

The Female Architectural Patronage in Late Medieval Georgia: Queen Mariam Dadiani

This paper studies the life and architectural patronage of Queen Mariam Dadiani, one of the most prominent female patrons in the Medieval history of Georgia. Like many women in the Medieval world, Mariam was a subject of political marriage, no less than three times. In 1634, after her marriage to King Rostom of Kartli (R 1633-1658), a Safavid-appointed ruler, she became the queen consort. Mariam not only retained Christianity after her marriage to the Muslim king, but also managed to have the same rights as he. Written sources and donor inscriptions credit her with constructing and repairing several churches in the kingdom.

After Rostom's death, Mariam Dadiani, through her marriage to Vakhtang V Shahnava (R 1658-1675), another Muslim king of Kartli, maintained her status as Queen and continued her agency. She acted as a patron during her Muslim husbands' lifetimes, which can be explained by her powerful personality in particular, and by the cultural tradition and political situation of Medieval Georgia in general.

Although Mariam has received the special attention of scholars as a commissioner of the arts, there is still need for extensive research on the subject. Focusing on her extensive building activity, this paper provides new insights into the patronage of royal female founders in late Medieval Georgia.

Review of Female Architectural Patronage in Medieval and Late Medieval Georgia¹

Female commissioners of architecture were known in Georgia from the early Middle Ages. The earliest inscriptions mentioning female donors, Azarukht and Themestia, belong to Bolnisi Cathedral (478-494) and the Jvari major church in Mtskheta (586-605) respectively.² Both inscriptions are carved above the entrances and are related to the liturgical arrangement of women's place in the early churches of eastern Georgia.³ The first

¹ The paper only discusses the building activity of queen consorts and other female members of the royal families. The architectural legacy of the ruling queens Tamar (R. 1184-1213) and Rusudan (R. 1222-1245) is a subject of another study.

² G. Chubinashvili, Bolnisskii Sion, *Izvestia Instituta Iazika, Istorii i Materialnoi Kulturi Imeni N. Marra*, IX, Tbilisi, 1940, p. 7-61; V. Beridze, *Kartuli Kurotmodzghvrebis Istorია*, t. II, p. 70; G. Tchoubinachvili, *I Monumenti del tipo di Ġvari*, Milano, 1970, pp. 95-96.

³ Separation of men and women during church services in early Medieval Georgia followed the practice of segregation introduced in Syria as early as the third century, and in Constantinople from the fourth century. See; W. Mayer, *The Dynamics of Liturgical Space: Aspects of the Interaction between John Chrysostom and his Audiences*, *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, 111, 1997, pp. 104-115; R. F. Taft, *Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When and Why?* *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 52, 1998, pp. 25-87. For Georgia see N. Chitishvili, *Samrevlo Sivrtsis Danawevreba Aghmosavlet Sakartvelos Adreul Eklesiebshi (Winaswaruli Mosazrebebi)*, forthcoming in *Georgian Antiquities*, 23, 2003. Regulations were different in early Medieval Europe. See G.

known case of a noblewoman acting like an independent commissioner of a whole building dates back to 777, when Queen Debora completed and consecrated Sioni Cathedral in the city of Samshilde. Being the representative of the local *Pitiakhsh* (lord) family, she was legitimate to act as an independent patron as early as the eighth century.⁴

The building legacy of Medieval Georgian noblewomen involves exclusively religious structures.⁵ Throughout the centuries, they founded monasteries, restored damaged cathedrals and constructed churches and chapels in order to commemorate family members. Their financial independence was secured through dowry and by income from lands.⁶ The size and quality of the constructed buildings varies according to the social status and sufficiency of the donor.

A good example for this kind of disparity can be seen in two twelfth-century monastic churches, both constructed for private purposes in Shida Kartli not far away from each other. The single nave church of the Holy Cross in the village of Lisa was erected and consecrated on the order of the nun Febronia, in order to pray for the safety of her brother captured by the Turks.⁷ To the west, the church has a tower attached, which was used as the nun's cell.⁸ The small size and simple architecture correspond to the modest lifestyle of Febronia.

On the contrary, the Church of the Holy Cross in Tighva Monastery, built in 1152, demonstrates royal ambitions. The founder and donor of the monastery, Queen Consort Tamar, was the daughter of David the Builder, a famous Georgian king who succeeded in uniting the country and making it a dominant regional power. Tamar was married to Shah Manuchehr III, the Muslim ruler of Shirvan. After his death in 1150,⁹ she returned to Georgia, took monastic vows, and spent the rest of her life as a nun in Tighva.¹⁰ The church of the monastery in Tighva is an inscribed cross in plan, with a dome resting on two freestanding piers in the west and projections of the apse walls in the east (Fig. 1). There is an upper gallery running around the west arm of the building. It was accessed through a door cut in its northern wall, which was connected by means of a bridge with the two-storey residence of the queen (now in ruins) standing 3.5 m northwest of the church. This enabled Tamar to attend the church service without entering the main space of the church. Architectural decoration is limited to curved ornamentation around the window on the southern façade and doors on the western and northern façades. The donor inscription is curved above the choir door and could only be read by Tamar herself. The restrained

Muschiol, Men, women and liturgical practice in the early medieval west, *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West, 300-900*, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 199-233.

⁴ Z. Aleksidzé, *Le Nouveau Manuscrit Géorgien Sinaitique N Sin 50*, Louvain, 2001, p. 56.

⁵ Queen Tamar (R. 1184-1213) is the exception. As a ruling queen, it was her direct responsibility to support both secular and religious constructions.

⁶ On the income and finances of Medieval queens and noblewomen, see: J. H. Drell, *Aristocratic Economies: Women and Family*, *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, edited by J. M. Bennett and R. Mazo Karras, Oxford, 2016, pp. 327-340; A. Bárány, *Medieval Queens and Queenship: A Retrospective on Income and Power*, *Annals of Medieval Studies at CEU*, edited by J. Rasson and M. Sággy, vol. 19, 2013, pp. 149-199.

⁷ Z. Aleksidzé, *Le Nouveau Manuscrit Géorgien Sinaitique N Sin 50*, p. 56.

⁸ R. Mepisashvili, V. Tsintsadze, *Arkhitektura Nagornoï Chasti Istoricheskoi Provintsii Gruzii-Shida-Kartli*, Tbilisi, 1975, p. 103-104.

⁹ E. Pakhomov, *Kratkii Kurs Istorii Azerbaidzhan*, Baku, 1923, pp. 30-31; *Istoria Azerbaidzhan*, edited by I. Huseinova, A. Sumbat-Zade, A. Gulieva, E. Tokarjhevski, t. I, Baku, 1958, p. 141.

¹⁰ L. Rtscheulischwili, *Die Klosterkirche in Tigwa. Ein Bau der Tochter des Königs David des Erbauers, der Schirwan-Königin Tamar*, Tbilisi, 1960, pp. 104-106; There is a controversy

decoration, unusual for twelfth-century architecture, well corresponds to the ascetic personality of the former wife of the shah.

In the late Middle Ages, monasteries often became a place of retirement for many noble women in Medieval Georgia. Tinatin Gurieli, the wife of King Levan of Kakheti (R. 1518-1574) was another queen consort who established a monastery, known as Akhali Shuamta, in the 1530s. *Akhali* in Georgian means “new”, and the place was referred to so, so as to distinguish it from Dzveli (i. e. old) Shuamta, a nearby famous early Medieval monastery. According to Georgian chronicles, Tinatin had a dream in her childhood in which a priest asked her to build a church in the name of the Mother of God. There was a white dogwood tree on the future construction site, a sign given to Tinatin to find a proper location. The chronicles continue that a few years later, on the way to their wedding venue in the town of Gremi, Tinatin and King Levan rested in Shuamta, where the future queen saw a white tree. Soon after the marriage, she founded a monastery and started construction of the church in the name of the Khaskhuli icon of the Theotokos with her own money. Tinatin also bought lands and villages and donated them to the monastery. The Georgian Chronicles assert that after giving birth to two sons, she passed away and was laid to rest in Akhali Shuamta at her will¹¹. A deed issued in 1604 states that Tinatin closed the old monastery of Dzveli Shuamta, assembled monks from different places in Akhali Shuamta, and appointed Gabriel Makashvili as its Father Superior.¹² According to the eighteenth-century historian Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi, Tinatin divorced the king, built the monastery and spent the rest of her life as a nun there, while Levan married for a second time.¹³ The last formal document mentioning her as an active queen dates back to 1560.¹⁴ The early-eighteenth Georgian historical report, known as the Paris Chronicle, gives 1591 as the date of her death.¹⁵ Actually, Prince Vakhushti is the only historian to claim that Tinatin became a nun. Other sources assert that she passed away. Thus, Tinatin's life is largely obscure due to the controversial historic sources, but there is no doubt that she was the founder and donor of the monastery and that she intended it as her burial place. The above-mentioned legend ascribes her inspiration to the vision she experienced in her childhood, though it seems that she was motivated not just by the vision. If it was for religious reasons, Tinatin could simply have restored Dzveli Shuamta, a once influential and rich monastery containing three churches from the early Medieval period. Instead, the foundation of a new monastery was an act of the queen's self-assertion, and served as her abode.

Enclosed with a high wall, the Church of the Mother of God stands in the center of a large yard (Fig. 2). It is built of brick and is an inscribed cross in plan.¹⁶ An elevated polygonal drum is supported by two freestanding piers in the west and projections of the apse walls in the east. The walls are decorated with blind arches, small crosses and rhombs, while huge Golgotha Crosses can be seen on the facades of the cross arms. Baguette

¹¹ As King Levan was famous for his adultery, her last wish was not to be buried next to him. Indeed, Levan was interred in the Cathedral of Archangels at Gremi. *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, edited by S. Kaukhchishvili, t. II, Tbilisi, 1959, pp. 353, 492.

¹² *Gruzinskie Tserkovnie Gudjari (Gramoti)*, collected by D. Putrseladze, Tiflis, 1881, p. 86.

¹³ Vakhushti Batonishvili, Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, *kartlis tskhovreba*, t. IV, edited by S. Kaukhchishvili, Tbilisi, 1973, p. 572.

¹⁴ *Opisanie Gruzinskikh Rukopisei Muzeia Gruzii*, collection A, t. IV, collected by Kh. Sharashidze, Tbilisi, 1954, p. 440.

