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The Original Cladding of the Portaitissa Icon

For centuries, the famous icon of Portaitissa and the legend of its appearance at the Georgian monastery of Iviron have occupied a special place in the publications of numerous visitors to Mount Athos. Paying special attention to this legend, the majority of authors say almost nothing about the painted image of the Virgin and the Child on this miraculous icon. If that omission would not seem surprising as far as pilgrim literature is concerned, it definitely is unusual for works showing a scholarly interest in the antiquities of Mount Athos. Nevertheless, pilgrims made the first step in this direction. The first to comment on the icon was Ioannis Komninos, whose note about the existence of the gilt cover on the miraculous icon dates to 1701 and is the oldest extant reference.¹ Komninos was followed by Vasilij Grigorovich-Barskij, who briefly and rather ambiguously described the painted and clad parts of the Portaitissa icon in 1744.² Far more valuable are the notes given by the archbishop Timote Gabashvili, who visited Mount Athos several times between 1755-1758 and stayed there at length.³ Gabashvili was a Georgian traveller, who visited many monasteries and paid the greatest attention to the study and description of the Iviron (figs. 1 and 2). Among the antiquities of the monastery (buildings, murals, manuscripts, and inscriptions), he showed special interest in the history of the Portaitissa icon. A comparison of the versions of the description of this voyage, *Mimoslva* in Georgian (which is a “combination of semi-fictional – documentary prose and a scholarly-historical inquiry”⁴) testifies to the fact that Timote Gabashvili undertook a thorough study to identify the donors of the revetment of the Portaitissa icon. For this purpose, he located some materials

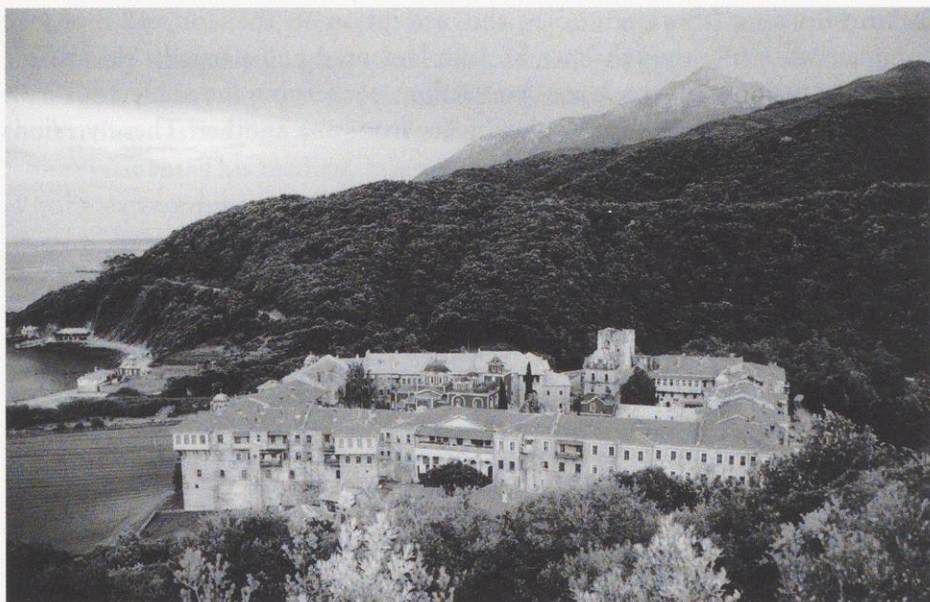
1 Ἰωάννου τοῦ Κομνήνου, *Προσκινετάριον τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους τοῦ Ἀθονος* (Ἄγιον Ὄρος, 1984), σελ. 64.

A brief note about the icon is preserved in the work of the French missionary Braconnier, who was active in Thessaloniki in the early eighteenth century, which includes a description of his voyage to the Athonite monasteries in 1706 (Κ. Σιμονοπούλου, *Ξένοι ταχιδιώτες στην Ἑλλάδα 1700-1800*, τομ. Β' (Ἀθήνα, 1973), σελ. 45-46.

2 V. Grigorovich/Barskij, *Vtoroe poseshchenie svjatoi Afonskoj gory [The Second Visit to the Holy Mount Athos]*, (St.-Petersburg, 1887), p. 136.

3 T. Gabashvili, *Mimoslva [Voyage]*, ed. by H. Metreveli (Tbilisi, 1955).

4 L. Menabde, *Dzveli kartuli mtserlobis kerebi [Old Georgian Centres of Literary Activity]*, vol. II, (Tbilisi, 1980), p. 232.



1. Mount Athos. Monastery of Iviron. View from north-west.



2. Mount Athos. Monastery of Iviron. Chapel of the icon of the Virgin Portaitissa.

in Ivron proper (they seem to be the inscription on the icon and monastic commemorations), though later he supplemented and partially revised his study. As the notes of the *Mimoslva* versions concerning the miraculous icon were written at different times, they differ from one another. These versions include the following:

version A (Ms H-842, 1756):

[ხატი] მძიმედ მოუჭედია ათაბაგის ყვარყვარეს ძეს ქაიხოსროს, ათაბაგსა ქართლისასა და ამირსპასალარსა სამცხისასა, ჯაყელ-ციხისჯვარელსა. წელნი წარსრულ არს მას აქეთ 263.

“[The icon] was heavily clad by Kaikhosro, atabag of Kartli and amirspasalar of Samtskhe, Jaq’el-Tsikhisjvareli, the son of atabag Q’varq’vare. 263 years have passed since then”.

version B (Ms Q-80, 1758):

[ხატი] მოუჭედია მძიმედ ათაბაგსა და ამირსპასალარსა სამცხისასა, ჯაყელ-ციხისჯვარელსა, დიდის ყვარყვარე ათაბაგის ძესა ქაიხოსროს, დედისიმედის ძეს, წმიდის ქეთონ დედოფლის დისწულს. მე ეგრეთ ვგონებ, მართალიც არ უწყი.

“[The icon] was heavily clad by Kaikhosro, atabag and amirspasalar of Samtskhe, Jaq’el-Tsikhisjvareli, son of atabag Q’varq’vare the Great and Dedisimedi, nephew of the Saintly Queen Ketevan. I think so, I do not know for sure”.

version C (Ms S-3244, 1759):

[ხატი] მოუჭედია მძიმედ ათაბაგსა და ამირსპასალარსა სამცხისასა, ჯაყელ-ციხისჯვარელსა, ყვარყვარე ათაბაგის ძესა ქაიხოსროს, დედისიმედის, მუხრანის ბატონის ასულის ძესა (მე ეგრეთ ვგონებ, წმინდის ქეთონ დედოფლის დისწულს).

“[The icon] was clad heavily by Kaikhosro, atabag and amirspasalar of Samtskhe, Jaq’eli-Tsikhisjvareli, son of Q’varq’vare the Great and Dedisimedi, daughter of the patron of Mukhrani (I think, nephew of the Saintly Queen Ketevan).⁵

In version C of his work, Timote Gabashvili inserted a sketch of the Portaitissa icon executed for him by an unknown artist.⁶ This image has nothing in

5 T. Gabashvili, op. cit., p. 043. The French translation of T. Gabashvili’s description of the Ivron Monastery was edited by M. Brosset in 1851 together with other materials on the history of Georgia. Cf. his *Additions et éclaircissements à l’histoire de la Géorgie depuis l’antiquité jusqu’en 1469 de J. C.*, (St. Petersburg), p. 189/195 (esp. the note concerning the cladding of the icon on p. 193). English translation: *Pilgrimage to Mount Athos, Constantinople and Jerusalem 1755-1759*, Timothy Gabashvili. Translated & annotated by Mzia Ebanoidze & John Wilkinson, Richmond, Surrey 2001.

6 On this see – T. Gabashvili, op. cit., p. 015-016. According to H. Metreveli, the C version of the text was made after the traveller’s return to Georgia. Accordingly, the drawings

common with the icon proper: it is a drawing of the Virgin and Child, which shows only the general aspect of the Portaitissa iconographic type.

In 1782, during the visit to Iviron of the Metropolitan Iona Gedevanishvili, the brethren asked him to read the dedicatory inscription on the Portaitissa icon revetment. This reading, inserted in the travel notes of the Metropolitan, is quite extraordinary and has nothing in common with the text on the icon proper: *"I, the guardian of Dadiani adorned this icon of the Virgin for intercession on behalf of my soul"*. Gedevanishvili also states that the identity of the donor is not mentioned in the inscription.⁷

In 1819, according to the instructions of the commission of the Iviron monastery brethren, a new revetment of the Portaitissa icon of the Virgin was executed in Moscow. This is told in the donor inscription placed on the lower frame of the Russian revetment and reads as follows:

Πάναγνε, μήτηρ, Ιβήρων ἡ Προστάτις,
 πρόσδεξαι τόντε μετ εὐμενείας κόσμον,
 ον προσάγουσι Σὴ πανσέπτω εἰκόνι,
 ὡσπερ ριτόν μένγε ἀλλ ουν μετ εὐλαβείας
 Ἀννα, Ἀννα, Κομίσης Παύλου καδ Ἀναστασίου εὐγενῶν,
 εἰς μνήμην αὐτῶν καὶ ἐρατῶν τοκέων,
 ἐν Μόσχα τῷ αωίθ ἐτει ἐν μηνὶ Νοεμβρίῳ
 συνεργία ταπεινοῦ Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Κυρίλλου τοῦ Ιβηρίτου.⁸

All holy Virgin, protectress of Iberians,
 kindly accept this adornment,
 that is dedicated to your all holy icon,
 as to the rhyton, with fear and respect
 by Anna, Anna, Paul Coimisses and Anastasios, Noblemen,
 for the commemoration of their (souls) and their beloved parents,
 Moscow 1819 in November
 by the assistance of humble Cyril the Iveronite, Archimandrite.⁹

It seems that for a long time the brethren could not decide whether to cover the icon with the new revetment permanently, as the Russian revetment appears

in the manuscript and the image of the Portaitissa icon among them must have been executed at that time, by his commission. This drawing is added to the publication of Iona Gedevanishvili's journey, edited in 1852 by Pl. Ioseliani.

⁷ Metropolitan Iona, *Mimosula anu mgzavroba [Journey]*, (Tbilisi, 1852), p. 32.

⁸ Γ. Συμυρνάκης, *Τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος* (ἐν Ἀθήναις, 1903), σελ. 467; G. Millet, J. Pergoire, L. Petit, *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de l'Athos*, I (Paris, 1904), p. 85; Ἱ. Χατζηφώτη, *Παναγία ἡ Πορταΐτισσα τῆς Ἱ. μονῆς Ἰβήρων τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους* (Ἀθήνα, 1990), σελ. 29-31.

⁹ A silver candlestick with seven candles, also executed in Moscow and destined to be put in front of the Portaitissa icon on feast days, is connected with the donor activity of the Father-Superior Cyril. The dedicatory inscription on the candlestick, dated 1 April, 1818, is in Slavonic and Greek (Γ. Συμυρνάκης, op. cit., p. 467; G. Millet, J. Pergoire, L. Petit, op. cit., p. 74).

only occasionally in the descriptions of travellers and pilgrims; mostly, the nineteenth-century authors mention the Georgian gilt cover.

Of special interest are the unpublished materials of the journey to Mount Athos undertaken by Platon Ioseliani in 1849, which are kept in the Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi (Ms S-3061). Alongside the description of the monastery, they contain references to the Portaitissa icon, providing a brief description and the texts of Georgian and Greek dedicatory inscriptions on its revetment.¹⁰

By the time Archimandrite Porfirij Uspenskij visited Mount Athos in the 1850s, the icon was already covered by the Russian revetment. Nevertheless, Uspenskij mentioned a Georgian inscription that appeared under the Muscovite cladding.¹¹

Materials collected during the scholarly expedition to Mount Athos in 1898, later published by Nikodim Kondakov, give a special place to the Portaitissa icon as well and refer to the old Georgian revetment. Alongside brief descriptions of its painted and chased parts, he published a photo, showing the old revetment of the icon.¹² By that time, the greater part of the icon was covered by a bipartite curtain (upper portion) and an embroidery (lower frame with Georgian dedicatory inscription), as well as an openwork netting, which was made to protect the donations.

A brief note of essential significance for the history of the revetment of the Portaitissa icon is preserved in an interesting work by the bishop Petre Konc'oshvili.¹³ He visited the Holy Land and Mount Athos in 1898. Although the description of his voyage does not mention the revetment itself, the narrative shows the attitude of the Iviron brethren towards the miraculous icon and gives an indication of the reason why the Russian revetment remained only a temporary adornment during the nineteenth century: "In the Georgian monastery at Athos, I was told that the Greek brethren of the Iviron monastery had commissioned the revetment for the Iviron Portaitissa icon of the Virgin with the Greek inscription in Moscow, which the Greek Father-Superior had

10 Later, in 1852, the scholar supplemented his edition of T. Gabashvili's *Journey with the dedicatory inscription of the icon*. P. Ioseliani, as he himself stated in the footnotes (*Ibid.*, p. 39, n. 1), was preparing a description of Iviron antiquities for the publication in Russian, although this was never completed.

11 P. Uspenskij, *Pervoe puteshestvie v Afonskie Monastyri i skity v 1845 godu* [*The First Journey to the Mount Athos Monasteries and Sketes in 1845*], vol. I (Kiev, 1877), p. 196.

12 N. Kondakov, *Pamjatniki khristianskogo iskusstva na Afone* [*Monuments of Christian Art on Mount Athos*], (St.-Petersburg, 1902), p. 166-167, pl. XVII (Cf. also his *Ikonografija Bogomateri*, II (St.-Petersburg, 1915), p. 214-216). The Russian translation of the dedicatory inscription of the icon given here was made by N. Marr.

13 P. Konc'oshvili, *Mogzauroba tsminda kalaks ierusalims da tsminda atonis mtazed* [*Journey to the Holy City of Jerusalem and Mount Athos*], (Tbilisi, 1901), p. 164-165.

himself shown me. But they did not dare to take off the old revetment and cover the icon of the Virgin with the new revetment as one of the Greek brethren had a vision not to dare to touch the holy icon, take off the old revetment and put on the new one".¹⁴

The flow of travellers and lovers of antiquities to Iviron increased subsequently, though the material concerning the Portaitissa icon was not actually enriched. The literature of that period mainly abounds in general notes on the legend of the icon, which occasionally mention the Georgian dedicatory inscription placed on its revetment.¹⁵

According to the testimony of the Iviron brethren, up to the mid-twentieth century, the icon was clad in the Russian revetment only on three great feastdays: Christmas, Easter, and Assumption. Later, that revetment was not removed and so permanently covered the old chased decoration (fig. 3).¹⁶

In winter 1993, the monastery synaxis decided to remove the later revetment from the icon. The Portaitissa icon was again visible in its original beauty (fig. 4). It was in such a form, when together with other pilgrims, I saw it in May 1993. Thanks to the benediction of the Father Superior of the monastery, Archimandrite Vasilios, I was given the opportunity to study this highly interesting monument of metalwork.

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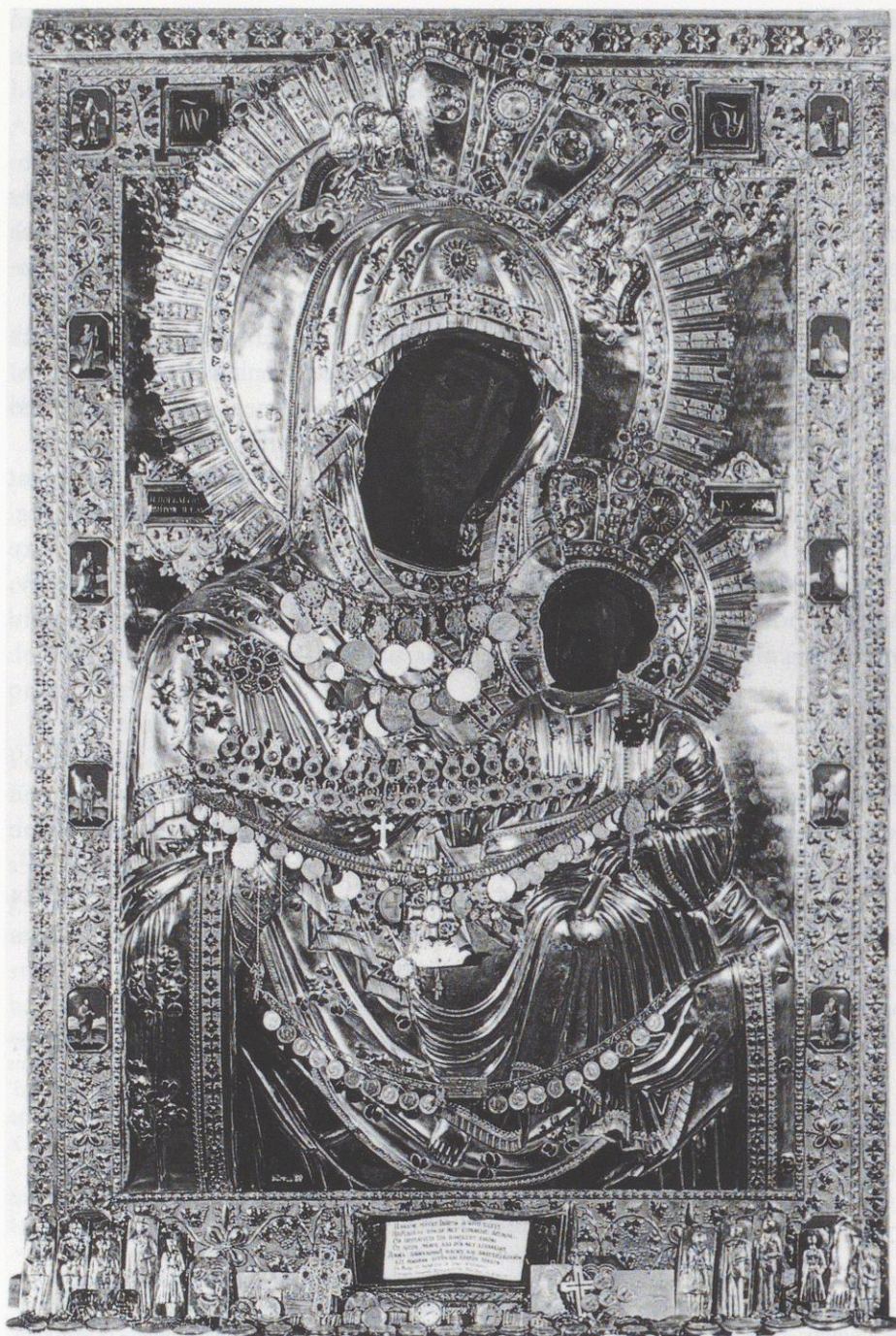
Today one can turn to two main sources for the study of the Portaitissa icon revetment – the dedicatory inscription placed on the icon and the Synodicon of the Iviron monastery.

The dedicatory inscription is placed on the lower frame of the icon (figs. 4 and 5). A long text in four lines is embossed on two elongated gold plaques

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 165.

¹⁵ Cf. the evidence of G. Nadareishvili that the Portaitissa icon is "richly adorned" and that "the icon has an inscription in Georgian [mentioning] among others the decorator of this icon Kaikhosro son of Q'varq'vare" (G. Nadareishvili, 'Kartvela iveriis monasteri atonzed' ['The Monastery of the Georgians on Mount Athos'], *Mogzauri*, 1903, N. 9, p. 249). For the complete bibliography see: I. Doenis, 'Bibliographie de la Sainte Montagne de l'Athos', in: *Le Millénaire du Mont Athos. 963-1963, Études et Mélanges*, vol. II (Venezia, 1964), p. 351-483.

¹⁶ This is why the icon is shown always with its nineteenth-century revetment in the publications of the last six decades; cf. R. Pabel, *Athos. Der Heilige Berg* (Münster, 1940), pl. between pp. 48 and 49; Σωφρόνιος Μόναχος, *Θησαυροὶ Ἁγίου Ὄρους* (Αθήναι, 1958), σελ. 113, πίν. 51; Ch. Dahm, *Athos, Berg der Verklärung* (Burda Verlag, 1959), pl. 14; P. Huber, *Athos. Leben, Glauben, Kunst* (Zürich, 1969), pl. 162; Σ. Πελεκανίδης, *Οἱ θησαυροὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους*, II (Αθήναι, 1975), σελ. 23; E. Amand de Mendieta, *L'art au Mont-Athos* (Thessaloniki, 1977), p. 276, pl. 3; S. Kadas, *Mount Athos. An Illustrated Guide to the Monasteries and their History* (Athens, 1979 – first ed., and 1987 – second ed.), pl. 99; N. Ševčenko, Icons in the Liturgy, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 45 (1991), fig. 25.



3. Portaitissa icon with nineteenth-century Russian cladding.



4. Portaitissa icon with old Georgian cladding.



5. Portaitissa icon. Dedicatory inscription. Detail.

covering the whole central part of the lower frame. The inscription is made in the old Georgian uncial script, *asomtavruli*, in small, beautiful, stylized letters. The lines are divided from one another by narrow horizontal strips and the words by three dots (two dots are occasionally used; it is rare to find the division mark completely omitted). An abbreviation mark, which is a short curved line with enlarged edges, is not always used. The last line of the inscription is partially overlapped by the lower plaque of the icon frame revetment. The text is slightly damaged in two places (first and fourth lines), but still its complete reconstruction is feasible.

I. ქ. ჰ დ(ელო)ფ(ა)ლო, [დ(ე)დ(ა)]ო კ(ა)ცთ მ(ო)ყ(უა)რისა ღ(მრთ)ისაო, ყ(ოვ-
ლა)დ უბიწოო ქ(ა)ლწ(უ)ლო მარიაჲ, შ(ეიწყა)ლ(ე) ს(უ)ლი პ(ა)ტრ(ო)[ნი]სა
ჩ(ემ)ისა ღიღისა ყ(უა)რყ(უა)რ(ე)ს შვილისა ქაიხოსროსა და მე მონა

II. შ(ენ)ი და ყ(ოვლ)ით(უ)რთ უღონო ქმნილი საბრ(ა)ლო ამბროსი.
გმ(ა)დლ(ო)ბ, რ(ომელმა)ნ ღირს მეც(ა)ვ უღ(ი)რსი ესე მოჭედ(ა)სა და შემ-
კობასა წ(მიდი)სა ხ(ა)ტისა შენისა პორტიატის(ი)სა. ეპა, დედოფალო,

III. შეი(წი)რე მცირე ესე ჩემი ც(ო)დვილისა მ(იე)რ კადრ(ე)ბ(უ)ლი და
ლაიც(ე)ვ ნეშტი ცხ(ო)რ(ე)ბისა ჩ(ემ)ისა უც(ო)დველ(ა)დ და ყ(ამს)ა
ს(ა)წყ(ა)ლ(ო)ბლისა ს(უ)ლისა ჩ(ემ)ისა გ(ა)ნსლვისასა შემეწიე და უჩინო
ყავნ ყ(ოველ)ნ(ი)ვე ც(ო)დვ(ა)თა ჩ(ე)მთა კ(ე)ლით წერილნი და წ(ა)რმა

IV. დგინე ც(ო)დ(ვ)ილი ს(ა)ყდ(ა)რთა ძისა და ღ(მრთი)სა შ(ე)ნისა
ღ(იღე)ბ(ა)დ ძისა შ(ენ)ისა და თანა დაუსაბამოსა მ(ა)მ(ო)სა [მის(ო)]სა და
ყ(ოვლა)დ წ(მიდ)ისა ს(უ)ლისა მისისა, აწ და მ(არა)დის და უკ(უნიო)ი
უკ(უნიხამდ)ე, ა(მი)ნ.

