sion Murals], in: *Srednevekovoe iskusstvo. Rus'. Gruzija*, Moscow, 1978, p. 90-91; Id., *Atenis Sionis mokhatuloba* [The Painting of Ateni Sion], Tbilisi, 1984, p. 13.

30 G. Abramišvili, Z. Alexidze ed., *K'art'uli c'arc'erebis korpusi, III, Atenis Sioni* [A Corpus of Georgian Inscriptions, III, Ateni Sion], Tbilisi, 1989, p. 33-34.

31 Though, the monument was archaeologically studied and fixed as early as the 50s of this century (connected with the construction of the storage reservoir) and later transferred to the Museum of Folk Architecture (Tbilisi), it has not yet become the subject of a special investigation. That is why there exist different viewpoints concerning the date of the basilica and the reconstruction of its original forms. R. Ramišvili, who had studied the monument archaeologically thinks, that the basilica must be contemporary to the tomb discovered nearby, i.e. of the 5th c. (cf. R. Ramišvili, *Ivris kheobis ark'eologiuri dzeglebi* [The Archaeological Monuments of Iori Gorge], I, Sioni, Tbilisi, 1970, p. 30-43); G. Čubinašvili and R. Šmerling dated the church to the 8th c. (G. N. Čubinašvili, *Arkhtektura Kakhetii* [The Architecture of Kakheti], Tbilisi, 1958, p. 132-133; R. O. Šmerling, *Malye formy*, p. 31-32). Taking into consideration the character of the sculptural decoration, the second supposition seems more acceptable.

32 N. K'adeišvili, *Žalet'is khurot' modzgvuli dzegli* [The Architectural Monument of Žaleti], Tbilisi, 1964.

33 T. Dvali, *Sop. Benisis c'minda Giorgis eklesia* [The Church of St George in the Village of Benisi], *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences (series of History, Archaeology and Art)*, 1986, N4, p. 119-136.