¹⁵ *Chronique Géorgienne*, traduite par M. Brosset, Paris, 1931, p. 25.

¹⁶ On architecture, see: G. Chubinashvili, *Arkitektura Kakhetii*, Tbilisi, 1959, pp. 440-446; V. Beridze, *XVI-XVII Saukuneebis Kartuli Saeklesio Khurotmodzghvreba*, Tbilisi, 1994, pp. 127-130.

moldings run along the angles of the drum. The tops of the windows are also decorated with small crosses. Due to the building material, all architectural elements are recessed. The use of pointed arches and glazed tales for the small crosses and rhombs indicates to the Iranian influence on the sixteenth-century eastern Georgian culture. The church also had an ambulatory and chapels, which were destroyed in the late nineteenth century. The tradition of financing construction in Akhali Shuamta by female representatives of the royal family was continued by the daughter of King Levan, the nun Tekla, who added to the church a chapel in the name of the Archangels in 1597.

The monastery of the Mother of God near the now deserted village of Goruli was founded at the expense of Darejan, the daughter of the Duke of Ksani. In the inscription carved on the tympanum of the southern entrance door of the church, she refers to herself as a lord, which means that she was the patron of the village.¹⁷ The construction started in the reign of King Rostom (R. 1632-1658).¹⁸ During the conservation works conducted in 2018, a gravestone was unearthed in the church marking the grave of Darejan, the daughter of the *Meitar* (king's chief servant), who died in 1663. Most likely, she is the same person as Darejan, the donor of the church mentioned in the above referred inscription. Taking into account that she was alive when the church was completed, one can assume that it happened before 1663, during the reign of King Vakhtang V, also known as Shahnavaz (R. 1658-1675).

The church is a small single nave structure built of roughly cut stone. Smoothly hewn stones are used at the corners, while the conch and vault are constructed of brick (Fig. 3). The entrances and windows are abundantly decorated with ornaments. During the construction process, the design and plan of the building were partially changed. The northern door was walled up, and decorative stones prepared for its frame were used instead to flank the eastern window.¹⁹ Both the donor inscription and the sculptural image on the tombstone representing her in a secular dress, indicate that Darejan did not take monastic vows (Fig. 4). Moreover, the monastery established by her was intended for monks, which is attested to by the fact that Papia, the master builder of the church, addresses “fathers and brothers” in his inscription.²⁰

Financing the restoration of cathedrals seems to be a part of the political agenda and a matter of great honor for the royal women in Medieval Georgia. Queen Rusa, grandmother of King Alexandre I, initiated restoration works on Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta. Built between 1010 and 1029, it was heavily damaged during Tamerlane's devastating

¹⁷ As it can be assumed both from narrative and material sources in Medieval and Late Medieval Georgia, female donors were exclusively noblewomen, unlike Byzantium where peasant women also financed religious structures. On the subject, see: Sh. E. J. Gerstel and S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Female Church Founders: The Agency of the Village Widow in Late Byzantium in Female Founders in Byzantium and Beyond*, Wien, Köln, Weimar, 2011/2012, pp. 195-211.

¹⁸ The inscription also mentions the name of the king in the reign of whom the construction was completed, but it is barely legible because of damage to the surface of the stone. David Muskhelishvili, who visited the church between 1956-1958, read the name as *Giorgi* and identified him with King George XI (R. 1676-1688 and 1703-1709); While exploring the church in 1964, Vakhtang Beridze could not read the end of the inscription; Devi Berdenishvili shares Muskhelishvili's reading. See: D. Muskhelishvili, *Kvemo Kartlis Istoriul-Geografiuli Ekspeditsiis Savele Samushaota (1856-1958) Shedegebi, Sakartvelos Istoriuli Geografiis Krebuli*, I, p. 52, No 12; V. Beridze, *XVI-XVII Saukuneebis Kartuli Saeklesio Khurotmodzghvreba*, pp. 71; D. Bedzenishvili, *Narkvevebi Kvemo Kartlis Istoriuli Geografiidan*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 325.

¹⁹ V. Beridze, *XVI-XVII Saukuneebis Kartuli Saeklesio Khurotmodzghvreba*, pp. 72.

²⁰ D. Khoshtaria, N. Natsvlshvili, D. Tumanishvili, *Mshenebeli Ostatebi Shua Saukuneebis Sakartveloshi*, Tbilisi, 2012, p. 253.

campaign in 1400. The destruction of supporting piers resulted in the collapse of the dome and the nave vault. Sections of the upper gallery and façade masonry were also damaged.²¹ After the death of Queen Rusa, works were completed by King Alexandre.

Another church presumably destroyed by Tamerlane was the early eleventh-century Cathedral of Alaverdi (Fig. 5). Its restoration was supported by the royal family of the recently established Kingdom of Kakheti. A colophon of Queen Anna's manuscript of the collection of chronicles *Life of Georgia*, dating from 1479 to 1495, states: "God praise and support in both lives patrons: the Queen of Queens Nestan-Darejan and their son King Alexandre and Queen Anna ... Alaverdi was captured by pagans, other kings were not able to clean and build it; They [Nestan-Darejan, Alexandre and Anna] built and cleared it of all evil, constructed the ceiling, dome, and cross arms".²² The mentioning of Queen Nestan-Darejan in the first place indicates that she was the main donor and initiator of the construction. Nestan-Darejan was the wife of George VIII, the last king of the united Georgian Kingdom, and the mother of the first king of Kakheti, Alexandre I. The restoration of Alaverdi Cathedral had a very important role in forming the political power of the new royal family.²³ While an initiator of the construction, she also declared her son and daughter-in-law as co-donors, thus gaining a reputation for them. Through emphasizing the incapability of the previous rulers, i.e. the kings of the united Georgia, to rebuild the cathedral, the text of the colophon actually presents its restoration as a fact legitimating the power of the new royal family and its claim to the throne.

Gayane, the sister of King Bagrat VI and the wife of the local lord Zedginidze-Amilakhori, was responsible for the restoration of Samtavisi Cathedral in the late fifteenth century. The donor's name is mentioned in the inscription located under the window on the western façade.²⁴ Completed in 1030, the cathedral was heavily damaged in the fifteenth century and went under restoration on the order and with the financial support of the noblewoman Gayane. During these works, the north-western pier, the dome and the western wall were rebuilt.²⁵ Since the Cathedral of Samtavisi had been a palatine church of the Zedginidze family, Gayane was not motivated only by piety: she felt herself responsible for its restoration as a member of that family. Her son Siaoash mentions himself as the son of the restorer (literary "builder for the second time") in his inscription located next to the above mentioned one, which may mean that Gayane acquired prestige through the patronage of Samtavisi Cathedral (Fig. 6).

Less ambitious or less affluent noblewomen were content with the construction of small religious buildings. Typically, these are single nave churches with or without additional spaces. One of the earliest examples is the Trinity Church in the village of Koreti, built on the order of Mariam, the Princess of Argveti, in 1000. In the donor inscription, Mariam refers to herself as to Queen and prays only for her children, which means that during the construction, her husband was dead and Mariam had assumed regency due to her

²¹ V. Beridze, *Kartuli Khurotmodzghvrebis Istoria*, t. II, Tbilisi, 2010, p. 92.

²² G. Chubinashvili, *Arkitektura Kakhetii*, p. 371.

²³ For religious patronage as a powerful tool for strengthening the political position of the donor, see E. L. Jordan, *Women, Power, and Religious Patronage in the Middle Ages*, New York, 2006, pp. 61-85; B. Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025-1204, Power, Patronage and Ideology*, London and New York, 2013, pp. 153-180.

²⁴ S. Barnaveli, Samtavisis "Meored Aghmsheneblis" Vinaoba, *Moambe*, t. XII, No 9, 1951, pp. 571-578.

²⁵ G. Sokhashvili, Samtavisi (Materials on the History of the Monument), Tbilisi, 1973, p. 114.

son's minority.²⁶ Indeed, the donor's inscription in St. George's Church built in the neighboring village of Savane in 1046, i.e. few decades later, mentions "Duke of Dukes" Giorgi, the son of Mariam²⁷.

Originally, the Trinity Church was a small, single nave structure accessed through southern and western doors (Fig. 7). The architectural decoration consisted of carved ornamentation on the cornice and around the window, typical for the architecture of Georgia around 1000. The annex running along the southern and western facades was built in the Late Medieval period. There is a chimney in the south-western corner of the structure. The donor's inscription inserted in the masonry of the western wall tells the story of the foundation of the Monastery of the Savior by Anna, an unknown noblewoman.²⁸ From the inscription, it is not quite clear whether the monastery was established around the Trinity Church or somewhere else. However, the existence of the chimney indicates that an additional structure may have been used as a living space (Fig. 8).

Between 1658 and 1675, Ketevan, the wife of the local ruler Turman Turmanidze, built the Church of the Mother of God in the village of Khatissopeli. The small single nave church is faced with smoothly hewn stones (Fig. 9). Door and window openings are adorned with carved ornamentation. Despite the obvious lack of craftsmanship that is revealed in the architectural decoration, the church is still one of the most neatly built structures of the time. The western façade bears a long inscription, explaining that Ketevan constructed the church to commemorate her dead son (Fig. 10).²⁹

Nurses of royal women make up another group of female donors who were particularly active from the seventeenth century in the Kvemo Kartli province.³⁰ One of the churches rebuilt by Isakhar, the nurse of Princess Mariam (presumably a daughter of George XI), is St Marina's Church in Dmanisi (Fig. 11-12). The once-destroyed single nave church was repaired in 1702.³¹ It seems nurses were as financially independent in architectural patronage as women of higher social status, though the size of the buildings indicates that their resources were relatively limited.

Studies show that female building activity in Medieval and Late Medieval Georgia was limited to church and monastery buildings. There is no evidence that noble women, even queen consorts, financed any civil construction. As members of a deeply religious society, when building or rebuilding churches and cathedrals, they were motivated by piety and the hope of gaining a remission of sins. It was also a way to enhance their reputation and social acceptance, and to create the representation of political power. One of the most prominent queen consorts admired for her piety and art architectural patronage is Queen Mariam Dadiani, whose building agency is discussed below.

²⁶ G. Gaprindashvili, 1000 Tslis Tsartsera Koretis Eklesiaze, *Dzeglis Megobari*, 21, 1970, p. 59.

