

**NATALIA CHITISHVILI**

George Chubinashvili National Research Centre  
for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation

**KING'S AND QUEEN'S PLACE  
IN THE INTERIOR OF THE GEORGIAN CHURCH**

Similar to the general liturgical practices of the Christian World, a rule based on the principles of hierarchy has been established over the centuries in the Georgian liturgical tradition, which regulated the arrangement of people in the church space. Special places were allotted for different ranks of clergy and laity. The presence of secular rulers, ecclesiastical authorities, monks, women, etc. at the service resulted in various divisions in the church space. However, it has to be taken into account that this was done in different ways in different countries and even in different regions within one country. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to make general conclusions based on isolated examples. The present article deals with the questions of where kings and queens (and their courtiers) stood during the service in the Georgian church and how the spaces assigned to royal persons were arranged.

Arrival of a king at the church was a processional event in Medieval Georgia.<sup>1</sup> Owing to lack of sources, we are unaware when this concept of a procession emerged, how it was formed and what kind of alterations it went through. However, the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Georgian code of laws entitled “Regulations of the Royal Court”<sup>2</sup> allows us to imagine at least partially the king’s festive procession moving towards the church during a religious celebration:

Now let us speak about the Epiphany, a grand occasion. It is the custom that all the Christians, as many as there might be, all of them, should go to the King, wherever he is. A large banner is attached to a staff [and carried in front of the procession] which is headed by the kettle-drummers; then comes the cross-bearer robed in vestments and carrying the wood of the True

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<sup>1</sup> For the procession of the Byzantine emperors see: R. J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia, Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London, 1997), pp. 231-235; G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest, The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003); G. P. Majeska, “The Emperor in His Church: Imperial Ritual in the Church of St. Sophia,” in: H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Washington, 2004), pp. 1-11.

<sup>2</sup> *Regulations of the Royal Court*, Texts prepared for publishing, translated into English, annexed by introduction, dictionary, notes and comments by K. Surguladze (Tbilisi, 1993), pp. 14-15.

Cross (lit. the wood of life) in his hands. After the blessing of the water they go back in the same order. When the King arrives at the church the drummers stop beating their kettle-drums and the banner is put in front of the church porch. After leaving the church the King passes [to the palace] with the banner and stands in front of the entrance. The darbazoba takes place according to protocol, major or minor, as the King would wish.

On entering the church, the king occupies his due place. Unfortunately, evidence on this subject is rather sparse and irregular in terms of time. A large part of the written and archaeological evidence comes from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, while there actually exists no material concerning the earlier period. It can only be presumed that the north-west niche of the minor church of the Holy Cross in Mtskheta dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century might have been the place assigned to either the catholicos<sup>3</sup> or the governor of Kartli (Fig. 1).<sup>4</sup>



Fig. 1. The Minor Church of the Holy Cross at Mtskheta. Interior. Looking west

From the 10<sup>th</sup> century, there is some evidence in the historic south-western Georgian province of Tao (now in Turkey), in the churches of Oshki, Khakhuli and Parkhali built by the representatives of the Bagrationi royal family, David Kuropalates and his brother Bagrat

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<sup>3</sup> G. Chubinashvili, *Pamiatniki tipa Djvari* (Tbilisi, 1948), p. 11, pl. 35, 38.

<sup>4</sup> N. Chitishvili, "Svetitskhovlis samepo saqdari," *Saqartvelos Sidzveleni*, 16 (2013), pp. 154-155.

Magistros, as well as in the Cathedral of Ishkhani completed in 1032 after several reconstructions.