O Queen, Mother of the human-loving God, Holy Virgin Mary, save the soul of my patron Kaikhosro, the son of Q'varq'vare the Great and me, Your slave, wholly weakened Ambrosi. Grace to You, who favored me, unworthy (person), to clad and adorn Your holy icon Portaitissa. O Queen, accept this small gift, ventured by me, sinful (person) and protect the remainder of my life sinlessly and succor me at the time of the expiration of my poor soul, and keep unknown everything done by me before the Throne of Your Son and God, for the Glory of Your Son and the Father without beginning and the Holy Spirit, forever, Amen.

The inscription was published several times in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Russian¹⁸ and Greek¹⁹ translations also exist. In general, the text of the inscription in these publications is read and interpreted correctly, although each of them has certain defects.

The Synodicon of the Iviron monastery is of equal significance for the data

17 Th. Zhordania, *Kronikebi [Chronicles]*, vol. II (Tbilisi, 1897), p. 314-315; P. Konc'oshvili, op. cit., p. 163; A. Natroev, *Iverskij monastyr na Afone [The Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos]*, (Tbilisi, 1910), p. 96.

18 P. Uspenskij, op. cit., p. 196; N. Kondakov, op. cit., p. 167; *Vyshnij pokrov nad Afonom ili skazaniia na Afone proslavivshikhsja ikonakh [Heavenly Pokrov upon the Mount Athos or the Legends about Famous Icons on the Mount Athos]* (Moscow, 1902), p. 32-33; A. Natroev, op. cit., p. 97.

19 *Βιβλίον ιστορικὸν περιέχον γεγραμμένον ἀρχαίαν ἱστορίαν περὶ τοῦ Ἀγιονόμου Ὁρους τοῦ Ἄθω ἐκ διαφόρων παλαιῶν χειρογράφων βιβλίων. Ἀπανθίσματα ἱστορικὰ διάφορα. Θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον καὶ Δαμασκηνοῦ πόνος Ἐγγραφή διὰ χειρὸς Δαμασκηνοῦ μοναχοῦ Ἰβηρίτου ἐν ἔτει σωτηρίῳ 1903. Τανναρίον 10 ἡμέρα Παρασκευῆς.*

This work for pilgrims was compiled by the Archimandrite of the Iviron monastery, Damaskinos. The dedicatory inscription of the old revetment of the Portaitissa icon was translated for him by the Georgian monk Lavrentios. The text is published in: Ἰ. Χατζιφώτη, op. cit., p. 31.

One more inscription "derrière une icône de la Portaitissa", copied by M. Gedeon, is cited in the collection of Christian epigraphy of Mount Athos (G. Millet, J. Pergoire et L. Petit, op. cit., p. 85-86):

Γαβριηλ παλαι πρωτοστατης αυλων | σοι τη παρθενω και μονη παναμωνω | ηγαγε
χαιρε, αγγελων θεου λογον | υπερφωα κυησιν και λογον | πασις βροτειου φυτλης προς
σωτηριαν | και αναβασιν αειλαμπους αιθερος. | Ουτω Γαβριηλ ιβερ, αθωνοπολος |
μονοτροπος, θυτης τε, αγγελοσχημων | σοφος τε μυστης θειων και ανθρωπινων | ηγγειλε
της σης, αννασσα, παρουσιαν | εικονος, θειας παντων παραμυθιας | των μοναζοντων ες
τηδε τη μεγαστη | μονη, καλλιστη, απασων λαμπροτατη. | η κτητορας Ιβηρας εσεχ τω γε ει,
| ανδρας γενναιους, κραταιους τε και θειους | Ευθυμιον τε και Γεοργιον ηρω|σον Ιωαννη
πνεοντι τον ζηλον. | Ος δη Γαβριηλ πεζοποντοπορησας | εβαστας αγων σην θειαν γε
εικονα | εισω της μονης εξαισιων τω τροπω. | Αλλ, ω πανακηρατε αγνη Παρθενε | βασιλεα
τεξασα γης τε και πολου, | πορταιτισσα εξοχως κεκλημενη, | τηρε φυλαττε ιερων μονην
τηνδε | ασινη, αλωβητον, ευθυνουμενην | συν ναιοις και τειχεσι και αλλω κοσμω | ινα
προσφυγων σκεπη και σωτηρια | εν βιω παντι η και παραθυμια. | α ψ θ ιουνιου κ (1799).

it contains.²⁰ It is embodied in a collection, compiled in the monastery in 1074 on the order of the Father-superior Giorgi Oltisari (1065-1077) and by the initiative of the archpriest Jacob and hymnographer Zosime, being added to nine other treatises, that form part of the manuscript (Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, Ms A-558²¹). As is known, the collection was originally made in memory of the builders of Iviron monastery. In the course of time, it was supplemented by the remembrances of Georgian donors; ultimately, the collection of these remembrances formed the basis of the synodal records. A part of the 166 commemorations collected in the Synodicon (fol. 183r-312v) was copied in the 1070s by Mikael Daghalisoneli according to the originals embodied earlier in the manuscript. A number of them date to the 1140s and are ascribed to Ioane Taplaisdze; the majority of the remaining commemorations was regularly added to the Synodicon up to 1180, while some of them were appended even later, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.²² In particular, commemorations NN 162 and 163, written in small minuscule script *nuskhuri* and contained in fol. 208rv, belong to the latter group (figs. 6 and 7).

The text of the first commemoration is as follows:²³

ესე საცნაურ იყავნ, წმინდანო მამანო და ძმანო, რომელ-ესე ქუემოთცა სწერია: დიდი და სახელგანთქმული საქართველოსა ათაბაგი, სამცხისა სპასალარი, ჯაყელ-ციხისჯუარელ და დიდად წა[რ]ჩინებული პატრონი ყუარყუარე, ნე-ბიერად და ღმრთისმსახურებით ცხორებდა და დღეკეთილობით აღასრულნა ყოველნი დღენი მისნი და სიბერითა კეთილითა უფლისა მიერ მი[ი]ცვალა [კორონი]კონსა რპვ.

პატრონსა ყუარყუარეს ცოდვანი მისნი შეუნდეს ღმერთმან.

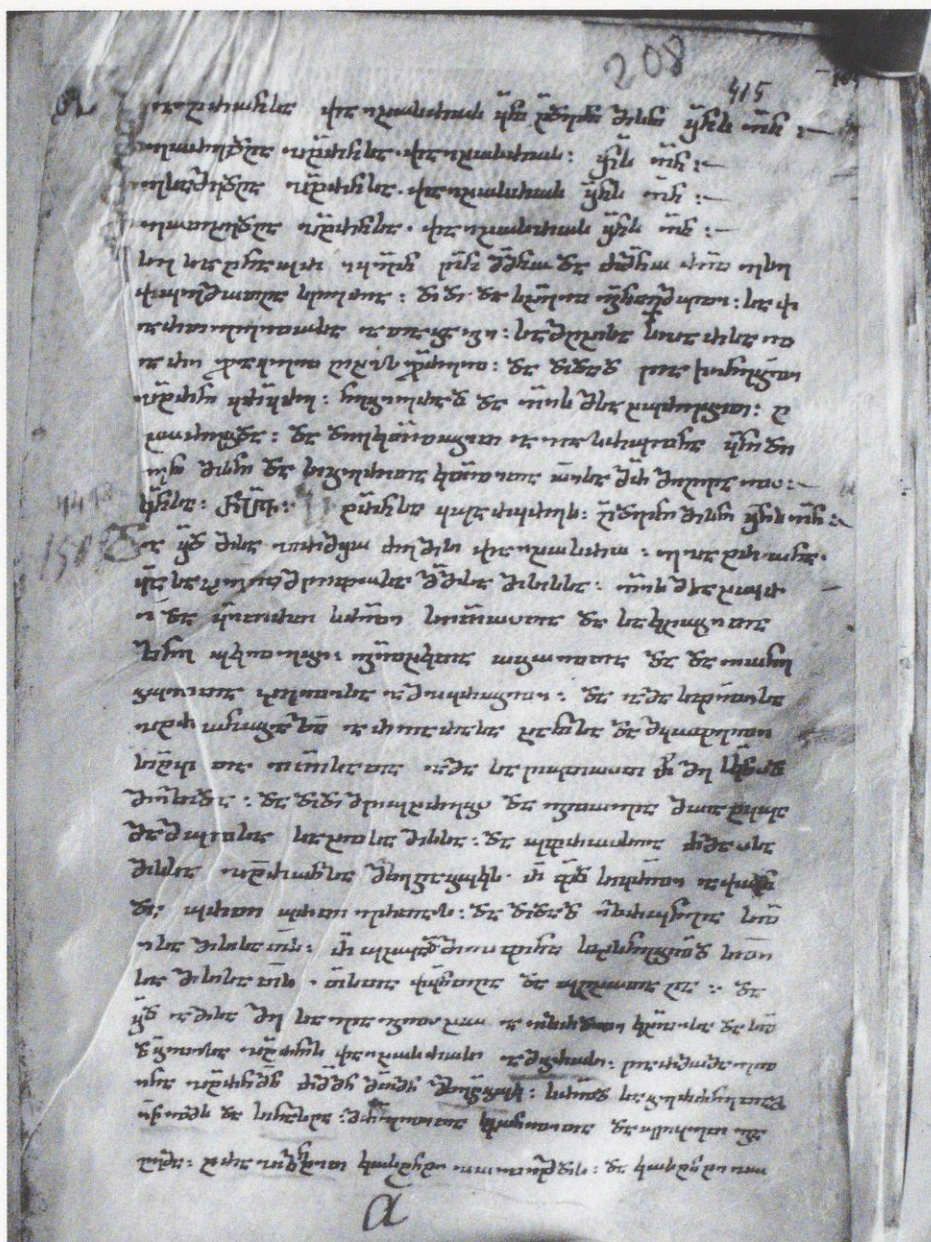
და შემდგომად მისა პირმშო ძე მისი ქაიხოსრო ეპატრონა ყოველსა საკელმწიფოსა მამისა მისისასა, ღმრთისმსახური და ყოვლითურთ სრული

20 Originally this was published in the early twentieth century by M. Janashvili, *Atonis monastiris 1074 tsilis khelnatseri aghapebit* [The Mount Athos Monastery Manuscript of 1074 with commemorations], (Tbilisi, 1901), p. 216-277. The critically established text with a study and commentaries was edited by H. Metreveli, *Atonis kartvelta monastiris saaghape tsigni* [The Synodicon of the Georgian Monastery on Mount Athos] (Tbilisi, 1998), p. 134-267.

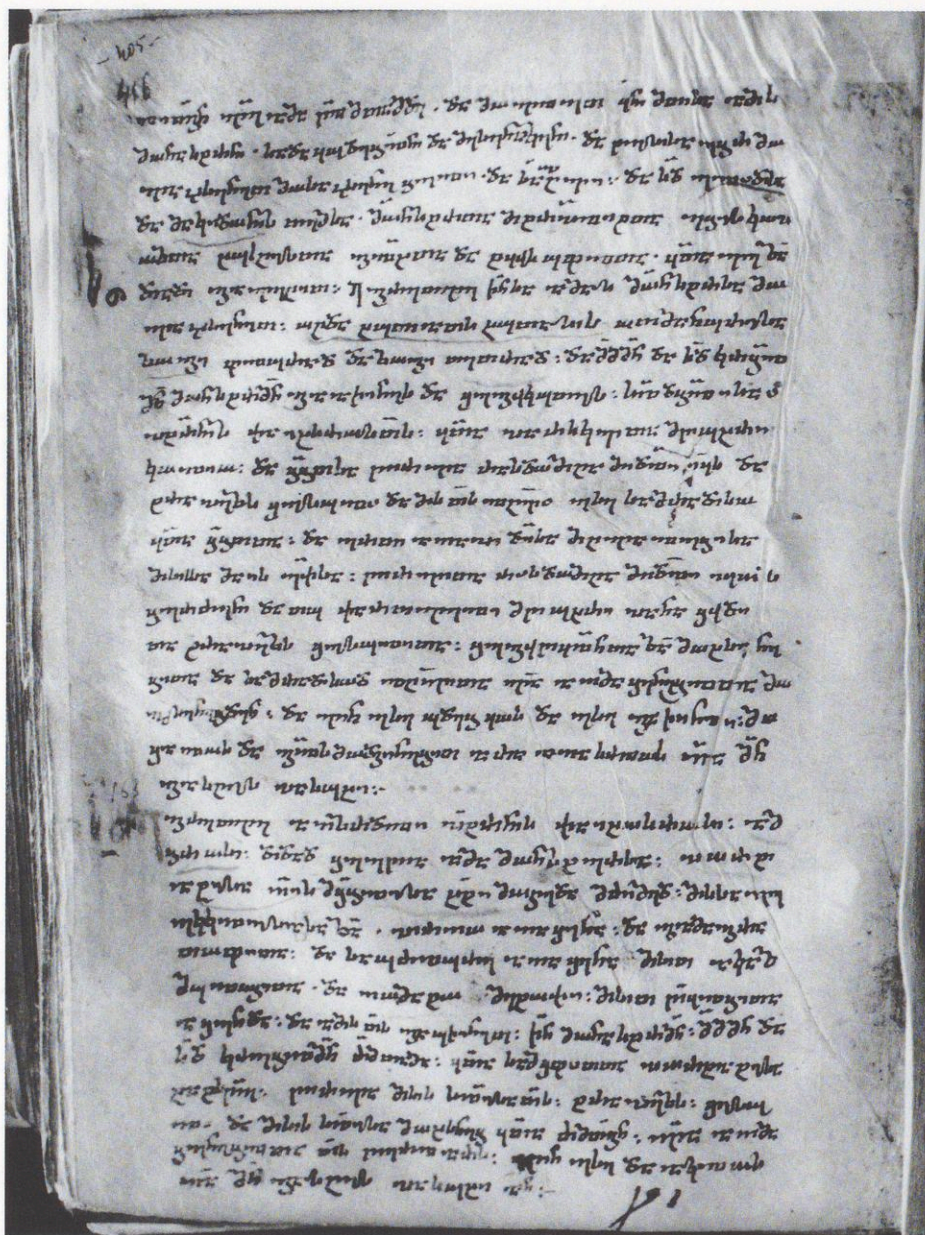
21 Th. Zhordania, *Opisanie rukopisej Tiflisskogo Tserkovnogo Muzeja* [Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Church Museum in Tbilisi], vol. I (Tbilisi, 1901), p. 85-86.

22 For a special study of different layers of the Synodal records see: N. Berdzenishvili, 'Atonis krebulis redaktsia' ['The Recension of the Athos Collection'], *Bulletin of the State Museum of Georgia*, XI-B, (1941), p. 25-40; J. Lefort, N. Oikonomides, D. Papachryssantou, avec la collaboration de H. Kravari et H. Metreveli, *Actes d'Iviron*, II (Paris, 1990), p. 34, 12-17. Separate observations concerning the collection are given in: R. P. Blake, 'Some Byzantine Accounting Practices Illustrated from Georgian Sources', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 51 (1940), p. 19-20.

23 Cf. the first edition of the commemoration – M. Janashvili ed., *Atonis monastiris*, p. 266-267. Cf. H. Metreveli, *Atonis*, p. 184-185. An abstract made by Bernadette Martin-Hisard of three commemorations (NN 162, 163 and 164) added to the Synodicon in the early sixteenth century is entered in the *Actes d'Iviron*, IV (Paris, 1995), p. 23-25.



6. Georgian Synodicon of Iviron monastery (Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, Cod. A-558, fol. 208r). Commemoration N162.



7. Georgian Synodicon of Iviron monastery (Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, Cod. A-558, fol. 208v). Commemorations NN 162 and 163.

სადრმოფთა საკაცოფთა ზნე-უკლები, გლახაკთა, ობოლთა და დაობლებულ-თა კელისა ამპყრობელი, და ამა სოფლისა პ[ა]ტრონობა[სა] ზედა არღარასა ხანისა დამყოფელი, სიტყ[უ]ითა ღმრთისათა ამა საწუთოფთ, მ მე, საუკონოდ მიიზიდა, და დიდი მწუხ[ა]რებად და გლოვა მოატყუა მამულსა სახლსა მისსა, და, უფროფსა, ძმასა და მისსა პატრონსა მზეჭაბუკს, რამეთუ ფრიად სი-ყუარული აქუნდა ურთიერთას, და დიდად იზრუნვა სულისა მისისათვს, რა-მეთუ უზუად მიჰფინა საკსენებელად სულისა მისისათვს თვსთა ქუეყანათაცა და უცხოთაცა. და შემდგომად ამისა მე, სავაგლახო, აღრზილი კურთხეულისა და სულდიდებულისა პატრონის ქაიხოსროსი ამბროსი წარმომავლინა პა-ტრონმან, ძმამან მათმან მზეჭაბუკ სრულიად საბერძნეთად, იმრუნალემს და სინასცა მრავლითა ს[ა]ქონლითა, დაუწყეთ გაცემა ტრაპიზ[ო]ნტით კოსტ[ან]ტიპოლემდის და კოსტ[ან]ტიპოლითგან ვიდრე ამა წმიდასა მათმდე და მოვლეთ ყოველნი მთისა ამის მონასტ[ე]რნი, სადაყუდებულონი და მე-სენაკენი და წესისაებრ მოვაკსენეთ მოსაკსენებელი და სალოცავი, და სრუ-ლიად ელაღისა და მაკიდონის თემსა მონასტერთა, მიტროპოლიტთა, ეპისკო-პოზთა, ხუცესთა, გლეხთა და ტყვის-უფალთა – ყოველთავე ზედა დიადი გავეცით. ეგრეთვე ჩუენსა ამას მონასტერსა მოვაკსენეთ ოცდახუთიათას ხუთასის ოთმანურისა, ზოგი ფლურად და ზოგი თეთრად; და მამან და სრუ-ლიად კრებულმან მონასტრ[ისა]მან განაჩინეს და შეგკუ[ე]თეს სულდიდ-ბულისა პატრონის ქაიხოსროსთვს ყოველთა პარ[ა]სკ[ე]ვთა მწუხრი კოლიო. და შაბათსა წირვა რა სდომიცა მღვდელი იყოს, და ტრაპეზს შესულა და მისთვს ღოცვაჲ ესე სამარადისო ყოველთა შაბათთა, და ერთი აღაპი დღესა მიცვალებისა მისისა მისი ექუსა წირვითა, რამსდომიცა მღვდელი იყოს ბერძენი თუ ქართველი, – მწუხრი პანაშვდითა, ტრაპეზს შესულითა, შეგკუალენთა ზედა მოხსენებითა და სამარადისოდ ღოცვითა, ვითარცა აღმაშენებელთა მოიკსენებდენ. და ვინ ესე უდებ-ყოს და ესე გაჩენილი მოშალოს და გულს-მოღვინებით არა აღასრულოს, ღმერთსა მან გასცეს პასუხი.

Know You, Holy fathers and brethren, what is written below: the great and famed atabag of Georgia, spasalar of Samtskhe, Jaq'eli of Tsikhisjvari, and the highly noble patron Q'varq'vare lived prosperously and piously and in felicity, completed all his days and committing himself to the Lord, passed away in RPV [186] of the Choronicon [=1498]. Lord, forgive Q'varq'vare his sins. And after him his son Kaikhosro established his rule over the entire state of his father; he [Kaikhosro] was pious and filled with all divine and human virtues and flawless, consoler of the poor, the orphans, and the dejected, and not staying long in this world, by the Lord's word he was called from this world to eternal life. And great grief and lamentation settled in his patrimony and house, and most of all for his brother, the patron Mzechabuk, for they had great love for one another, and he took great care of his [Kaikhosro's] soul, for he gave lavishly for the remembrance of his soul in his own country and abroad. And after this, I, the wretched Ambrosi, reared by the blessed and magnanimous patron Kaikhosro, was sent by their brother, the patron Mzechabuk to all Greece, Jerusalem and Sinai with much wealth; we began to give it away from Trebizond to Constantinople, and from Constantinople up to this Holy Mount. And we visited all the monasteries, hermitages, cells and according to the rule, presented our diptychs and prayers, and [visited] the monasteries of all Hellas and the province of Macedonia, the metropolitans, bishops, priests, the poor and homeless – we gave to them all with generosity. Also to our monastery we donated twenty five thousand Otmanuri – part in Pluri and part in

*Tetri*²⁴. And the Father Superior and the entire community of the monastery ordained and ordered for our magnanimous patron Kaikhosro vespers every Friday, kolio and prayers on Saturday, by all priests attendants, with entrance into the altar and prayer for him; this perpetually every Saturday, and one feast on the day of his decease on the sixth of May with liturgy with the presence of all the priests, Greek or Georgian, vespers with funeral service, with entrance into the altar, saying Kyrie Eleison, and perpetual prayer, as the builders [of the monastery] are commemorated. And whoever neglects to do this, does away with this ordainment, and shall not perform it willingly, let him answer God.

After this, on fol. 208v follows the second commemoration written by the same hand (fig. 7):²⁵

ეგრეთვე აღზრდილი პატრონის ქაიხოსროსი ამბროსი დიდად შეეწია ამა მონ[ა]სტერსა, პორტიატისა ღმრთისმშობლისა ხატი მოჭედა მძიმედ, მისსავე ეკკლესიასა ზედა პირლო აღაშენა და გა[ა]მაგრა თოპითა, და საუძლურე აღშენა მისით აღკაზმულობითა, და ღომატო მეტოქი მისით[ა] წყალობითა აშენდა. და ამისთვის გაუჩინეთ ჩუენ, მონასტერმან, მამამან და სრულიად კრებულმან ძმათამა[ნ] ყოველთა სამშ[ა]ფათთა პორტიატისა ხატს წინაშე წირვა მისის სულისათვის, გრაპეხს შესულა და მისის სულისა მოხს[ე]ნებ[ა] ყოველთა ძმათაგან, ვითარცა აღმაშენებელთათვის წერილ არს. ვინ ესე დააკლოს, ღმერთსა მან გასცეს პასუხი, ამენ.

Also, Ambrosi, brought up by the patron Kaikhosro, greatly helped this monastery: [he] revetted heavily the icon of the Holy Virgin, Portaitissa, built a fortress at his own church, fortifying it, and built the hospital with its facilities, and the metochion Gomato²⁶ was built thanks to him; and for this we – the monastery, the Father Superior, and the entire community of brethren – ordained the divine service before the icon of Portaitissa for his soul every Tuesday, entrance into the altar, and remembrance of his soul by all brethren as is written for the builders [of the monastery]. Whoever fails in this, let him answer God. Amen.

It is somewhat unusual that both commemorations were written in the synodicon by Ambrosi himself.²⁷ However, both are paleographically identical with the Gospel copied and illustrated by Ambrosi during his stay at the monastery

24 *Otmanuri, Pluri, Tetri* – these coins were well known in Georgia in the second half of the fifteenth century. They were equivalent to those Ottoman and Venetian golden and silver coins – *Osman, Florin and Akça* – which were in circulation in Samtskhe at that time (R. Kebuladze, *Evropuli monetebis mimoktseva sakartveloshi [The Circulation of European Coins in Georgia]*, (Tbilisi, 1971), p. 14). R. Blake paid attention to the names of these coins in the commemoration of atabag Kaikhosro (op. cit., p. 33). In connection with the Iviron commemorations on these coins see Cecile Morrison's note in *Actes d'Iviron*, IV, p. 25.