²⁷ V. Beridze, Savane, XI Saukunis Kartuli Khurotmodzghvrebis Dzegli, *Ars Georgica*, 1, 1942, pp. 77-132.

²⁸ G. Gaprindashvili, 1000 Tslis Tsartsera Koretis Eklesiaze, *Dzeglis Megobari*, 21, 1970, p. 56.

²⁹ D. Berdzenishvili, *Narkvevebi Kvemo Kartlis Istoriuli Geografiidan*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 289.

³⁰ A church in the deserted village of Chandari was built by Moghik, a nurse of an unknown princess in 1656; Zilikhan, the nurse of Elena, the daughter of Shahnavaz, constructed a church near Samshvilde in 1672. See D. Berdzenishvili, *Narkvevebi Kvemo Kartlis Istoriuli Geografiidan*, p. 230-231.

³¹ D. Berdzenishvili, *Narkvevebi Kvemo Kartlis Istoriuli Geografiidan*, p. 190.

Mariam Dadiani and her life in Western Georgia

Born in the 1600s, Mariam was a daughter of Manuchar I Dadiani (d. 1611), the Prince of Odishi (Samegrelo), and his second wife Tamar, a noblewoman from the house of Jaqeli, whom he married in 1598 after his first wife Nestan-Darejan Bagrationi died in childbirth. The Dadiani family was one of the most powerful dynasties ruling in Western Georgia, as dukes at the beginning and as de-facto independent governors from the 1550s.

Manuchar and Tamar had four children, among whom Mariam apparently was the eldest. The exact date of her birth is unknown, but taking into consideration that she was married in 1621, her birth could be between 1599 and 1606.³² Apart from the three siblings, Mariam also had two half-brothers from the mother's side and one half-brother from the father's side. The latter was Levan II Dadiani (R. 1611-1657), the Prince of Odishi from 1611 to 1657. He played an important role in Mariam's life by arranging her first two marriages.

Looking forward to taking control of Western Georgia, Levan was actively involved in wars against the Kings of Imereti. At the beginning of his government, Dadiani tried to seek a union with the ruling houses of Apkhazia and Guria principalities, Shervashidze and Gurieli respectively, through political marriages.

While being married himself to the daughter of Apkhazian Prince Seteman Shervashidze³³ in 1621, Levan arranged Mariam's marriage to Simon II Gurieli.³⁴ In 1625, Simon murdered his father and became the Prince of Guria. After ascending the throne, he, with a group of conspirators, laid a plot against his wife's brother Levan Dadiani. The group included Levan's brother Ioseb Dadiani, and father-in-law Seteman Shervashidze. However, the conspiracy was revealed. Levan's revenge was brutal. He looted Abkhazia, blinded Ioseb and confiscated his property. He dethroned and blinded Simon Gurieli too, and took Mariam and her only child Otia with him to Odishi.³⁵ Then he made Simon's uncle Mamia II Gurieli, Catholicos of Abkhazia, the new ruler of Guria, thus ensuring his influence in the principality.

We do not see Mariam as a patron or commissioner of art while living in Guria from 1621 to 1625. In that period, she had neither the authority nor financial resources to invest in

³² In Medieval Georgia, the minimum age for women to marry was twelve years. This age was determined by the Church Council of Ruisi-Urbnisi convened in 1105. E. Gabidzashvili, *Ruis-Urbnisis Krebis Dzeglistsera*, Tbilisi, 1978, p. 90; According to another Church Council convened in 1748, priests were allowed to marry twelve- and thirteen-year-old girls before being ordained. *Kartuli Samarlis Dzeglebi*, t. III, church legislative documents (XI-XIX centuries), edited and commented by I. Dolidze, Tbilisi, document No 200, canon No 22, p. 802. Without primary source cited, Giorgi Tsereteli in his work on Mariam and her son Otia says that Mariam was sixteen when she was married off. That means that she was born around 1605. G. Tsereteli, *mariam dedopali da shvili misi otia, Mtsqemsi*, 12, 1893, p. 6. This date is also shared by Abesalom Tughushi. A. Tughushi, *Tskhovreba da Ghvatsli Dedopal Mariam Dadianisa*, Tbilisi, 1992, p. 5.

³³ Levan was madly in love with Nestan-Darejan Tchiladze, the wife of his regent uncle Giorgi Lipartiani. In around 1622, he accused his wife Tamunia Shervashidze of adultery, mutilated her and sent her back to Abkhazia. Levan abducted Nestan-Darejan and married her. Humiliated, Giorgi Lipartiani could not swallow the insult and died soon after. D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires, A History of Georgia*, London, 2013, p. 195.

³⁴ Vakhushti Batonishvili, Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, p. 826.

³⁵ A. Lamberti, *samegrelos aghtsera*, Tbilisi, 2011, pp. 37-43 (for Italian edition, see *Relazione della Colchide hoggi detta Mengrellia, nela quale si tratta dell' Origine, Costumi I Così naturali di quei Paesi*. Del P.D. Archangelo Lamberti, Napoli, 1654); I. Antelava, *Levan Dadiani*, Tbilisi, 1990, pp. 65-67; D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires, A History of Georgia*, p. 195.

church building.³⁶ After the failed plot of 1625, Mariam lived at the court of her brother Levan Dadiani in “a marvelous royal palace” in Zugdidi.³⁷ She would be engaged in various activities scheduled for the prince and princess, which were attended by a large retinue.³⁸ The daily routine of meals, walks in the fresh air, and participation in court ceremonies, enabled women to experience an active social life.

Mariam’s life until her second marriage in 1634 is largely obscure. Contemporary chroniclers describe her as “praised among ladies”³⁹ and a person “of great merit”⁴⁰, so one can assume that she gained an exceptionally good reputation. Her earliest preserved image dates from that time (Fig. 13). Mariam is represented in the murals of Levan Dadiani's burial chapel in the Church of the Savior at Tsalenjikha, painted in 1636.⁴¹ Her frontal figure is depicted on the western wall next to her brother Erekle. Both images have explanatory inscriptions: “Princess Mariam” and “Prince Erekle” respectively. Mariam’s clothing and hairdo are typical for the upper class in the seventeenth-century Samegrelo. She wears an elaborate dark red, patterned dress set with gems, a cape, a furred hat, and high-heeled shoes.⁴² Mariam’s black hair is arranged in two braids falling down her chest and reaching her shins, indicating that she was married or formerly married.⁴³ The ends of the braids were finished with fringes made of black silk.

A detailed description of the local fashion of that period is found in Archangelo Lamberti’s text:

Women and the nobility wear Persian shoes with three *goji* [about 9.50 cm] heels. These shoes are made of leather of various colors. ... The hat is made either of pure wool or of silk. Some people embroider it or decorate it with sable fur in the Tatar manner. ... Mengrelians dress up for parties and festivals in another type of garment, which is so long that it reaches the toes and its flounce sleeves touch the ground. These garments are very beautiful both in shape and owing to the precious cloth. They are sewn with Damascus fabric or velvet and brocade. For the lining, they use sable fur, and from top to bottom it is decorated with buttons made of gold or pearls ... this type of clothing is common for both men and women.⁴⁴

³⁶ Actually, Mariam had no time to enjoy her position as the Princess of Guria, unlike her mother Tamar who wore the title of the Princess of Guria at least for a short time as the wife of Vakhtang I Gurieli (R. 1583-1587). After his murder, Tamar buried Vakhtang in Shemokmedi Monastery, ordered a golden icon in the name of the Mother of God, decorated with three precious stones, and installed it on his tomb. See: D. Bakradze, *Arkheologicheskoe Puteshestvie po Gurii i Adchare*, St. Petersburg, 1878, p. 122.

³⁷ Don Cristoforo de Castelli, *Relazione e Album dei Schizzi Sulla Georgia del Secolo XVII*, il testo e le iscrizioni ha decifrato, tradotto, indagato, e ha munito i commenti Begian Guiorgazze, Tbilissi, 1976, for Georgian text see p. 56, for Latin text see p. 288; A. Lamberti, *Samegrelos Aghtsera*, p. 55.

³⁸ Don Cristoforo de Castelli, *Relazione e Album dei Schizzi Sulla Georgia del Secolo XVII*, for Georgian text see p. 56, for Latin text see p. 288.

³⁹ S. Kakabadzé, L'histoire de Géorgie par Pharsadane Guiorgaidjanidzé (texte), *Bulletin Historique*, Livre II, Tiflis, 1925, p. 241.

⁴⁰ Don Cristoforo de Castelli, *Relazione e Album dei Schizzi Sulla Georgia del Secolo XVII*, for Georgian text see p. 55, for Latin text see p. 287.

⁴¹ Dating is based on E. Takaishvili's interpretation of the inscription. E. Takaishvili, *Arkheologiuri Mogzaurobani da Dhenishvnani*, book II, Tfilisi, 1914, p. 218; I. Lortkipanidze and M. Janjalia suggest a broader date – 1630s. I. Lortkipanidze, M. Janjalia, *Tsalenjikha, Wall Paintings in the Saciour's Church*, p. 21, 193.

⁴² Her uncle Giorgi Lipartiani and nephew Aleksandre are also wearing similar hats.

⁴³ According to Ivane Javakhishvili, this hairstyle was typical for married women. Virgins wore one braid down their chest and one down their back. See: I. Javakhishvili, *Masalebi Kartveli Eris Materialuri Kulturis Istoriisatvis*, III-IV, Tbilisi, 1962, p. 58.

⁴⁴ Archangelo Lamberti, *Samegrelos Aghtsera*, p. 59-61.

Indeed, Mariam's outfit in the chapel image largely corresponds to this description.