Fig. 2. Church of St John the Baptist in Oskhi. Interior. Niche in the south-west pier of the dome

Niches of semi-circular plan cut into the piers supporting the dome of the church of St John the Baptist at Oshki have been identified as being associated with local rulers (Fig. 2). W. Djobadze noted that they “could have comfortably accommodated the sovereigns not only seated but also standing.”<sup>5</sup> The conch of the niche cut in the south-western pier is made up of radial beams and looks like a shell. The conch as well as the pilasters of the niche had been painted red. A badly damaged figure of a saint is depicted in the niche under the conch. Its iconography (the way of depicting the hair, the nimbus without the cross) suggests that it must have been the representation of St John the Baptist. On both sides of the figure, on the imposts of the conch arch, there are above-the-waist sculptural images of David Magistros and Grand Duke Bagrat accompanied by supplicatory inscriptions in Georgian capital (*asomtavruli*) script. The one carved next to David mentions the Virgin, while the other next to Bagrat mentions St John the Baptist.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> W. Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historic Tao, Klarjeti, and Šavšeti* (Stuttgart, 1992), p. 100.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

The assignment of the southern arm of Oshki to the king and his courtiers, i.e. its somewhat “secular” nature, is emphasized by a mural painting in the southern apse (Fig. 3),<sup>7</sup> which represents the wedding of King Bagrat IV and the festive procession bringing the Holy Nail to Georgia, which had been sent with his wife Helena, the niece of Emperor Romanos III, as part of her dowry.<sup>8</sup> Its representation close to the place where members of the royal family stood must bear a special ideological significance.



Fig. 3. Church of St John the Baptist in Oshki. Interior. Mural painting in south apse. Detail

A similar semi-circular niche is also observed in the north-western pier in Oshki (Fig. 4). At a glance, this niche, unlike the first one, is rather modestly decorated. However, on closer examination it becomes clear that the sculptural decoration of the niche has been intentionally

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<sup>7</sup> According to the inscription, the painting was executed in 1036 at the expense of Jojik Patrikios. See: E. Takaishvili, *1917 tslis arqeologiuri eqspedicia samkhret saqartveloshi* (Tbilisi, 1960), pp. 43, 56; N. Thierry, “Peintures historiques d’Ošk’i (Tao),” *Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes*, N° 2 (1986), p. 135-136; W. Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries...*, p. 140.

<sup>8</sup> N. Thierry, “Peintures historiques d’Ošk’i (Tao),” pp. 136-138; A. Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in the Medieval Kingdom of Georgia* (Philadelphia, 1998), pp. 232-234.

destroyed.<sup>9</sup> The damage renders it impossible to recognise the original images and thus complicates identification of the niche's function.



Fig. 4. Church of St John the Baptist in Oskhi. Interior. Niche in the north-west pier of the dome

However, this can be done with the help of analogous archaeological evidence from other churches of Tao. In Khakhuli, the niche cut in the north-western pier was painted (Fig. 5-6). At present, only a small fragment of the painting remains. It shows that there was a canopy resting on four pillars depicted here, of which only its upper part, fragments of two left-side pillars and a roof, can be identified. A one-line capital (*asomtavruli*) inscription made under the canopy mentions Matthew, a priest of the Khakhuli monastery.<sup>10</sup> Although the niche is contemporaneous with the church, built in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, paleographical peculiarities of the inscription seem to indicate that it was made later, in the 12<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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<sup>9</sup> N. Chitishvili, "Svetitskhovlis samepo saqdari," p. 157, note 22.

<sup>10</sup> E. Takaishvili, *1917 tslis arqeologiuri eqspedicia...*, p. 65, pl. 94. Nearby, at the upper left side of the niche, there is an incised two-line lower case (*nuskhuri*) inscription: "God, have mercy on Papuna. Amen".





Fig. 5. Church of the Mother of God in Khakhuli. Interior. Niche in the north-west pier of the dome