25 M. Janashvili ed., *Atonis monastiris*, p. 268; H. Metreveli, *Atonis*, p. 186.

26 On Gomato (or Kamena) monastery and its relationship with Iviron see: *Actes d'Iviron*, vol. I (Paris, 1985), p. 208–215; vol. II (Paris, 1990), p. 78, 191–193; vol. III (Paris, 1994), p. 38–39 (doc. NN58, 59, 62, 70, 72, 75, 79), vol. IV (Paris, 1995), p. 16, 18–20, 32–33 (doc. NN86, 88, 90–92, 94, 141, 144).

27 H. Metreveli states that the commemoration of Ambrosi is unusual as he tells us about his voyage and activity at the holy sites in the first person: "Due to this, the commemoration can be considered the earliest note by a Georgian traveller" (T. Gabashvili, *Mimoslva*, H. Metreveli's edition, p. 0183).

of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem.²⁸ This identity, together with the nicely stylized handwriting, is also demonstrated by an analogous decoration of the initials in the text.

According to these two sources, it becomes clear that the revetment of the Portaitissa icon was made on the commission of Ambrosi, ward of Khaikhosro, the son of Q'varq'vare the Great, atabag and amirspasalar of Samtskhe. Ambrosi, after the death of Q'varq'vare and Kaikhosro, was sent by the second son of Q'varq'vare, atabag Mzechabuk, with a large sum of money and precious donation to Mount Athos, as well as to Jerusalem and Sinai.

The activities of Q'varq'vare Jaq'eli (1451-1498), atabag of the southern Georgian province of Samtskhe, and those of his sons Kaikhosro (1498-1500) and Mzechabuk (1500-1516) are connected with one of the most complicated periods in the history of Georgia. Mongol domination and the subsequent invasions of Tamerlane weakened and then fragmented the united Georgian kingdom, which in the fifteenth century finally disintegrated into several rival kingdoms.²⁹ The fall of Byzantium isolated Georgia and greatly impeded its contacts with both the Orthodox world and Western Europe. All this resulted in economic and cultural decline, which heavily affected the spiritual life of Georgia.³⁰

From the beginning of their rule in the late thirteenth century, the Jaq'eli's of Samtskhe also contributed significantly to the disintegration of the country.³¹ This tendency came to the fore during the reign of Q'varq'vare, who continuously struggled against the king of Georgia and even used the Persian ruler Uzun Hasan against him.³² This struggle led to the defeat of royal power. In the 1460s Q'varq'vare managed to capture Giorgi VIII (1446-1466) and made him marry his daughter Tamar; in 1484, for a short time, he made his grandson (by this marriage), Vakhtang, the king of Kartli (East Georgia).³³ In order to emphasize the separation of Samtskhe from the united kingdom of Georgia, Q'varq'vare began to coin silver money with his name. The existence

28 Cf. *infra*, n° 61.

29 K. Salia, *History of the Georgian Nation* (Paris, 1983), p. 242ff.

30 On this in detail see: I. Javakhishvili, *Kartveli eris istoria [History of the Georgian Nation]*, vol. IV (Tbilisi, 1967), p. 48, 169.

31 A. Kikvidze, 'Samtskhis Samtavros tsarmoshoba sakartvelos peodalur monarkiasi' ['The Origin of the Samtskhe Principality in the Feudal Monarchy of Georgia'], *Proceedings of Tbilisi State University*, vol. XXXVII (1949), p. 39-95.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 83ff. On the foreign policy of Q'varq'vare and his sons see: M. Tamarashvili, *Istoria katolikobisa kartvelta shoris [The History of Catholicism among the Georgians]*, (Tbilisi, 1902), p. 57-60, 595-597.

33 K. Sharashidze, 'Sakartvelos istoriis masalebi (XV-XVIII ss.)' ['Materials for the History of Georgia (15th-18th centuries)'], in: *Masalebi sakartvelos da kavkasiis istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of Georgia and the Caucasus]*, vol. 30 (Tbilisi 1954), p. 237-240.

of different versions of these coins testifies to the fact that Q'varq'vare had a permanent mint (probably in his residence in Akhaltsikhe) that produced a large quantity of coins.³⁴

In addition, the atabag of Samtskhe tried to separate his province from unified Georgia ecclesiastically. Q'varq'vare and later his son Mzechabuk, decided to make the Bishop of Atsq'uri independent from the Patriarch of Georgia and become the leader of all the bishoprics of Southern Georgia.³⁵ To a certain extent, these intentions of the Samtskhe rulers were encouraged by the visits of the high clergy of the East Christian Churches, which occurred because of the contemporary political situation prevailing in the Georgian kingdom. The Muslim invasions compelled these visits as a means of soliciting donations to offset the difficult economic conditions afflicting the patriarchies. At the same time, in addition to receiving generous presents from the atabags, such contacts were successfully used to promote the separation of the parishes of Southern Georgia from the rule of the Georgian Church. Four such visits are known in the reign of Q'varq'vare, Kaikhosro and Mzechabuk,³⁶ including a visit of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Joachim I (1498-1502 and 1504) to Samtskhe, probably in 1500-1501;³⁷ it was during this visit that a panegyric on Atsq'uri See and its eparchy, as well as those of the Samtskhe Atabags was written.³⁸ Of particular interest in this work, which was a requital for the rich offerings received from Mzechabuk, is the author's attempt to emphasize the

34 On this see – D. Kapanadze in: the *Bulletin of the State Museum of Georgia*, XI-B (1941), p. 150-152 and XIV-B (1947), p. 149-165.

35 K. Sharashidze, *Samkhret sakartvelos istoriis masalebi (XV-XVI ss.)* [*Materials for the History of South Georgia (15th-16th centuries)*], (Tbilisi, 1961), p. 85-97.

36 These were made by an anonymous Greek Metropolitan in the 1350s (Th. Zhordania, *Opisanie rukopisei*, vol. II (Tbilisi, 1903), p. 269); by Michael, Patriarch of Jerusalem and Antioch, in the 1370s who wrote a special document to confirm the independence of the West Georgian Church, entitled “Mtsneba Sasjuloi”, a Georgian translation of which survives (I. Javakhishvili, op. cit., p. 111-115; N. Berdzenishvili, *Sakartvelos istoriis sakitkhebi* [*Studies in the History of Georgia*], vol. V, Tbilisi, 1971, p. 100-106); by Joachim, Patriarch of Constantinople, in the first years of the sixteenth century (cf. infra, n° 37); and by Dorotheos, Patriarch of Antioch, – no later than 1516 (T. Zhordania, *Opisanie rukopisei*, vol. II, p. 317-318; I. Dolidze, ed., *Dzveli kartuli samartlis dzeglebi* [*Monuments of Old Georgian Law*], vol. III (Tbilisi, 1970), p. 221-223, 1153.

37 T. A. Γριτσόπουλος, Ἰωακείμ ὁ Α', Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (1498-502), *Θρησκευτικὴ καὶ Ἱστορικὴ Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, τόμος 6 (Ἀθήναι, 1965), σελ. 1091-1092.

38 Σπ. Λάμπρου, Μανουὴλ Κορινθίου τοῦ μεγάλου ρήτορος Διήγησις περὶ τῆς ἐν Ἀσγορίῳ εἰκόνης τῆς θεοτόκου, *Νέος Ἑλληνομνημίων*, τόμος 9 (Ἀθήναι, 1909), σελ. 409-432 (afterwards – Διήγησις). The work is included in manuscript N. 801 of Iviron monastery, in fol. 104r-132r; Id., Κατάλογος τῶν ἐν ταῖς Βιβλιοθήκαις τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους Ἑλληνικῶν κωδίκων, τόμος Β (1900), σελ. 227-228. Its authorship was recently studied (R. Bartikjan, 'Pripisyvaemyj Manuilu, velikomu ritoru Konstantinopol'skoj Patriarkhii panegirik gosudarjam Samckhe-Saatabago Qvarq'vare II, Kaikhosroju i Mzeczabuku' ['The Panegyric to the Rulers of Samtskhe-Saatabago, Q'varq'vare II, Kaikhosro and Mzechabuk Ascribed to Manuil, the Great Rhetor-

antiquity of the Atsq'uri church and the significance of this province in the establishment of Christianity in Georgia.³⁹ The orientation of the ecclesiastical policy of Q'varq'vare and his sons is revealed in the decision to appoint a Greek priest Symeon, originating from Trebizond, as the bishop of Atsq'uri.⁴⁰ Likewise, the special care shown by the Jaq'eli family for the Georgian ecclesiastical centres of the Holy Land reveals a similar tendency. Along with paying their Christian debt, this activity was determined by the desire to establish and heighten the authority of the religious centre of Samtskhe and to emphasize their own power and possibilities as rulers of an independent kingdom. Although the attempt of the Samtskhe atabags to gain independence for the Atsq'uri eparchy failed and the unity of the Georgian Church remained intact,⁴¹ it was impossible to stop the disintegration of the country.

The domain of the Jaq'eli became a separate princedom by the second half of the fifteenth century and comprised a vast territory from Borjomi gorge (Tori province) up to Č'orokhi gorge (Erzerum province).⁴² Its rulers, beginning with Sargis I the Great († 1285), were traditionally distinguished by their political and intense cultural activity. This activity explains how Samtskhe was still a relatively advanced province in economic and cultural terms at a time of general hardship for Georgia. Alongside the persistent attempt to separate their province from the united Georgian kingdom, the representatives of several generations of the Jaq'eli rulers initiated the building and painting of many significant monastic centres and churches in various parts of Samtskhe, producing richly adorned icons, processional crosses, and manuscripts in the different workshops and scriptoria of the province. This activity is especially vivid from the late thirteenth century and throughout the fourteenth century. During this period great domed churches were erected that were distinguished

rician of the Patriarchate of Constantinople'], *Proceedings of Tbilisi State University*, vol. 266 (1987), p. 37ff).

39 For this purpose, the first part of the panegyric is dedicated to the missionary activity of the Apostle Andrew and St. Nino in Georgia, which the author often places within the boundaries of Samtskhe (cf. Διήγησις, p. 409-419). The same tendency is characteristic of "Mtsneba Sasjuloi", written in Georgian later during the visit of the Antiochian Patriarch, Dorotheos, to Atsq'uri (cf. *supra*, n° 35), where in order to emphasize the ecclesiastical separation of the different provinces of the country, St. Andrew's activity is connected with Samtskhe, while that of St. Nino with Kartli, the central province of the country (I. Dolidze, *op. cit.*, p. 227).

40 *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (The Life of Kartli/Georgia) tells nothing about the provenance of Symeon; at the same time, it is stated in the Διήγησις (p. 422), that before being appointed Atsq'uri Bishop, he was the priest of the Tbeti eparchy. It is quite obvious, why Symeon was called "elect of the Lord, imitation of Christ" in the panegyric of Samtskhe atabags; besides, as the author emphasizes, "after having occupied the bishopric the days of welfare came all over the country".

41 K. Sharashidze, *Samkhret sakartvelos*, p. 94-97.

42 *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, 1973, p. 656-659.

from contemporary architectural monuments in other regions of Georgia by their artistic merits and scale.⁴³ Highly artistic fresco ensembles were executed that usually contained dynastic portraits of the representatives of the Jaq'eli family.⁴⁴ The long activity of the atabags resulted in the final construction of the system of fortresses, scattered all over the territory of Samtskhe, which provided a single defense system for the whole province.⁴⁵

In the fifteenth century, difficulties caused by the disastrous invasions and the disintegration of the country certainly influenced the character of the cultural emergence of Samtskhe. Although by that time art and architecture had degraded to the same extent as in other regions of Georgia, still Samtskhe's rulers persisted in this endeavour. Though large-scale building activity did not occur, the literary sources and monuments demonstrate that its intensity remained proportionally the same. In addition to the erection of small chapels, bell-towers and other monuments, and their painting in certain cases,⁴⁶ the number of restorations significantly increased.⁴⁷ Besides the activity of the

43 The important monasteries are those of Sapara (late thirteenth century – fig. 8) and Zarzma (early fourteenth century), as well as Č'ule, which was erected in the second half of the fourteenth century and is connected with atabag Beka Jaq'eli. Of the lesser churches of the same period one should note Bieti, Tsq'ordza, Tiseli, Karzameti, and the extensively rebuilt monastery of Shorota (cf. V. Beridze, *Samckhis khurotmodzgvreba, XIII-XVI saukuneebi* [Architecture of Samtskhe, thirteenth-sixteenth centuries], Tbilisi, 1955; G. Kutladze and O. Maisuradze, *Shorota* (Akhalsikhe, 1992), p. 28).

44 The earliest are murals of the main church of St. Saba in Sapara monastery, comprising several layers, executed from the late thirteenth up to the mid-fourteenth century (G. Khutsishvili, *Saparis kedlis mokhatuloba* [Wall Paintings of Sapara], (Tbilisi, 1988), p. 32-69, 79-121). The vast mural decoration of the main church of Zarzma monastery was executed in the first half of the fourteenth century and later was partially repainted in the sixteenth century (E. Taq'aishvili, *Arkheologicheskie ekskursii, razyskanija i zametki* [Archaeological Excursions, Studies and Notes], vol. I (Tbilisi, 1905), p. 40-66). As for Č'ule, it was painted later, in 1381 (D. P. Gordeev, 'Otchet o poezdke v Akhalsikhskij uezd v 1917 godu. Rospisi v Č'hule, Sapare i Zarzme' ['Report on the Travel in 1917 to the District of Akhalsikhe; The Frescoes of Č'ule, Sapara and Zarzma'], *Izvestija Kavkazskogo Istoriko-Arkheologiceskogo Instituta*, t. I, (1923), p. 12-36; S. Amiranashvili, *Istoriija gruzinskogo iskusstva* [History of Georgian Art], (Moscow, 1963), p. 252). At the same period, smaller decorations were executed in the Lasuridze chapel of Sapara monastery, in the domed church of Tiseli monastery, and at Bieti rock-cut monastery as well as elsewhere.

45 V. Beridze, op. cit., p. 19-21.

46 Saq'uneti, Sadgeri and Kotelia churches, bell-towers in Kheoti and Shorota (V. Beridze, op. cit., p. 188-192, 196-200, 206-214; G. Kutladze, O. Maisuradze, op. cit., p. 16-17).

47 The most important rebuilding was that of the dome of Tbeti cathedral. At the beginning of the twentieth century it was still ruined (cf. N. Marr, *Dnevnik poezdki v Shavshiju i Klardju*, [Diary of a Journey to Shavsheti and Klarjeti] (St. Petersburg, 1911), pl. 2, 3). They also commissioned the decoration of the facades of the Parkhali basilica with an arcature (E. Taq'aishvili, *Arkheologiceskaja ekspeditsija 1917 goda v juzhnye provintsii Gruzii* [Archaeological Expedition of 1917 to the Southern Provinces of Georgia], (Tbilisi, 1952), p. 94-97, pl. 138-140); the reinforcement of the annex of the main church in the Vardzia rock-cut complex



8. Sapara monastery. View from south-west.

(K. Melitauri, *Vardzia* (Tbilisi, 1969), p. 8, 12; id., *Stroitel'stvo i arkhitektura Vardzii* [*Construction and Architecture of Vardzia*] (Tbilisi, 1975), p. 49-50; G. Gaprindashvili, *Vardzia* (Leningrad, 1975), p. 14, pl. 71, 72); and finally, the enlargement of the west cross-arm of Kumurdo cathedral, which took place later, in the early sixteenth century (E. Taq'aishvili, 'Khristianskie pamjatniki' ['Christian Monuments'], *Materialy po Arkheologii Kavkaza*, XII (1909), p. 42-44, pl. VI).

rulers of the province, similar donor activity was practised by their subjects, local nobles such as the Kavkasisdze, Mamalasdze, Berisdze, Tokhasdze, and Shaburisdze families.⁴⁸

Furthermore, historical sources as well as works of art and architecture testify to the continuation of this activity in the reign of Q'varq'vare and his sons.⁴⁹ At the same time, two main features characterise the donor activity of the Samtskhe rulers in the second half of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The first was the aim to restore and furnish the Atsq'uri Episcopal church, as well as to decorate the icon of the Virgin kept within it, which according to the legend was brought to Atsq'uri by the Apostle Andrew (fig. 9).⁵⁰ The second, no less significant, sphere of donor activity of Q'varq'vare

48 Cf. the church of Tsakhni, erected in 1433 by Beshken Berisdze (M. Brosset, *Rapports sur un voyage archeologique dans la Georgie et dans l'Arménie*, II Livraison, 2eme rapport (St. Petersburg, 1851), p. 138-139); Okrobagebi church built by the representatives of the Mamalasdze family in 1466 (N. Marr, op. cit., p. 89); Ioane Bishop of Atsq'uri, eristavi Shaburisdze took part in the erection of Smada church (E. Taq'aishvili, 'Khristianskie pamjatniki', p. 4, fig. 1); at the same period Murvan Kavkasisdze restored the Otxta Eklesia fortress (ibid., p. 88; W. Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historic Tao, Klarjeti, and Shavshet'i* [Stuttgart, 1992], p. 174-175, pl. 235-237). In 1493, on the initiative of Zaal Tokhasdze a western chapel was added to Bieti church (E. Taq'aishvili, 'Khristianskie pamjatniki', p. 45).

49 Thanks to surviving dedicatory inscriptions, it is possible to identify the donors and date of the Solomonisi rock-cut church (the wall paintings of which include the portraits of donors) and the palace of atabag Mzechabuk in Oltisi (E. Taq'aishvili, *Arkeologiuri ekspeditsia kolaoltisshi da changlshi* [Archaeological Expedition in Kola-Oltisi and Changli], (Paris, 1938), p. 31-33, 41-42. Among the illuminated manuscripts, which are dated and which preserve the names of highly professionally trained craftsmen, two should be singled out. These are Gospel pages copied in the 1460s-1470s and adorned with miniatures by the painter Anania, which were later bound into the manuscript A-845 (copied earlier, in the eleventh century); and the Four Gospels Q-920, commissioned in 1504 by Tamar, the daughter of atabag Q'varq'vare the Great, and copied and richly adorned by the calligrapher Akaki (M. Dzhanaashvili, *Opisanie rukopisej Tserkovnogo Muzeja* [Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Ecclesiastical Museum], vol. III (Tbilisi, 1908), p. 59-67; R. Shmerling, *Obraztsy dekorativnogo ubranstva gruzinskikh rukopisej* [Samples of the Decoration of Georgian Manuscripts], (Tbilisi, 1940), p. 65-66).

50 *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, I, p. 39-43. After the cathedral was severely damaged in a disastrous earthquake of 1283 (Ibid., II, p. 278) it became the subject of permanent care by the Samtskhe rulers. Particular attention was lavished on the church beginning from Q'varq'vare's rule, when the attempts to separate the Atsq'uri episcopate from the Georgian Church were most active. In his panegyric Patriarch Joachim I emphasises that "truly orthodox and greatly pious to everything sacred of blessed memory the great king Q'varq'vare, rejoicing at the piety, humility and reasonableness of the bishop, donated to the holy church of the Virgin many silver and golden objects, many estates and golden adornments – for the venerated icon" (Δι' ἡγίας, p. 422-423). Q'varq'vare's sons, Khaikhosro and Mzechabuk continued their father's activity. The first of them "adorned with numerous donations the holy, venerated church of the Virgin". The same can be said of Mzechabuk as well, who assigned the Zarzma monastery with its income, villages and peasants to the Atsq'uri cathedral (cf. S. Kakabadze, ed., *Istoriuli sabutebi* [Historical Documents], II (Tbilisi, 1913), p. 26-29). In addition, "he adorned with donations ... above all the church of our holy mistress, the Virgin, where her miraculous icon is kept ... and if anyone would have liked to write on how great a [quantity



9. Atsq'uri Icon of the Virgin (State Art Museum of Georgia).

of] movable and real property, i. e. villages, lands, precious golden and silver holy objects, precious stones and highly valuable pearls or many other things, he generously donated, it would have made up a big book ... Everyone belonging to this royal family was generous and liberal ... but still this great chief, truly the most generous king, Mzechabuk excelled them in his rich donations and gifts. Even to the present day he endlessly adorns the holy church of the Virgin with valuable tributes” (Διήγησις p. 426-427). In late fifteenth century the church was robbed twice and its miraculous icon was twice captured as the result of the invasions of Uzun Hasan (1477) and Iakub Khan (1486). The stolen icon, ransomed at a heavy price and brought back, was adorned with a new revetment commissioned by Kaikhosro (cf. *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, II, p. 478-479, 482; Διήγησις, p. 424). The present revetment of the icon was commissioned by the king of Imereti (West Georgia) Giorgi II (1565-1583) and his wife, Queen Tamar, in 1578-1583 (T. Saq'varelidze, *XIVXIX saukuneebis kartuli okromč'edloba [14th-19th-century Georgian Metalwork]*, vol. I (Tbilisi, 1987), p. 147, 179-180, pl. 84 – with earlier bibliography).

and his heirs was the assistance offered to the Holy Sites of the Christian East. The Samtskhe atabags gave rich donations to various Orthodox patriarchates, especially to Georgian ecclesiastical centres located beyond the boundaries of the kingdom. The Patriarch of Constantinople notes that Mzechabuk “gave especially rich donations to the Holy churches and monasteries, which included those of the Holy Mount and Sinai, as well as others which he learned were in need of everything. He, this pious king beloved by God, embellished the Holy patriarchates with donations”.⁵¹ For the sake of a complete analysis of the activity of Q’varq’vare Jaq’eli’s family it should be emphasized that looking through the notes preserved in Georgian and foreign sources, a somewhat ecstatic tone characterizes each of its representatives. This is evident in the colophons, which date to the 1520s and 1530s, preserved in Ms Q-969 (fol. 310v-311v) and Ms H-1717 (fol. 232v-233v) of the Tbilisi Institute of Manuscripts,⁵² as well as a panegyric to the Jaq’eli family, written by the Patriarch Joachim I, in which all the representatives of the family depict Christian virtues. To a certain extent, the clerical origin of the authors of the colophons and the panegyric account for this. Nevertheless, the similarities between Georgian and Greek sources express a viewpoint widespread among the Samtskhe nobility, according to which military power and “great devotion to Christianity” were considered of the utmost moral merit.⁵³

In particular, the sources emphasize the high erudition of each member of Q’varq’vare Jaq’eli’s family. At a time of cultural progress of Samtskhe and its contacts with the outside world, there seems to be no need for such emphasis concerning a powerful noble family ruling the province. At the same time, it reflects an attitude shared among the contemporary Georgian aristocracy, which aspired to an ideal of the wholly perfect person. The characterisation of the erudition of the Kaikhosro atabag is limited to a statement about his mastering foreign languages (Arabic, Persian, and especially – Greek), while

51 Διήγησις, p. 426. Given the activity of the Jaq’eli family and the great scale of their donations, it is striking that they actually did nothing for the most significant spiritual centres in Georgia proper. This must be explained by the opposition of the Samtskhe rulers to the high clergy of the Georgian Church and a policy deliberately to ignore them.