Mariam as the Queen of Kartli

Political changes that took place in Eastern Georgia in the 1630s made Mariam a diplomatic bride for the second time. In 1633, Shah Safi appointed his loyal commander of Georgian origin, but of Muslim faith, Khosrov Mirza, to rule Kartli (central east Georgia) as King Rostom, instead of Teimuraz I, who had already reigned over the kingdom for seven years.⁴⁵ Newly widowed at 67-years-old, Rostom decided to strengthen his position through a political marriage, and asked Levan Dadiani for the hand of his sister Mariam.⁴⁶ The main source for this event the *History of Georgia* by the contemporary author Parsadan Gorgijanidze, which claims:

They [Rostom] set a council, started advising, found Levan Dadiani to create a relationship by marriage, and sent marriage brokers to him and asked him for his sister Mariam, praised among ladies, to be the future Queen of Georgia. The marriage brokers went with the request and they [Levan Dadiani] were delighted and they agreed.⁴⁷

Some contemporary authors assert that Mariam was more than unhappy with her new marriage. The groom was much older, and a non-Christian. She steadfastly refused to marry a Muslim king, while he married her “despite her being a Christian and divorced”.⁴⁸ Mariam was not required to convert to Islam; on the contrary, it was Rostom who agreed to be baptized or, most likely, to simulate baptism.⁴⁹

They staged the baptism of an unruly heretic. A priest simulated washing the head of King Rostom to make it possible for Mariam to marry to him. This kind of hypocrisy was applied by the priest.⁵⁰

Political alliance with Levan Dadiani was too important for Rostom to let religious feelings endanger his wedding plans with Mariam. Actually, it does not seem likely Rostom considered Mariam's demand as a challenge to his faith, which was far from being strong. The Theatine missionary Pietro Avitabile says that Rostom would behave like a Muslim

⁴⁵ D. M. Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy 1658-1832*, New York, 1957, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁶ Rostom's first wife was Ketevan Abashishvili, whom he married after his arrival in Georgia and who died soon after. See D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires, A History of Georgia*, p. 198; Vakhushti Batonishvili, Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, p. 440; *Tskhovreba Sakartveloisa (Parizis Kronika)*, text edited and commented by G. Alasania, Tbilisi, 1980, p. 94.

⁴⁷ S. Kakabadzé, L'histoire de Géorgie par Pharsadane Guiorgaidjanidzé (texte), *Bulletin Historique*, Livre II, Tiflis, 1925, p. 241; *Chronique Géorgienne*, p. 66.

⁴⁸ *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient (renseignements sur la Géorgie)*, Tbilisi, 2018, p. 308.

⁴⁹ Don Guiseppe Giudice da Milan, *Tserilebi Sakartveloze*, Tbilisi, 1964, p. 35.

⁵⁰ Don Christoforo de Castelli, *Relazione e Album dei Schizzi Sulla Georgia del Secolo XVII*, for Georgian text see p. 55, for Latin text see p. 287.

among Muslims, while crossed himself in front of his wife; however, he never attended church services or observed a fast.⁵¹

Shah Safi also approved the marriage between Rostom and Mariam, and sent Dadiani 50,000 *marchil* as a gift, and granted him an annual payment of 1000 Tabrizian *tumans*. Excited, Rostom did not want to delay the wedding, so he and Dadiani agreed to meet in Imereti. Accompanied by their wedding suites, they met near Kaka Bridge⁵² and like 'the sun rising from the Black Sea, Queen Mariam, was brought up towards Kartli'.⁵³ According to Father Avitabile, Mariam arrived in Gori in April 1634.⁵⁴

In 1634, after the Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord [16 April], the sister of the Prince of Odishi, the new Queen of Kartli, who was married off to our king and who came to Gori so as not to be seen by the Persians, desired to visit the Church of the Augustinian padres and also our small chapel with great pomp and ceremony at five o'clock in the afternoon, after the soldiers retreated to the fortress. She was accompanied by nobility and prelates both from Odishi and Guria.⁵⁵

Mariam's visit to Catholic missions in Gori can be understood as a message for all Christian faith groups that despite the marriage to the Muslim king, the new queen had retained her Christianity, and that the freedom of their religion was guaranteed.⁵⁶ Indeed, rivalry between Rostom and Teimuraz considerably complicated the situation of the Catholics in Eastern Georgia. Although Rostom had never oppressed them on purpose, hostilities and unnecessary attention from curious Persian soldiers made the life of friars in Kartli quite uncomfortable. However, Mariam's arrival made no difference, and by 1638, all Theatines had left the region, never to return.⁵⁷

After a fabulous wedding, Mariam settled in Tbilisi. Drawings made by the Theatine priest Don Christophoro de Castelli are the earliest images representing her as the Queen Consort of Kartli (Fig. 14). Mariam is dressed in a flower patterned gown and is crowned with an elaborated aigrette decorated with precious stones and half-moons. The Queen's outfit corresponds to the Iranian style dominating King Rostom's court.⁵⁸

In the seventeenth century, Tbilisi, the capital of the Kingdom of Kartli, was a small city consisting of several districts located on both banks of the Kura River. A large early Medieval fortress, Narikala, built on a rocky hill, overlooked the city. King Rostom reinforced it through a new wall slanting down from the upper fortress towards Metekhi Bridge on the Kura River. The predecessors of King Rostom lived in the palace standing in

⁵¹ Don Pietro Avitabile, *Tsnobebi Sakartveloze (XVII s.)*, introduction, translation and comments by Bejan Giorgadze Tbilisi, 1977; for Georgian text see p. 34, for Italian p. 125.

⁵² Vakhushti Batonishvili, Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, p. 828; I. Antelava, *Levan Dadiani*, pp. 82-83; D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, p. 199.

⁵³ S. Kakabadzé, L'histoire de Géorgie par Pharsadane Guiorgaidjanidzé (texte), p. 242.

⁵⁴ Relazione di Giorgia acrita dal P. Prefetto in Aleppo alli 24 Novembre 1635; see Don Pietro Avitabile, *Tsnobebi Sakartveloze (XVII s.)*, pp. 109-135.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, for Georgian text see p. 28, for Italian p. 116.

⁵⁶ I. Peradze, The Reconstruction of Women's History According to the sources of Catholic Missionaries, *Catholic Heritage in Georgia*, proceeding the 1st International Symposium (June 6-8, 2017), Tbilisi, 2018, p. 97; Actually, Rostom was known for his religious tolerance. Officially, he embraced Shia Islam, but never persecuted any religious groups. D. M. Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 82.

⁵⁷ N. Natsvlishvili, *Katolikuri Eklesiebi Sakartveloshi: Istoria da Arkitektura*, dissertation submitted at Ilia State University in support of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies, Tbilisi, 2019, pp. 72-74; <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fgRVK0526bUSbJ-z6RrFHjN9JDrq2D4-/view>

⁵⁸ Don Christoforo de Castelli, *Relazione e Album dei Schizzi Sulla Georgia del Secolo XVII*, picture 58, for Georgian text see p. 92, for Latin text see p. 322.

the fortress, side by side with the Iranian garrison stationed there. Rostom then granted the whole fortress to the Iranians and decided to move his royal residence into the city itself. He chose an area between two main Christian landmarks of Medieval Tbilisi, Anchiskhati Church and Sioni Cathedral. His new palace, built in this place, was described by contemporaries as being of “Kizilbashian”, i.e. Iranian style.⁵⁹

The exact date of Rostom’s move is unknown.⁶⁰ Most likely, he moved from the fortress to the city after he had consolidated his power and secured his place on the throne, i.e. after 1634, which means that for at least several years, Mariam had to reside in Narikala fortress, where “the palace of the king with very large and beautiful halls”⁶¹ was located, but which also housed Iranian soldiers and their families. She would hardly enjoy that environment, not only because of the alien non-Christian milieu, but also because of problems with attending religious services, as the palatine Church of St. Nicholas was under Iranian control. Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi writes that Queen Mariam built a small single nave church in the lower fortress for private use.⁶² Apparently, it was the first building financed by Mariam. The historian does not give the date of its construction, but adds that in the eighteenth century, the building belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church. On the other hand, Jean Chardin, who visited Tbilisi in 1672, in his travel book mentions another church belonging to the Queen, standing close to Sioni Cathedral. Summarizing both data, one can assume that after the royal family moved into the city, Mariam chose for herself a church located near her new palace. The previous church of the Queen in the lower fortress was abandoned and finally passed into the hands of the Armenians

Thus, from the late 1630s, Mariam and Rostom lived in the residential district of the city. The choosing of that particular area is somewhat unexpected for the Muslim king. The district was predominantly Georgian, with a significant number of Orthodox churches.⁶³ It is hard not to see Mariam’s role in his decision, even without having direct proof to argue so. Actually, as everywhere in the world, the late Medieval and early Modern Georgian historical texts were written from the masculine point of view, giving all credit for renovating and rebuilding the city to King Rostom, while Mariam’s contribution was usually ignored. As Platon Ioseliani states:

⁵⁹ Vakhushti Batonishvili, Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, p. 334.

⁶⁰ Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi says that Rostom left the fortress soon after his first marriage to Ketevan Abashishvili, around 1632 (Vakhushti Batonishvili, Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, p. 439). According to Platon Ioseliani the palace was built in 1638 (Pl. Ioseliani, *Opisanie Drevnostei Goroda Tiflisa*, Tiflis, 1866, p. 240; Pl. Ioseliani, Aghtsera Tfilisis Sidzveleta, Tbilisi, 2009, p. 195), while Vakhtang Beridze dates the construction of the new residence back to 1640-50s (V. Beridze, *Kartuli Khurotmodzghvrebis Istoria*, t. I, Tbilisi, 2011, p. 392).

⁶¹ Vakhushti Batonishvili, Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, p. 334.

⁶² Ibid, p. 336. The Queen also had a private church in Gori. It belonged to the Augustinian priests until 1637. The last priest who left the country entrusted it to the Theatines, but one year later when they also left Georgia, the abandoned church became Mariam’s property. In a paper dated to 1668 by a Capuchin priest on Catholic real estate in Georgia, the former Augustinian monastery is mentioned as the Queen’s church; it survived until the nineteenth century. The church is found on the Gori plan of 1802, but was demolished soon after, as it does not appear on the plan of 1860. N. Natsvlshvili, *Katolikuri Eklesiebi Sakartveloshi: Istoria da Arkitektura*, pp. 108, 111; E. Mamistvalashvili, *Goris Istoria*, I, Tbilisi, 1994, p. 132; National Archives of Georgia, fund no 1448, description no 1, case no 3770.

⁶³ M. Berdznishvili, *Tbilisis Garegani Sakhe XVIII Saukuneshi*, Tbilisi, 1965, p. 6.