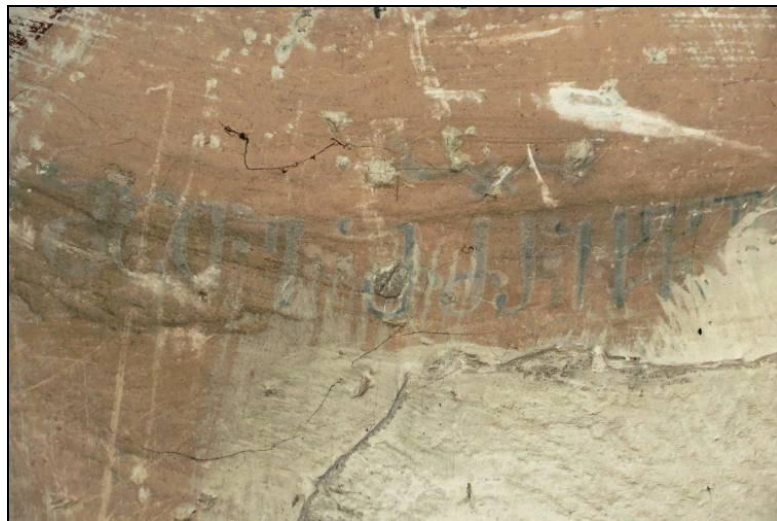


Fig. 6. Church of the Mother of God in Khakhuli. Interior. Niche in the north-west pier of the dome. Inscription

The content of the inscription and its location suggest that the niche was designed as a standing place for the priest of the Khakhuli Monastery - at least at the time when the niche was

painted and the inscription executed. As for the identification of the painting, owing to its poor condition it is hard to say what had been depicted here. According to W. Djobadze, it was the scene of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple;<sup>11</sup> however, the small area in the niche designated for the painting raises some doubts. It is more likely that there were isolated figures depicted under the canopy - probably the Saviour, or a saint, or even the priest Matthew himself. In this latter case, the supplicatory inscription would appear above his head.

In Parkhali, the niche in the north-western pier was also painted. The painting was still visible, although very poorly, in 1917 when E. Takaishvili visited the church. On either side of the head of the figure depicted in the niche there was a supplicatory inscription mentioning Abraham, the priest of Parkhali.<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 7. Ishkhani Chathedral. Interior. Niches in the north-west and south-west piers of the dome

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<sup>11</sup> W. Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries...*, p. 147. W. Djobadze's description does not say what fragments were preserved at the time he saw it. He merely mentions that "some fragments remain in the upper portion."

<sup>12</sup> E. Takaishvili, *1917 tslis arqeologiuri eqspedicia...*, p. 94.

Niches of Ishkhani stand out in terms of their unusual shape in comparison with those of Oshki, Khakhuli and Parkhali. In fact, they have lost the shape of a niche (Fig. 7).<sup>13</sup> The niche in the south-western pier is absolutely flat, while its upper, framing part is semi-circular. The niche in the north-western pier is only slightly arched in the depth, while part of the upper “frame”, unlike the first one, is rectangular, without any curving. With regard to this niche, the most remarkable elements are the two small rectangular holes in its upper part, on either side, at the level of the bottom of the conch. They still preserve remains of the mortar filling them. These holes suggest that there used to be a light construction like a canopy, probably made of wood, attached to the niche.

The niches cut into the piers, their decoration and their inscriptions, which have survived in the churches of Tao-Klarjeti, provide a more or less clear picture of their affiliation and function. They serve as a valuable source for understanding how the space was allocated during the liturgy in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Secular and religious persons who were the highest in rank attended the liturgy and listened to it standing in these niches. Thus the niches of Oshki, Khakhuli, Parkhali, and, in all probability, Ishkhani show a certain system of articulation of the space for the congregation of the church, according to which the southern part had to be assigned to the king and the nobles, while the northern part must have been allotted to the bishop or the priest and religious persons accompanying them, though it is also possible that some of the secular people stood among them too. Owing to a lack of relevant historical sources, it is difficult to conclude when the bishop or the priest took this place and, if they took part in the service, when it was that they moved to the sanctuary.

A treatment of the divisions of the church involved not only the divisions for laity and clergy, but also for men and women, for common people and members of the court.<sup>14</sup> Study of the architecture of Oshki, Khakhuli, Parkhali and Ishkhani has suggested that the eastern portion of the church adjacent to the sanctuary was divided between lay noblemen and clergy. The former occupied the southern part of that space while the latter stood in the northern part, probably together with some secular persons. The western portion of the nave should have been allotted to

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<sup>13</sup> The unusual shape of the niches was first spotted by W. Djobadze, who thought that “either the construction of the niches was not finished or they lost their original function in the eleventh century” (W. Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries...*, p. 196).