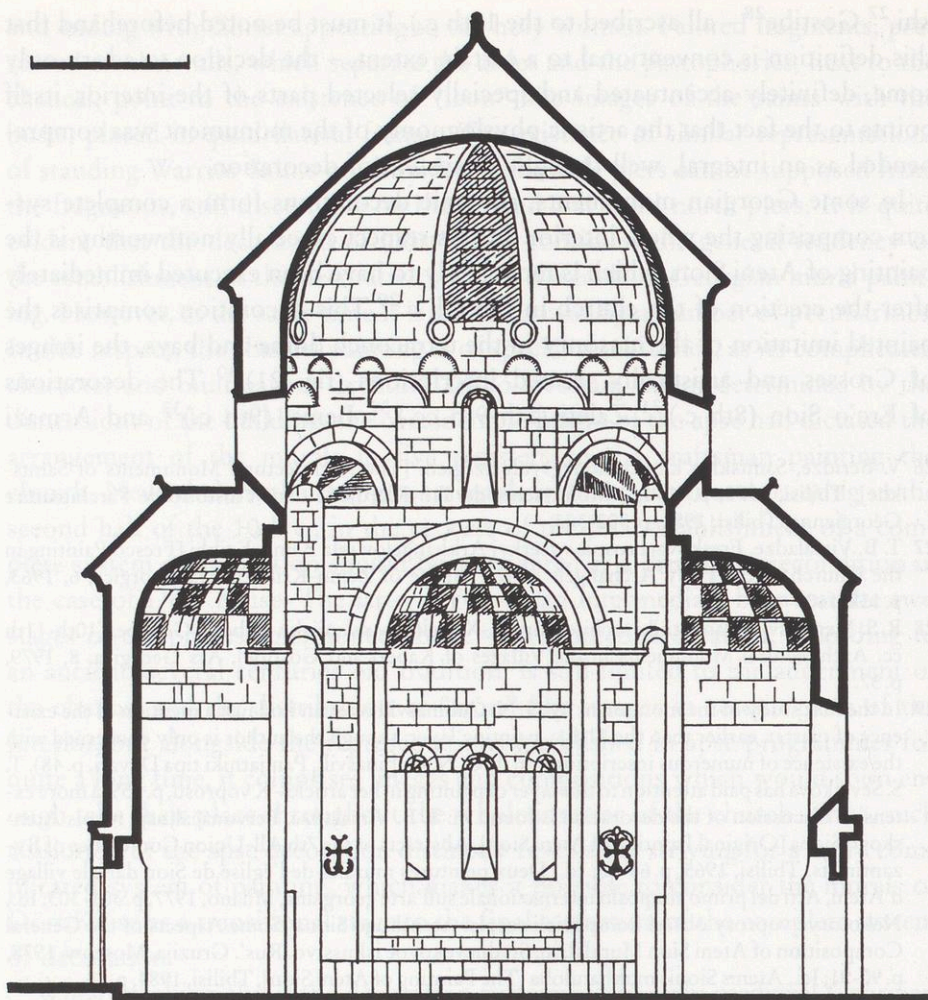


Fig. 21: Ateni Sion. Transverse section looking east. Aniconic decoration.

(864)³⁴ churches are to be ascribed to the same group, though, unlike Ateni Sion, in all the above-mentioned monuments, the decoration is limited to the representation of a single motif (namely, the masonry imitation). In this type of monuments aniconic motifs often coexist with the sculpture (capital reliefs and ornamental motifs, adorning certain constructive elements of the interior). This imparts artistically more complete character to the laconic decoration, creating the unique expressiveness in every particular case.

The final stage of establishment of a complete system of decoration can be traced in Georgian murals dating to the late 10th and early 11th cc. (the main church of Udabno rock-cut monastery in Gareja)³⁵ (fig. 22). Due to the better state of their preservation a more complete picture is traceable in the contemporary murals of Svaneti. In the selection of themes these murals follow the established tradition: Deisis or Maiestas Domini in the apse, minimal number of Christological scenes, united by the Theophanic idea, in the naos and the figures of separate saints whose place is varied: in the murals, where hierarchic interrelation between separate parts is ignored, the Warrior Saints occupy the upper zone of the wall or the vault, while in other cases, where the hierarchic order is preserved, they are represented in their usual place, in the lower zone. At the same time, distributing the images in the whole interior, the craftsmen followed architectural articulation of the church more or less connecting them, as far as the general compositional arrangement is concerned. Besides, certain attention is paid to the general rhythmical organization of the ensemble, revealed in the alternation of separate colouristic accents or separate verticals. Accordingly, these murals make it possible to trace a consistent process of formation of an ensemble as an artistically homogeneous unit. If in the murals of Atsi,³⁶ Ipkhī,³⁷

34 R. O. Šmerling, *Sak'art'velos*, p. 11; T. S. Ševjakova, *K voprosu*, p. 257; R. S. Mepisašvili and W. Cincadze, *Arkitektura nagornoj časti istoričeskoj provincii Gruzii – Šida Kartli* [The Architecture of the Mountainous Part of the Historical Province of Georgia – Šida Kartli], Tbilisi, 1975, p. 20-21.

35 The date of execution of the murals in the main church of Udabno monastery is still the subject of dispute among the scholars. The date – 983 – proposed by G. Abramišvili on the basis of the fragmented dedicatory inscription was revised and rejected by T. Virsaladze, who dated the murals to the early 11th c. (cf.: G. Abramišvili, *Davit garejeli cikli*, p. 69-74; T. B. Virsaladze, *K voprosu o datirovke*, p. 237-239). Her dating is also supported by A. Volskaja (*Rospisi*, p. 87-88). In fact, the peculiarities of the decoration system testify to a relatively later date of execution.

36 T. S. Ševjakova, *Monumental'naja živopis*, p. 18-20.

37 T. S. Ševjakova, *K datirovke rospisi cerkvi sv. Georgija bliz sel. Ipkhī, Verkhnjaja Svanetia* [On the Dating of the frescoes of the Church of St George Near the Village Ipkhī, Upper Svanetia], *Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR*, t. XXV, №6, 1963, p. 829-836. The opinions expressed here were later concisely repeated in the album of the same author – *Monumental'naja živopis*, p. 20-22. Concerning different aspects of Ipkhī murals see also: N. Thierry, *Notes d'un second voyage en Haute-Svanétie*, *Bedi Kartlisa, Revue de kartvélologie*, vol. XXXVIII, 1980, p. 58-60; N. A. Aladašvili, G. V. Alibegašvili, A. I. Volskaja, *op. cit.*, p. 23-27.

