Irakli Tezelashvili

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

Institute of the History and Theory of Art

Intercession Through a Dialogue:

Depicting the *Virgin Paraklesis* in Medieval Georgia

Among the numerous iconographic variations of the Virgin Mary — Mother of God (Theotokos) — those of Constantinopolitan origin had an immense impact on Byzantine world and its culturual neighbours, including medieval Georgia.[1]

Icons of the Virgin, venerated in the famous shrines of Constantinople, defined the general picture of the Marian iconography in Byzantium. Among such images the *Virgin of the Intercession* took one of the major roles. It depicts supplicating Mother of God in the pose of intercession, with her hands extended towards imagined or depicted figure of Christ and, therefore, acts as one of the most powerful expressions of the Mother of God's petitioning for the salvation of mankind. The original of this, now lost, icon was kept in Constantinople in the chapel of Hagia Soros (The Holy Girdle) of the Chalkoprateia basilica or the Blachernaie palace (the question of chapel's location remains problematical) and is more widely known and referred as *Hagiosoritissa*.[2]

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[1] For the general issues about the veneration and imagery of the Theotokos in Byzantium, see: Maria Vassilaki ed., *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Athens: Abbeville, 2000); O. E. Jetingof, *Obraz Bogomateri. Ocherki vizantijskoj ikonografii XI–XIII vv.* (Moskva: Progress-Tradicija, 2000); Maria Vassilaki ed., *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Leslie Brubaker & Mary B. Cunningham eds, *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011); Leena Mari Peltomaa, Andreas Külzer, & Pauline Allen eds, *Presbeia Theothokou: The Intercessory Role of Mary across Times and Places in Byzantium (4th–9th Century)* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschafen, 2015).

[2] "Virgin Hagiosoritissa", *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 3: 2171; "Agiosoritissa", *Pravoslavnaja Jenciklopedija* 1: 254.

Popularity and widespreadness of the iconography of Hagiosoritissa both in monumental painting and in minor arts of the Byzantine world stimulated an appearance of the other variations of this type. Among such variations the theme of *Virgin Paraklesis* (Intercessor) acted as one of the innovations from the middle Byzantine period. A Paraklesis was, in fact, a more elaborate variation — it depicts the Virgin of the intercession with an unrolled scroll in one of her hands.[3] This scroll contains the customary text of her petition, addressed to Christ for the salvation of mankind, with the answers from Christ, thus forming the dialogue, however, some other variations of the text did also exist (including petitioning for the donor). There is no general evidence that this iconographic type derived from a Constantinopolitan original icon and, therefore, it is considered to be an amplified version of Hagiosoritissa. The type of the Virgin Paraklesis became extremely popular from the 12th century in the church decoration programmes and in minor arts of the Byzantine world.[4]

Georgia, as the easternmost neighbour of the Byzantine world, naturally embraced the cult of the Virgin Mary after the Christianization. Moreover, consideration of the country as a special place, destined for the unfulfilled missionary deed of the Virgin Mary, did find a place in the local narration of the conversion and formed a significant part in the country's ideological self-reflection afterwards.[5] The local adoption of Marian iconography happened gradually, however by the 10th century, most of the iconographic variations of the Virgin were already present in all mediums of medieval Georgian art.[6]

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[3] "Virgin Paraklesis", *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 3: 2177; "Paraklisis", *Pravoslavnaja Jenciklopedija* 54: 557–8 (with previous bibliography); Ivan M. Djordjević, Miodrag Marković, "On the Dialogue Relationship Between the Virgin and Christ in East Christian Art", *Zograf* 28 (2000/01), 13–48.

[4] Ivan M. Djordjević, Miodrag Marković, "On the Dialogue Relationship Between the Virgin and Christ in East Christian Art", 13–48; V. D. Sarabjanov, *Spaso-Preobrazhenskij sobor Mirozhskogo monastyrja* (Moskva: Severnyj Palomnik, 2010), 188, 190, Ill. 165–6; Annemarie Weyl Carr, Andréas Nicolaïdès eds, *Asinou across Time: Studies in the Architecture and Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Cyprus* [Dumbarton Oaks Studies XLIII] (Washington DC: Harvard University Press, 2012), 85–8, 155–7ff.

[5] For a general overview of the veneration of the Theotokos in Medieval Georgia, see several articles from the materials of the conference "The Veneration of the Virgin Mary in the Orthodox Church", published in *Logos* 8 (2014) and Edisher Chelidze, *Martlmadidebuli khat'i* (Tbilisi, 2020), 311–80 (both should be read with caution).

[6] For the Marian imagery in medieval Georgia, see: Zaza Skhirtladze, "Apocryphal Cycle of the Virgin in Medieval Georgian Murals. Preliminary Observations", in Ivan Stević ed., *ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ. Collection of Papers Dedicated to the 40th Anniversary of the Institute for Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade* (Belgrade, 2012), 103–18; Mariam Didebulidze, "ghmrtismshoblis gamosakhvis t'raditsia shua sauk'uneebis kartul khelovnebashi", *Logos* 8 (2014), 224-32; Nina Chichinadze, *Khat': k'ult'i da khelovneba (kartuli khat'ts'eris ist'oriidan)* [modernulobis ist'oria da teoria 5] (Tbilisi: Ilia State University Press, 2014), 100–11ff; Nana Burchuladze, *kartuli khat'ebi* (Tbilisi: Karchkhadze Publishing, 2016), 63–109.