<sup>14</sup> T. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (Philadelphia, 1980), p. 117.



common people though it is unclear whether the division by gender occurred as well. As for the queen and her courtiers, in the absence of any evidence, one can only presume that in Oshki space for them could be provided in the upper gallery at the western end of the church.<sup>15</sup> The galleries of Otkhta and Parkhali churches must have had a similar function.<sup>16</sup>

Apparently, this early tradition of arranging king's and queen's space respectively near the sanctuary and in the gallery remained alive in Georgia for centuries. Regrettably, owing to the lack of evidence, we can not trace it at all stages of the development of Georgian architecture. Rectangular projections attached to the south-western and north-western piers of the dome (height 0.15 m, width 1,55m, length 0.99m), which obviously are the remnants of the niches, can be seen in the church of the Zarzma monastery built around 1300 (Fig. 8).<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 8. Church of the Transfiguration in Zarzma. Interior. South-west pier of the dome

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<sup>15</sup> The gallery in Oshki is constructed at its western wall, above three entrances to the church. It was about three meters in width. At present, it is almost completely destroyed (W. Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries...*, p. 97).

<sup>16</sup> For the function of the upper gallery in Georgia see: D. Tumanishvili, N. Natsvlshvili, D. Khoshtaria, *Mshenebeli ostatebi shua saukuneebis sakartveloshi* (Tbilisi, 2012), pp. 87-94. For the function of the gallery in Byzantium see: T. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, pp. 128-134; R. J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia, Architecture, Structure and Liturgy...*, pp. 223-226; R. Taft, "Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When and Why?" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 52 (1998), pp. 59-60; V. Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual in the Churches of Constantinople* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 91-93.

<sup>17</sup> V. Beridze, *Samtskhis khurotmodzgyreba, XIII-XVI saukuneebi* (Tbilisi, 1955), p. 128.



Fig. 9. Church of the Holy Archangels in Gremi. Interior. Looking south-west

Similar projections can be seen on the south-western pier in the church of the Holy Archangels at Gremi built in the 1560s (Fig. 9). Construction of Gremi is associated with Levan, King of Kakheti (east Georgia). According to the report of the Russian ambassadors to Kakheti in 1640, it was the king's last wish to be buried in that church.<sup>18</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup>-century historian Vakhushti Bagrationi also mentions the fact that the resting-place of King Levan is in Gremi.<sup>19</sup> Although none of the sources mentions the specific place of the burial, G. Chubinashvili presumes that it must be situated in the bay between southern and western transepts<sup>20</sup> - apparently, because of the raised floor in that part of the church. Moreover, soon after the king's death his donor portrait was painted near the same corner, on the west wall. Apparently, the king's image was placed above his grave, which explains choosing an unusual place for the

<sup>18</sup> M. Polievktov, *Materiali po istorii gruzino-russkix vzaimootnosheniih (1615-1640)* (Tbilisi, 1937), p. 379.

<sup>19</sup> Vakhushti Batonishvili, *Agtsera samefosa saqartvelosa*, edited by T. Lomouri and N Berdzenishvili (Tbilisi, 1941), p. 100.

<sup>20</sup> G. Chubinashvili, *Arkhitectura Kakhetii* (Tbilisi, 1959), p. 449; M. Vachnadze, "Levan kakhta mepe da misi shvidi portreti kakhetsa da saberdznetshi," *Literatura da Khelovneba*, No 5-6 (1992), p. 153.

donor's portrait.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the projections at the south-western pier must be identified as the standing place of King Levan. Obviously, the southern transept was the royal wing of the church; it was here that the king attended the service and his resting-place was arranged here too.

Written and archaeological evidence of the later period shows that in the large cathedrals of Kutaisi, Alaverdi and Svetitskhoveli at Mtskheta separately constructed thrones for kings were erected near the western piers of the domes. Although the written information dates from the 1640s and 1650s, this does not preclude their presence in earlier periods too.