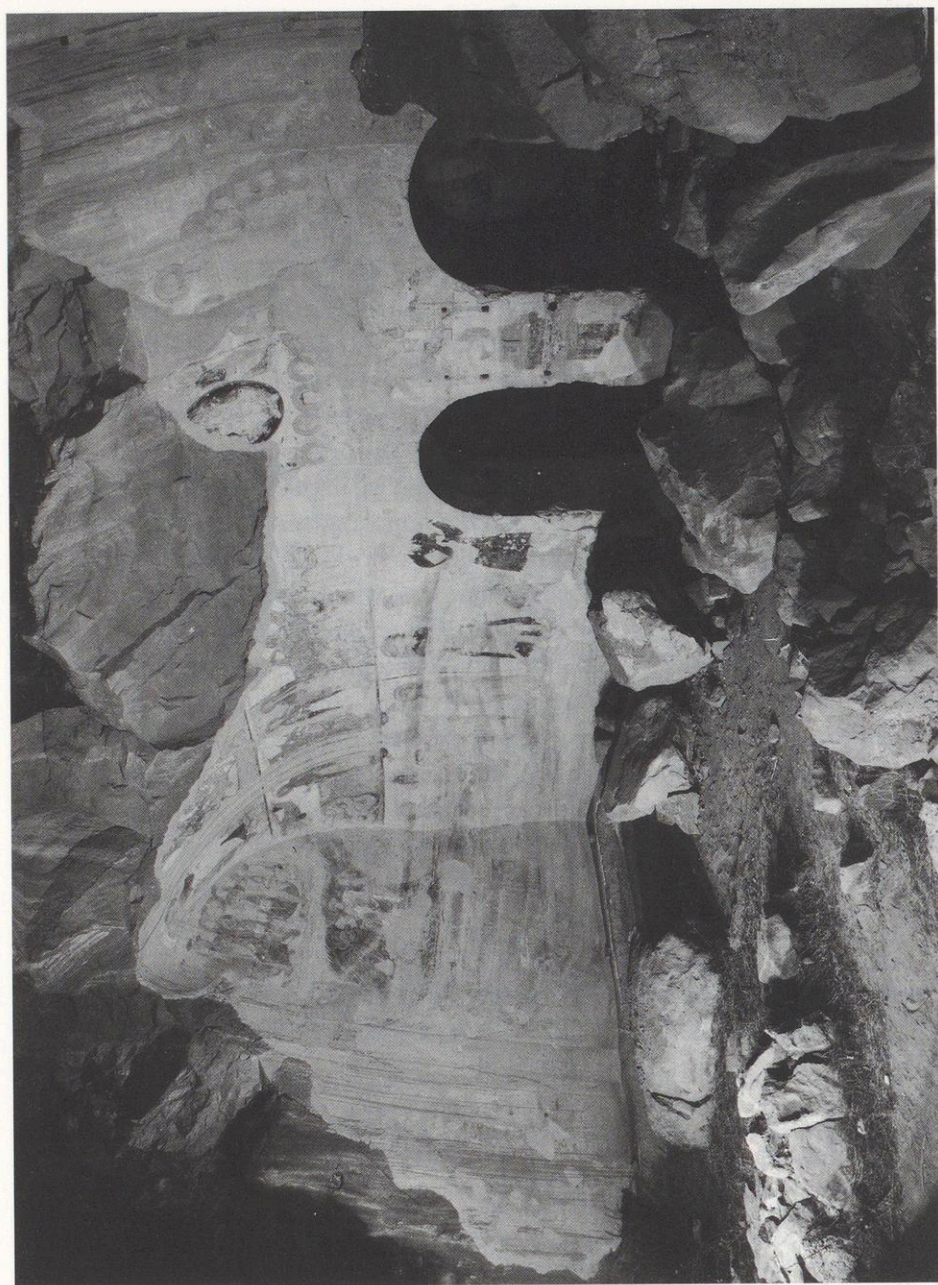


Fig. 22: Udabno monastery. The main church. Looking north-west.

Adiši³⁸ the beginning of the movement in this direction may be seen, the murals of Svipi,³⁹ Žibiani⁴⁰ and Lağami⁴¹ mark the end of this development at the early stage of evolution of the Svaneti school of painting.