The quintessence of this adoption is the hexaptych in the monastery of St Catherine in Sinai, which was painted by local Georgian intellectual and painter, Hieromonk Iovane (John) Tokhabi (late 11th–early 12th century). The upper part of the main wing of this hexaptych contains icon-like depictions of all the major venerated Marian icons of Constantinople.[7] This phenomenon leads to the conclusion that most iconographic types of Virgin Mary were meticulously copied, labeled, and understood in the artistic tradition of medieval Georgia. Naturally, the active cultural contacts of Georgia with the Byzantine world led to the appearance of all the metropolitan images of the Virgin in local tradition, and it may not be surprising to find images of the Virgin Paraklesis, which undoubtfully had a Constantinopolitan origin, in the monumental painting and minor arts of medieval Georgia.

Remarkably, a little has been written about the features of the Paraklesis in Georgian artistic tradition. In this essay, I will try to collect all the known examples of this iconographic type from medieval Georgia and discuss them in the frame of a general picture of the Byzantine Marian imagery in connection with the local attitudes and traditions.

Earliest securely dated example of Virgin Parklesis was preserved in the principal church of the Oshki monastery (nowadays Turkey) — the magnificent church of St John the Baptist. Constructed in 963–76 at an enormous expense, it was a major royal foundation and an ambitious project of two ruling brothers from Tao branch of Bagrationi dynasty — Bagrat IV Eristavteristavi and David III Magistros (future King of Tao and Kuropalates).[8]

The image of Paraklesis was preserved on the octagonal sculpted column in the southern-western open gallery (a type of narthex?) of the church; it was included in the relief scene of the Deesis, which occupied an upper section the western side of the column (Fig. 1).[9] Some parts of the column including the

[7] Zaza Skhirtladze, *Sinas mtis ekvsk'aredi khat'i. lit'urgik'uli k'alendari bizant'iur da kartul sakhvit t'raditsiashi* (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 2020) (forthcoming).

[8] There is an enormous amount of literature about the Oshki complex; for the latest information, see Zaza Skhirtladze, "The Oldest Murals at Oshki Church: Byzantine Church Decoration and Georgian Art", *Eastern Christian Art* 7 (2010), 97–133 (with the most of the earlier bibliography).

[9] For the description and analysis of the pillar's iconographic program, see: Ekvtime Takaishvili, *Arheologicheskaja jekspedicija v juzhnye provincii Gruzii* (Tbilisi, 1952), 51–3 reprinted in idem, *Collected Works* 1 (Tbilisi: Artanuji, 2017), 184–7; David Winfield, "Some Early Medieval Figure Sculpture from North-East Turkey", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XXXI (1968), 45–57; Wachtang Djobadze, "Four Deesis Themes in the Church of Oški", *Oriens Christianus* 72 (1988), 168–82 reprinted in idem, *Oshkis tadzari* (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1991), 54–66; idem, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historic Tao, Klarjet'i, and Šavšet'i* [Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archaologie 17] (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), 105–9; Natela Aladashvili, "Vosmigrannaja kolonna v juzhnoj galeree Oshkskogo hrama", *Ars Georgica* 10-A (1991), 69–81; Leila Khuskivadze,

Deesis scene and an orans figure of St Nino were lost in Autumn 2000, when an unknown person deliberately destroyed or stole these sculptures, thus leaving the pillar damaged and decapitated. The sculpted Deesis represented a typical trimorphon with a central figure of Christ with interceding Virgin and St John the Baptist by his side, but it also included some unusual features, most intriguing of which was the unrolled narrow scroll in the right hand of the Virgin, which resembled the same-type scroll in the left hand of Christ (it is interesting to note that Christ did not hold the open codex). The inscriptions on the scrolls were already illegible to read in 1917 when Ekvtime Takaishvili visited and examined the monument; he only found some traces of the red ink[10] and it seems, that both scrolls must have contained inscriptions in Asomtavruli script, which were written in the red ink. Moreover, a small figure of the donor — Grigol of Oshki ("Oshkeli") — was placed right under this scene and his petitions for the salvation was documented by side his figure in an inscription in red ink, read by Takaishvili: "Christ have mercy on thy servant Grigol". Thus, the scene of a Deesis and an image of the donor/master-builder formed a united composition.