52 K. Sharashidze, ‘Sakartvelos istoriis’, p. 258-259; id., *Samkhet sakartvelos*, p. 15-17, 78.

53 It is characteristic that Mzechabuk is named as “Enlightened by God, brave rider and defeater of many strong and famous warriors”, and at the same time – “the enclosure of Christianity, venerably admitting a complete monkhood and angelic scheme” (K. Sharashidze, *Samkhet sakartvelos*, p. 1516). The description of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch is very similar: “his mind was greedy in study and deriving benefit from the luminous Evangelical and Apostolic quotations, the Psalms of the heavenly David, comprehension of which turns the human mind to God and to the contemplation of the reflection of his sweet and beloved beauty. As for his physical strength, frame and bravery, in all these he was inferior to none of the famous ancient heroes. That is why he was formidable to his enemies and barbarians, and well-known over almost all the world” (Διήγησις, p. 425-426).

Mzechabuk is depicted in terms of his wide sphere of interests, particularly the fact that “he had thoroughly, as permitted by human possibilities, studied the Scripture in three languages – Georgian, Arabic and Persian” and equally important that “he had dedicated his life to three occupations – books, hunting and prayers”.⁵⁴ Similarly, the sources concerning the events of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the Jaq’eli’s province emphasize that an unusually large number of monks came from noble families.⁵⁵ It is noteworthy that Mzechabuk himself took monastic vows under the name Jacob. His action may have been conditioned by the failure to gain the ecclesiastical independence of Samtskhe.⁵⁶ Although some references were certainly exaggerated, for the most part they convey a sound image of a personality “entirely perfect and wholesome in divine and human aspects.”⁵⁷

Taken together with other considerations, this ideal of virtue seems to have played an important role in the great interest shown to Georgian monasteries in the sacred places of the Orthodox world, as expressed by the assistance rendered to them by the Samtskhe atabag's family at the turn of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries.

Life in the Georgian monastery on Mount Athos was similarly complicated. From the second half of the fourteenth century, the number of Georgian monks in Iviron, as well as their rights, greatly diminished.⁵⁸ At the same time, after the fall of Constantinople the monasteries of Mount Athos were seized and robbed by the Turks. Numerous invasions by its enemies and disastrous plundering weakened Iviron as well as other monasteries.⁵⁹ By the late fifteenth century, it became obvious that without assistance from the motherland it would be impossible to restore the devastated Iviron and revive its monastic life. In fact, a Greek chronicle reflecting the history of Iviron from the thirteenth-seventeenth centuries states that in 1492 the inhabitants of

54 Διήγησις, p. 426.

55 See for example, the Synodal records of Gergeti church (Tbilisi, Institute of Manuscripts, Ms A-1085), and the colophons of the so-called Kopasdze manuscript (Ms Q-969).

56 K. Sharashidze, *Samkhet sakartvelos*, p. 16, 95-96.

57 The so-called “Meskhuri Matiane” [Meskheti Chronicle] (Tbilisi, Institute of Manuscripts, Ms S-947, fol. 10r-11r).

58 A. Natroev, op. cit., p. 254-258; F. W. Husluk, *Athos and its Monasteries* (London, 1924), p. 54-55; L. Menabde, op. cit., p. 224-225; E. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos. The Garden of the Panaghia* (Berlin-Amsterdam, 1972), p. 135; concerning the conditions of the monastery by the late fifteenth century see *Actes d'Iviron*, IV, p. 22ff.

59 Cf. M. Janashvili ed., *Atonis monastris*, p. 269.

The fact that in the early fifteenth century Iviron was placed seventh among the Athonite monasteries but only thirteenth late the same century testifies to the scale of diminution (B. de Khitrovo, *Itinéraires Russes en Orient*, vol. I₁ (Genève, 1889), p. 208, 262). By that time the number of monks had also decreased to fifty (*Actes d'Iviron*, IV, p. 22-23).

the monastery sent representatives to the “Iberian autocracy”. They went to the “master and king, patron Q’varq’vare” who “listened to them and helped them”.⁶⁰ This was not the first case when the Samtskhe rulers rendered assistance to Iviron. From a monastery synodicon it is known that on the occasion of the premature death of Q’varq’vare’s third son, Bahadur († 1474), the Jaq’eli family offered rich donations to the Jerusalem and Sinai monasteries, while the Greek monk Symeon, “their serf for a long time”, and the Georgian monk Akaki, “their ward from his early childhood and [their] slave”, were sent to Mount Athos by the Q’varq’vare family. Besides the donations “given from Trebizond to Constantinople and from Constantinople to the Holy Mountain”, they donated twenty thousand Otmanuri, “some in Fluri and some in Tetri”, and two horses to Iviron monastery itself.⁶¹ It is probable that the decision of

60 Θεοδοσίον ἱερομονάχου [καὶ Ἱερεμίου ἡγουμένου] διήγησις ὁραιότης περὶ τῆς βασιλικῆς μονῆς τῶν Ἱβήρων ἣν ὀφείλουσι γινώσκειν πάντες οἱ μοναχοὶ αὐτῆς, published in: M. Γέδεον, Ὁ Ἅγιος. Αναμνήσεις – ἔγγραφα – σημειώσεις (ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει, 1885), σελ. 172-175. There also exists an old Georgian translation of the chronicle, edited by K. Kekelidze in his – *Etiudebi dzveli kartuli literaturis istoriidan [Studies in the History of Old Georgian Literature]*, t. III (Tbilisi, 1955), p. 69-86. On the donations of atabag Q’varq’vare see *ibid.*, p. 82-83.

61 Commemoration N164 on fol. 209rv:

[ს]აცნაურ იყავნ, ჩუენთა ამათ პატრონთა აქა აღწერისა მიზეზი ესრეთ იქმნა: პატრონი ბაჰადურ, რომელი პირველ სწერია და მერმე ძმათა თანა რიგსა ზედა, თუ რომელთა იყო უმრწემეს ანუ უდიდეს, ესე პატრონი ჩუენი ბაჰადურ განეყო მშობელთა და ძმათაგან და, უფროსდა ვთქუა, სოფლისაგან, და წარვიდა გზასა მას საუკუნესა ჭაბუკი, ყოვლითურთ სრული საღმრთოთა შინა, ხოლო პასაკითა ოცისა, გინათუ კა-ისა წლისა, და აღავსო სახლი მამული მწუხარებითა გამოუთქმელითა. მაშინ დიდებულთა მშობელთა და ძმათა ამისთა, ღმრთისმსახურებისა ძლით, თვსსავე თემსა და ქუეყანასა თანა უცხოთა ქუეყანათა უზუად მიჰვინე[ს] საკსენებელი და სალოცავი, ვითარ-იგი იერუსალჴმს და სინაჴსცა, და ეგრეთვე ჩუენ მოგუცეს საქონელი და წარმოგუა[ვ]ლინეს საბერძნეთისა ქუეყანასა. და წარმოვედით და, ვითარცა ჯერ-იყო, განვჴოვდით ებისკოპოსთა, მონაზონთა, მღვდელთა და გლახაკთა ზედა ტრაპეზონთასა კოსტანტინეპოლედმდე და ვიდრე ამა წმიდად მთამდე. და მოველეთ ყოველი მთისა ამის მონასტერნი და, წესისაებრ მოვაგსენეთ მოსაგსენებელი და სალოცავი: და ეგრეთვე განვიცადეთ ჩუენი ესე მონასტერი, რამეთუ ყოველთაგან უმეტეს დაგლახაკებულებიყო, და ეკლესია ფრიად დაძუშლებულიყო, და სენაკები და ზღუდენი და პირდოსნი უმეტესნი დაქცეულ იყვნეს, და ფრიად უნუგეშინისცემოდ გასრულიყო. და ამას ესევეთარსა უპოვარებასა შინა მოვაგსენეთ ამა ჩუენსა მონასტერსა ოცი ათასისა ოთმანურისა, რომელიმე ფლურად და რომელი[მე] თეთრად, და ეგრეთვე, ორნი ცხენნი, და გავაჩინეთ ერთი ალაპი პატრონისა ბაადურისთვს დღესა მიცვალებისა მისისა ოკდონბერსა ათსა, რაჴთა რაოდენიცა მღვდელი იყოს, ბერძენი თუ ქართველი, ჟამსა წირვიდნ და ტრაპეზად შევიდოდნ და ყოველთა სეფის ამოკუშთათა მოიკსენებდნ, და სახარებისა, და სამოციქულოსა, და სენაქსარსა ზედა მოიკსენებდნ, და ყოველთა ლოცვათა, ვი-

monastery brethren to appeal for help to the Samtskhe atabags and not to the king of Georgia, or the rulers of any other province of the country was made in response to this contribution by the Jaq'eli family.

It is not known what else was contributed to Iviron by Q'varq'vare. However, an extant note claims that the activity of his sons Kaikhosro and Mzechabuk was significant. Besides rich donations mentioned in the Synodicon of the monastery, some of their other contributions included the decoration of the Portaitissa icon with cladding, the erection of its church fortress, the building of the hospital with its equipment and the building of the monastery metochion in Gomato. Furthermore, the archives of the Iviron monastery reveal that they commissioned the restoration of decayed towers and cells in the southern part of the monastery, the re-erection of the great fortress tower (fig. 10),⁶²

თარცა აღმაშენებელნი მოიგსენებოდენ. და ვინ უდებ-ყოს და ესე განხენილი მოშალოს, ღმერთსა მან გასცეს პასუხი.

ხოლო ამის საქმისა მსახურნი, რომელნი სამცხით მოიწივნეს, ერთი ბერძენი იყო, მღვდელმონაზონი, სახელით სჯმონ, რომელი დიდი ხანით ყმა მათდა ქმნილი იყო, და ერთი ქართველი მონაზონი, სახელით აკაკი, სიყრმითგან მათ თანა აღზრდილი და მონა.

Know you that the following was the reason of the description of our patrons: the patron Bahadur, written first and his brothers in order of succession of age, who was younger or older, this patron of ours Bahadur, departed from his parents and brothers and, I must add, from this world, taking the road of eternity, a youth, perfect in divine matters, and aged twenty, twenty-one years old, filling his father's house with ineffable grief. Then the noble parents and his brothers, through divine service, gave away lavishly for the remembrance of his soul in his common and country and in foreign countries, both in Jerusalem and Sinai, and they gave us too wealth and sent us to the land of Greece. And we went and, as was proper, we gave away to bishops, monks, priests and the poor from Trebizond to Constantinople and to this Holy Mountain. And we visited all the monasteries of this mountain, and according to the rule, we presented our diptychs and prayers, and we visited this monastery [i. e. Iviron], for it had much declined, and the church had grown very old, and the cells and the walls and poles were mostly in ruins, and turned into desperate light. And in such dire need we presented this monastery of ours twenty thousand Otmanuri – part in Pluri and part in Tetri, as well as two horses, and ordained one commemoration for our patron Bahadur on the day of his decease the tenth of October, and all the priests – Greek and Georgian – serve vespers, with an entrance into the altar and be mentioned while prosphora and while reading the Gospel, Apostles and Synaxary, and all prayers, as the builders [of the monastery] were commemorated. And whoever neglects to do this, and does away with this ordainment, let him answer God.

And the performers of this, who came from Samtskhe, one was a Greek, hieromonk Svimon by Name, and one Georgian monk, Akaki by name, brought up from childhood with them and their serf.

Cf. M. Janashvili ed., *Atonis monastris*, p. 267-269; H. Metreveli, *Atonis*, p. 186-187). For the date of Bahadur's death see the colophon of Ms. H-1717 of the Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi (fol. 232v; K. Sharashidze, *Sakartvelos istoriis*, p. 197-200, 258).

It is generally supposed that the Symeon sent to Mount Athos by atabag Q'varq'vare is the Greek priest who was later, in 1486, made a bishop of Atsq'uri (cf. I. Javakhishvili, op. cit., p. 145; L. Menabde, *Dzveli kartuli mtserlobis kerebi* [Centres of Old Georgian Literacy], t. I (Tbilisi, 1962), p. 469, n° 8).

⁶² Today the tower is partially destroyed, although when A. Riley visited it in 1883 it was still undamaged (A. Riley, *Athos or the Mountain of the Monks* (London, 1887), p. 131). On the

and the arrangement of the lateral domes of the main church as well as the exterior gallery (fig. 11).⁶³ In addition to the monastery Synodicon, the depiction of Kaikhosro and Mzechabuk in the exterior gallery of the main church should be considered as a direct reflection of this contribution. Their portraits were included in the row of those Georgian kings and nobles who were distinguished by their special contribution in the building of the Ivron (fig. 12).⁶⁴

The contributions of the Samtskhe atabags to old Georgian monasteries located beyond the boundaries of the country seem to have occurred on a wide scale, comprising all the Holy Sites which were the subject of special care for Georgians beginning in the Early Middle Ages. This small Orthodox kingdom in the north-east corner of the Byzantine world for a significant period took special care of the many Georgian monastic centres in the Holy Land. Over time, due to the persistent hardships of the country, their rights in these places gradually weakened, but as soon as peace and minimal welfare returned to the kingdom, new claims to the old rights were repeatedly made. Such was the case beginning in the first half of the fifteenth century, when the country recovered after the invasion of Tamerlane, at which time Georgians paid new attention to the sacred places of Eastern Christendom. The Samtskhe rulers played a pivotal role in this regard. A prominent example of their role

engraving in this publication, it is shown from the south-west. The same view is given on a lithograph by an anonymous artist, published in P. Milonas' album (*Athos and its Monastic Institutions Through Old Engravings and Other Works of Art* (Athens, 1963), p. 83, pl. 29). According to Milonas, this representation seems to have been executed in the 1880s, though as P. J. Burridge noted, the tower here is completed; consequently, the lithograph is most likely to have been drawn after Riley's visit, ca. 1885-1890 (P. J. Burridge, *The Development of Monastic Architecture on Mount Athos with Special Reference to the Monasteries of Pantocrator and Chilandar* (University of York, 1982), p. 165).

- 63 “Καυχοςρόης καὶ Μεζτζετζάμπουν, οἱ εὐσεβεῖς αὐθένται καὶ βασιλεῖς, οἵτινες μεγάλως συνήργησαν εἰς τὴν τῆς Μονῆς ἀνείργειν, καὶ εἰς τὴν τῶν ταύτης προασείων καὶ μετοχιῶν, καὶ τὰ πεπονημένα διεωθαυμένα τῶν πύργων καὶ τῶν κελλίων ἀνίγειν καὶ ἐδιώρθωσαν ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ μέγας πύργος τότε ἐκ βάθρων ἀνηγέρθη καὶ ἐγένετο ἐκ θεμελίων, καὶ αἱ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τουρλαὶ, καὶ ὁ ἔξω νάρθεξ, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα χρησίμως κατεσκευάσθησαν, εἰς δόξαν Θεοῦ” (M. Gedeon, op. cit., p. 173-174; cited with certain mistakes in: P. Uspenskij, *Pervoe puteshestvie*, I, p. 177-178). In the Georgian recension, this passage is given in greater detail: K. Kekelidze, *Etiudebi*, p. 83).

The inscriptions of 1500 and 1513 on the southern and western facades of the catholicon should be connected with this building activity (G. Millet, J. Pergoire, L. Petit, op. cit., NN200 and 220).

- 64 P. Uspenskij, op. cit., p. 190; A. Natroev, op. cit., p. 56. In 1883 these portraits were repainted, resulting in the alteration of their explanatory inscriptions. This is explained in the colophon of Cod. Ath. Georg. 8 (N. Marr, ‘Agiograficheskie materialy po gruzinskim rukopisjam Ivera’ [‘Hagiographical Materials according to the Georgian Manuscripts of Ivron’], *Zapiski Vostochnogo Otdelenija Imperatorskogo Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva*, t. XIII, fasc. 23 (1901), p. 72), notes of P. Konc’oshvili (op. cit., p. 175-176) and G. Nadareishvili (op. cit., p. 268-269).



10. Monastery of Iviron. Great fortress tower.



11. Monastery of Ivron. The main church with exterior gallery. View from north-west.

concerns the Jerusalem monastery of the Holy Cross, an age-old centre of Georgian religious and cultural activity, learning and creative work, abiding in the monasteries of Jerusalem and its environments.⁶⁵ For a long period, the monastery of the Holy Cross belonged to the Georgians and, accordingly, it always received special care from the Georgian royal court and aristocracy.⁶⁶ From the monastery Synodicon it is known that by the order of Mzechabuk, Ambrosi donated a large sum of money for the commemoration of Kaikhosro; a hundred Fluri of this sum was spent by the brethren to buy a field.⁶⁷ According

65 L. Menabde, op. cit., t. II, p. 69ff.

66 H. Metreveli, *Masalebi ierusalimis kartuli koloniis istoriustvis* [Materials for the History of the Georgian Colony in Jerusalem], (Tbilisi, 1962); T. Virsaladze, *Rospis' Ierusalimskogo Krestnogo Monastyrya i portret Shota Rustaveli* [Wall Paintings of the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem and the Portrait of Shota Rustaveli], (Tbilisi, 1973), p. 10ff.

67 The early list of commemorations of the monastery of the Holy Cross (the so-called Tischendorf's list) gives a long account of this:

სახელითა ღმრთისა მამისა, ძისა და სულისა წმიდისათა, შეწევნითა პატრიოსნისა და ცხოველსმყოფელისა ჯუარისა და შეწევნითა ყოვლად წმიდისა ღ(მრთ)ის მშობელისათა და ყოველთა წმიდათა ღ(მრთ)ისათა ჩუენ, ჯუარ-

ელთა ძმათა და დაძათა და სრულიად საღ(მრ)თ(ო)მან კრებულმან, დავედევით ესე წიგნი პატრონსა ათაბაგსა მზეჭაბუკს კურთხეულისა მათისა ძმისა სულისა სამლოცველოდ. ღიადი საქონელი გამოეგზავნა მათისა გაზრდილისა ამბროსეს კელითა, და მთაიწმიდას და სრულიად საბერძნეთშიგან მრავალი გაეცა, აგრეთვე ამა საუფლოთა და წმინდათა ადგილთა მოიღო: ას ფლურად ერთი დიდი ყანა იყიდა. გ კვირიაკესა მარხვათასა აღაპი გაუჩინეთ, მწუხრს — პანაშუდითა, წირვითა და ტრაპეზის დაგებითა ყოველთა წელიწადთა დაუკლებლად. ვინ არა გარდაიკადოს და დააკლოს, ღმერთმან იგი დააკლოს სასუფეველსა. აგრეთვე ასი ფლური ნაღდი მოგუცა, ხაზ(ი)ნაშიგან ჩავდევიტ. მისთვის ერთი კანდელი დავკიდეთ, სამარადისოდ ენთებოდეს და ზეთი ამა ჯუარის მონასტრისაგან მიეცემოდეს, ვიდრე ესე მონასტერი იყოს, არა მოიშალოს. აგრეთვე ერთი ვერცხლის ბარძიმი შემოსწირეს საპატიო და თეფში ვერცხლისავე. ლ ფლუსი სხუად [მოსახსენებელში] ჩასაწერლად და შენდობად ითქმოდეს დაუკლებლად. პატრონსა ქაიხოსროს შეუნდვნეს ღმერთმან, ძმათა და დაძათა მრავალი მოგუცეს ცალკე, შეუნდვნეს ღმერთმან.

აგრეთვე ესე ყულად მისის ყრმის ამბროსეს კელითა ისაქმა და მოგვვიდა და ერთი ათასი შემოსწირა ჯუარს პატრონსა, და კოსრომელი ჰკრა და ერთი გარი იყიდა სამეგრეოსა საპატიო და ამა ყულ(ა)ისტვს მატიაწეშიგან ჩავწერეთ და მოსაკსენებელშიგან; ამბროსეს და მისთ დედა-მამათ შეუნდვნეს ღმერთმან, თხუთმეტი ფლური შესავალი მოგუცა.

In the name of God, of God the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, with the assistance of the Holy and life-giving Cross, and with the help of the All Holy Mother of God, and all the saints of God, we, the brothers and sisters of the Holy Cross [Monastery], and the all divine community we have instituted this book for the master, Atabag Mzechabuk, for prayers for their blessed brother's soul. He sent us great wealth, by the hand of his ward Ambrosi, and he gave away much on the Holy Mountain and the entire Greece; he also donated to these divine and holy places. He bought a large field at one hundred Pluri. We instituted a feast for the third Sunday of Lent, with a requiem in the vesper, with service and a repast, each year without missing. Who does not pay and keep it back, let God keep him back from the Kingdom of Heaven. Also, he gave us one hundred Pluri in cash, which we put in the treasury. For this, we hung a candle, for it to burn eternally and let oil for it be given from this Holy Cross monastery. While this monastery exists, let this rule never cease. They also donated a honorable silver cup and a platter of silver as well. Another thirty Pluri were also donated, to be recorded in the remembrance book. Let forgiveness be said without fail. Let the Lord forgive Master Kaikhosro; they gave us, to brothers and sisters much in addition, Lord forgive him.

Also, all this was done by the hand of their serf Ambrosi, and he came and donated one thousand to the Holy Cross [monastery], and he tolled the bell and bought one ox from the drove, to be fattened. And for all this we recorded it in the chronicle and also in the remembrance book. Lord forgive Ambrosi and his parents, he gave us fifteen Pluri for recording this.

A relatively short commemoration is inserted in the Synaxarion of the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem: (Cod. Jer. Georg. 24-25):

გ. კვირიაკესა მარხვათასა. ამას დღესა აღაპი და წირვა პ(ა)ტრო(ო)ნის ათაბაგის ქაიხოსროსი, შეუნდვნეს ღმერთმან. ყანა იყიდა ას ფლურად და მისთ(ჯ)ს განუჩინეთ. ვინცა დააკლოს, კრულ იყოს.

In the third week of the Lent. In this day (is established) commemoration and liturgy for the Patron Atabag Kaikhosro. He purchased the field for one hundred Pluri and we ordered [commemoration] for this. Whoever will lessen let him be cursed.

The Georgian text was published by H. Metreveli in her *Masalebi*, p. 77, 108; see also: *Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*, Bd. III: J. Assfalg, *Georgische Handschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1963), p. 70-71.



12. The main church of the Iviron monastery. The row of donor portraits of Georgian kings and nobles in the exterior gallery (repainted in the 1890s).

to the commemoration of the Synodicon of the Iviron monastery, Ambrosi was sent also to Sinai, likewise closely connected to Georgia for centuries. The data of the manuscripts and icon collections, as well as epigraphic evidence, points to the intense activity of Georgians in the monastery of St. Catherine itself and indicates that some churches in the environs of Mount Horeb belonged to Georgians.⁶⁸ Strangely enough, the Sinai Synodal Records (Cod. Sin. Georg. 77, fol. 192r-205v) do not contain any commemorations of Q'varq'vare's sons, Kaikhosro and Mzechabuk, nor the remembrance of Ambrosi, whereas the Synodicons of the Iviron and the Jerusalem monastery of the Holy Cross contain extensive commemorations of these persons, telling in detail about their rich donations and building activity. Moreover, because of the special contribution by Kaikhosro, Mzechabuk, and Ambrosi, the brethren had to mention them in their prayers "as builders". In the Athonite commemoration, Ambrosi does not say anything about Sinai: "We began to give [the money] away from Trebizond to Constantinople, and from Constantinople to this Holy Mountain". Likewise, the Synodal Reports of the monastery of the Holy Cross make no mention of Ambrosi's donation to Sinai: "Ambrosi gave much [money] on the Holy Mountain and the whole of Greece". It can be assumed that for unknown reasons Ambrosi interrupted his journey and did not reach Sinai.