King Rostom (1636-1658) raised the glory of Tiflis again, renovated and fortified it, built baths and caravansaries in it ... laid out a garden ... and erected a magnificent palace for himself.⁶⁴

Besides defensive and civil buildings, several churches were also restored. Tradition credits Rostom with renovating a small fortress and church on Tabori Mountain, erecting the Church of St John the Baptist in front of his palace, the Church of the Annunciation in the middle of the King's Square, and initiating construction of the St George Church next to it.⁶⁵ The first two churches have not survived to the present day. St George's Church was completed in 1710 and served as a court church in the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Vigorous construction works financed by the royal family resulted in a significant change to the cityscape. In the city view drawn by French artist Guillaume-Joseph Grelot, who accompanied Jean Chardin during his visit to Tbilisi, the urban area around the King's palace can be seen as being densely populated and highly developed (Fig. 15). Grelot's drawing is the earliest visual evidence illustrating how the building environment of Tbilisi looked. The palace, presumably already altered and redecorated for that period by Rostom's successor King Shakhnava, was a two-story house with a mezzanine. An open balcony overlooking the river ran along the façade. An area adjacent to the palace from the south, called the Kings Square, was surrounded by shops.⁶⁷ The royal residence contained a mosque without a minaret, and a bathhouse. Its main entrance was open to male guests, while female access was provided via a covered passage connecting the bath directly to the women's section of the palace.⁶⁸

About five hundred meters from the palace was the above-mentioned Queen's church. In Grelot's drawing, it is marked by the letter F and explained as a white building (l'ouvrage blanc, *tetrasheni* in Georgian) or church of the queen (l'église de la reine) (Fig. 16). In the main text, Chardin says that church was built by Queen Mariam and includes it in the list of the main churches of Tbilisi.⁶⁹

The building was distinguished neither by history nor by architectural design, apparently the only reason it was mentioned alongside the episcopal and patriarchal cathedrals was its connection to the Queen. The church was dedicated to St John the Baptist, while *Tetrasheni* seems to be its popular name. David Khoshtaria was the first scholar to try and reconstruct the history of the building.⁷⁰ By comparing eighteenth and nineteenth-century writings, he suggested that the church building erected in the early Medieval period was in a poor physical condition by the 1650s. King Rostom removed its dome for safety measures, and Queen Mariam and her third husband King Shahnava erected a replacement

⁶⁴ Pl. Ioseliani, *Opisanie Drevnostei Goroda Tiflisa*, p. 21; Pl. Ioseliani, *Aghtsera Tfilisis Sidzveleta*, pp. 24.

⁶⁵ Pl. Ioseliani, *Opisanie Drevnostei Goroda Tiflisa*, p. 73, 253; Pl. Ioseliani, *Aghtsera Tfilisis Sidzveleta*, pp. 65, 205.

⁶⁶ *Old Georgian Cities and Towns, Tbilisi*, editors: Marina Bulia and Mzia Janjalia, Tbilisi, 2006, p. 123-124, annotation 35.

⁶⁷ *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient (renseignements sur la Géorgie)*, p. 317.

⁶⁸ R. Gverdsiteli, Rostom Mepis Sasakhalis Abano, *Dzeglis Megobari*, 2, 1964, p. 12.

⁶⁹ *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient (renseignements sur la Géorgie)*, p. 314.

⁷⁰ D. Khoshtaria, Shenishvnebi Shua Saukunebis Tbilisis Eklesiebze, *Georgian Antiquities*, 12, 2008, pp. 240-242.

after his death in 1658.⁷¹ Thus, D. Khoshtaria places the date of its reconstruction between 1655 and 1660.⁷²

The church has not survived, but Grelot's drawing gives a general idea of its structure and architectural design. It was an octagonal building covered with a high pyramidal roof. The windows were arranged in each facet, both in the lower part and in the drum. Naturally, the drawing does not show the layout of the interior; however, one can assume that it was either four- or eight-apsed, or of a simple cruciform plan inscribed in an octagon, as per floor plans used for early Medieval churches in Georgia from time to time.⁷³

There had to be several reasons for Mariam making this particular church her private chapel. Presumably, it was the only vacant church building relatively in a good physical condition by that period; it was within a walking distance from the new palace and stood next to Sioni Cathedral. Destroyed numerous times by different invaders over the centuries, due to its importance, Sioni Cathedral always received special attention from the royal family and was restored several times through their money.⁷⁴ Mariam and Rostom made no exception. They not only took care to increase its income, but also freed its serfs from royal and city taxation. In 1634, Mariam restored a law on the exemption of serfs of Sioni Cathedral from royal taxes;⁷⁵ in 1649, she returned a vineyard, mill, and arable land in Kisiskhevi (a village in Kakheti) to the cathedral; according to a deed issued and signed in 1650 by Rostom, the King financed construction of a caravansary to the south of Sioni Cathedral on its land, and granted an annual 100 *marchils* to the church from the income of the caravansary; in 1652; the serfs of the cathedral trading on the state lands were freed from custom duties on the Queen's decision.⁷⁶

Three of the four above-mentioned deeds delivered and signed by Mariam are documents about tax exemption and restoration of royal deeds, which was only the King's prerogative in Medieval Georgia. The queen consorts were usually limited to giving donations and granting status or land to someone from their own domains.⁷⁷ This right was gained only after the fifteenth century, during a politically turbulent time for the country; the King's central influence gradually started to reduce, while other royal members, including queen consorts, became more independent.

Thirteenth-century donation books show that queen consorts and noblewomen did not have the right to act without their husband's approval. The Queen Consort Tamar, the wife of King David VI Narin (R. 1245-1293) was able to buy two villages for Gelati Monastery "after request and receiving permission from the equal to God, King of Kings David."⁷⁸ Her contemporary, noblewoman Kakana, redeemed the village Noste from the residents of

⁷¹ Pl. Ioseliani, *Opisanie Drevnostei Goroda Tiflisa*, p. 247; Pl. Ioseliani, *Aghtsera Tfilisis Sidzveleta*, pp. 201, 209; Vakhushiti Batonishvili, *Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, p. 335-336;

⁷² D. Khoshtaria, *Shenishvnebi Tbilisis Shua Saukuneebis Eklesiebbe*, p. 241.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ For the history of Sioni Cathedral see *Old Georgian Cities and Towns, Tbilisi*, p. 121-122, annotation 30.

⁷⁵ National Centre of Manuscripts, Ad-595.

⁷⁶ National Archives of Georgia, fund 1448, description 1, case 5006; National Centre of Manuscripts, Sd-765.

On the history of the caravansary see M. Mania, Tbilelis Karvaslis Istoriisatvis, *Georgian Antiquities*, 10, 2007, pp. 148-189.

⁷⁷ D. Jghenti, *Kartlis Dedopal Mariamis Roli Sakhelmtsipo Ganmgeblobashi, Matsne*, 1, 1985, p. 104.

⁷⁸ *Kartuli Samartlis Dzeglebi*, t. II, text published, references and indexes by I. Dolidze, Tbilisi, 1965, document No 27, p. 75.

Surami and returned it to Kvatakhevi Monastery only through her husband Mikel.⁷⁹ According to these documents, the cost of the village was paid from the woman's personal funds, and the goal of the donation was to provide female donators with agape.

From the fifteenth century on, the types of documents issued by queen consorts become more diverse, and include legal papers. Weakening of the centralized power of the male ruler is well attested by the criminal deed (wergild) signed and delivered in 1433 by Queen Consort Tamar, the wife of King Alexandre I (R. 1412-1442). At the beginning of the document, she calls herself the "king of kings" Tamar, imitating Queen Tamar (R. 1184-1210), the first female ruler of Georgia, thus emphasizing her emancipation and power. Indeed, the Queen's ambitiousness and powerful personality is not only expressed in her title, but also in the fact of delivery of this type of document itself, as in Medieval and Late Medieval Georgia, certain type of documents, including criminal deeds, were issued exclusively by kings.

Other documents connected to legal decisions were those delivered by Queen Consort Nestan-Darejan, the wife of King Simon I of Kartli (R. 1556-1569, 1578-1600). In 1574, she returned the Tbililashvili family, the residents of Ateni, to Svetitskhoveli Cathedral,⁸⁰ later, in 1577, she exempted serfs from custom duties in the city of Ali in favor of the same cathedral.⁸¹ Nestan-Darejan was an active patron during her husband's captivity in Alamut fortress from 1569 to 1578, while the Kingdom of all Kartli was under the nominal control of his rival and brother David XI (Daud-Khan II).⁸² David resided in the fortress of Kveshi, governing Kvemo Kartli, Tbilisi and its environs. Daud-Khan's disdainful attitude toward Nestan-Darejan encouraged some noblemen to insult her. While staying in the village of Kavtiskhevi, her residence was ravaged and her property seized.⁸³ However, Nestan-Darejan, supported by the high nobles loyal to Simon, retained her power to a certain extent in absence of her husband. The main area of her activity was her domain in Shida Kartli. After Simon's release from prison and his elevation to the throne for a second time, Nestan-Darejan restored her authority in Kvemo Kartli, as attested by the deeds of grant issued in 1584 and in 1593.⁸⁴

After becoming the queen consort of Kartli, Mariam Dadiani received a part of royal lands under her direct control both in Shida and Kvemo Kartli. The Queen's villages and lands are listed in the book of law *Dasturlamali* collected and compiled by King Vakhtang VI around 1704. It contains two main parts – the King's and Queen's *Dasturlamali*. The second part of the book, entitled the Queen's *Dasturlamali*, explains that it was first instituted by King George XI (R. 1676-1688), stepson of Mariam Dadiani.⁸⁵ The first paragraph defines the amount of offerings appointed for agape for Queen Mariam, which means that she was already dead when the document was instituted. However, when referring to the Queen's villages, it is said that they belonged to her in a previous time. Indeed, the documents delivered by Queen Mariam and the area of her architectural patronage allow us to suggest that the book of law instituted by King George XI was largely

⁷⁹ *ibid*, document No 30, p. 78.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, p., document No 128.

⁸¹ *ibid*, p., document No 131.

⁸² D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires, A History of Georgia*, p. 172.

⁸³ Vakhushthi Batonishvili, Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, p. 409.

⁸⁴ *Kartuli Istoriuli Sabutebis Korpusi*, t. IV, document No 157; *Les Antiquités Géorgiennes*, tome III, Sous la rédaction de E. Takaichvili, Tiflis, 1910, document No 163, p. 140.