This composition of the Deesis acted as the main scene of the highly sophisticated program of the octagonal column: eschatological, triumphal, and paradisiacal connotations of this program are evident.[11] Therefore, it seems intriguing to consider, what was the meaning of depicting the unrolled scroll in the Virgin's hand. The Deesis per se has a strong eschatological function and therefore, a scroll must have furthermore stressed the intercession role of the petition for salvation. Now lost inscription would have made the function of the scroll clearer in this context. The scroll of the Virgin could have acted as a medium for placing a plea for salvation for the main donor(s) of the church — David III Magistros and his brother Bagrat II Magistros of Tao. The latter variant seems the most suitable for the inscription, because there is no other mention of the main donor(s) on the column and taking into consideration, that the pillar formed some kind of autonomous mini-program within the rich, sophisticated, and highly intriguing decoration program of the church, where literally every chance was used to manifest the devotion, piety, and the glory of the donor(s), it seems quite unlikely that their names would have been left outside of the column. Therefore, it is more plausible to assume that the scroll of Virgin on Oshki column contained some kind of prayer for the salvation of the main donor(s) of the church.

"Oshkis skulpturul "vedrebat'a" t'aviseburebebis shesaxeb", *Georgian Antiquities* 3 (2003), 62–4; Natela Aladashvili, "Oshkis tadzris skulpturuli dekori da misi programis damokidebuleba monastris tanadroul istoriul vit'arebast'an", *Academia* 6-7 (2006), 37–9; Tamar Dadiani, Tamar Khundadze, Ekaterine Kvachatadze, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture* (Tbilisi: Chubinashvili Centre, 2017), 127.

[10] Ekvtime Takaishvili, *Arheologicheskaja jekspedicija v juzhnye provincii Gruzii*, 51.

[11] Leila Khuskivadze, "Oshkis skulpturul "vedrebat'a" t'aviseburebebis shesaxeb", 62–3.

Next example is preserved in one of the rock-cut churches of the Tsamebuli branch of the monastery of St John the Baptist at the Gareja desert — a vast monastic center in the southern-eastern part of the country. Unlike the Oshki monastery, which, as noted, was a principal royal and state foundation of Tao-Klarjeti principality, Tsamebuli chapel seems to be related to monastic art and devotion towards simplicity and, therefore, the quality of the frescoes is not as high. Only the apse of the chapel was frescoed.[12] It depicts a Deesis-Vision (Fig. 2) with enthroned Christ in the centre and interceding figures of the Virgin and St John the Baptist by his side. Two figures of tetramorphs are placed between the central three figures of the composition. Both the Virgin (Fig. 3) and St John the Baptist hold in their right hands unrolled scrolls, which have traces of black and burgundy inscriptions in the Asomtavruli script. Mary's scroll has preserved only several graphemes (Fig. 4): ᲮᲣᲤᲝ | ᲚᲣᲤ | ᲖᲚᲜ | ᲤᲝᲥᲖ | ᲚᲣᲮᲣ | — ჩემო | სოფლისა|თუის | გევვ, which can be reconstructed as [ძეო და ღმერთო] ჩემო, სოფლისათუის გევვ[დრები] = **[My Son and God] I pray thee for the World.** The scroll is damaged beyond this point — all the plaster is lost; Initially, it must have contained at least fifteen lines (likewise the scroll of St John the Baptist) and would present a long text of the prayer of the Virgin towards Christ but it is unlikely that there would be a place for Christ's answers on the scroll. Overall, this composition forms a clear vision for the further eschatological sense of the Second Coming of Christ and it would be a suitable theme for a monastic chapel, which may have acted as a funerary place for the monks. While the dating of this fresco composition on the stylistic and iconographical grounds to the second half of the 10th century is generally acceptable, it can be also supported with the paleographical features of the inscriptions.

Further example of the Paraklesis is preserved on the silver book cover of the luxurious Georgian four gospels manuscript (Щук. 760) from the State Historical Museum, Moscow. A detailed and extended colophon, which is placed at the end of the codex, not only securely dates it to 1070 but also mentions the donors and the scribe of the manuscript.[13] It was scribed and painted by certain Hieromonk Theodore, a

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[12] Givi Gaprindashvili, "1089 ts'lis ts'arts'era mits'isdzvris shesakheb garejis ts'amebulis udabnos 'kharit'onis kuabidan'", *Matsne: ist'oriis, arkeologiis, etnograpiisa da khelovnebis ist'oriis seria* 2 (1976), 178; Aneli Volskaja, "Rannie rospisi v Garedzhi", Offprint from *IV Mezhdunarodnyj simpozium po gruzinskomu iskusstvu* (Tbilisi, 1983), 5; idem, "Rospisi peshhernyh monastyrej David-Garedzhi", in Konstantine Pitskhelauri red., *Gareji. K'akhetis arkeologiuri eksp'editsiis shromebi* VIII (Tbilisi, 1988), 138–9; "Rock-cut Monasteries in Gareji", in Nikoloz Vacheishvili ed., *National Cultural Heritage Program 1997. Annual Report* (Tbilisi: Open Society Georgia Foundation; Diogene, 1997), 40–1, pls 46–7, xxxvi–xxxvii; Marina Bulia, Aneli Volskaya, Dimitri Tumanishvili, Teimuraz Jojua, *Davitgareji Monasteries: Natlismtsemeli, Bertubani* (Tbilisi: Chubinashvili Centre, 2010), 64–5.