The special attention of the Samtskhe atabags towards the Holy Land and Mount Athos, as reflected in material assistance and building activity, did not slacken in the subsequent period. A large book of donations, which were given to the monastery by Nav-Q'varq'vare (1516-1535) the grandson of Q'varq'vare the Great, and son of Kaikhosro,⁶⁹ states that the members of the Jaq'eli family made significant donations – "the customs fee for Tortumi salt, all with Tetri" (i. e. silver coin) – to the church of the Virgin Portaitissa in return for forgiveness and intercession for their souls.⁷⁰ The commemorations of Nav-Q'varq'vare, his wife and sons, included in the Synodal Reports of St. Catherine's

68 P. Uspenskij, op. cit., p. 188-196; A. Tsagareli, 'Pamjatniki gruzinskoj stariny v Svjatoj Zemle i na Sinae' ['Monuments of Georgian Antiquity in the Holy Land and on Sinai'], *Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij Sbornik*, IV (1888), p. 1920; cf. D. K'ldiašvili, 'L'icône de Saint Georges du Mont Sinaï avec le portrait de Davit Aymašenebeli', *Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes*, N° 5 (1989), p. 119-120; D. Mouriki, 'La presence géorgienne au Sinai d'après le témoignage des icones du monastère de Sainte-Catherine', *Βυζαντιο και Γεωργια. Καλλιτεχνικες και πολιτιστικες σχεσεις, Συμπόσιο*, (Αθηναι, 1991), σελ. 39-40.

69 H. Metreveli, 'Nav-q'varq'vares utsnobi dokumenti' ['An Unknown Document of Nav-Q'varq'vare'], *Mravaltavi* IV (1975), p. 192-205; Id., 'Un document inconnu de Nav-Kvarkvare du Monastere de l'Iviron au Mount Athos', *Bedi Kartlisa*, vol. XXXIII (1975), p. 63-72.

70 H. Metreveli, Nav-q'varq'vares, p. 203.

monastery (Cod. Sin. Georg. 77, fol. 192r),⁷¹ testify to the contribution to Sinai of these members of the Samtskhe atabags.

Having examined the general history of the Samtskhe atabags and their fervent activity in support of various churches and monasteries in the Orthodox world, we arrive at a crucial question surrounding the Portaitissa icon: who executed its decoration and where was this done? The evidence suggests that Ambrosi initiated the decoration. In particular, the Ivron monastery commemoration, which gives a detailed account of the donations sent by his brother Mzechabuk together with Ambrosi, does not refer to the execution of the revetment for the Portaitissa icon and its arrival from Georgia. At the same time, the commemoration of Kaikhosro in the Jerusalem monastery of the Holy Cross, in addition to many other donations, offers a detailed account of contributions, including the presentation of a silver chalice and plate.⁷² On the other hand, the Ivron commemoration of Ambrosi (N163) emphasizes that he rendered great assistance to the monastery and “heavily clad the icon”. More importantly, for his decoration of the icon and building activity in the monastery, the Ivron brethren ordained a service for Ambrosi’s soul every Tuesday before the icon of Portaitissa, as well as entrance into the altar, and remembrance of his soul by each member of the brethren “as is written for the builders [of the monastery]”. Such an honour for especially great services had rarely been given to anyone.⁷³

The donations to the sacred places of Eastern Christendom comprise only one part of Ambrosi’s activities. His decoration of the miraculous icon and building work in the Ivron monastery were especially significant. As a ward and serf of Kaikhosro, Ambrosi did not himself possess the material means to execute such a vast work. This could only have been realised with rich donations from the atabags. Nevertheless, as their delegate to Mount Athos, his contribution to the Ivron monastery and, accordingly, the honour given to him by the brethren resulted from his practical activities. At the same time, the palaeography of the revetment’s dedicatory inscription, its perfect calligraphy, the use of complex ligatures, as well as the highly eloquent level of the text, all suggest that it was executed by a Georgian craftsman. It is significant that Ambrosi speaks in the first person in the inscription. Taken together all these points underscore Ambrosi’s active presence as the ward and serf of the atabags, and

71 I. Javakhishvili, *Sinis mtis kartul khelnatserta aghtseriloba* [*Catalogue of Georgian Manuscripts of Mount Sinai*] (Tbilisi, 1947), p. 241.

72 Cf. *supra*, n° 66.

73 Some scholars call Ambrosi a bishop, but there is no documentary confirmation of his having this title (A. Tsagareli, *op. cit.*, p. 61; P. Konc’oshvili, *op. cit.*, p. 164; A. Natroev, *op. cit.*, p. 98).

testify to his immediate participation in the execution of the Portaitissa revetment.

Two manuscripts kept in the Tbilisi Institute of Manuscripts further support this argument. One of them, the Four Gospels (Ms Q-84), was copied and illuminated by Ambrosi in the Jerusalem monastery of the Holy Cross.⁷⁴ A middle-sized manuscript (10.2 x 7.2 cm) copied on parchment in a nice calligraphic hand reveals the skill of the calligrapher and miniaturist. Together with large initials, outlined in cinnabar and gold, the Gospel decoration comprises ornamental heads (at the beginning of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, on fols. 4r, 91r, 144r) and seven miniatures. In addition to the images of the Evangelists (fol. 3v, 55v, 90v, 143v) (fig. 13), they include the Nativity (2v) (fig. 14), Baptism (7v) (fig. 15), and Annunciation (92v). The paint layer is largely exfoliated in the miniatures, almost completely revealing the preparatory design of the compositions, which is drawn in the same black ink as the written text. The design, as well as the compositional arrangement of the scenes, figures and their attitudes, the manner of execution of the landscape and architectural background, are distinguished by their high artistic merit, testifying to the training of the miniaturist. The homogeneity of the artistic decoration of the codex is evident; it supports the conclusion that, similar to the text, the miniatures and decorative heads were executed by Ambrosi. He placed the only colophon at the end of the Gospel by Matthew (fol. 54r) (fig. 16): და აწ ესე ს(ა)ხ(ა)რ(ე)ბა აღიწერა ც(ო)დვილისა ამბროსი(ი)ს(ა)გ(ა)ნ იმ(რუხა)ლ(ე)მს, მონასტერსა ჯ(უარ)ისა პ(ა)ტიოსნის(ა)სა, სადიდებ(ე)ლად ღ(მრთი)სა მ(ა)მისა, ძისაჲ და ს(უ)ლისა წ(მიღ)ისა და საღოცველ(ა)დ ს(უ)ლდ(იდე)ბ(უ)ლისა პ(ა)ტრო(ნ)ის ქაიხოსროს(ჯ)ს – *And this Gospel was copied by the sinful Ambrosi in Jerusalem, in the monastery of the Holy Cross, for the glory of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and for the prayer for the great soul of the patron Kaikhosro.*⁷⁵

74 *Description of Georgian Manuscripts*, collection Q, vol. I (Tbilisi, 1957), p. 97-98. The manuscript was earlier kept in Martvili monastery. It was there that E. Taq'aishvili had seen it in the early 1920s and given its brief description (E. Taq'aishvili, *Arkheologiuri mogzaurobani da shenishvani* [Archaeological Excursions and Notes], vol. II (Tbilisi, 1914), p. 109.

75 The colophon is cited in: T. Gabashvili, *Mimoslva* (ed. by H. Metreveli), p. 0185, n° 1. A second cinnabar inscription is placed next to it: ქ(რისტ)ე, შ(ეიწყალ)ე ნ(იკოლო)ზ ქ(ა) ამინ – *Christ, have mercy upon Nikoloz K'a, amen*. This inscription is made in a different script from that of the Gospel, being written in larger and more angular letters. Brief inscriptions written in the same hand are numerous in the manuscript and all indicate the use of the Gospel in liturgical practice. It can be supposed that the inscriptions were made by Nikolaos Choloq'aishvili (1585-1659) who was the Father-Superior of the monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem in 1643-1649. The palaeography of the inscriptions made by him in various manuscripts is similar to that found in the Gospel copied by Ambrosi. Despite this



13. Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi.
Cod. Q-84, fol. 55v. St. Mark.



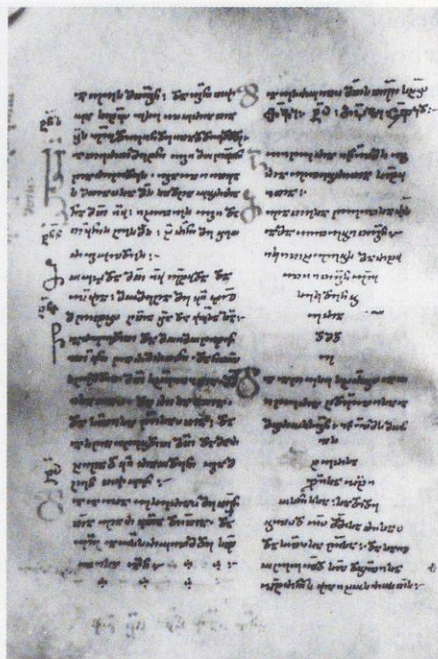
14. Cod. Q-84, fol. 2v. Nativity.

similarity, this identification is hindered to a certain extent by the fact that this famous Father-Superior of the Georgian monastery in Jerusalem is traditionally mentioned by his monastic name Nikephoros. Both names – Nikephoros and Nikolaos are found in the colophons of various manuscripts (Nikephoros – Ms H-2339 of the Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, fol. 3v; Ms Georg-24 of the Greek Patriarchate in Jerusalem, fol. 256v; Ms K-25 of the Historical-Ethnographical Museum in Kutaisi, fol. 300v). Cf.: *Description of Georgian Manuscripts*, collection H, vol. V (Tbilisi, 1949), p. 234; N. Marr, *Ierusalimis berdznuLi sapatriarkos c'ignatsavis kartuli khelnac'erebis mokle aghtseriloba* [A Brief Catalogue of the Georgian Manuscripts kept in the Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem], (Tbilisi, 1955), p. 234; M. Nikoleishvili ed., *Kutaisi istoriul-etnografiuli muzeumis kartul khelnac'erta aghtseriloba* [Catalogue of the Georgian Manuscripts of the Kutaisi Historical-Ethnographical Museum], vol. I (Tbilisi, 1953), p. 116.

The silver plates, bearing the Crucifixion above and St. John the Evangelist below, fixed on the wooden cover of the manuscript with velvet binding, are not contemporary with the manuscript. They were executed later, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, by a middle-ranking craftsman. It can not be excluded that the plates for the decoration of the codex were executed after its removal to Georgia, where it was renovated by Kirile (Cyril) Gabunia the Father-Superior of the Sairme monastery of the Virgin (cf. colophon on fol. 218r).



15. Cod. Q-84, fol. 7v. Baptism.



16. Cod. Q-84, fol. 00. Colophon of Ambrosi.

The second manuscript, a Psalter (Ms A-351)⁷⁶ is also written on parchment. It is small in size (10 x 7.5 cm). In this case as well, the main adornment of the text, written in neat, even letters, are the initials, although here they are made in gold, indicating the lavishness of the manuscript. This is confirmed by the fact that one or two lines on every page is completely written in gold. The same colour is used for the sign marking the end of the line (three dots), while the punctuation mark is given in black points inscribed in golden circles. The most significant artistic accent of the manuscript is a miniature of the Prophet David opening the Psalter text (fol. 2v) (fig. 17). The composition follows the traditional iconography of the biblical king: David is depicted seated on a wide throne with a high back and holding a harp in his hand. He is looking up, at the blessing hand stretching out from a fragment of heaven, depicted in the centre of the upper part of the miniature. The architectural background

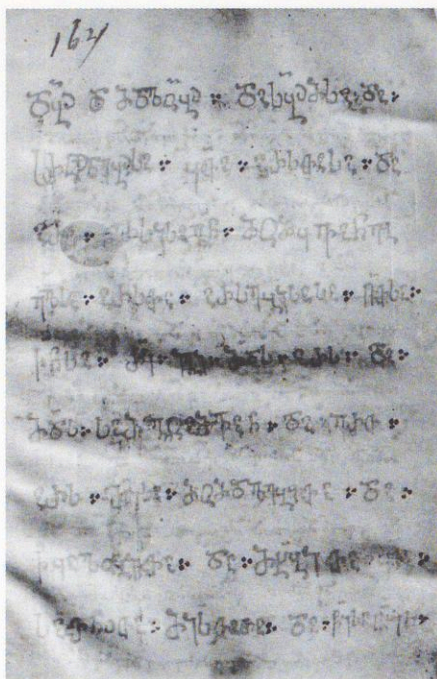
⁷⁶ Notes on the manuscripts are given in: L. Shervashidze, 'Miniatury Kutaisskoj rukopisi N115 i Leningradskoj OI 58'. *Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR*, t. XIV, N1 (1953), p. 55-62; L. Menabde, op. cit, t. I, Tbilisi, 1962, p. 499-500; *Catalogue of Georgian Manuscripts*, Collection A, t. I₄ (Tbilisi, 1985), p. 68-70.

behind David is formed by a wall divided into horizontal courses filling the whole lower part of the composition. On both sides, it is terminated by high buildings, the one to the right being a canopy which seems to symbolize Sion. Artistic traits originating from late Palaiologan models are revealed in the figure's proportions and posture, as well as in the precise and expressive design. The clearly built, symmetrical and well-balanced composition was created by an experienced craftsman. This can be seen in the modelling of the face, which is rendered in light pink with soft lighting on a dark grey, olive ground and with small white highlights in the corners of the eyes, above the brows and on the neck. The same can be said of the bright, lively colouristic arrangement of the miniature: gold is the leading colour both in the background and in the details of David's royal vestments, his crown and harp. The light ochre of the royal throne covered by a golden design strengthens this impression. In addition, the blue colour of the robe and the bright red, green and light lilac used in the architectural details is perceived as more distinct colouristic accents. The background is also marked by the characteristic tendencies of this period: striving towards emphasizing certain spatial accents in the composition is felt in the buildings of light classical forms, with the velum spread between them, a detail already traditional by that time.

In addition to this miniature, the manuscript is also adorned with a small headpiece at the beginning of the text of the Psalms (fol. 3r) (fig. 17). This is a stylised vegetable motif inscribed in a rectangular frame. The easy interlace of its stems and leaves is drawn masterly by an experienced hand in blue against the gold background and is outlined by a thin, even, red border. The colophons supplemented to the manuscript include several texts which are much longer than those in the Gospels copied by Ambrosi in Jerusalem. On fol. 163v there is a colophon written in a larger *nuskhuri* script in golden ink, over the main text of the Psalm: ნათელსო სოფლისა, უფალო ქრისტე ღმერთო, ღირს ყავ განახლებად სულით და კორცით ნათელსა შინა ღმრთაებისა შენისასა სუფევად უკუე პატრონი მზეჭაბუკ, რამეთუ ფრიად მოსურნე არს სწავლად საღმრთოთა მცნებათა შენთა – *Light of the world, Lord Christ, make patron Mzechabuk worthy of dwelling in soul and body in the light of Your Divinity for he is very keen to study Your holy commandments*. On fol. 164r, it is supplemented by a second colophon also written in gold ink. The text in *recto* is written in *asomtavruli* script while in *verso* it is continued by *nuskhuri* (fig. 18): დ(იდე)ბ(ა)ე და მ(ა)დლობ(ა)ე დას(ა)ბამსა და სრულეპასა ყ(ოველ)თა არსთასა და არა არსისაგ(ა)ნ მომყვანებელსა არსთა არსებისასა ღ(მერ)თსა ჩ(უე)ნსა, რ(ომე)ლი-იგი მ(არა)დ(ი)ს არს და მ(არა)დ(ი)ს სამეჟამ(ო)ვან და ერთ არს, რ(ომ)ლისა მომ(ა)დლებითა და წყალობითა და მ(ეო)ხ(ე)ბითა ყ(ოველ)თა სათნ(ო)თა მისთათა და



17. Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi. Cod. A-351, fols. 2v-3r: Prophet David and beginning of the Psalter text.



18. Cod. A-351, fol. 164r.
Colophon of Ambrosi.

წ(მიდი)სა ღ(მრთ)ის მშ(ო)ბლისა-
თა სრულ იქმნ(ე)ს წ(მიდა)ნი ესე
ღ(ავი)თის ფ(სალმუ)ნნი ბრძანე-
ბითა ღიდისა წარჩინებულისა
თვთ-მპყრ(ო)ბ(ე)ლისა პ(ა)ტრ(ო)-
ნის ყ(უა)რყ(უა)რ(ე)ს ძისა მგნისა
და ახოვნისა პ(ა)ტრონის მზეჭაბუ-
კისითა, რ(ომლ)ისა მრავალმცა
არი(ა)ნ წელნი სუფევისა მისისანი
და კსენ(ე)ბ(ა) მისი მოუკლებ(ე)ლ
ყოს ღ(მერთმა)ნ სიმრ(ა)ვლესა
შ(ინ)ა ე(ამ)თ(ა)სა, ა(მი)ნ – *Glory*
and thanks to the beginning and per-
fection of all beings, Who had introdu-
ced beings into existence out of non-
existence, our God, who ever exists and
assists in three Persons and one Sub-
stance for ever, by the grace and mercy
and help of all His adherents and of
the Holy Mother of God this Holy
Psalms of David was completed by the
order of the son of the great noble,

autocrat, the patron Q'varq'vare, and the patron Mzechabuk, ... amen. The next colophon on fol. 164v-165r belongs to atabag Mzechabuk himself, although it is again written in Ambrosi's hand. The main part of the text of the colophon is palaeographically similar to the text of the Psalms and is written in black ink, with particular words in gold (fig. 19): აღვაწერივნე წმიდანი ესე ღავითნი მე, მონამან და მოსავმან ქრისტეს ღმრთისამან მზეჭაბუკ სახსრად და საცოდ სულისა ჩემისათვის და შესანდობლად მშობელთა, ძმათა და ნათესავთა ჩემისათვის. აწ ვინცა მიემხვივნეთ ესრეთ შენდობისა ბრძანებდით. პატრონსა დედისიმედსა ცოდვანი მისნი შეუწდოს ღმერთმან. პატრონი ყვარყვარე აღდგომელე და ცოდვანი მისნი შეუწდოს ღმერთმან. პატრონსა ქაიხოსროს შეუწდოს ღმერთმან. პატრონსა მზეჭაბუკს შეუწდოს ღმერთმან. პატრონსა ბაადურს შეუწდოს ღმერთმან. ყოველთა ძმათა და ნათესავთა ჩუენმან ჩუენცა და თქუენცა მოგვახსენეს – *I had ordered to describe these holy Psalms, I Mzechabuk, slave and believer in Christ God, to redeem and guard my soul and for the forgiveness of my parents, brothers and relatives. Now whoever follows this will be forgiven. God forgive the patron Dedisimedi her sins. Long live the patron Q'varq'vare and God forgive his sins. God forgive the patron Kaikhosro. God forgive the patron Mzechabuk.*

God forgive the patron Bahadur. All our brothers and relatives and you too be commemorated. Finally, in the lower part of fol. 165r is one more colophon separated from the previous text by a large interval. It is also written in Ambrosi's hand and is arranged in the same way as the previous colophon (fig. 19): გათავდეს ქორონიკონსა რპზ, აპრილსა კე ხელითა ფრიად ცოდვილისა მწერლისა ამბროსესითა. უფალო ღმერთო მოუკლებელ ყავ ხსენებაი პატრონის მზეჭაბუკისი, ამინ – *It was completed in Koronikon RPB (172), on April 25, by the hand of the very sinful writer Ambrosi. God, make unceasing the commemoration of the patron Mzechabuk, Amen.*

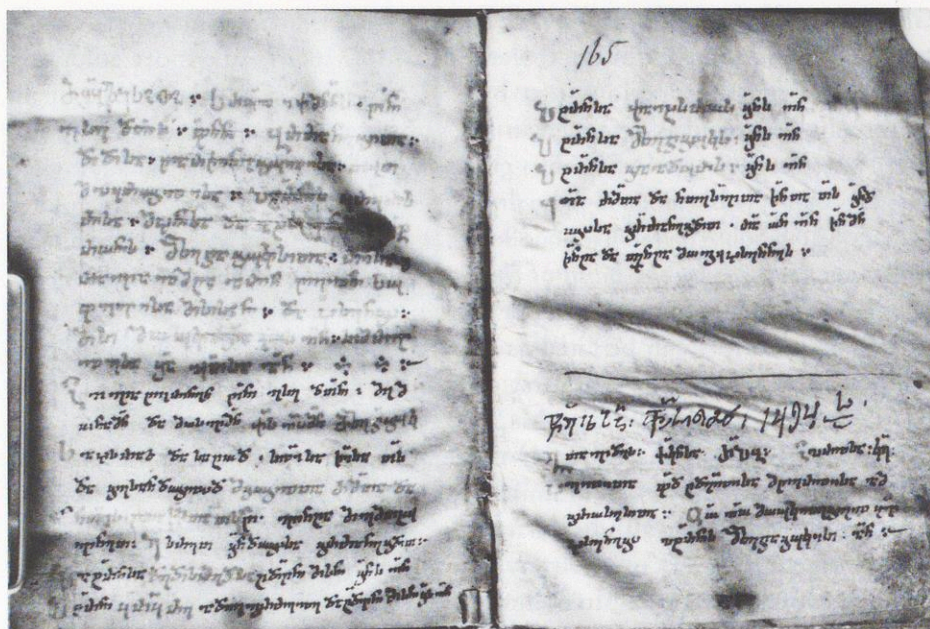
Two manuscripts can be cited as close parallels to the Psalter copied and illuminated by Ambrosi. The first of them is a Greek-Georgian collection (St.-Petersburg Public Library, Ms *Raznojaz.* OI-58)⁷⁷, which is tentatively dated to the turn of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries.⁷⁸ This manuscript of unusual contents and lavish illuminations was definitely created by the joint efforts of several scribes and miniaturists.⁷⁹ The miniatures are easily divided into two groups based on their stylistic peculiarities. One group comprises the images that have much in common with the miniatures of Ms A-351 (to the same series can be ascribed those miniatures of the Greek-Georgian manuscript which were later embodied in fol. 155 of the seventeenth-century liturgical collection, Kutaisi Historical-Ethnographical Museum, Ms K-115).⁸⁰ The second manuscript of the Four Gospels (Tbilisi Institute of Manuscripts, Ms Q-920), was copied by the scribe Akaki. He was active at the court of Dedisimedi, the daughter of atabag Q'varq'vare, and made the copy in 1504 by atabag Mzechabuk to Mount Athos with a rich donation after the death of

77 Long notes and observations on the manuscripts periodically appear in the scholarly literature (N. L. Okunev, 'O greko-gruzinskoj rukopisi s miniatjurami' ['On a Greek-Georgian Manuscript with Miniatures'], *Khristianskij Vostok*, t. I (1912), p. 43-44; L. Shervashidze, op. cit., p. 55-62; Sh. Amiranashvili, *Istoriya gruzinskogo iskusstva* [History of Georgian Art], (Moscow, 1963), p. 287; V. Likhacheva, 'The Miniatures of the Georgian Menologion of the 14th Century', *II International Symposium on Georgian Art*, Offprint (Tbilisi, 1977). Despite this up to now opinions differ about the function of this manuscript. V. Likhacheva and P. Mijovic consider it to be a menologion (V. Likhacheva, op. cit., p. 3; P. Mijovic, 'Gruzinskie menologi s XI po XIV vv.' ['Georgian Menologia of the 11th-14th cc.'], *Zograf*, N8, 1977, p. 19), while L. Evseeva thinks it to be an iconographical manual (L. M. Evseeva, 'Greko-gruzinskaja rukopis' iz sobranija Gos. Publichnoj Biblioteki im. M. E. Saltykova-Shchedrina' ['Greek-Georgian Manuscript from the Collection of M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library'], in: *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo*, vol. III, (Moscow, 1983), p. 332-367); L. Evseeva, *Afonskaia kniga obrazstv. O metode raboty i modeljakh srednevekovogo khudozhnika* [Athonite Book of Models. Concerning the Methods of the Work of Medieval Craftsmen] (Moscow, 1998).