Descriptions written by the Russian ambassadors are particularly noteworthy in this regard. They provide information not only about the standing area of a king and a high priest, but also contain information about the place reserved for the queen and, most importantly, about the liturgy conducted there.

Prince Mishetski and Secretary Klucharev visited Georgia and, in particular, the Kingdom of Kakheti from 1640 to 1643. In their records, they described the process of the liturgy in the churches of Kakheti. They attended the service dedicated to the Nativity of the Virgin at Akhali Shuamta Church.<sup>22</sup> King Teimuraz stood near the north-western pier of the dome and at his order, one of the Russian ambassadors stood next to him. His son, Prince David, with about twenty noblemen, came to stand at the south-western pier. The description does not mention separately constructed thrones for the king or the prince, only the places where they stood. There was no special throne arranged for the archbishop either. He stood in the middle of the church, in front of the holy gate, and later moved into the sanctuary. When the Bible was brought out from the north door, it was first taken to the king, who kissed the Crucifixion on its embossed cover and then it was taken into the sanctuary. No other activity during the liturgy relating to the king is mentioned in the descriptions and, probably, there there were none.

Unlike the church of Akhali Shuamta, in the Alaverdi Cathedral, separately constructed thrones were arranged not only for the king, but for the high priest as well. They have not been preserved, but according to the ambassadors' description, the archbishop of Alaverdi stood on a

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<sup>21</sup> M. Vachnadze, "Levan kakhta mepe da misi shvidi portreti..," p. 151-153; M. Vachnadze, "Levan Kakhta mepe da postbizantiuri kartuli monumenturi pertsera XVI saukunis kakhetis mkhatvrobis magalitze," *Alaverdis eparqii istoriis furtslebi, Sametsniro konferentsiis masalebi*, I (Tbilisi, 2007), pp. 123-137.

<sup>22</sup> *Posolstvo kniazia Mishetskogo i diaka Kliuchareva v Kakhetiu 1640-1643*, edited by M. Polievktov (Tbilisi, 1928), pp. 136-137.

stone dais with throne built next to the south-western pier of the dome. Nearby, to his left, there was Prince David together with a nobleman. King Teimuraz stood on a dais with throne located near the north-western pier. Russian ambassadors were placed nearby, behind him.<sup>23</sup>

In west Georgia, in the Kingdom of Imereti the situation was different. In the Cathedral of Kutaisi (so-called “Bagrat’s Cathedral”), the royal throne was erected near the south-western pier of the dome. The ambassadors have not described it in detail, but it is clear that the throne was built of stone and was equipped with a seat, since the king sat on the throne during the sermon. According to the description, the throne was covered with painting depicting kings.<sup>24</sup>



Fig. 10. Svetitskhoveli Cathedral of Mtskheta. Interior. South wall  
(photo by D. Ermakov, Georgian National Museum)

Royal thrones in the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral and Samtavro church at Mtskheta do not exist anymore. One can discuss their architectural aspects only on the basis of old photographs. The

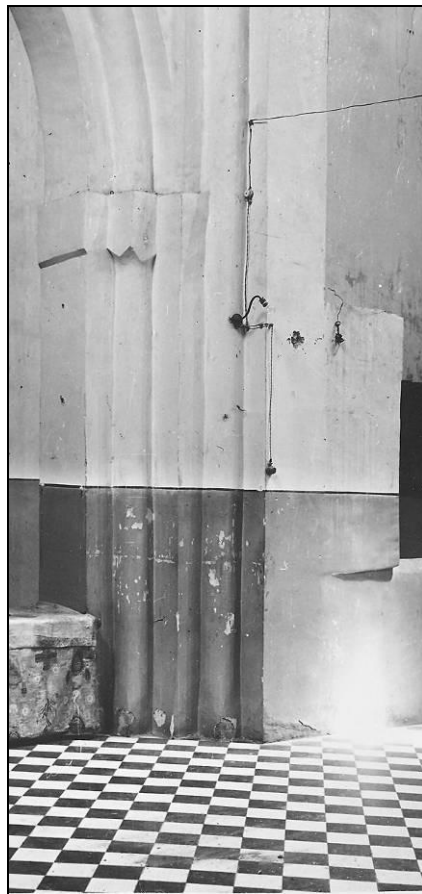
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<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, p. 141.