[13] The manuscript was initially published by Elina Dobrynina and Irina Sterligova but without the mentioning of the colophon (Je. N. Dobrynina, "Neizvestnaja gruzinskaja licevaja rukopis' iz gosudarstvennogo istoricheskogo muzeja (Shhuk. 760)", *Hrizograf* 1 (2003), 259–307; I. A. Sterligova, "Chekannyj oklad gruzinskogo tetraevangelija iz

former monk of the Gareja desert, in the Romana monastery, Constantinople for the youngest member of the ruling family of the Kakheti-Hereti kingdom Abaz, brother of the King Aghsarthan Kuropalates. While the upper cover of the book cover contains a standard image of Crucifix, the lower has an interesting composition, which depicts a combination of Majestas Domini with Deesis (Fig. 5). In this scene both the Virgin and St John the Baptist are inclined towards the enthroned figure of Christ and withheld unrolled scrolls with Greek inscriptions. The Greek inscription on the Virgin's scroll is an abridged version of the customary text of the Paraklesis.

The Virgin Paraklesis was placed in an intriguing apse programme of the Tbeti Cathedral. This major church of Šavšeti principality served as a cathedral for Bishops of Tbeti who acted as secular and clerical governors of the region. Cathedral contained an interesting fresco decoration, which was destroyed after the locals blew up the church in 1960.[14] Visual material, which is kept at various museums, state, and private archives allows us to reconstruct the scheme of apse decoration: it contained a two-tiered scene of a splendid Majestas Domini, which was enriched with the third register of the row of the holy bishops (Fig. 6). The second register of the scheme contained figures of twelve apostles and the centre of this scene had a rather unusual setting: it depicted interceding figures of the Virgin and St John Baptist with unrolled scrolls. Thus, while keeping the traditional bizonal arrangement of Majestas Domini with the central figures of Mary and John at the centre of the second zone (which was a characteristic feature of a local painting school), the main painter of the apse shifted emphasis from the sense of theophany to more clearly expressed eschatological connotations. This change in apse programme started to occur in the late 10th century (e.g. cases of Kataula and Ipkhi)[15] in the various parts of the country and would have formed the so-called *Deesis-Vision* — an extremely popular iconographic theme for apse schemes in medieval Georgia.[16] In Tbeti, interceding figures of the Theotokos and Forerunner per se could have achieved such change, but it was furthermore elaborated with the inscriptions on their unrolled scrolls. Unfortunately, these inscriptions,

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gosudastvennogo istoricheskogo muzeja (Shhuk. 760)", *ibid,* 308–20). It was subsequently published by Darejan Kldiashvili with the full text of the colophon (Darejan Kldiashvili, "Gareja — K'onst'ant'inop'oli. Teodore Garejelis mier Romanas monast'ris kartul sk'rip't'oriumshi 1070 ts'els gadats'erili otkhtavi", *Georgian Antiquities* 7–8 (2005), 143– 68). It was also included in the catalogue of Georgian manuscripts outside Georgia (The Georgian Manuscript Book Abroad, *Compiled by Nestan Chkhikvadze, Maia Karanadze, Vladimer Kekelia, and Lela Shatirishvili* (Tbilisi: Kekelidze National Center of Manuscripts, 2018), 149).

[14] Irakli Tezelashvili, *Frescoes of the Tbeti Cathedral* (forthcoming).

[15] Zaza Skhirtladze, *Otkhta ek'lesiis presk'ebi* (Tbilisi, 2009), 110–6.

[16] Tania Velmans, "L'image de la Déisis dans les églises de Géorgie et dans le reste du monde byzantin", *Cahiers Archéologiques* 29 (1980–81), 59–90f = idem, *L'art médiéval de l'Orient chrétien, recueil d'études* (Sofia, 2002)[2], 48–62.

which could have been read even after the blowing of the cathedral, were not documented in details. The only detailed photograph of the Virgin from Tbeti, which was published by Nicole Thierry (Fig. 7),[17] allows to reconstruct several graphemes on her scroll: ჯႼႭ [-]. — ძეო [-] — **My Son [-]**. From this evidence, we can assume, that the Virgin's scroll in Tbeti contained the standard, local Georgian variation of the Paraklesis text, which can be also witnessed in different variations in the abovementioned Tsamebuli chapel and, in the frescoes of Pirghebuli and Udabno monastery churches. The dating of the destroyed frescoes of the Tbeti cathedral remains open for discussion.[18] Both iconographic and stylistic characteristics of these frescoes allow us to date this painting to the last quarter of the 11th century and connect it to the donation of a local anonymous bishop.