78 L. Evseeva, 'Greko-gruzinskaja rukopis', p. 342.

79 N. Okunev has already noted the participation of several craftsmen in the illuminating of the manuscript (cf. his – 'O greko-gruzinskoj rukopisi s miniatjurami', p. 44).

80 L. Shervashidze, op. cit., p. 55 ff.



19. Cod. A-351, fol. 164v-165r. Colophons of Atabag Mzechabuk and Ambrosi.

on Q'varq'vare's commission.⁸¹ Could this be the same monk who was sent his brother Bahadur in the 1470s?⁸² The miniatures in the manuscript depict the four Evangelists (Matthew – fol. 11v, Mark – fol. 80v, Luke – fol. 124v, John – fol. 194v), but they differ from one another to a certain extent. However, an affinity among the image of St. John the Evangelist and the miniatures of the Four Gospels and Psalter copied by Ambrosi has been noted, especially in their colouristic solutions and modelling of faces.⁸³

A comprehensive study of these manuscripts must still be undertaken. This is particularly the case with the Greek-Georgian collection, the Georgian text of which has not yet been studied. An examination of its contents and palaeography, and a detailed reading of its colophons will throw light on much of its history. Nevertheless, it is significant that the miniatures of these manuscripts have much in common with the Four Gospels and Psalter copied and illuminated by Ambrosi. It seems probable that all these manuscripts should be considered

81 *Description of Georgian Manuscripts*, Collection Q, t. II (Tbilisi, 1958), p. 347-349.

82 Cf. *supra*, p. 172, n° 61.

83 L. Evseeva, 'Greko-gruzinskaja rukopis', p. 342, 344.

as the product of one artistic school, if not one workshop, and that Ambrosi should be connected with it.⁸⁴

There is an evident palaeographic similarity between the commemoration written by Ambrosi in the Synodicon of the Iviron monastery, the initials of Four Gospels and Psalter copied by him, and the dedicatory inscription of the Portaitissa icon. In all these cases, the shapes of the letters and their restricted decorative rendering make it possible to recognize the hand of Ambrosi himself in the inscription of the Portaitissa icon.

The case of Ambrosi is certainly not exceptional in Georgia during this period. On the contrary, the practice whereby persons of versatile learning attached to the retinue of the rulers of the separate provinces of the country and actively engaged in different spheres of creative work, seems to have been widespread. In this respect, the Bandaisdze family is a striking example: during the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries, several generations were closely connected with the Kvenipneveli family⁸⁵ who ruled the Ksani principality (a large province in central Georgia), and copied and illuminated manuscripts and painted churches for them.⁸⁶ At the turn of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries Soil Kopasdze, an amilakhvari (i. e. chief of the cavalry) of Tao, the southern part of the province ruled by the Jaq'elis, was active in Samtskhe. In the sources, he is described as "well skilled in painting, a philosopher, a faithful adherent of the Scriptures, and a commentator on its translations".⁸⁷ It is known that in 1502 he painted and revetted an icon (now kept in the Kutaisi Historical-Ethnographical Museum, Inv. N1197), whose long dedicatory inscription mentioning the patron Mzechabuk was executed according to the same formulae as the inscription of Ambrosi on the Portaitissa icon.⁸⁸

The silence of the sources concerning the delivery of the Portaitissa icon revetment to Mount Athos by Ambrosi excludes the possibility of its execution in Samtskhe; thus the only possible place of its execution was at the Iviron

84 Based on a brief stylistic analysis of the miniatures L. Evseeva proposed that the Greek-Georgian collection was compiled on Mount Athos (L. Evseeva, 'Greko-gruzinskaja rukopis', p. 367).

85 M. Brosset, op. cit., III livraison, 6e rapport (St. Petersburg, 1851), p. 77-78; Sh. Meskhia, 'Dzegli Eristavta', in: *Masalebi sakartvelos da kavkasiis istoriisvis*, 30 (1954), p. 316-321; V. Beridze, *Dzveli kartveli ostatebi* [Old Georgian Masters of Art] (Tbilisi, 1967), p. 15-17.

86 The evidence of Avgaroz Bandaisdze tells of his mastering of several fields, among them – literary activity, calligraphy, preparation of parchment, book binding, painting, sewing, and building activity (Institute of Manuscripts, Ms A-575, fol. 311); published in: Th. Zhordania, *Kronikebi*, II (Tbilisi, 1897), p. 204; V. Beridze, *Dzveli kartveli ostatebi*, p. 15. In addition, it is supposed that Avgaroz Bandaisdze compiled the Chronicle of the Ksani principality (Sh. Meskhia, op. cit., p. 316-321).

87 Colophon of Ms Q-969 of the Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, fol. 311r.

88 S. Kakabadze, 'Oltisis mtavari kopasdze' ['Kopasdze the Ruler of Oltisi'], *Saistorio krebuli*, I (1928), p. 110-111.

monastery itself. Nonetheless, the revetment is certainly connected with Samtskhe. From the fourteenth century up to the mid-sixteenth century, representatives of several generations of Jaq'elis sponsored creative work in architecture, mural painting and book illumination as well as metalwork. Indeed, the Samtskhe school of metalwork produced chased decorations of venerated relics for the Georgian Church, including the icon of the Saviour of the Anchi cathedral (first half of the fourteenth century) (fig. 20),⁸⁹ the icon of the Virgin of Atsq'uri cathedral (late fifteenth century),⁹⁰ and the processional cross of the Sadgeri church (early sixteenth century) (fig. 21).⁹¹ This work had far older origins since Samtskhe had earlier become one of the significant schools of Georgian metalwork. In this school were executed, for example, the Zarzma icon of the Transfiguration (886),⁹² the Brei processional cross (early tenth century),⁹³ the Shemokmedi rhypidion (turn of the tenth-eleventh centuries),⁹⁴ and the Brei icon of Saint John the Baptist (early eleventh century).⁹⁵ It is also known that from this time the Sapara monastery had become one of the prominent centres of metalwork in the country (fig. 8).⁹⁶ Thus, taking into account the general political, economic and cultural efflorescence of Samtskhe in the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries, it is considered possible that the inner revetment of the wings of the icon of the Saviour from the Anchi cathedral was executed in Sapara.⁹⁷

How then are we to interpret the notes of the Iviron monastery commemoration and those given by Timote Gabashvili (certainly based on the former) concerning the "heavy cladding" of the Portaitissa icon? There is no easy answer to this question because Georgian sources do not use such a term, especially in the numerous dedicatory inscriptions on icon revetments. Consequently, the only possible explanation seems to lie in the desire of the compiler of the commemoration (as reflected by the eighteenth-century traveller) to emphasize the fact that the miraculous icon was completely embellished with chased decoration, except for the faces, contrary to the case when the revetment adorned only individual parts of the icon. This then raises another question:

89 S. Amiranashvili, *Beka Opizari* (Tbilisi, 1956), p. 910, pl. 46-50; T. Saq'varelidze, op. cit., p. 12-24, pl. 25.

90 Cf. supra, n° 49.

91 T. Saq'varelidze, op. cit., p. 37-38; cf. A. Chkhartsvili, *Mamne okromc'edeli [Goldsmith Mamne]*, (Tbilisi, 1978), p. 8ff.

92 G. Chubinashvili, *Gruzinskoe chekannoe iskusstvo [Georgian Metallwork]*, (Tbilisi, 1959), p. 27-42, fig. 14.

93 Ibid., p. 70-79, fig. 101-105.

94 Ibid., p. 127-133, fig. 114-115.

95 Ibid., p. 190-193, fig. 125-128.

96 Ibid., p. 445-447.

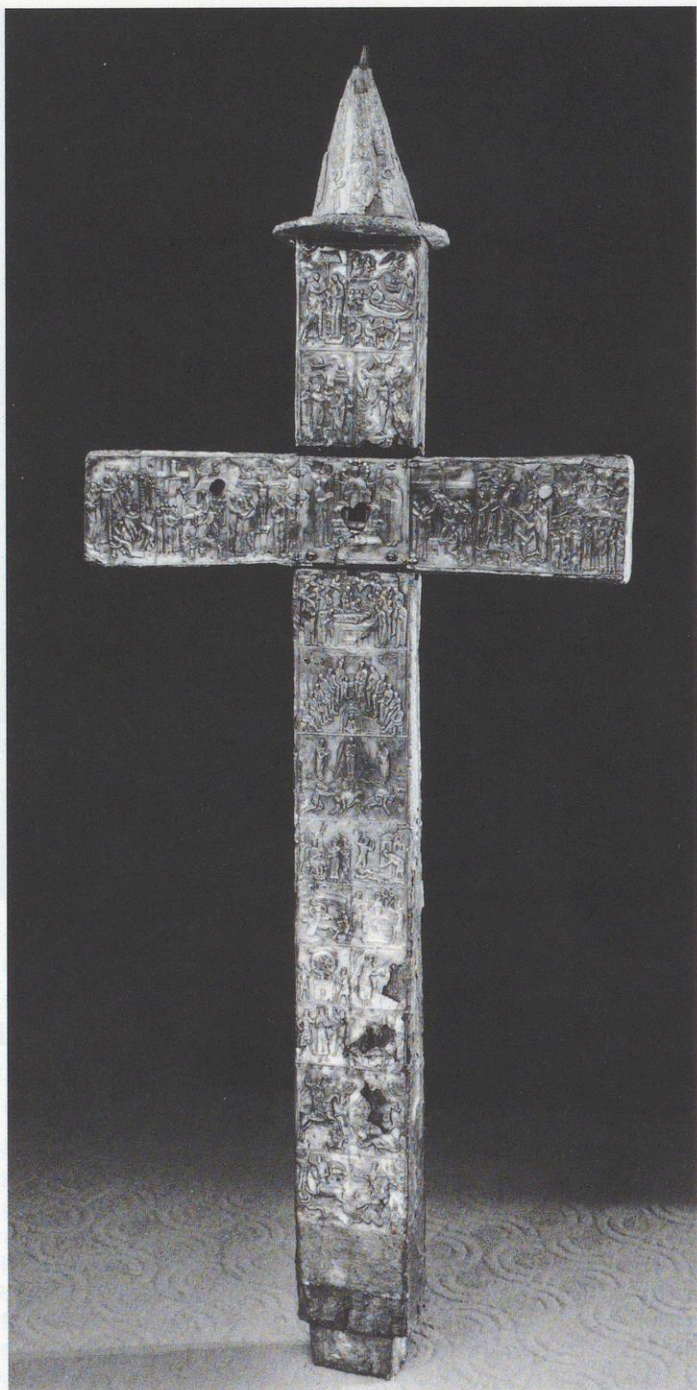
97 T. Saq'varelidze, op. cit., p. 24.



20. Anchi Icon of the Saviour (State Art Museum of Georgia).

was the Portaitissa icon covered with cladding earlier? This is highly unlikely, since sources do not mention it. Had an older revetment existed, then the dedicatory inscription and the monastery commemoration would have noted that the icon was re-chased or the revetment was renewed, according to tradition traceable in the epigraphy of other works of Georgian metalwork.⁹⁸

98 Cf. for example, the Paliastomi icon (T. Saq'varelidze, op. cit., p. 155); the icon of Khvamlı St. George (M. Brosset, op. cit., II livraison, 9eme rapport (St.-Petersbourg, 1850), p. 26); the chased plate bearing the Ascension, later used as an icon (G. Chubinashvili, op. cit., p. 111); the Kortskheli icon (N. Kondakov, D. Bakradze, *Opis' pamjatnikov drevnosti v nekotorykh khramakh i monastyryakh Gruzii* [Description of the Ancient Monuments in Some Churches and Monasteries of Georgia], (St.-Petersbourg, 1890), p. 98); the icon of the Saviour from Anchi (S. Amiranashvili, *Beka Opizari*, p. 11); the icon of the Dormition from the Shemokmedi monastery (E. Taq'aishvili, *Arkheologicheskie ekskursii*, I, p. 74-75).



21. Processional Cross of the Sadgeri church (State Art Museum of Georgia).

Ascertaining the precise date of the execution of the Portaitissa icon revetment is not difficult given that it was made after the death of Kaikhosro and at the time when donations were taken to the Holy Sites of Eastern Christendom for the remembrance of his soul. Accordingly, we can conclude that the revetment occurred no earlier than 1500 (the date of Kaikhosro's death). Soon after his patron's death Ambrosi was to start for Mount Athos, Jerusalem and Sinai. The treatise written by the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Joachim I, recites the story of Mzechabuk sending donations to the Holy Sites no later than 1504.⁹⁹ Thus, 1500-1504 should be considered the period during which the Portaitissa icon was embellished with a revetment.¹⁰⁰

* * *

In the state it has reached us, the original revetment of the Portaitissa icon reveals several chronological layers. The unity of the latter forms a composition whose scheme and programme was created according to the traditions of Orthodox art established over centuries. The central part of the icon – the Virgin with the Child and small busts of the Archangels on both sides of the halo – is flanked by the images of the Apostles and Evangelists, arranged at intervals against the ornamental background on the lateral parts of the frame. To the left the sequence from the top is as follows: Peter, Mark, Matthew, Jacob, Luke, and Andrew. To the right appear: Paul, John, Simon, Bartholomew, Philip, and Thomas. The lowest frame of the icon bears the long dedicatory inscription, while the upper frame is completely decorated with vegetal motifs (fig. 4).

This type of structure for a metal icon had been preserved in Byzantium for a long time.¹⁰¹ Its particular variations are known, whereby separate figures of saints as well as Christological or Mariological scenes are distributed on the frame around the central images. The number of the representations as well as their frequency and size on the framing varies. Yet, beginning in the eleventh century in Georgia,¹⁰² and from the fourteenth century in Byzantium, the

99 Cf. *supra*, n° 37.

100 H. Metreveli thinks that the date of execution of the Portaitissa icon revetment, 1493, given in the earliest (A) version of Timothe Gabashvili's *Mimoslva*, must stem from the notes of N162 commemoration of Iviron monastery. In her opinion, using the year of death of the atabag Q'varq'vare (1498), recorded in the commemoration, Timote Gabashvili determined the period of activity of the atabag Kaikhosro and accordingly, the date of execution of the revetment (cf. T. Gabashvili, *Mimoslva*, p. 045).

101 A. Grabar, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du Moyen Âge* (Venice, 1975), p. 10.

102 The earliest examples in Georgia are the Chuq'uli and Tsageri icons (G. Chubinashvili, *op. cit.*, p. 28, 32-33, fig. 1 and 2).

general compositional principle of the icon scheme remained unaltered. Among the examples executed according to this model are revetments showing a certain affinity with the Portaitissa icon, in particular the bilateral icon of the Saviour and the Virgin from the church of St. Clement, Ochrid (now in Skopje Museum) (figs. 22 and 23),¹⁰³ as well as the icons of the Trinity¹⁰⁴ and the Virgin¹⁰⁵ from the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos. While sharing a common programme and scheme, certain peculiarities distinguish one from another. In the first case, the depiction of the images on both sides of the Ochrid icon greatly enlarges the number of figures placed on the frame, comprising the Prophets and Church Fathers (around the Virgin) alongside the Apostles and Evangelists (around the Saviour). On Athonite icons, the sequence of the Apostles is supplemented by several images of Saints (other figures are of a later period). Finally, unlike the Portaitissa icon, the lateral images on the above-quoted parallels are represented on all four sides of the framing. Notwithstanding these distinctions, the common tradition rooted in the same principles should be stressed, being apparently widespread in the Byzantine cultural area long before the execution of the Portaitissa icon. As far as their affinity to the Portaitissa icon goes, the icons from the Vatopedi monastery undoubtedly testify to the long-term practice of producing revetments in terms of a similar programme and compositional scheme on Mount Athos.

One component of this tradition apparently included the principle of placing a dedicatory inscription on the lower frame of the metal icon or chased decoration. Contrary to Byzantium, where only the fourteenth-century icon of the Hodegetria from the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos can be cited,¹⁰⁶ Georgian examples are far more numerous, comprising a long period. The earliest of them is the icon of the Transfiguration from Zarzma. Though its original dedicatory inscription of 886 was later (in the first half of the eleventh century) copied and complemented during the revetment restoration, its place on the lower frame of the icon was left unchanged.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, examples of the dedicatory inscription placed in the same location abound in the tenth-eleventh centuries,¹⁰⁸ partially in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries,¹⁰⁹ as well as

103 A. Grabar, op. cit., p. 38-39, pl. XIX-XXII, fig. 31-36.

104 N. Kondakov had already noted this icon in the early twentieth century (see his *Pamjatniki khristianskogo iskusstva na Afone*, p. 186-188; A. Grabar, op. cit., p. 66-68, pl. XLVIII-XLIX, fig. 81-86).

105 A. Grabar, op. cit., p. 49-52, pl. XXXI, fig. 47.

106 Cf. supra, n° 104.

107 G. Chubinashvili, op. cit., p. 28, 32-33, pl. 1-2.

108 Cf. the icon bearing the Deesis from Paq'i, and the icons of St. George and St. John the Baptist in the churches of Saq'dari and Murq'meli (G. Chubinashvili, op. cit., pl. 52, 226, 266).

109 Several examples can be cited: the group of clad icons from the Mghvimevi monastery – the



22. Ochrid. Church of St. Clement. Icon of the Saviour.

tripartite Deesis, the Crucifixion, the Saviour; the icons of Christ and the Virgin from Chazhashi; the triptych of the Seti church (G. Chubinashvili, op. cit., p. 398-400, 592-593, 598-600, fig. 68-71, 73-78, 363; R. Q'enia, V. Silogava, *Ushguli* (Tbilisi, 1986), pl. 2-3, 20; A. Javakhishvili, G. Abramishvili, *Jewellery and Metalwork in the Museums of Georgia* (Leningrad, 1986), pl. 187).



23. Ochrid. Church of St. Clement. Icon of the Virgin.

in the post-Byzantine epoch,¹¹⁰ which testifies to the endurance of this tradition across several centuries, during which, to a great extent, it preconditioned the character of the scheme and programme of icon decoration. In the fifteenth-eighteenth centuries, dedicatory inscriptions were often placed on the back side of icons. Still, in executing the Portaitissa icon, the Georgian craftsman gave preference to the mode established in the metalwork of his country. This preference, alongside the repetition of a compositional scheme of icon decoration certainly well known to him, might have reflected the desire to make the inscription, containing information on the donation of Samtskhe atabags to this miraculous icon, one of the sacred relics of Mount Athos, openly displayed and thus fully comprehended.

The oldest layer of the Portaitissa icon comprises the central part with the figures of the Virgin and Christ, plates with the dedicatory inscription on the lower frame, and ornamental plates on the lower part of the upper frame.

The central image of the icon – the Virgin with the Child – certainly repeats that of the painted original (fig. 24);¹¹¹ among the figures, only the faces of the

110 L. Khushivadze, *Levan Dadianis saokromc'edlo sakhelosno* [*The Goldsmith's workshop at the Court of Prince Levan Dadiani*], (Tbilisi, 1974), pl. 4, 5, 7, 12, 19, 26; T. Saq'varelidze, op. cit., pl. 45, 47, 74, 85, 86, 88, 90.

111 Views differ about the origin and the date of the painting of the Portaitissa icon. Majority of the publications refer to the legend of the miraculous appearance of the icon to Mount Athos after the iconoclast controversy. Only few authors give the presumable date of the execution of the painted images of the Virgin and Christ. Thus N. Kondakov tentatively suggested the period of iconoclasm (*Pamjatniki khristianskogo iskusstva na Afone*, p. 166) while later he attributed it to the 12th century (Cf. *Ikonografija Bogomateri*, II, p. 214). This date was shared later by Ch. Diehl (*Manuel d'art Byzantin*, II (Paris, 1926), p. 589-590). G. Sotiriou associated the icon with Panselinos or his school (Τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος ('Αθῆνα, 1915), σ. 132). More recently, P. Vocotopoulos, having compared the icon to certain Byzantine monuments, dated it to the beginning of the 11th century ('Note sur l'icone de la Vierge Portaitissa', *Zograf*, 25 (1996), p. 27-30). It should be noted that he omitted Georgian monuments and historical sources. It is impossible to claim an absolute iconographic correlation between the painted images and the chased revetment of the icon as it is unknown whether the half-figures of the Archangels were painted in the upper part of the central area on both sides of the Virgin's halo, or what was depicted on the icon frame – separate figures (or half-figures) of the saints (Evangelists and Apostles among them), or scenes. In 1648, while making a copy of the icon, in his letter to the king Alexei Mikhailovich and Archimandrite (later Patriarch) Nikon, concerning its removal to Russia, Father-Superior of the Iviron monastery, Archimandrite Pachomios gives a detailed description of the process of making a copy and states: "ἡ ὁποία δὲν ἀλλάσσει ἀπὸ τὴν πρῶτην καθόλου, οὔτε κατὰ τὸ μήκος, οὔτε κατὰ τὸ πλάτος, οὔτε κατὰ τὸ σχῆμα, ἀλλ' ὅλως δι' ὅλου ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἢ νέα εἰς τὰ πάντα τῆς παλαιᾶς" (*Podlinnye akty, otnosjashchiesja k Iverskoj ikone Bogomateri, prim-sennoj v Rossiju v 1648 godu* [*Authentic Acts Connected with the Iviron Icon of the Holy Virgin Brought to Russia in 1648*] (Moscow 1879), p. 6 (factually the same is repeated in the second letter sent to the Archimandrite – Ibid., p. 11; both letters are dated June 15, 1648). However, it is less likely that the revetment was temporarily taken off while making the copy, as this would have been specially pointed out. As a result, this copy of the Portaitissa

Virgin and Christ are left uncovered by the cladding. This part of the revetment is arranged on two large plates. The lower of them is bigger, reaching higher than the figures' shoulders while the upper plate bears the heads and the background around them. These two parts of the revetment are not thoroughly fitted to one another. If on the figures their junction is less noticeable, against the background it is easily perceived because of the discrepancy between the parts' ornamental motifs.

The vestments of the Virgin, who is depicted in the iconographic type of the Hodegetria,¹¹² as well as those of Christ, are traditional. The maphorion of the Virgin is plain, being embellished with festoons on the right shoulder only. Another decorative adornment is a large rosette with a precious stone, which was later attached to the veil covering the forehead of the Virgin (fig. 24). In addition, a six-pointed star executed graphically is stamped on her breast and her right shoulder. The maphorion is trimmed with a narrow band bearing a simple leaf ornament, a continuous scroll in the bends of which thin, jagged leaves are inscribed. The dress of the Virgin is plain; on the breast, it is decorated with vertical, parallel incisions, while the right cuff is trimmed with a narrow ornamental band. The vestment of the Child seated on the left hand of His Mother is treated in a somewhat different manner. A chiton, seen on the breast and the right arm, is covered all over by an engraved ornament. The rows of the stylised floral motif of a stem with two curved scrolls and an oblong bud with a small cone on the top follow the drapery lines. The entire cloth is actually seen on the chiton only, where the ornament is arranged in horizontal rows (fig. 4).