⁸⁵ *Dasturlamali, Kartuli Samartlis Dzeglebi*, edited and published by I. Surguladze, Tbilisi, 1970, pp. 702-722.

based on an already existing legal document valid in Mariam's lifetime. One of the laws of *Dasturlamali* about fishing in the River Mtkvari near modern Gardabani (Karaii Valley) mentions that the share of fish was distributed by King Rostom and its amount was kept unchanged by his successors⁸⁶.

According to *Dasturlamali*, the Queen owned seven villages (Opreti, Gamoghma Nakhiduri, Tsintskaro, Shua Bolnisi, Chkhekvi, Gomareti, and Urtsevani) in Kvemo Kartli and eight (Ruisi, Tamarasheni, Aradeti, Kekhvi, Achabeti, Tskhinvali, Sadakudeblo, and Ali) in Shida Kartli.⁸⁷ The village of Kisiskhevi in Kakheti⁸⁸ and lands in Tbilisi, Gori, and Ateni also belonged to her.⁸⁹ However, this enumeration could be incomplete or slightly different, as the documents delivered by her from 1634 to 1680 show a broader area of activity.⁹⁰ The Queen was representative of the royal court in the eparchies of Tbilisi, Manglisi, and Ruisi,⁹¹ meaning that the bishops of those eparches had to address the Queen regarding tax exemption and reduction for their serfs or for other state-related issues.⁹² That is why she was authorized to free the serfs of Sioni Cathedral from royal taxes in 1634. Since it took place in the first year of her marriage with Rostom, it can be assumed that the distribution of power between the Queen and King was either a subject of premarital negotiations⁹³ or an already established tradition, a reflection of which can be seen in the political activity of the less powerful Queen Consort Nestan-Darejan. Indeed, Mariam acceded to greater influence through her marriage to Rostom, and became an independent ruler in her domain. She had the right to give orders, resolve agreements, strike deals, restore or issue new grant deeds, except serfs, etc. In view of the fact that Rostom was a Muslim king in a Christian country, communication with clergymen was facilitated by the Christian Queen. Many papers delivered and signed by Rostom also mention her name. Sometimes, both are signatories of such papers. In all these documents, the Queen's name follows the King's, but when the Queen issues a paper herself, she is the sole author, as it would be unacceptable to place her name before the King's name. Thus, Mariam had the same rights as the King, but only in her domain, which was a declaration of her power from Rostom's side and quite a smart decision at the same time, as the Medieval standard of social subordination was maintained and the King's reputation was not violated. Outside her domain, she was a good advisor in politics and a supportive wife, actively involved in court ceremonials.

The inscription describing the story of the foundation of the town Mepiskalaki (in Georgian meaning King's Town, modern Akhalkalaki in Kartli) refers to Rostom and Mariam as equal patrons, and explains their role:

At the time happy King Khan Shah Sefi was sitting in Iran Turan, in the name of God, we, the son of the ruler of Georgia, the King of Kings Patron Rostom, and our wife the Queen of Queens Patron Mariam, started to build a town on the bank of Tedzami. We called it the King's Town and

⁸⁶ *ibid*, p. 513.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, p. 720-721.

⁸⁸ Pl. Ioseliani, *Opisanie Drevnostei Goroda Tiflisa*, p. 212; Pl. Ioseliani, *Aghtsera Tfilisis Sidzveleta*, pp. 171.

⁸⁹ *Dasturlamali*, p. 721.

⁹⁰ *Pirta Anotirebuli Leksikoni, XI-XVII ss. Kartuli Istoriuli Sabutebis Mikhedvit*, III, materials collected and prepared for publishing by Ana Bakradze, Levan Ratiani, and Giorgi Otkhmezuri, volume compiled by Darejan Kldiashvili and Mzia Surguladze, Tbilisi, 2004, pp. 58-62.

⁹¹ *Dasturlamali*, p. 720-721.

⁹² I want to express my gratitude to historian T. Jojua for consultation on this subject.

⁹³ A. Tughushi, *Tskhovreba da Ghvatsli Dedopal Mariam Dadianisa*, p. 17.

built churches and monasteries ... to make our serfs, Armenian merchants, permanent residents of the King's Town...⁹⁴

The town, built between 1634 and 1642, was part of a broader campaign aiming to develop ruined settlements and infrastructure in the Kingdom of Kartli, in order to promote trade. Besides explaining the reason for establishing a new town, the inscription also emphasizes the foundation of places of Christian worship, which should be ascribed to the participation of Mariam. Rostom, a Muslim ruler, would not have been particularly interested in the construction of churches and monasteries, his major goal being to create a comfortable environment for merchants, as he did in 1652 when he built a village and a bridge combined with a caravanserai across the Khrami River (the modern Red Bridge on the Georgia-Azerbaijan border) "so that travelers do not need to search for accommodation and food."⁹⁵ Thus, while the King was focused on the urban development of the town, the Queen ensured its Christian identity.

Rostom and Mariam's main goal was to stabilize the devastated kingdom and resettle the deserted villages. By reducing taxes and securing freedom to travel, the royal family helped local noblemen to return to their abandoned lands. For example, Mariam gave back one abandoned village to a widowed noblewoman under one condition – she should not levy a tax on new residents of the village for seven years.⁹⁶ Such a flexible policy stimulated many families to return to their ancestral homes and restore them. Economic growth also resulted in the development of art. Affluent families and clergymen became the initiators of the foundation of monasteries, church construction, restoration, decoration with murals, etc. The ambitions of the donors of these architectural structures were expressed in different ways. Some chose stone as a main building material, some focused on the size of the building, others spent out on hiring experienced masters, but all of them tried to immortalize their name and merit in donor inscriptions, usually placed in the most visible location - above the entrance.

Kvemo Kartli enjoyed the Queen's particular support due to its devastated condition. According to Prince Vakhushti, Mariam was a donor of the restoration of Bolnisi Cathedral, which had been heavily destroyed by Persians in 1634.⁹⁷ Built of local greenish tuff from 478 to 494, Bolnisi Cathedral is a large three-nave basilica with projecting apse. Open arched galleries are attached to the north and south facades. The latter is shorter due to the baptistery also located to the south.⁹⁸ During the Persian invasion, the roofing of the church was destroyed, as were parts of its longitudinal and western walls. Mariam rebuilt the cathedral mostly of brick, a material widely used in this period. For the façade, builders also used hewn stone blocks, but these are smaller than the originals and can easily be distinguished (Fig. 17). Architectural details such as the pointed arches of the western door and windows, decorated with stylized lilies, show the construction methods and taste of the time. The central nave was covered with flat cross vaults (Fig. 18); the isles with semi-barrel vaults. Rows of semicircular windows were made in the lower parts of the vaults.

⁹⁴ G. Bochoridze, *Kartlis Eklesia-Monsatrebi da Sidzveleebi*, edited by Z. Skhirtladze and N. Chitishvili, Tbilisi, 2011, p. 45.

⁹⁵ S. Kakabadzé, L'histoire de Géorgie par Pharsadane Guiorgaidjanidzé (texte), *Bulletin Historique*, Livre II, p. 262.

⁹⁶ *Pirta Anotirebuli Leksikoni, XI-XVII ss. Kartuli Istoriuli Sabutebis Mikhedvit*, III, p. 59.

⁹⁷ Vakhushti Batonishvili, Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, p. 311.

⁹⁸ G. Chubinashvili, *Bolnisskii Sion*, p. 7-61; V. Beridze, *Kartuli Kurotmodzghvrebis Istoria*, t. II, p. 32.

Obviously, the Queen felt obligated to restore one of the oldest and best-known cathedrals in the region. Besides a sense of responsibility, her patronage can also be understood as a gesture of gratitude towards the Bishop of Bolnisi, who supported King Rostom in the war campaign against his rival, King Teimuraz I.⁹⁹

In 1645, Mariam's only son Otia died in the town of Gori.¹⁰⁰ It was a huge shock for the royal family. Mourning in Gori lasted twelve days, and then Otia was transferred for burial in Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta. In order to commemorate her son's death, the Queen undertook a series of activities. She distributed his property among churches and monasteries.¹⁰¹ She also financed the construction of a church in Gori on the “bed” of her son. As Otia was buried in Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, the term “bed” must mean the place where the deceased was rested before the funeral, and where members of the royal family received condolences for their loss. Contemporary sources claim it was an open place and that Mariam was seated on the ground while mourning.¹⁰² This memorial church can be identified as the Church of the Archangels, later dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin, which has not survived to the present day. The 1802 plan of Gori shows it placed to the south of Gori Cathedral (the former Catholic church of the Holy Family).¹⁰³ Judging from the late nineteenth-century photographs, the Church of the Archangels was a brick structure, an inscribed-cross in plan, with an elongated western arm (Fig. 19). There were twelve narrow windows arranged in the high drum of the dome. The windows of the lower part were flanked with Golgotha Crosses. Decoration of the drum – semicircular double frames of the windows, triangular architectural elements bowed inwards brickwork, and decorative stone slabs placed on the tops of the facets, resemble the drums of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Georgian and Armenian churches,¹⁰⁴ indicating that the church was renovated later. The interior of the church was painted and lavishly adorned with icons. The Queen also donated serfs to the church and established an agape for Otia's soul.¹⁰⁵

As it will be seen below, the Church of the Archangels in Gori was perhaps the most ambitious architectural project commissioned by Queen Mariam. Despite the fact that the royal family did not hold back finances on its construction and decoration, the church is a good example of the decline of building craftsmanship in Late Medieval Georgia.

In Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, where Prince Otia was buried, Mariam also prepared her burial place next to his tomb, near the southwest pillar, and decorated its eastern wall with their mural portraits (Fig. 20). In the image, Mariam and Otia are presented against a neutral background. Both are dressed in golden and purple royal clothing embroidered with gold and silk twine and adorned with precious stones. Otia's soul is commended to the icon of the Mother of God – The Platitera, painted above him. In the mural, the Queen and Prince are of a much younger age than they actually were in 1646 when it was painted. This fact makes

⁹⁹ D. Berdzenishvili, *Narkvevebi Kvemo Kartlis Istoriuli Geograpiidan*, p. 341.

¹⁰⁰ *Kronikebi*, collected, chronologically ordered and commented by T. Jhordania, book II, Tbilisi, 1897, p. 457.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*; S. Kakabadzé, L'histoire de Géorgie par Pharsadane Guiorgaidjanidzé (texte), *Bulletin Historique*, p. 252.