<sup>24</sup> *Aleksi Yevlevis 1650-1652 tslebshi Imeretis samefoshi elchobis saangarisho agtseriloba*, Russian text with the review of the manuscripts and Georgian translation prepared for publishing by I. Tsintsadze (Tbilisi, 1969), pp. 122, 137.

royal throne at Svetitskhoveli was situated in the southern transept of the cathedral, to the right of the throne of the catholicos (Fig. 10). Apparently, it was erected in the 1740s, when after a break of 170 years, King Teimuraz II was crowned according to the Christian rite. The canopy was removed in 1960s for unknown reasons and at present it is impossible to find any trace of it. The photographs show a light arched baldachin on four columns topped with a dome imitating the domes of Medieval Georgian churches.<sup>25</sup>

The throne annexed to the north-western pier of the dome in the Samtavro church was removed during restoration works in 1974. The photo taken from south-west shows only a part of its southern wall (Fig. 11). The throne bears a resemblance to the royal niche at Oshki; however its lower part is far longer and projects deeper into the church interior. Both the pier and the throne are completely covered in plaster so that no masonry can be seen anywhere, which makes it impossible to establish how the throne was attached to the pier and when it was built.



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<sup>25</sup> For detailed discussion of this throne see: N. Chitishvili, "Svetitskhovlis samepo saqdari," pp. 149-165.



Fig. 11. Samtavro Church of the Transfiguration in Mtskheta. Interior. North-west pier of the dome from the west  
(photo by Zenko, National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia)

Among the written sources that show the situation in other parts of the Christian world, particularly noteworthy is the information provided by Sozomen in his *Ecclesiastical History*. According to him, St Ambrose of Milan allocated an area to the emperor in the naos of the church in front of the sanctuary, which was praised by Theodosius I and his successors too.<sup>26</sup> Here we should also mention Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople, where space specially assigned to the emperor – *metatorion* (the emperor's seat) was located in the south-eastern part.<sup>27</sup> According to a 10<sup>th</sup> century source, *The Book of Ceremonies* by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the space allotted to the emperor was divided into several parts and his throne stood in one of those. Based on this source and archaeological evidence, T. Mathews has attempted to specify the location of the imperial throne. In particular, he has discussed four circular holes uncovered by archaeologists in the southern bay of the church, next to the south-eastern pier, which points to the throne having stood there.<sup>28</sup> T. Mathews presumes that the imperial *metatorion* was probably arranged at the extreme eastern part of the southern nave, although during the liturgy the emperor was present in the above mentioned southern bay of the church, the place where his throne was erected.<sup>29</sup>

A considerable number of royal thrones erected in the 16<sup>th</sup> century have been preserved in Russia. No earlier evidence, written or archaeological, has survived. However, there is a presumption that Russian sovereigns used to attend the liturgy standing in galleries, since they, unlike Byzantine emperors, did not have the right to take part in liturgy. If the church did not have a gallery, they were assigned a special place somewhere within the space for the congregation.<sup>30</sup> The situation changed during the reign of Ivan the Terrible (1533-1547) - in the Dormition Church of the Kremlin in Moscow, he occupied a place in front of the sanctuary, in

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<sup>26</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book VII, Chapter 25.

<sup>27</sup> T. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, pp. 133-134; R. J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia, Architecture, Structure and Liturgy...*, pp. 223-226.

<sup>28</sup> T. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, p. 134, fig. 50, tab. 87-88.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 134.