While in Tbeti the inclusion of the Paraklesis in the apse scheme served for shifting the meaning of the programme towards eschatological context, in Pirghebuli it was explicitly placed in the context of the Second Coming of Christ. The main church of the Pirghebuli monastery, located in the southern part of the country, was frescoed twice.[19] The first layer of the murals, which can be seen in the altar, must be dated to the early 12th century. The second layer, to which the image of Paraklesis belongs, can be asserted to the 1180s — it is a donation of Rusudan, sister of King George III, and aunt to Queen Tamar. A monumental image of the Second Coming of Christ was placed on the western wall of the church, which, in the center contained an image of the trimorphic Deesis. Mary is depicted on the left side of Christ with an unrolled scroll in her hand. The scroll contains a text written in 11 lines with Asomtavruli script (Fig. 8): ※ჭ: ჯႼႭ : ႦႠ : | ႬᲢႭ : ႾႳ�᳄Ⴍ : ႢᲕᲔႧᲠᲔႡႨ : ᲡᲝᲤᲚᲘᲡᲐᲗᲥᲘᲡ : ᲨᲔᲘᲬᲧᲐᲚᲓᲔႬ : ႡႠ|ႪᲝᲢ�᳄ᲕᲘ|ᲥᲮᲬᲘ : ᲨᲔ|ႬႨ > — ქ. ჭ, ძეო და ღ(მერ)თო ჩემო, გვედრები სოფლისათჳს, შეიწყალდენ დაბადებულნი შენი **[O, My Son and God, I pray thee for the World, save those created by thee].** The painter of the Pirghebuli frescoes thought it necessary to add this petition of the Virgin to her image in the context of the Second Coming. Thus, the programme of the church gained explicit eschatological connotation, which was achieved by the antithesis of the two Deesis images — one in the apse (in a variation of a Deesis-Vision) and the second on the western wall. This arrangement seems to be characteristic of the programmes of the Georgian monumental painting of the 12th and 13th centuries. Such assembling of the programme may also

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[17] Nicole et Michel Thierry, "La cathedrale de T'beti. Nouvelles donnees", *Cahiers Archéologiques* 47 (1999), Fig. 32.

[18] Mariam Didebulidze, "shua sauk'uneebis kartuli k'edlis mkhat'vrobis dzeglebi t'ao-k'larjetshi", *Georgian Antiquities* 19 (2016), 58–9 (with previous bibliography).

[19] Nodar Bakht'adze, Nana K'up'rashvili, Lado Mirianashvili, Konrad Zehnder, Temo Jojua, *P'irghebulis monast'eri: 1989 da 2002–2003 ts'lebis k'omp'leksuri eksp'editsiebis shedegebi* (Tbilisi, 2005), 266–7. In this publication layers of the fresco decoration are dated mistakenly to the early and late 13th century.

reflect the presumable funerary function and private character of the church — a phenomenon that can be overseen in the donations and foundations of Georgian nobility from the second half of the 12th century.

The composition which depicts Paraklesis in the context of conchial Deesis is preserved once again in the Gareja Desert. The refectory of the Udabno monastery was frescoed several times.[20] Initially, it was painted in the second half of the 11th century, presumably with the support of the same high-ranking members of the ruling family of the Kakheti-Hereti Kingdom, which commissioned Four Gospels of Theodore Garejeli. Some parts of the refectory were repainted in the second half of the 13th century. The northern wall of the refectory contains a niche of the abbot, which has an apse like shape. This niche is the only part of the refectory which was repainted more than twice. The conch of this apse contains a two-layered image of the Deesis with enthroned Christ in the centre with figures of the Virgin and St John the Baptist with unrolled scrolls (Fig. 9). The iconography of the scene in both layers is the same, but strikingly, in the second layer unrolled scrolls were added to the figures of Mary (Fig. 9) and John. Mary's scroll contains a text written with white (?) paint in Asomtavruli script in 12 lines (Fig. 10): ꭰꭼ� — ძეო და ღ(მერ)თო ჩ(ემ)ო, სოფლისათ(ჳ)ს გევედრები. ჴ, დედაო ჩემო კაცთათ(ჳ)ს მოვკ(უ)ედ მე და ძე ღ(მრთი)სა ეძიებს სხუასა [O, My Son and God, I pray thee for the World. O, My Mother, I died for the men and/but the Son of God seeks for other].[21] Virgin's Paraklesis from the Udabno refectory once again shows its strong connection with eschatological connotations of the Deesis.

After discussing all the known and preserved examples of the Virgin's Paraklesis from Medieval Georgia,[22] it is noteworthy to consider some general observations. It is undoubtfully that the concept and

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[20] Zaza Skhirtladze, Antony Eastmond, "Udabno Monastery in Georgia: Innovation, Conservation and the Reinterpretation of Medieval Art", *Iconographica* VII (2008), 35–6 (with complete previous bibliography); Marina Bulia, Aneli Volskaya, Dimitri Tumanishvili, *Davitgareji Monasteries: Laura, Udabno* (Tbilisi: Chubinashvili Centre, 2008), 92–3.

[21] The text of the inscription was initially published by Shalva Amiranashvili (Shalva Amiranashvili, *Istorija gruzinskoj monumental'noj zhivopisi* I (Tbilisi, 1957), 58) and afterward, it was reprinted in several works without any corrections (cf.: Aneli Volskaja, *Rospisi srednevekovyh trapeznyh Gruzii* (Tbilisi, 1974), 60; Ekaterine Gedevanishvili, "Udabnos monast'ris sat'rap'ezos sats'inamdzghvro nishis mokhat'ulobisatvis", *ist'oriisa da etnologiis inst'it'ut'is shromebi* X–XI (2010/11), 316).