Given a certain iconographic affinity of the painted and clad parts of the Portaitissa icon, it should be noted that the treatment of the revetment reflects general contemporary trends in art, which differ from the traits of the earlier epoch when the miraculous icon was painted. Indeed, this layer of the revetment fully displays a tendency characteristic of Georgian metalwork of the Late Middle Ages. Earlier, the process of striving for plasticity of form and figure attained its height in Georgia in the eleventh century and retained its vivacity up to the thirteenth century, after which this tendency greatly weakened. Therefore, like a number of Georgian metal icons from the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries (for instance, the inner revetment of the wings of the Anchi icon of

icon as well as other later copies based on it, will not be used in this discussion of the iconography.

112 N. Kondakov saw a variation of Eleousa in this type of Hodegetria depicted from the waist up. According to him, the most significant trait of the iconographic type of Portaitissa is the head of the Virgin bent to the Child, whose head is represented in a frontal position (N. P. Kondakov, *Ikonoграфия Bogomateri*, II, p. 214-215).



24. Portaitissa Icon. Central Part. Detail.

the Saviour,¹¹³ the icons of the Saviour and the Virgin from the Gelati monastery,¹¹⁴ and the icon of the Virgin from the Kldisubani church¹¹⁵), the revetment of the Portaitissa icon is not distinguished by the perfection of plastic forms, line and design which was characteristic of Georgian metalwork of an earlier period.

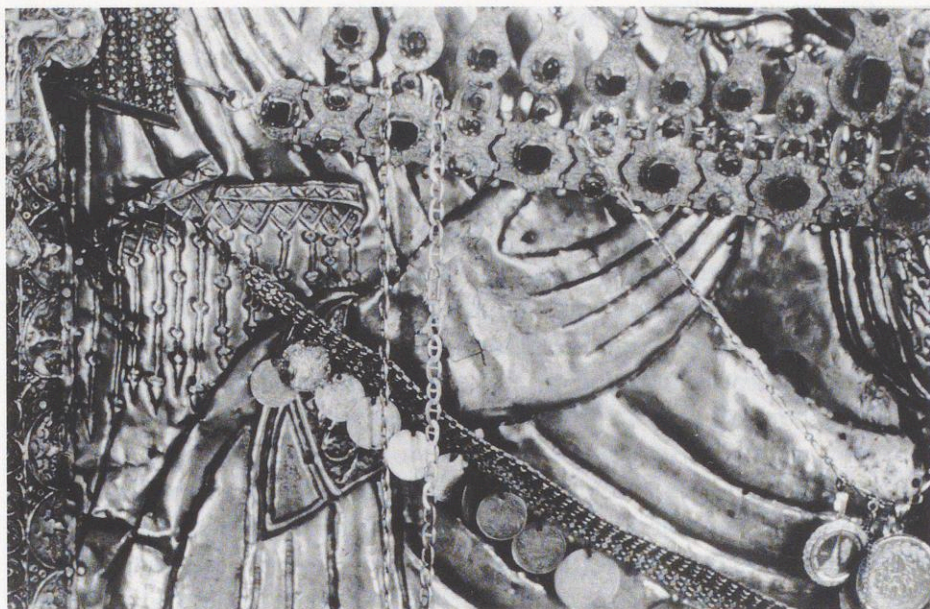
On the revetment, the figure of the Virgin projects from the background in low relief. Furthermore, instead of being plastically modelled, the main parts of the bodies are described graphically, by lines. Drapery designs distinguish separate forms. Plastic masses of the maphorion folds are to a certain extent revealed on the head only, which the flow of the folds follow. In other cases, as on the body, the drapery of maphorion heavy cloth is depicted with large lines cut in metal. Compact rows of these stiff lines of uneven thickness cover the surface of the image, shaped as parallel or radiating bunches, which greatly increase the decorativeness of the revetment. This manner of shaping the vestment conforms to the character of the metalwork. It reflects a peculiar approach to relief by which the graphic treatment of form and figure, emphasising the role of line as the leading artistic means of rendering the icon revetment, replaces the emphasis on plastic volume. In addition, the palms of the Virgin with very long, thin fingers, do not differ from the other bodily details; they too are not plastically distinguished from the background (fig. 25).

The same can be said about the figure of the Child, in which graphic modes likewise accentuate its general volume and the decorative elaboration. While, on the one hand, the correct body movement and the convincing attitude or gesture are given less attention, the drapery design is of a somewhat different character: the flow of parallel lines, which entirely covers the ornamented dress surface, is supplemented by far more dynamic forms in the hymation folds, though again they are treated graphically by means of stamped lines. Against this background, Christ's left hand correctly rests on a scroll and a cloth represented by a lofty design falls from the shoulder. On the other hand, the absolute conventionality, even clumsiness, marking the depiction of the feet is in contrast to this. In order to depict it in profile, the right foot turns outward from the heel, though the nails and shoe laces are outlined on it (fig. 26). This rendering cannot be regarded as a characteristic trait of the epoch or the result of a lesser mastery of the goldsmith, insofar as a similar mode of depiction of a foot appears much earlier, on the ninth-century encaustic

113 T. Saq'varelidze, *op. cit.*, pl. 1-5.

114 *Ibid.*, pl. 43, 44.

115 G. Chubinashvili, *op. cit.*, pl. 546.



25. Portaitissa icon. Old Georgian cladding. Detail.



26. Portaitissa icon. Old Georgian cladding. Detail.

icon from Tsilkani.¹¹⁶ The same cannot be said of the left foot, whose foreshortened frontal view was attempted unsuccessfully. This type of foreshortening was often used in icon painting and metalwork for a long period;¹¹⁷ therefore, we could expect that it would also be used in the Portaitissa icon painting as well, but the goldsmith repeated it unsuccessfully.

The central part of the revetment was damaged over time. It is partially pressed in by the right hand of the Virgin. In addition, the gilt layer on the central part of her figure has to a large extent come off, because of the constant touching of the revetment surface by people coming to pray. The revetment is punctured by nail holes in several places, which seem to have been used for attaching donations and the nineteenth-century Russian cladding. On the other hand, the background of the central part of the icon is preserved in good condition.

The background up to the Virgin's halo is chased in the same sheet as the figure itself. Above it, the background is formed by several small plates.

Ornament used in the background decoration of the central part is represented by the only variation on the Portaitissa icon – a flower inscribed in a scroll interlaced with a tripartite bud placed between its two open petals (figs. 4 and 24). This type of ornament, together with its variations, comes from the repertoire of thirteenth/fourteenth-century Byzantine engraved ornamentation.¹¹⁸ Among its variations, which are sometimes used alongside other ornaments in the background or frame decorations, the icon of the Annunciation from the church of St. Clement in Ochrid (Skopje, Historical Museum, ca. 1300),¹¹⁹ whose affinity with the engraved ornament against the background of the Portaitissa icon should be pointed out. As for Georgian metalwork, the motif is traditional and often appears from the tenth to sixteenth centuries.¹²⁰ N. Kondakov took this circumstance into consideration when he noted that “the design of the chased ground contains curves with roses inside, following the Georgian model and style”.¹²¹ The ornament became widespread in Georgian

116 L. Khuskivadze, ‘Monument géorgien de peinture encaustique, *Atti del Primo Simposio Internazionale sull'arte Georgiana* (Milano, 1977), p. 149-158, pl. LXIII.

117 Cf. for example – N. P. Kondakov, *Ikongrafia Bogomateri*, II, p. 201, 203, fig. 93; V. Djuric, *Icones de Yougoslavie* (Belgrade, 1961), p. 87-88, 92, 95, pl. X, XXII, XXVIII; J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantine et en Occident* (Bruxelles, 1964), p. 49, 164, 173; V. Lazarev, *Istoria Vizantijskoj zhivopisi [History of Byzantine Painting]* (Moscow, 1986), pl. 421, 458, 554, 596; K. A. Manafis, ed., *Sinai. Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens, 1990), pl. 60; A. Grabar, op. cit., fig. 47.

118 A. Grabar, op. cit., fig. 7, 38, 42-43, 45, 88.

119 Ibid., p. 34-37, fig. 26-29.

120 G. Chubinashvili, op. cit., pl. 1, 63, 68-72, 153-154, 218, 300-304, 415-417, 432a.

121 N. Kondakov, *Pamjatniki khristianskogo iskusstva na Afone*, p. 167.

art beginning in the late twelfth century and lasting up to the fourteenth century. During this period, it appeared in different variations, both in the scheme and plastic treatment of the subject, in the sculptural decoration of architecture,¹²² mural painting,¹²³ and book illumination.¹²⁴

The decoration on the plates fixed on the lower part of the icon's upper frame differs from the background ornament in its design. The main difference lies in the fact that the ornamental pattern on the frame is articulated by rhomboid framings formed by double wavy strips connected with one another by small knots. The framings, as well as the inner sides of their wavy strips, are lancet shaped. Each framing carries a trefoil interlace formed by circular stems with pointed oblong buds and flowers. The portion between the framing and the tripartite motif is filled by small stalks coming out of the circular stems. The background left free of rhomboid shape is covered by an ornament similar to that on the background of the central part of the icon (fig. 4).

The motif of the lancet-shaped rhombs deserves special attention. The emergence of such a motif in the repertoire of engraved ornamentation derives from those stages in the development of Byzantine and Georgian art that involved a particular intercourse with the artistic traditions of oriental, Islamic art. One such stage began in the late twelfth century because of the general political situation then obtaining in the Caucasus and the whole Christian East. During that time Islamic influence can be observed in some architectural

122 P. Zakaraia, *Kartuli centralur-gumbatovani arkhitektura XI-VXIII ss. [Georgian Central-Domed Architecture of the 11th-18th centuries]*, t. II (Tbilisi, 1972), pl. 64, 93, 118, 122 (Pitareti, Tsughrughasheni, Akhtala).

123 The main church of the Vardzia monastery (G. Gaprindashvili ed., *Vardzia* (Leningrad, 1975), pl. 74, 75, 85, 90); Ozaani church of the Ascension (E. Privalova, 'Rospis tserkvi Voznesenia v Ozaani' ['Wall Paintings of the Church of the Ascension in Ozaani'], *Ars Georgica*, IX-A (1987), p. 140-141); the main church of the Natlismcemeli monastery in the Gareja desert (Sh. Amiranashvili, *Kartuli khelovnebis istoria [History of Georgian Art]*, Tbilisi, 1971, pl. 85, 86); Q'intsvisi church of St. Nicolas (O. Piralishvili, *Q'intsvisi* (Tbilisi, 1979), pl. 7, 54-57, 59); the refectory of the Bertubani Monastery in Gareja (A. Volskaja, *Rospisi srednevekovykh trapeznykh Gruzii [Wall Paintings of Medieval Refectories of Georgia]* (Tbilisi, 1974), p. 138, pl. 29, 45); Timotesubani (E. Privalova, *Rospis' Timotesubani [Timotesubani murals]* (Tbilisi, 1980), p. 104, pl. 46); the main church of the Kobair monastery and its north chapel (N. Thierry, 'Les peintures de la cathedrale de Kobayr', *CahArch*, XXIX (1980-1981), fig. 2, 3); the church of the Annunciation in the Udabno monastery in Gareja (G. Chubinashvili, *Peshchernye monastyri David Garedji [Cave Monasteries of David Gareja]*, (Tbilisi, 1948), p. 72).

124 Manuscripts of the Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi – Four Gospels from Jruč'i (H-1667), Gelati (Q-908), Vani (A-1335), and Largvisi (A-496), astronomical treatise (A-65). R. Shmerling, *Obraztsy*, pl. X₂, XIV, XV; Sh. Amiranashvili, *Istoriya*, pl. 102; id., *Gruzinskaja Miniatura* (Moscow, 1966), pl. 31, 38, 45; G. Alibegashvili, *Khudozhestvennyj printsip illiustirovaniia gruzinskoj rukopisnoj knigi XI – nachala XIII vekov [Artistic Principles of Illustration of Georgian Manuscripts of the 11th – beginning of the 13th cc.]*, (Tbilisi, 1973), pl. 43.

monuments and the fine arts of Georgia.¹²⁵ As the Islamic world expanded, beginning in the fourteenth century, the influence gradually grew stronger as in other regions of the post-Byzantine world. Whereas it was not clearly articulated in specific examples of the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries,¹²⁶ later on, beginning in the sixteenth century, the influence of oriental art became more pervasive in all spheres of art,¹²⁷ including metalwork, affecting stylistic traits and selection from the ornamental repertoire. However, as demonstrated by scholarly studies, the use of Oriental motifs in Georgian art was limited to relatively few, distinct works in which these motifs are dissolved in the general composition or combined with local motifs, thus creating something essentially different from the prototype.¹²⁸

The same can be said of the ornament used in the frame decoration of the Portaitissa icon. Alongside its certain affinity with the examples of oriental ornamentation, a different perception of the line in its decorative function by the Georgian craftsmen is definitely reflected here. Indeed, in Islamic monuments of art, circular ornamental patterns are more complicated, sometimes even intricate, whose complexity generates a more strained character. On the other hand, the linear dynamism on the revetment of the Portaitissa icon is less tense and more calm and even. On the whole, the pattern here is clearer, distinct, easily legible. Thus, the craftsman endowed a motif of oriental provenance with different expressiveness.

Definitely significant is the fact that the same approach towards ornamentation is revealed in the manuscripts copied and illuminated by Ambrosi. In this respect, an ornamental motif used by him for the headpiece decoration of the Psalms text seems relatively characteristic (fol. 3r). The motif greatly differs

125 G. Chubinashvili, *Peshchernye monastyri David Garedzi*, p. 70-71, 74, 82; G. Alibegashvili, op. cit., p. 112-113; Z. Skhirtladze, *Rospis' Bertubanskogo kbrama [Wall Paintings of Bertubani Church]* (Tbilisi, 1987), p. 143-145; id., 'The Church of Kirants', *Annual Conference of the Faculty of Oriental Studies of Tbilisi University, Abstracts of Papers* (Tbilisi, 1987), p. 21.

126 Particularly characteristic examples of the epoch are the ornamental decoration of the Daba (third decade of the fourteenth century) and Č'ule (1381) churches. R. Shmerling, 'Postroika Molaret Ukhutsesa tsarja Georgija Blistateljnogo v sel. Daba Bordzhomskogo rajona' ['The Building of the "Molaret ukhutsesi" – Minister of Finances of King Giorgi the Magnificent in the Village of Daba, Borjomi District'], *Ars Georgica*, II, (1948), p. 120-121; V. Beridze, *Samtskhis*, p. 149-150, pl. 71, 72.

127 G. Chubinashvili, 'Iranskie vlijanija v pamjatnikakh arkhitektury Gruzii' ['Iranian Influences in the Monuments of Architecture in Georgia'], *III International Congress on Iranian Art and Archaeology*, Offprint (Leningrad, 1936), p. 251-261; R. Shmerling, 'Zolotoj sosud iz Ckchoro-Tsku' ['Gold Bowl from Chkchoro-Tsku'], *Ars Georgica*, I (1942), p. 143-157; I. Khuskivadze, *Kartuli saero miniatura [Georgian Secular Miniature]* (Tbilisi, 1976), p. 8ff.

128 R. Shmerling, 'Postroika', p. 120. It should be noted that secular miniatures, where artistic tendencies connected with the Orient were most strongly manifested, are in a unique, absolutely distinguished position (I. Khuskivadze, op. cit., p. 8).

by its scheme from the ornament in the upper frame of the revetment of the Portaitissa icon. The artistic execution of the ornament also emphasises this difference: on the headpiece of the psalm text the ornament is depicted in several colours (gold, blue, cinnabar), due to which it is deprived of the graphical distinctness characteristic of the chased ornament. Nevertheless, despite the above, similarity is easily discernible, and it is revealed in the artistic peculiarities of the motif: first of all this is an affinity with the prototypes sharing the tradition of the same oriental artistic circle, besides the inner inclination towards the transformation of the prototypes due to which the ornament acquired a new scheme, differing from the others not only in its character but expressiveness.

Comprehension of a similar tendency is traceable on other Athonite icons and therefore implies paying attention to the ways by which separate elements rooted in the oriental artistic tradition gradually penetrated into a somewhat secluded monastic community. Leaving aside the discussion of this aspect of Athonite metalwork, attention should be paid to the revetment of a mosaic icon of the Crucifixion from Vatopedi monastery. Similar to the original decoration of the upper frame of the Portaitissa icon, a row of rhomboid-shaped rosettes with lancet forms play certain organising role in its decoration.¹²⁹

No tangible proof exists to suggest that the use of the decoration on the lateral frames of the Portaitissa icon was analogous to the preserved one. Nevertheless, an inclination towards equilibrium and symmetry, which to a certain extent characterises the general compositional scheme, makes it possible to propose the existence of a single system of ornamental framing around the central image, especially as a considerable part of Byzantine and Georgian chased decorations demonstrate this adherence to such a solution.

Of the narrow bevels (chamfers) between the central part of the icon and its frame, only the upper one has preserved the original revetment layer. The single narrow plate covering it is filled with a row of palmette-like leaves. The inner side of the motif has a semicircular back and is divided into small sprouts. Each petal touches the other with its tip from the back side. Small curved stems, which serve as additional joints for the separate motifs of the ornamentation, are inserted between the palmettes. This ornament, with its different variations was already known in the art of the Early Middle Ages,¹³⁰ and later on became widespread both in the Christian East and Western Euro-

129 A. Grabar, *op. cit.*, fig. 53, 56-59.

130 J. Cledat, 'Le Monastère et la Necropole de Baouït', *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire*, t. XII, fasc. 2 (Le Caire, 1906), pl. CVIII; E. Chassinat, 'Fouilles à Baouït', *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire*, t. XIII (1913), pl. LXXIX,1; Ya. Smirnov, *Tsromskaja mozaika [The Mosaic of Tsromi]*, (Tbilisi, 1935), p. 7, fig. 7-12.

pe.¹³¹ Given this development, it seems even more unusual that this motif does not appear more regularly in the ornamental repertoire of Byzantine and Georgian metalwork.

The epoch had made its imprint on the artistic peculiarities of execution of the ornament. Unlike in earlier monuments of the eleventh-thirteenth centuries, mastery of the technique was almost entirely lost in the later period. Whereas previously the plastic rendering of each ornament within a given motif scheme achieved a vivid pictorial quality, later this rendering assumed a non-expressive form reduced to a flat surface. As a result, ornament design often became less masterful with individual flowers executed in an uneven manner. Even though the background of the revetment was engraved, thereby reducing the plasticity of forms, still it exhibits a mobile, dynamic structure. In addition to these characteristics, the arrangement of tightly set ornaments – the circles with floral motifs that cover the background surface without symmetry and order – demonstrate irregularity of execution. Similarly, the flowers are also depicted in various positions with their heads bent in different directions. Thus, as a result, this free compositional arrangement of motifs creates a homogeneous carpetlike surface, which, nevertheless, is not monotonous. The principle of a decorative filling of the surface, first revealed in Georgian metalwork far earlier (beginning at least from the twelfth century), here as well as in contemporary monuments, is especially pronounced and combined with the design of the vestment drapery. It considerably increases the general decorative effect of the revetment. On the whole, the old layer of the Portaitissa icon revetment executed by Ambrosi well represents its epoch. It fully reflects the tendency typical of the fifteenth/sixteenth-century metalwork. On the one hand, it strives to express the artistic trends of the previous period; at the same time, a considerable weakening of these trends is felt, due to which this striving could not ultimately achieve the former completeness and brilliance.

The haloes of the Virgin and Child do not belong to the original layer of the revetment. When fixed to the latter, they did not completely cover the original haloes, which appear to be different in their outlines and do not coincide with the later ones by their place as well. Consequently, a large strip of the old layer is seen by the right contour of the Virgin's halo; efforts were made to conceal its lower part beneath ornamental plates fixed on it, and it partially reaches under the latter (Virgin's) halo. A small fragment is discernible on the figure of the Child as well (fig. 4). According to it, it becomes clear that the halo circle above the Child's head was drawn somewhat higher more to the left. Because of this, a small segment, located immediately above the place

131 Ya. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, p. 30-32, fig. 7.

where the Virgin and the Saviour touch each other, was left uncovered after fixing the relief haloes onto the revetment. In order to eliminate this discrepancy, two small plates belonging to the icon's background were fastened to the segment that had a smooth surface, like the Virgin's halo. At the time the new haloes were made, these plates were most likely taken from those parts of the icon, which were damaged by time.

The background of the Virgin's halo is formed by a complicated relief interlace. It is decorated with five rosettes. The central one is a network of plant stems forming a complicated pattern, with green enamel inserted in it. The design of the side rosette pairs is formed by a different interlace, woven into a complicated pattern of the thin smooth stem. The Child's halo is similar in its decoration. Due to its small size, only three rosettes were placed here, the central of which is treated in the same way as on the Virgin's halo; the side ones bear white stones (fig. 24).