¹⁰² S. Kakabadzé, L'histoire de Géorgie par Pharsadane Guiorgaidjanidzé (texte), *Bulletin Historique*, p. 251.

¹⁰³ E. Mamistvalashvili, *Goris Istoria*, I, p. 286; The Church of the Archangels built few years ago in a small garden does not exactly match its initial location because of important urban changes made to the area.

¹⁰⁴ M. Liluashvili, *Kartuli da Somkhuri Arkitekturis Urtiertkmedeba XVIII-XIX Saukunebis Tbilisshi in Architecture and Identity: Church Building in Tbilisi (1801-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2016, pp. 133-148.

¹⁰⁵ S. Kakabadzé, L'histoire de Géorgie par Pharsadane Guiorgaidjanidzé (texte), *Bulletin Historique*, p. 252.

scholars to think that the mural representation is a copy of an easel portrait created presumably in the 1630s for Rostom's new palace.¹⁰⁶

In 1656, the dome of Svetitskhoveli Cathedral collapsed after a massive earthquake. According to the inscription, it was restored the same year.¹⁰⁷ The inscription mentions Rostom and Mariam as a donor couple (Fig. 21). Carved on the northwest part of the cornice in large Georgian capital (*asomtavruli*) letters, it was easily seen by the naked eye for a literate person. Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, the main church of the country and burial place for the Bagrationi family,¹⁰⁸ had a special importance to Rostom. In 1648, on his way to a battle with Teimuraz I, he arrived at Mtskheta, went around the Cathedral, and asked God for help.¹⁰⁹ Despite being Muslim, he followed the Medieval tradition of praying in church before a battle, thus encouraging his Christian soldiers and pleasing the clergymen. Even if Rostom were indifferent about the restoration of the Cathedral, he had to be mentioned in the inscription regardless. From the Late Medieval perspective, it would be unimaginable to undertake this kind of activity without the King's involvement. It is noteworthy that all written sources ascribe the restoration of the dome to King Rostom, while Queen Mariam's role in it is completely ignored.¹¹⁰ This attitude can also be explained by the fact that the expenses of the restoration of the collapsed dome were covered by royal money, so the main donor was believed to be the King rather than the Queen.

Restoration of the dome of Svetitskhoveli Cathedral appears to have been the last architectural project undertaken by King Rostom and Queen Mariam as a couple. In 1658, Rostom died, and Mariam became a diplomatic bride for the third time.

Keeping the Throne

Mariam did not have much time to mourn her husband's death. On the order of Iranian Shah Abbas II, she was married to Vakhtang V, renamed Shahnavaz (R. 1658-1675).¹¹¹ The marriage was not easy for either party. Rostom and Mariam had adopted Vakhtang and were

¹⁰⁶ N. Chikhladze, Svetitskhoveli Mokhatulobani, in *Svetitskhoveli*, Tbilisi, p. 242. In modern scholarship it is a well established idea that some easel paintings were ordered by King Rostom to decorate his luxurious palace. See M. Chahryar Adle, Archéologie et arts du monde Iranien, de l'Inde Musulmane et du Caucase d'après quelques recherches récentes de terrain, 1984-1995, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1996, 140-1, pp. 354-355.

Another picture named "A lady in a Persian dress" is considered to be a possible portrait of Queen Mariam Dadiani. The drinking horn held by the woman, a wine decanter and parts (head and shank) of a pig shown at her feet, reveal that she is Christian, while the precious dress points to her high social status. As a hog was a symbol of the Dadiani family depicted on their flag, I. Koshoridze suggests that parts of the pig may demonstrate her identity. I. Koshoridze, Akhali Tsnobebi Sakartvelo-Iranis Urtiertobata Shesakheb, in *Sakartvelo-Iranis Kulturul Urtiertobata Istoriidan, Arkitektura da Sakhviti Khelovneba XVI-XIX Saukuneebi*, Tbilisi, 2011, p. 56.

I think that the lack of a crown makes it impossible to consider the woman as a queen. Moreover, if the portrait was made for the royal palace, there was no need to hide her personality.

¹⁰⁷ On the history of the restoration of the dome, see D. Khohstaria, Mshenebelta Gamosakhuleba Mtskhეთის Svetitskhovლის Tadzris Gumbatze, *Georgian Antiquities*, 9, 2006, p. 112-127.

¹⁰⁸ Rostom himself was buried in Qum.

¹⁰⁹ *Tskhovreba Sakartveloisa (Parizis Kqronika)*, p. 97.

¹¹⁰ *Karlis Tskhovreba*, edited by S. Kaukhchishvili, t. II, Tbilisi, 1959, p. 425; t. IV, p. 446, 905; *Tskhovreba Sakartveloisa (Parizis Kronika)*, p. 106.

¹¹¹ *Tskhovreba Sakartveloisa (Parizis Kqronika)*, p. 109; D. M. Lang, *The Last Years of Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 85-86.

preparing him as heir to the throne. This, plus the fact Vakhtang was already married and had to divorce¹¹². Both Vakhtang and Mariam well understood the importance of their marital union. The Queen retained her status and influence, while Vakhtang V consolidated his legitimacy as King. Actually, Mariam tried her best to keep the throne. In 1658, immediately after King Rostom's death, she sent a letter to the Grand Vizier Mohammad Beg. In the letter, Mariam promised her loyalty to the Shah and claimed that she was a valuable advisor to King Rostom in political matters and expected that the situation would not change in the future.¹¹³ Mariam convinced Shah Abbas that she was the main guarantee for peace in the Kingdom of Kartli, thus securing herself the throne.

Shaknavaz and Mariam did not change the policy. Their reign was stable and peaceful. The 1660s was a very active period for Mariam as a patron and commissioner of construction. The area of her activity was her domain in Shida Kartli, where she restored and constructed at least four churches. The church in the village of Aradeti is perhaps the earliest structure built during this construction wave. According to the inscription located above the southern door, "We, Patron Mariam, daughter of Dadiani, constructed this church and offered it to Holy Father Sabas in 1666".¹¹⁴ The church was built for the monks and servants of Sapara Monastery, who had been exiled by Ottomans and settled by Teimuraz I in the suburb of Aradeti in 1630.¹¹⁵ The new church was dedicated to St. Sabas as the main church in Sapara.

The small single-nave structure is built of rubble-stone (Fig. 22). Three small and narrow windows are cut into the eastern, southern and western walls (the two latter were enlarged later). The image of the Pantocrator and symbols of the evangelists painted in the barrel vault of the church can be considered a memory of murals of the dome and pendentives in the church of St Sabas in Sapara Monastery.

In architectural form, size and low construction quality, Aradeti Church resembles that of Zghuderi in the environs of Tskhinvali, also erected by Queen Mariam, presumably in the same period. An inscription mentioning the merit of "Mariam, the Queen of Queens, sister of King Dadiani"¹¹⁶ is carved above the southern door. Built of roughly cut stone, it is a small, single-nave building dedicated to St George.¹¹⁷ Judging by its location, it can be identified with a church mentioned in the 1779 enactment of the Church Court called *dikasterion* on the case of the property of the Mount Athos Vatopedi Monastery in Liakhvi

¹¹² The eyewitness Peshangi Pashvibertqadze gives a different course of events in his historical poem, the *Shahnavażiani*, which includes the period from 1658 to 1665. In the poem, Vakhtang V, a viceroy from the Mukhranian dynasty, is represented as a direct successor of powerful Bagrationi kings, who was consecrated in Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, instead of the Shah appointed ruler converted to Islam. Queen Mariam is not a widow, forced to marry him for third time, but a young lady, daughter (not sister) of the powerful Levan Dadiani, who was already dead by this time. The happily married couple has four children, actually shared by Vakhtang and his first wife Rodam. The poem is interesting in terms of Georgian narrative, which whitewashes current events and aims to legitimate the new ruler through representing him as a successor of powerful kings of Medieval Georgia, David the Builder and Queen Tamar. See M. Brosset, *Historie de la Géorgie*, p. 2, liv. 1, St. Petersburg, 1856, pp. 601-614; D. Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia, A History*, New York, 2013, p. 108; Peshangi, *Shahnavażiani*, edited by G. Leonidze and S. Iordanashvili, Tbilisi, 1935; S. Kakabadze, *Dzveli Kartuli Literaturis Istoria*, t. II, Tbilisi, 1981, pp. 497-512.

¹¹³ D. Jghenti, Kartlis Dedopal Mariamis Roli Sakhelmtsipo Ganmgeblobashi, *Matsne*, p. 108.

¹¹⁴ *Kronikebi*, book II, p. 483; M. Brosset, *Rapports*, sixième rapport, p. 114.

¹¹⁵ *Les Antiquités Géorgiennes*, tome III, Tiflis, 1910, pp. 538-359.

¹¹⁶ R. Mepisashvili, V. Tsintsadze, *Arkhitektura Nagornoi Chasti Istoricheskoi Provintsi Gruzii-Shida-Kartli*, p. 138.

¹¹⁷ Today this is an occupied territory and the church cannot be accessed.

basin. According to the document, Vatopedi Monastery possessed the Church of Kashueti St George on the cliff demolished by the swollen river. The icons of the ruined church were entrusted to Makhniashvili, a resident of the town Tskhinvali. Instead of the ruined building, Queen Mariam constructed a new church on the opposite bank of the river and granted the position of Archpriest to Makhniashvili. The belongings of the old church were transferred here.¹¹⁸

In 1668, Queen Mariam restored the Cathedral of St Stephen the Protomartyr in Urbnisi. The large three-nave basilica was originally built in the sixth century and partly rebuilt in the tenth century (Fig. 23). By the seventeenth century, the building had again been badly damaged. The inscription above the southern door mentions the Queen as the only donor of the construction. Its author definitely exaggerated, stating that the cathedral was razed to the ground, as the present building contains significant portions of Early Medieval walls and piers. That is why it became necessary to reinforce the longitudinal walls with pairs of massive buttresses. The vaults had been completely destroyed, and were rebuilt with brick. As in the case of Svetitskhoveli, Prince Vakhushti ascribes the restoration of the cathedral to King Shakhnava despite the fact that the donor inscription mentions only the Queen: “the ravaged [cathedral] was built and renovated by King Vakhtang and adorned the icon of St Stephen the Protomartyr; enclosed it with a fence built of stone and lime mortar.”¹¹⁹ Shakhnava was Prince Vakhushti's great grandfather, which explains his sentiments towards the King.