<sup>30</sup> G. Shtender, S. Sivak, "Arkhitektura interiera Novgorodskogo Sopiiskobo sobora i nekotore voprosi bogoslujenia," *Byzantinorossika*, 1 (1995), pp. 293-295.

the southern part of the church.<sup>31</sup> Today the royal seat, the so-called *Monomachos throne*, stands in the southern bay, to the right of the Patriarch's throne, next to the church entrance (Fig. 12). It was made of wood in 1551, presumably by carpenters from Novgorod.<sup>32</sup> It stands on four fantastic sculpted animals and has pillars and a dome of a complicated shape. The lower part of the throne consists of 14 wooden panels with scenes from 'the Life of Sovereigns from Vladimir' represented on them. In particular, the panels tell how Vladimir II Monomachos marched into Thracia, how he received royal regalia from Constantine IX Monomachos, how these regalia - Monomachos crown, festive shoulder pads and other objects - were brought to Russia and, finally, the coronation of Vladimir Monomachos himself with these regalia. The door entering the throne has inscriptions marking these events.



Fig. 12. Church of the Kremlin in Moscow. Interior. Monomachos' throne (photo from the Internet)

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<sup>31</sup> However, I. Sokolova thinks that this must have been the continuation of the already existing tradition: I. Sokolova, *Tron tsaria Ivana Groznogo v Uspenskom sobore* (Moskva, 2006), p. 7. For the Dormition Church see: B. Fedorov, "Uspenski sobor: issledovanie i problemi sokhranenia pamiatnika," *Uspenski sobor Moskovskogo Kremliia, Materiali i issledovania* (Moscow, 1985), pp. 52-68.

<sup>32</sup> I. Sokolova, *Tron tsaria Ivana Groznogo*, p. 7.

On the order of Ivan the Terrible, a royal throne was also erected in St. Sophia's Church in Novgorod. It is also known that in 1650 King Aleksey Mikhailovich ordered a royal throne to be erected in the church of St Nicholas the Miracle-Worker in Yaroslavl.<sup>33</sup> Royal thrones, albeit of a later period, can be found in the church of the Annunciation in the Moscow Kremlin, in the main church of the Holy Trinity Monastery near Kostroma, and in the church of the Annunciation at Solvychevodsk.

Thus, unlike stone thrones in Georgian churches, which are attached to the wall or the pier, thrones in Russia are wooden structures easy to carry from one place to another. However, on the other hand, it should be mentioned that there are patriarchal and Episcopal stone thrones in Russia placed next to the south-western or north-western pier of the dome. Accordingly, it is obvious that Russians were aware of this form, but while creating royal thrones they gave preference to portable wooden constructions.

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We mentioned above W. Djobadze's opinion that in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries queens attended services in the upper galleries of churches in Tao-Klarjeti. The study of Late Medieval sources makes it possible to recreate a more or less clear picture, which, presumably, must be the continuation of a tradition which existed before the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The most valuable among them is the above-cited report of the Russian ambassadors that contains the description of the liturgy in the Cathedrals of Alaverdi and Kutaisi. It says that the place for the queen and her courtiers in Alaverdi was assigned at ground level in the cathedral; it was the space behind the north-western pier of the dome, i. e. behind the royal throne, which was confined and covered with velvet cloth.<sup>34</sup>

The description of the Kutaisi cathedral shows a different situation: here the queen and other noble women attended the liturgy standing in the upper gallery. The ambassadors' report says: "The Queen can hear chanting and can see everyone around, but the people cannot see her."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> At present, this throne stands in the church of Elias the Prophet in Yaroslavl. It was moved there in 1938 with regard to opening the anti-religious museum in the church.

<sup>34</sup> *Posolstvo kniazia Mishetskogo i diaka Kliuchareva v Kakheti*, p. 141.

<sup>35</sup> Aleksi Yevlev's 1650-1652 tslebshi Imeretis samefoshi elchobis saangarisho agtseriloba, p. 137.

However nothing is said about whether this area was separated from the main space with cloth. It is possible that there was no need for a hanging curtain here, because the gallery was arranged high above ground level so that the queen stayed hidden out of sight of the people standing in the cathedral.