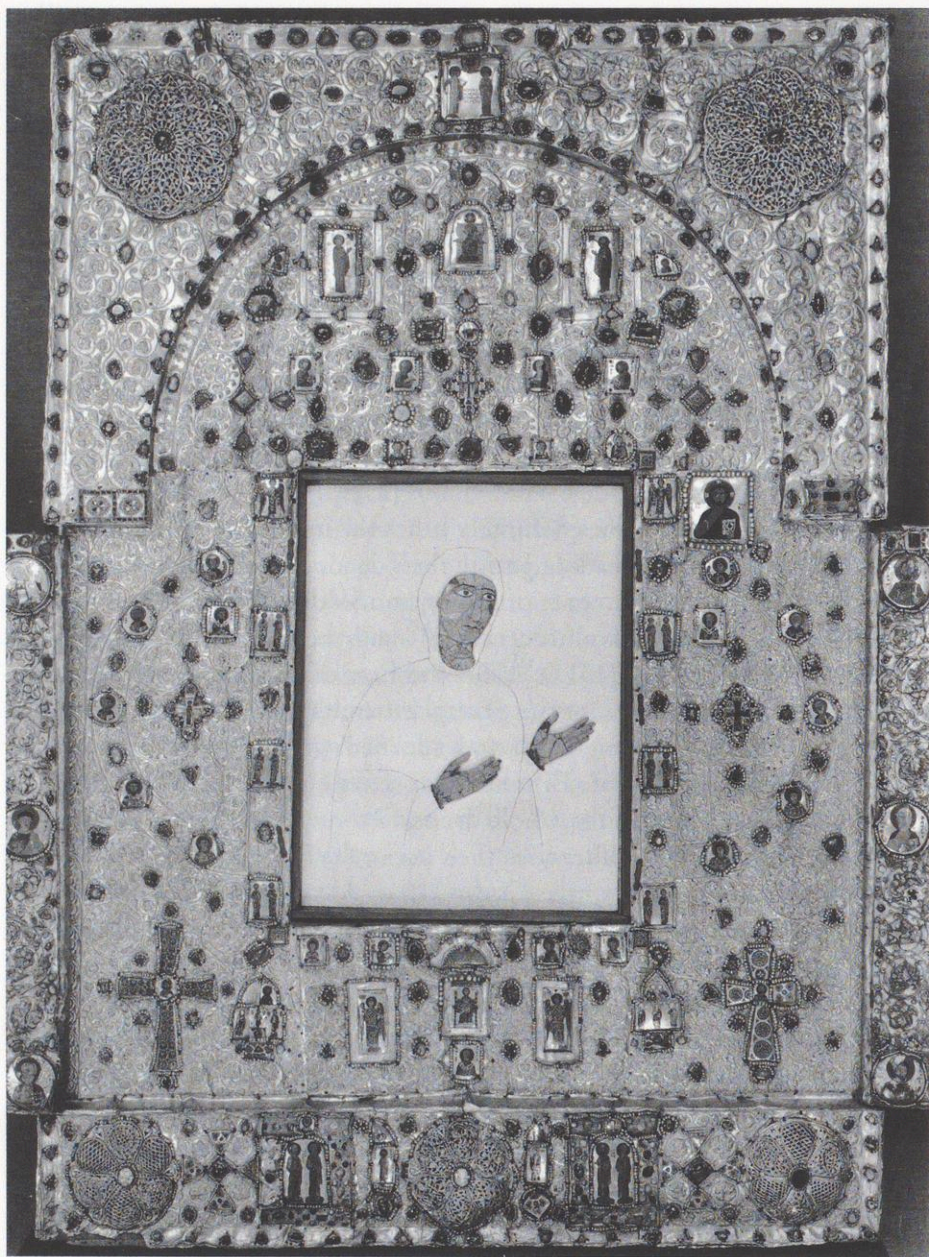
The treatment of the haloes definitely bears the imprint of Byzantine art.¹³² First of all rosettes play a leading part in their decoration, though this element is also found on the monuments of Georgian metalwork as, for example, on the Khakhuli icon (early twelfth century)¹³³ and the icon of the Virgin from the Bachkovo monastery (1311).¹³⁴ On the first of them rosettes appear as light accents incorporated into the general ensemble (fig. 27). On the icon of the Virgin from Bachkovo, which was adorned with the revetment by the brothers Athanase and Egnate Egnatisdze, rosettes constitute the leading motif of not only the haloes, but the whole decorative system of the revetment (fig. 28). Similarly, Byzantine influence of their use in the Portaitissa icon, analogous to the above-mentioned examples, is doubtless. Although rosettes in this case appear only on the haloes, they represent one of the most significant artistic accents of the whole system of the revetment because of their plastic and decorative treatment (large stones embellishing them also play a certain part in it). Most importantly, the rosettes adorning the haloes on the icon of Iviron monastery replicate those on various Byzantine monuments both in their form and in the character of the interlace design.¹³⁵ A comparison of these monuments with the character of the treatment of haloes on the Portaitissa

132 The statement of N. Kondakov that the haloes are of old Georgian type is not convincing (N. Kondakov, op. cit., p. 167).

133 R. Q'enia, *Khakhulis Ghvtsismshoblis khatis karedis moc'ediloba* [*The Cladding of the Khakhuli Icon of the Virgin*] (Tbilisi, 1972), p. 44ff.

134 M. Παναγιωτίδης, Η εικόνα της Παναγίας Γλυκοφιλούσας στο μοναστήρι του Πετριτζου στη Βουλγαρία, *Εὐφροσύνης. Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Μανόηλ Χατζιδάκη* (Ἀθήνα, 1992), σελ. 459-460, πιν. 235. For materials concerning the icon see: A. Shanidze, *Gruzinskij monastyr v Bolgarii i ego tipik* [*Georgian Monastery in Bulgaria and its Typicon*] (Tbilisi, 1971), p. 354ff.

135 A. Grabar, op. cit., fig. 32, 42, 47-48, 61, 73.



27. Khakhuli icon of the Virgin. Central part (State Art Museum of Georgia).



28. Bachkovo monastery. Icon of the Virgin.

icon reveals the existence of a common artistic tendency. At the same time, an especially high level of execution of these details on the icon of Iviron monastery strikes the eye; the former is more emphatically manifested in its comparison with the style of the images of the Virgin and the Child on the revetment. In the rendering of the haloes, attention is drawn to the treatment of the interlace design and revealing of the plastic expressiveness of the complicated interlace, being interwoven as a kind of tangle. Two semicircular massive forms of different size, composed from various interlacing stems and leaves and depicted with great accuracy and delicacy, contrast with the relatively flat volumes of the figures of the Virgin and the Child, which are articulated by means of large drapery lines carved somewhat carelessly and standing at some distance from one another. However, this notable difference does not generate any discord between the separate details of the central part of the revetment, nor does it compromise the homogeneity of its general artistic aspect.¹³⁶

The explanatory inscriptions of the images are not original either. One of them extends to both sides of the Virgin's halo: ΜΗΡ ΘΥ Η ΠΟΡΤΑΙΤΙΚΑ, while the other is placed to the left of the Child's halo: ΙΧ ΧC (figs. 24, 29, and 30). The massive, square frames of silver, where the large letters of the explanatory inscriptions stand out against the dark blue enamel background, were executed independently and were later fixed to the revetment by four silver nails. The character of their execution reveals the hand of another craftsman, who was not contemporary with the icon revetment itself.

Most likely the Virgin and the Child had an explanatory inscription in the days of Ambrosi. The fact that no traces of the original inscription remain on the revetment supports the conclusion that, analogous to the present ones, they were executed separately and then fixed to the ornamental background. An examination of Byzantine material demonstrates that, in the thirteenth/fourteenth centuries and even later, execution of the inscription on the revetment proper was widespread. At the same time, cases analogous to the Portaitissa icon¹³⁷ testify to the simultaneous existence of both practices.

The artistic peculiarities of the Archangel figures represented on both sides of the Virgin's halo point to the hand of another craftsman. Indeed, a cursory glance at the icon revetment reveals distinctly different rendering of these

136 A late nineteenth-century photograph shows that openwork crowns with enamel medallions were fixed on the haloes (N. Kondakov, *Pamjatniki khristianskogo iskusstva na Afone*, pl. XVII). It is unknown on what evidence Kondakov ascribed them to the seventeenth century (*ibid.*, p. 167). These crowns seem to have been removed when the icon was covered with the Russian revetment.

137 A. Grabar, *op. cit.*, fig. 61 (icon of the Saviour from the Vatopedi monastery), fig. 69-70 (icon of the Virgin from the same monastery).



29. Portaitissa icon. Old Georgian cladding.
Explanatory inscription.



30. Portaitissa icon. Old Georgian cladding.
Explanatory inscription.

parts of the revetment, specifically seen in the proportions, postures, and plastic treatment of the figures.

Half figures clad in imperial vestments have neither a neutral background nor any framing. That is why they are not clearly distinguished against the richly ornamented, carpetlike background of the central part of the icon; nor do they play any special role as far as the whole composition is concerned (especially since they are made from an identical material, and accordingly, colour as the background and figures). Nonetheless, these figures assume a notable position in the general decorative ensemble of the icon revetment because of their high relief and bold, even free manner of their plastic volumes. In this respect, a hand upraised in veneration before the body and especially a slightly bent head, projecting as a single block, stand out (fig. 4).

The fact that the images are fixed immediately on the ornamental background, where no special places were left for them, seems to be a less important argument in proving the different date of their execution; such cases were not exceptional in the practice of Byzantine and Georgian goldsmiths. Other factors are more important in underscoring their chronological discrepancy with the

original revetment of the Portaitissa icon. First, the style of the images is similar to the figures of the Evangelists and Apostles and suggests an earlier date for their execution (fourteenth-fifteenth centuries). Naturally, this can be explained by the existence of more archaic tendencies in the style of the images; although a high technical level of execution seems to support the first viewpoint. Most importantly, it is unknown whether the Archangel figures existed in the painted layer of the icon. Often when such images were present by the side of the Virgin and the Child, they were not generally covered by the cladding. In this respect, the fact that such a tendency is characteristic of the great majority of Byzantine monuments known today¹³⁸ is significant. It is doubtless that these images existed on the painted layer of the Portaitissa icon since they are on its oldest copy (moved to Russia). The supposition that the copy might have been made without taking off the revetment should not, certainly, be ignored; although, in this case, more pressing is the need to explain the presence of the Archangel figures. No simple, unambiguous answer exists to these questions. It is fair to assume that the chased images of the Archangels, executed somewhat earlier than the original cladding of the Portaitissa icon and probably adorning some other icon, were later added to the revetment of the miraculous icon.

The cladding of the icon framing represents a different layer. For one, its material differs from other parts that are completely executed in silver, except for the plates with the Apostles and Evangelists.

The main feature in this part of the Portaitissa icon revetment is an inscription of the craftsman who created it. The inscription in two lines is placed in the lower right angle of the icon, above the plate bearing an image of St. Thomas. It is executed in small initial letters, by a distinct, standard hand. Only the ligature – SP – in the second line is written in minuscule. Another ligature – TI – is also used in the same line.

The ending of the second word (in the first line of the inscription), containing the name of the master, is covered by the plate of the outer edge of the frame. Because it is impossible to determine the number of concealed letters, the complete name of the goldsmith may be reconstructed only conjecturally. The legible text of the inscription reads as follows: ΕΡΤΟΝ ΛΑΣΚΑΡ[...] ΤΟΥ ΣΠΑΡΤΙΝΟΥ (fig. 31). According to the norms of Greek onomasticon the incomplete word of the first line may be reconstructed as Λασκαρίος or Λασκαρις.¹³⁹ At the same time, the form Σπαρτινου, given in the second line, signifies that the name of the craftsman was to be given in the corresponding genitive case, namely Λασκαριου or Λασκαρου.

138 Ibid., fig. 32, 42, 47-49, 70.

139 W. Pape, *Die griechischen Eigennamen*, Bd. 2 (Brunswick, 1884), p. 776.

The name Λασκαριος or Λασκαρις seems to have been well-known for the Greek-speaking world. At the same time, beginning in the Late Antiquity, it appears in Greek vocabulary, but in the form of a verb;¹⁴⁰ as a proper name Λασκαριος or Λασκαρις is found far later and emerges as a family name or a nickname.

Beginning at least in the thirteenth century, the Laskaris took an active part in the political and cultural life of Byzantium. Several representatives of the family are known in the fifteenth/eighteenth centuries, though no man of art seems to have been among them.¹⁴¹

The stem of Σπαρτίνος, Σπαρτ, is far older as a lexical unit and is often found in Classical Greek in various meanings.¹⁴²

Σπαρτίον or Σπαρτος, formed from σπαρτ, does not seem by context to correspond to the contents of the inscription. Accordingly, there arises a basis for the supposition that the stem σπαρτ together with the suffix -ίνος had acquired a new meaning which, according to the old function of the suffix in, can be perceived in the meaning of the patronymy or provenance (though the suffix ατίς, accepted and active to the present, was more likely to have been used to express provenance). If such uses were excluded by classical norms, then the date of the inscription should prompt a new consideration. It dates to a period when old linguistic traditions were breaking down and forgotten, giving place to new ones and separate deviations often appearing both in manuscripts and epigraphy.¹⁴³



31. Portaitissa icon. Dedicatory inscription of the craftsman on the late period framing.

140 Λεξικὸν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης (Ἀθῆναις, 1852), σελ. 783; Δ. Δημητράκου, *Μέγα λεξικὸν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσης*, τόμος Ε' (Ἀθῆναι, 1951), σελ. 42-67.

141 *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. II (New York, Oxford, 1991), p. 1180-1181; E. Trapp, *Downfall and Survival of the Laskaris Family*, *Macedonian Studies*, 1983, I-2, p. 45-49; *Ἑγκυκλοπαιδία Πάπυρου Λάρου Μπριτάνικα*, τόμος 37 (1989), σελ. 371-373.

142 Λεξικὸν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης, σελ. 1285; E. A. Sophocles, *The Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)*, vol. II (New York, 1887), col. 1003; C. W. Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1968), col. 1247.

143 There are numerous examples of Greek epigraphy in Georgia: T. Q'aukhchishvili, *Berdznuli*

If we assume Σπαρτίνογ to determine the provenance, it must be, first of all, associated with one of the oldest centres of Peloponessus, Sparta, which had retained its age-old significance during the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁴ Concerning the provenance of the master-renewer of the revetment of the Ivron icon the fact should be noteworthy that the tomb of one of the latest representatives of the Laskaris family, Manuel Laskaris Khadziki dated by the inscription to 1445, was discovered near Sparta, in the Mistra monastic complex, namely in the arcosolium of the narthex in the main church of the Panthanassa monastery.¹⁴⁵

This inscription caught the attention of P. Ioseliani during his stay in the Ivron monastery; a Russian translation of the text is preserved among the materials of his voyage.¹⁴⁶

The system of ornamental decoration is the same on both sides of the icon framing. Its main part is adorned by circles with a point in the middle, being arranged in horizontal rows against a punched background. Originally each row comprised five such circles; but since the plates of the outer edge of the framing partially cover them, the rows containing four circles are seen on the whole perimeter of the framing. In turn, this row is duplicated by the edge composed of an imitation of precious stones, formed by alternating oblong rhomb-like and two small circular "stones". The row is framed by a narrow filigree, followed by a heavy, multi-patterned garland strip; finally, the outer edge of the frame is provided by a narrow relief shaft formed by a needle interlace (fig. 32).

Looking at these chased strips, formed by different ornamental motifs, attention is drawn to a very high level of technique. Whereas in the row of the circles a certain inaccuracy can still be observed, other details of this chased layer are modelled with such accuracy as to suggest that they were made by the same stamp. This could not but leave its imprint on the artistic aspect of the ornamental borders. It makes no difference that both the imitation of precious stones and the garland strip are not executed by the engraving technique and, accordingly, have far higher relief (the same can be said about the outer edging of the icon frame, which seems to have been first cast and then decorated by etching). Unlike the ornament on the background of the old revetment, a certain constraint, stiffness and immobility are discernible here. Narrow ornamental strips covering the lateral and lower slants were executed in the same

c'arc'erebi sakartveloshi [Greek Inscriptions in Georgia], (Tbilisi, 1951), p. XLVIII-LII, 2-4, 129-130, 164-165.

144 Π. Λοῦκας, *Ἡ Σπάρτη διὰ μέσου τοῦ αἰῶνος* (New York, 1922).

145 G. Millet, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra* (Paris, 1910), pl. 152.

146 Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, Ms S-3061, fol. 19r. In the Russian translation *Parte* stands for *Sparta*.

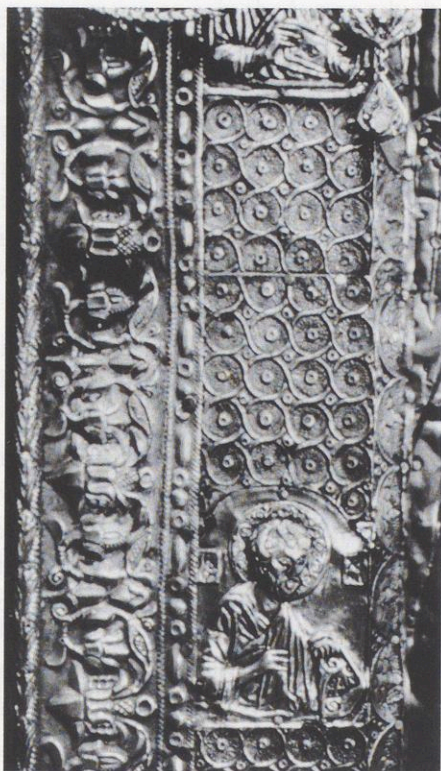
period. Motifs embellishing the slants of the original revetment of the icon were used in their decoration.

The chronological limits left their imprint on both the leaf scheme and the style of its execution, which is marked by a greater stiffness. Three points are inserted in the left portion between the leaves from the back side, serving as an additional decorative element of the later layer.

Observing the revetment of the Portaitissa icon, we notice the lack of correspondence in terms of their artistic rendering between the ornamental decoration of the framing and the images of the Evangelists and Apostles attached to it. Indeed, it is obvious that the half-figured chased gold plates were executed not only by different craftsmen but in different periods. Their fixation on the side frames of the Portaitissa icon was determined at the same time when the frames were re-embellished with the silver cladding.

This synchronicity is demonstrated by the fact that on the later framing the places for the plates with the images of the Evangelists and Apostles were specially marked by a narrow relief contour. Nevertheless, in certain cases, the size of the plates and that of the places left for them do not correspond to one another; for example, the plate with the image of St. Andrew is somewhat smaller, while that with the images of St. Paul and St. Symeon are bigger – the plates even partially overlap the contours. In certain cases we notice partial damage of the edges of the plates with relief (for example, the upper edge of the plate with the images of St. Thomas, St. John, St. Andrew), which suggests that they were used for the second time (cf. fig. 4).

The first feature of the framing plates with figures that attracts our attention is their asymmetrical arrangement. This is even more noticeable with the golden images standing out as distinct colouristic accents against the dark grey silver background. Whereas on the left-hand part of the frame the distance between separate plates is more or less even, on the right one, beginning from



32. Portaitissa icon. Late period framing.
Detail.

the upper part, considerable spaces are left between the images. This lack of correspondence between the distribution of the plates on the left and right frames increases from top to bottom; on the right frame, only several centimeters are left between the last two plates. It is hard to say what caused this discrepancy, whether an inner striving of the master to avoid the strict symmetry of the icon revetment scheme, or his professional level. The issue is compounded by the fact that, as mentioned above, the icon framing as a whole is a product of a later period, and the figures of the Evangelists and Apostles were placed on it at that time. Therefore, in this case, we have to deal with the co-existence of different chronological layers, which makes it impossible to give any straightforward answer to the question. Nevertheless, it is clear, that by the time when the original layer of the icon revetment was made, or its frames were re-clad, this kind of asymmetry was not at all unusual or unexpected.

The plates with the images of the Evangelists and Apostles have a characteristic form: their upper part is semicircular, each plate being framed by a narrow relief edging on two sides. All the figures are depicted up to the waist and turned three-quarters towards the central part of the icon. Clad in traditional vestments, they hold a book or scroll in their hands. Greek explanatory inscriptions are distributed vertically on both sides of their haloes, on a square protruding surface. An examination of the chased decorations of Byzantine icons reveals the popularity of such an iconography in the fourteenth/fifteenth centuries. Numerous examples exist which show great affinity with the images on the Portaitissa icon, making it possible to assume their origin from one and the same artistic circle.¹⁴⁷ At present it is difficult to define this circle precisely because of variations in the provenance of the monuments, though the fact that specimens of the Athonite school of goldsmithing are among them is eloquent. It suggests that in this traditional monastic artistic centre, alongside the establishment of such a scheme of decoration, the iconography of lateral images was also adopted and practised by local craftsmen.

The style of the images also testifies to the same period. It is not hard to note a different manner of vestment drapery of the Evangelists and Apostles, as compared with the central images of the icon. Free and natural movements, which distinguish these small half figures, contribute to the accentuation of their plastic expressiveness. In this respect, the absolutely smooth neutral

147 Alongside the icon of the Saviour and the Virgin named above, these are – the icon of the Virgin with donors from the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, the icon of the Virgin in the Trinity church in Venice and, especially, three icons from the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos: those of the Saviour, the Virgin and the Trinity (A. Grabar, *op. cit.*, fig. 31-36, 43-44, 61, 65, 82, 84, 86).

background around the figures emphasizes even more greatly the forms which, notwithstanding their small size, are modelled in detail. A closer scrutiny reveals a picturesque, free manner in the treatment of the vestment, which endows its solid and substantial half figures and the flow of the folds with a dynamic quality (cf. fig. 33).

The absolute affinity with the images of the Archangels fixed on both sides of the Virgin's halo is important in defining the provenance of the plates' style and the chronological boundaries of their execution. Most significant, however, is the great similarity in both the iconography and artistic peculiarities between the Portaitissa icon and the Byzantine monuments mentioned above.¹⁴⁸ The same artistic tendency is easily discernible in the proportions of the figures, the character of line and modelling of forms; while the great affinity of some of them (as in the bilateral icon of the Skopje Museum¹⁴⁹) suggests as a possibility that they originated in a common centre of goldsmithery. In the light of these parallels with Byzantine monuments, we can surmise that they date from a period stretching from the late thirteenth to the early fifteenth century. Nevertheless, we must explain the emergence of the images on the Portaitissa icon that are identical to them in style. If we assume that the plates with the Evangelists and Apostles were already present on the old layer of the icon revetment, still we must conclude from their archaizing style that they did not derive from the hand of Ambrosi. This is even more true of the later layer of the icon frame, where both these trends are revealed more vividly. Accordingly, we can not exclude the supposition that by the time of execution of the old revetment, the images of the lateral framing of the icon either existed already or were assigned to another craftsman by Ambrosi himself and that they were made according to old originals. Subsequently, while re-cladding the lateral frames these images were fixed to it.

In his brief description of the Portaitissa icon, after having quoted a dedicatory inscription, P. Ioseliani mentions a nacreous frame executed in 1722.¹⁵⁰ He does not state what was adorned – the whole icon or the inscription only, nor does he mention where he learned the date of its execution. This frame no longer exists.

At a relatively early stage of development of medieval Georgian metalwork, when numerous monuments were executed during the tenth–eleventh centuries, all exhibit common artistic peculiarities; despite the different professional level of execution, these monuments represent a single artistic vision, stylistically

148 Cf. *supra*, n° 101, 103–106.

149 A. Grabar, *op. cit.*, fig. 31–36.

150 Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, Ms. S-3061, fol. 19r.



33. Portaitissa icon. Framing. Detail.

homogeneous and integrated. Contrary to this, in the later period beginning in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, artistic integrity is usually absent in metal icons and the chased decorations of painted icons. Still, even in this epoch, several monuments were produced, which – despite the existence of stylistically different layers and variations in detail – must be considered as artistically integrated and complete works. The revetment of the Portaitissa icon can be considered as one of these relatively rare examples. Several factors explain the artistic heterogeneity and diversity of the revetment. First, it combined images that differ from one another in their design, character of line and plastic articulation. Second, ornamental motifs used for the decoration of separate parts of the icon are not uniform in scheme and

treatment. Finally, separate details of the revetment differ from one another in both the material and, accordingly, the colour. Despite all these differences, the revetment of the Portaitissa icon together with the painted images creates a homogeneous, unified work of art whose variations and multiple layers are difficult to perceive at first glance. At the same time, the stylistic traits and individual features of each layer of the chased decoration of the icon make it possible to determine precisely the chronological boundaries of their execution, and to identify those premises, which were decisive for the artistic traits reflected in the images of each layer.

It is difficult to say when the revetment of the Portaitissa icon acquired its final aspect. We only know for certain that the original revetment was altered in the course of the centuries. Some parts were removed (such as the lateral frame decoration and explanatory inscriptions), and replaced by new ones (including the silver frame, haloes and inscriptions). It is possible as well that in the process of partial renovation part of the revetment, separate details were used a second time (for example, the plates with the images of the Evangelists and Apostles). Accordingly, it is possible to reconstruct a fairly clear picture of the chronological sequence for the addition of separate layers

of the chasing. This long process of metamorphosis emphasises the special care which – because of its miraculous power and overall sacredness – had always been shown to the holy icon of the Virgin Portaitissa, delivered by Divine providence to the Georgian monastery on Mount Athos.