[22] The Virgin Paraklesis is also included in the apse programme of the Zarati church Sts Cyricus and Julitta (16th century). The text on the Virgin's scroll contains the customary prophetic text (Iuza Khuskivadze, *Zarati. Church of Sts Cyricus and Julitta* (Tbilisi: Chubinashvili Centre, 2008), 7) which refers to the incarnation of Christ, and therefore it does not have any connection with the interceding text of the Paraklesis.

iconography of Paraklesis came to Georgia from Byzantium via works of minor art and other suitable models. Nevertheless, Georgian tradition has not adopted a traditional "Byzantine" placing of this iconographic type in the church decoration system (easternmost piers of the altar or the walls of the entrance in the narthex).[23] Subsequently, we do not witness the Byzantine approach in function and form of this iconographic theme: it does not take the shape of the framed icons, which would have frequently been considered as the part of the templon's program, nor does it form the so-called "Spatial Deesis" with the separate panels of the Virgin and Christ as it is presented in numerous examples from medieval Byzantine/Balkan and Russian churches. However, the content and meaning of the iconographic theme remain intact: it was designed and called to furtherly stress, underline, assist, and intensify the self-sufficient supplication of the Virgin Mary with textually expressed dialogue with Christ. Thus, the use of the imported theme of Paraklesis in medieval Georgia stayed in line with the general Byzantine context, however, adopted it to the local preferences for certain iconographic themes.

The examples of Tsamebuli, Tbeti, and Udabno manifest, that local Georgian preference was more inclined to place an image of the Virgin Paraklesis in the context of the variations of the Deesis (or in the case of Pirghebuli monastery — in the Deesis inserted in the Second Coming composition) in the apse scheme with the symmetrical and corresponding figure of St John Baptist. Such an approach can also be witnessed in the works of minor arts as seen in the example of Oshki pillar relief or the composition from the book cover of the Four Gospels of Theodore Garejeli. This attitude must have been related to the extreme popularity of the Deesis theme in medieval Georgia.

The text of the inscription of the Virgin from Tsamebuli, Tbeti, Pirghebuli, and Udabno frescoes[24] furthermore testify that the Georgian tradition did not copy or translate Greek original of the Paraklesis text (unlike e.g. Serbian examples, where Slavonic tradition closely translates the original). The standard Greek

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[23] Elena Vinogradova and Andrej Vinogradov reconstruct an image of the Virgin Paraklesis in the murals of Lykhne church and Mokvi Cathedral (both were (re)painted in the 1360s) in the occupied by Russia Abkhazeti region (E.A. Vinogradova, A. Ju. Vinogradov, "O date fresok Mokvskogo sobora" in O. V. Nikiforova red., *Rossija — Gruzija. Dialog kul'tur* [Trudy Central'nogo muzeja drevnerusskoj kul'tury i iskusstva im. Andreja Rubleva XI] (Moskva, 2015), 50). Only the lower part of Mary's figure remains in Lykhne, but even in this state, the pose of the figure does hint that it was an image of the Paraklesis. This does not seem unusual if we consider the Byzantinizing character of the Lykhne and Mokvi frescoes.

[24] Customary Greek text is also inscribed on the Virgin's scroll on of the icons from the Iveron monastery, which is presumably connected to the Georgian donors, however, the icon belongs to local Athonite-Cretan painting school and does not have connections with Georgian artistic tradition. The icon and the text on the scroll were recently published by Zaza Skhirtladze (see Zaza Skhirtladze, "mghvdelmonazoni mark'os Kartveli — atonis ivironis monast'ris mtavari ek'lesiis mkhat'vari, *gelati metsnierebata ak'ademiis shromebi* VI (2020), 325–7.).

text of the Paraklesis, which later was included in the manual book of Dionysios of Fourna, did not have a unified recension, however, all the variations of this text strongly resemble one another. The text forms a dialogue between the Virgin Mary and Christ and consists of nine verses which include five petitions of the Virgin and four responses from Christ. The typical text begins with Mary's plea to Christ to receive her entreaty and after receiving a positive answer from Christ, that sinners would get salvation, she thanks him.[25] Georgian text does have a similar synopsis as the Greek original, however, it does not appear to be a strict word to word translation, characteristic e.g. for the literary traditions of the Gelati theological school. Moreover, in most of the cases, this text does not even take the form of the dialogue. The examples of Tsamebuli and Pirghebuli inscriptions present only the Virgin's plea to Christ to save his creation but omit Christ's responses. Only the scroll from Udabno does contain a full dialogue between Mary and Christ, however, even in this case, the conversation takes an abridged form (it consists of two parts with the Virgin's plea acting as a starting point of dialogue and Christ's response as the end of it, thus leaving out Mary's gratitude, which was an ending point for the most of the Greek and Slavonic versions). Subsequently, Georgian tradition not only adopted the iconography of the Virgin Paraklesis to local iconographic traditions but interpreted the text of the Paraklesis to make its synopsis more understandable for the local context.