Interesting information on this subject is provided in *The Life of St. John the Chrysostom* written by Symeon Metaphrastes. According to this account, during the service conducted in Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, after his fellow servant caught a glance of a lady in the gallery, St John had the cloth hung over the place from where one could look down.<sup>36</sup> However, such a demarcation of women's space in the church had not become a tradition and this place was not always covered with cloth. Two 14<sup>th</sup>-century sources describe two different situations of the place of women in the gallery of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. In a letter written in 1309 the Patriarch Athanasius I expresses his worries about women standing in the gallery not for piety or praying, but in order to show themselves, their beauty and their ornaments.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, the Russian pilgrim Ignatius Smolenski who in 1392 attended the consecration ceremony of Manuel I and his spouse says that during the ceremony men stood at ground level inside the cathedral, while women were in the gallery, which was covered with silk cloth so that the women's faces were not visible to anyone, while they themselves could see everything below.<sup>38</sup>

The monastery of Tigva built in 1152 in central Georgia provides valuable evidence on this point. Its church became home to Tamar, daughter of the famous Georgian king David the Builder, at one time the queen of Shirvan, who later took monastic vows.<sup>39</sup> Tigva is characterized by a peculiarity, which makes it differ from contemporary and not only contemporary monasteries of Georgia. A two-storey palace was erected 3.5 m north-west of the main church for the queen who had become a nun. The palace was directly connected to the gallery by means

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<sup>36</sup> *Dzveli metafrasuli krebuli: seqtembris sakitkhvebi*, texts prepared for publishing, comments and references added by N. Gogvadze (Tbilisi, 1986), pp. 257-258; R. Taft, "Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When and Why?" pp. 49-50.

<sup>37</sup> R. Taft, "Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When and Why?" pp. 55-56.

<sup>38</sup> *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, т. XI (St-Petersburg, 1897), p. 102; G. P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington, 1984), pp. 104-105; R. Taft, "Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When and Why?" p. 55.

<sup>39</sup> L. Rcheulishvili, *Tigva: Sharvanis dedoflis Tamaris agmshenebloba* (Tbilisi, 1960), pp. 45-47, 68-69; fig 21; D. Tumanishvili, N. Natsvlishvili, D. Khoshtaria, *Mshenebeli ostatebi...*, pp. 87-89.

of a bridge through a door cut in the western part of the north wall.<sup>40</sup> What makes this gallery unique is that it was impossible to reach it from ground level in the church; the only way to the gallery was through the bridge connecting it with the palace.

The arrangement of the upper gallery in Tighva raises a question regarding the liturgy used in the church in general and at Holy Communion in particular. Did the Queen receive Holy Communion on entering the church after leaving the gallery, going over the bridge and then going through the palace or was the holy offering provided to her in the gallery? In the latter case, the priest would enter the gallery by leaving the church, going through the palace and over the bridge.

So far we possess no other information about the place of women in the Georgian church and, therefore, we can only venture assumptions with regard to single occasions.<sup>41</sup> Evidence on the kings' place in general and the thrones in particular, as we have seen, is relatively richer. Though it remains rather sparse and belongs to different periods, its homogeneity suggests consistency of the tradition of allotting to kings a special place in the church near the sanctuary. On the other hand, specific occasions conditioned by various circumstances could cause another part of the church to be allocated to the king. In certain cases, he could be provided space in a gallery and, accordingly, the queen's area could be arranged in a different place. Such examples, confirmed by written sources, can be observed in several churches in Constantinople such as the Church of the Virgin at Chalcostrate, the Church of St. Mokios, the Church of St. Apostles, and the Church of St. Sergius and St. Bacchus. As Constantine Porphyrogenitus says in his *Book of Ceremonies*, in these churches the emperor attends the liturgy at the space provided for him in a gallery, while the queen stands on the left side at ground level in three of these churches (relevant information about the Church of St. Sergius and St. Bacchus has not survived).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> L. Rcheulishvili, *Tighva*, p. 45.

<sup>41</sup> For the women's place in the Byzantine church in details see: T. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, pp. 130-134; R. J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia, Architecture, Structure and Liturgy*, pp. 229-230; R. Taft, "Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When and Why?" pp. 49-60; A.-M. Talbot, *Women and Religious Life in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> T. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, pp. 132-133.