The examination of Early Medieval Georgian decorations makes it quite clear that the process of establishment of the painting system, traceable from the 6th up to the 10th cc., was an organic part of the development of mural painting in the country. Noteworthy is the gradual character of this inner process, which had naturally prepared the ground for a complete system of decoration which Georgia adopted from Byzantium by the end of the 10th.

It is quite natural to ask what was most likely to determine the continuous and gradual evolution of the decorative system of mural painting in Georgia. It seems that the stable tradition of the cult of images, ascertained in the country during the Early Middle Ages, must have played a decisive part in this respect. The continuity of the iconographic tradition, its gradual alteration and supplementation, as well as the process of gradual establishment of the system of decoration was possible only in the condition of preserving the veneration of images throughout the whole Early Middle Ages. Consideration of the historical sources, original and translated literature as well as the monuments of fine arts, preserved to our days testify to the fact that the strong iconoclastic wave which swept a great part of the Byzantine world for more than a century did not touch Georgia.⁴² On the contrary – the continuity of artistic traditions was contributed to by the emphasized iconodule tendency, which is traceable in the national culture throughout the earlier period, and especially distinctly in the 8th-9th cc.⁴³ It is not coincidental either, that the tendency towards the preser-

38 For the first time the painting was mentioned in: T. S. Ševjakova, *K voprosu o kharaktere*, p. 263; later it was specially studied; cf. T. Ševjakova, *K voprosy datirovki rospisi cerkvi "Džgraag" raspolozhennoj za sel. Adiši* [Regarding the Dating of the Frescoes of the Church "Džgraag" Near the Village of Adiši], *Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR*, T. XXVII, N3, 1961, p. 377-384; cf. N. Thierry, *Notes d'un second voyage*, p. 90-93; N. A. Aladašvili, G. V. Alibegašvili, A. Volskaja, *Op. cit.* p. 121-122.

39 T. S. Ševjakova, *Pirveli p'enis mkhatvroba sopol Svipis eklesiaši* [First Layer Painting in the Church of the Village Svipi], *Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR*, t. XXIV, N6, 1960, p. 769-774; the existence of the entire system of decoration in the first layer of painting was ascertained in the course of restoration. G. Cheišvili, M. Buchukuri, *On Certain Peculiarities of Medieval Mural Paintings in Upper Svaneti*, IV International Symposium on Georgian Art, Tbilisi, 1983, p. 8-10; cf. N. A. Aladašvili, G. V. Alibegašvili, A. Volskaja, *op. cit.* p. 17-19.

40 T. S. Ševjakova, *Rospis pervogo sloja živopisi cerkvi "Lamaria" selsoveta Ušgul* [The First Layer Frescoes of the Church of "Lamaria" in the Village of Žibiani], *Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR*, 1964, N1, p. 189-204; Id., *Monumentaljnaja živopis*, p. 24.

41 M. Kenia, *Lağamis mackhovris eklesiis udzvelesi mkhatvroba* [The Oldest Painting of Lağami Church], *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences (Series of History, Archaeology and Art)*, 1986, N1, p. 146-165.

42 J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

43 Z. Skhirtladze, *The Iconoclastic Controversy and Georgian Art During the 8th-9th cc.*, 18th Annual Byzantine Studies Conference, Abstracts of Papers, Urbana-Champaign, 1992, p. 6-7.

vation of old iconographic themes in Georgia is especially vivid in the murals of the chancel and dome, i.e. in those parts of the church, which within the limits of the incomplete decoration system, were actually always accentuated by painting, as has been shown.

Willing adoption of the system of decoration, which was ultimately formed by the 10th c. Byzantium, was rightly connected with the new style established in Georgian architecture, which had subjected separate forms to single spatial concept, demanding the adornment of the interior by a complete system of painting.⁴⁴ At the same time, the establishment of a new system of decoration in the posticonoclastic Byzantine church and the ultimate result of the gradual development of this system in Georgia must also have taken place in this case.

This essential change determined to a considerable extent the further development of Georgian mural painting.

44 T. B. Virsaladze, *Freskovaja rospis*, p. 111; cf. G. N. Čubinašvili, N. P. Severov, *Puti razvitiia gruzinskoj arkhitektury* [The Ways of Georgian Architecture], Tbilisi, 1936, p. 81-83.