Overviewing all the known depictions of the Virgin Paraklesis from medieval Georgian art, which only consists of up to ten examples, clearly shows that this iconographic type of the Theotokos was not the most popular Marian image in Georgia. However, the local tradition preserved quite early examples (Oshki, Tsamebuli) of such imagery predating some of the earliest examples of this iconographic type in Byzantium. Analysis of the Georgian version of text of the scroll manifests that dialogue original was perceived to present main meaning of the text without exact translation, thus local versions of this text should be added to the variations of the Paraklesis text.

Inserting the image of the Paraklesis in original local iconographic programmess and interpreting freely the text of the scroll makes discussed Georgian material an important local witness to this major Byzantine iconographic type. Therefore, it should be considered as the local contribution to the general issues of the Marian iconography in Byzantium.

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[25] The Greek text of the Virgin Paraklesis is analyzed in details in Andreas Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken* 1 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschafen, 2009), 329–41 and Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "The Metrical Inscriptions in the Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa", in Annemarie Weyl Carr, Andréas Nicolaïdès eds, *Asinou across Time: Studies in the Architecture and Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Cyprus,* 85–8 (with previous bibliography). Sources for this text remain unidentified and disputed.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. The Oshki Monastery, Church of St John the Baptist, Octagonal Colum. Deesis. 963–76 [After David Winfield, "Some Early Medieval Figure Sculpture from North-East Turkey", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XXXI (1968), Fig. 20$_a$].

Fig. 2. Gareja Desert, The Monastery of St John the Baptist, Tsamebuli Branch Chapel, Deesis-Vision in the apse, 10th c. (Photograph: Neli Chakvetadze).

Fig. 3-4. Gareja Desert, The Monastery of St John the Baptist, Tsamebuli Branch Chapel, Deesis-Vision in the apse, The Virgin Paraklesis, Detail of the Scroll, 10th c. (Photograph: Neli Chakvetadze).
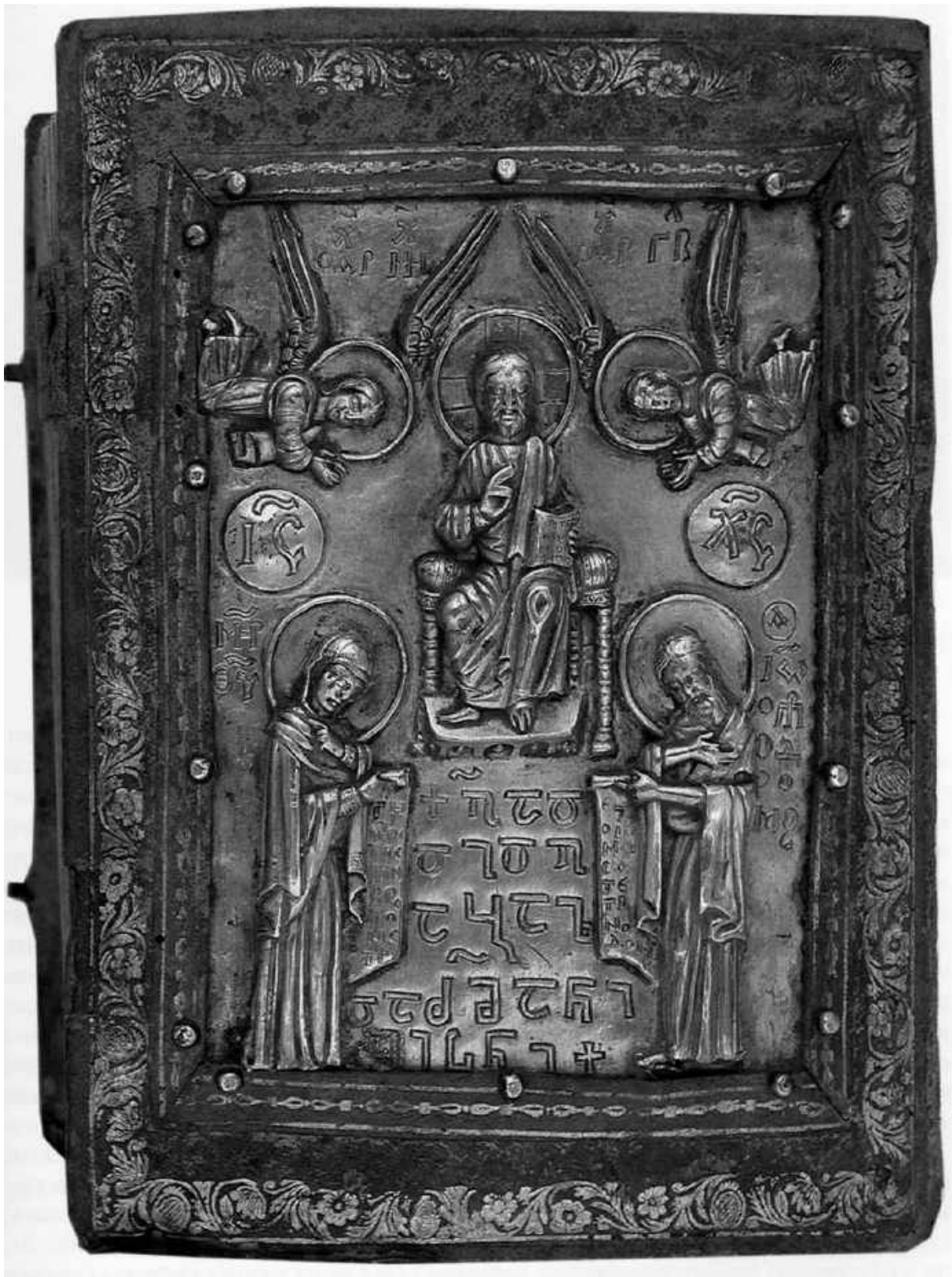
Fig. 5. Moscow, State Historical Museum. Four Gospels of Theodore Garejeli, Constantinople (Щук. 760), The Lower Cover, 1070 [After I. A. Sterligova, "Chekannyj oklad gruzinskogo tetraevangelija iz gosudastvennogo istoricheskogo muzeja (Shhuk. 760)", *Hrizograf* 1 (2003), il. 2].
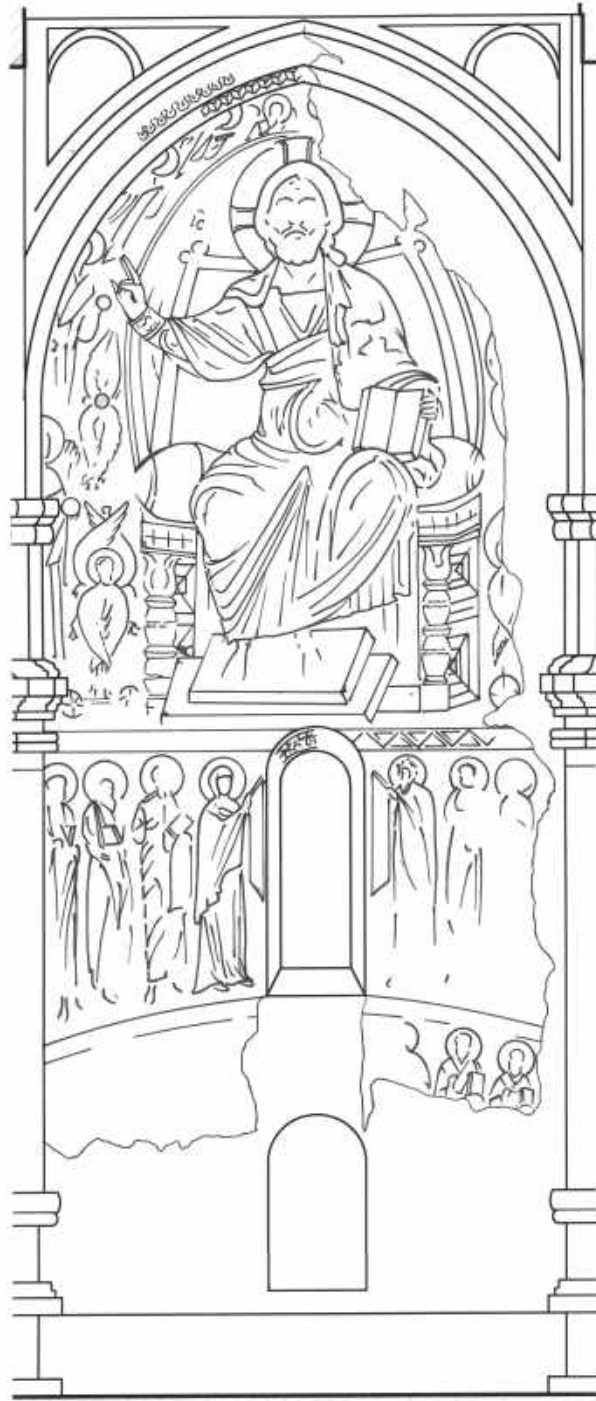
Fig. 6. Tbeti, Cathedral of the Apostles (Apse Scheme: Irakli Tezelashvili).

Fig. 7. Tbeti, Cathedral of the Apostles, The Virgin Paraklesis in the apse, Second Half of the 11th Century [After Nicole et Michel Thierry, "La cathedrale de T'beti. Nouvelles donnees", *Cahiers Archéologiques* 47 (1999), Fig. 32].

Fig. 8. The Pirghebuli Monastery, Church of the Virgin, The Virgin Paraklesis from the Western Wall, Detail of the Scroll, 12th c. (Photograph: Neli Chakvetadze).

Fig. 9. Gareja Desert, Udabno Monastery, Refectory, Abbot's Niche, Deesis, 13th c. (Photograph: Neli Chakvetadze).

Fig. 9-10. Gareja Desert, Udabno Monastery, Refectory, Abbot's Niche, Deesis in the apse, The Virgin Paraklesis, Detail of the Scroll, 13th c. (Photograph: Neli Chakvetadze).