Another important structure reconstructed on the order of Queen Mariam was the Cathedral of the Mother of God in Ruisi. Ruined and restored several times over the centuries, it is a domed structure elongated from east to west (Fig. 24). Its dome is supported by four free-standing pillars. An additional pair of pillars stands to the west. According to Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi, it was “renewed and adorned” by Queen Mariam,¹²⁰ but he says nothing about the exact date of renovation. Unlike Mariam's other activities, in Ruisi her merit is not documented by any inscription. The heavily rearranged façade layers make it difficult to identify the parts rebuilt by her stonemasons. Giorgi Chubinashvili assumed that the eastern façade and the lower part of the decoration of the southern door were restored during her reign.¹²¹ The brickwork of the northern chapel also can be ascribed to that period. The building inscription in the western façade mentions Giorgi, the overseer of the stonemasons during the second restoration of the cathedral. The paleography of the inscription places it in the late seventeenth century, which means that Mariam restored the cathedral after her marriage to Shakhnava.¹²²

Donor inscriptions do not mention King Shakhnava, so it can be assumed that all these buildings were financed from the Queen's budget. As a woman, her financial independence was ensured by a rich dowry,¹²³ given by her brother Levan Dadiani upon her marriage to King Rostom. Along with numerous precious things, she received court servants,

¹¹⁸ *Kartuli Samartlis Dzeglebi*, texts edited and commented on by I. Doidze, t. V, Tbilisi, 1974, pp. 93-94.

¹¹⁹ Vakhushti Batonishvili, Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. IV, pp. 373.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 373-374.

¹²¹ G. Chubinashvili, Ruisis Tadzris Istoriisatvis, N. Maris Sakhelobis Enis, *Istoriisa da Materialuri Kulturis Moambe*, V-VI, 1940, pp. 464-465.

¹²² I. Gelashvili, An Unknown Inscription of Giorgi, “the Overseer of Masons”, from the Church of the Mother of God in Ruisi, *Proceedings of the Institute of History and Ethnology*, XIV-XV, 2015-2016, pp. 349.

¹²³ G. Nadareishvili, *Dzveli Kartuli Saojako Samartali*, Tbilisi, 1974, pp. 39-42.

including a private priest.¹²⁴ As Queen, she processed serfs and lands, providing herself with an income. Exceptionally profitable were dye-houses also belonging to the Queen.¹²⁵ Queen Mariam was free to manage her wealth and concentrate on the patronage of art and architecture.

None of the church buildings renovated or constructed on Queen Mariam's order contain the royal imagery used "to present the power and authority of the monarchy to all its subjects"¹²⁶ in Medieval and Late Medieval Georgia. Her official status as the wife of the Muslim kings restricted her from being presented within the church space as a donor and commissioner of the building, but it does not mean that she was not displayed inside the church at all. Apart from Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, Queen Mariam was depicted in the Church of the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem.¹²⁷

In 1643, Father Superior Niceforo Irbachi (Nikoloz Irubakidze-Cholokashvili) renovated the monastery through the financial support of Levan Dadiani. His sister Queen Mariam also donated money, and was depicted along with other commissioners. Her image, which has not survived, is known from a photograph published by N. Kondakov in the early twentieth century.¹²⁸ Mariam was presented on the southern projection of the apse, kneeling at the feet of Christ Pantocrator (Fig. 25). The explanatory inscription "the Queen of Kartli Mariam, the daughter of Dadiani, God forgive her, Amen" accompanied the image.¹²⁹ Despite not being the main donor for the renovation, the status and pious reputation of the Queen granted her a prestigious place next to the apse. The significant difference in size between the figures of the Queen and Christ, as well as the simplicity of her image, underline her modesty as a mere Christian. The same attitude is revealed in the epitaphion embroidered on her order and donated to Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. A small figure of the kneeling queen is presented in the lower right corner, with the explanatory inscription: "the Queen, servant of God" (Fig. 26). The date of its creation is unknown. V. Beridze suggests that the epitaphion may have been embroidered after Otia Dadiani's death i.e. after 1645.¹³⁰ If we take into account that the donor inscription of the epitaphion mentions only the Queen, like the church inscriptions, it may indicate that the embroidery was made after 1658.

It is not common for Medieval Georgian epitaphions to depict donors. Queen Mariam is the first to have placed her image on it. Years later, her step daughter Tamar, the wife of

¹²⁴ M. Brosset, Notice sur un document du Géorgien du XVIIe s., *Mélanges Asiatiques tirés du Bulletin Historico-Philologique de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St.-Petersbourg*, tome III, Ire livraison, St.-Petersbourg, 1857, pp. 17-35; S. Barnaveli, Dadianis Asulis Mariamis Mzitvis Tsigni, *Sakartvelos Sakhelmtsipo Muzeumis Moambe*, XXIII-B, Tbilisi, 1962, pp. 207-223; Masalebi *Sakartvelos Sotsialur-Ekonomikuri IstoriisaTvis (Mzitvis Tsignebi)*, edited and published by M. Iashvili, pp. 8-14.

¹²⁵ Z. Khidureli, *Peodaluri Mitsatmplobeloba XV-XVIII Saukuneebis Aghmosavlet Sakartveloshi (Samepo Domeni)*, pp. 92-106.

¹²⁶ A. Eastmond, Royal Renewal in Georgia: the case of Queen Tamar, in *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*, papers from the Twenty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St Andrews, 1992, edited by Paul Magdalino, Aldershot, 1994, p. 283.

¹²⁷ T. Gabashvili, *Pilgrimage to Mounth Athos, Constantinople and Jerusalem*, translated and annotated by Mzia Ebanoidze and John Wilkinson, London and New York, 2013, p. 142.

¹²⁸ N. Kondakov, *Arkheologicheskoe Puteshestvie po Sirii i Palestine*, St. Petersburg, 1904, p. 265, ill. LX. The archeologist N. Chubinashvili made sketches of the wall paintings during his journey in Jerusalem in 1845. Sketches, published in 1958 in the journal *Sabchota Khelovneba*, are not exact copies of the paintings. See *Sabchota Khelovneba*, 8, 1958, picture 7 between pages 8 and 9.

¹²⁹ T. Virsaladze, *Rospisi Ierusalimskovo Krestnovo Monastiria I Portret Shota Rustaveli*, Tbilisi, 1973, p. 55, ill. VIII.

¹³⁰ V. Beridze, *Kartuli Nakargobis Istorridan*, Tbilisi, 1983, pp. 19-20.

Givi Amilakhvari, also portrayed herself on an epitaphion embroidered for Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. It is almost an exact copy of the epitaphion ordered by Queen Mariam.¹³¹

Thus, on all three images, the Queen is presented without her husbands. It can be assumed that the formal etiquette did not allow the Queen to be depicted alone in her husband's lifetime, so she found a way to displace herself through votive composition rather than in an interceding one.

After King Shahnava's death in 1675, the widowed Queen Mariam continued to be an active political figure. She is mentioned in some deeds issued by her stepson King George XI, the successor of Shahnava, as the co-author of the documents. In 1680, Queen Mariam died.¹³² She was buried in Svetitskhoveli Cathedral next to her son Otia Dadiani. The merit of Queen Mariam was so big that she is the only queen consort to have been compared to Queen Tamar:

And Queen Mariam embellished churches with vestments, icons, crosses, and instruments for mass, sewn with pearls and gems. And she was greatly respected by the Shah and by all Georgian men and women, by lords and noblemen. [She] was of good nature in every way similar to whom nobody has been after Queen Tamar.¹³³

Indeed, beyond architecture, there are also books, icons, embroidery, and wall paintings created through the financial support of Queen Mariam. Perhaps the most famous among them is her edition of the *Life of Georgia*, the collection of Georgian chronicles copied between 1633 and 1646.

Conclusion

This study shows the important role of architecture in creating a representation of the political power of Medieval and Late Medieval female rulers. Queen Consorts and other noblewomen acquired prestige through the construction of religious buildings. Architectural patronage became a main visible way for Queen Mariam to demonstrate her Christianity while being the wife of Muslim kings. Churches and cathedrals built and renovated through her financial support also give an interesting hint at her marital status. Donor inscriptions present her and King Rostom as co-founders, while she is not mentioned together with Shahnava, which can be explained by the formal character of her third marriage. However, when the donor of the construction is a different person, such as an abbot or a local lord, Mariam and Shahnava are named as a royal couple following the official etiquette.¹³⁴

¹³¹ *Kartuli Nakargoba*, Tbilisi, 2011, pp. 50-57. The donor's inscription of the epitaphion mentions both Givi Amilakhvari and Tamar, while Queen Mariam is aluded to alone.

¹³² Despite the fact that the date of her death is given on her gravestone, some scholars place it between 1680-1683 due to the controversial narrative sources on the date of her death. A. Tughushi, *tskhovreba da ghvatsli dedopal mariam dadianisa*, p. 53; N. Chikhladze, Svetitskhovlis Mokhatulobani, in *Svetitskhoveli*, p. 242.

¹³³ *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, t. II, p. 441.

¹³⁴ See inscriptions of Kvatakhevi Monastery: "Abbot Nikoloz Chkheidze built this porch during the kingship of Vakhtang and queenship of Mariam, the daughter of Dadiani", and of the church in the village of Khatissopeli: "May God praise the King of Kings Patron Shahnava and the Queen of Queens Patron Mariam." V. Beridze, *Kartuli Kurotmodzghvrebis Istoria*, t. II, p. 133; D. Berdzenishvili, *Narkvevebi Kvemo Kartlis Istoriuli Geografiidan*, p. 289.

Queen Mariam was an active patron and political figure during her Muslim husbands' lifetimes. Despite the very strong influence of the Iranian culture, social traditions and way of life, noblewomen in Georgia maintained much more formal power than those in the Islamic world.¹³⁵ In the history of Medieval Georgia, Mariam is a rare example of a queen consort who acted as a joint ruler.¹³⁶ Her husbands respected her for her outstanding personal qualities, while Georgian society admired the Queen for her pious reputation and patronage of Christian culture during the turbulent political period of the country, when the process of Islamization was very strong. Despite difficult marriage choices, Mariam, as a person of strong Christian identity, never sought refuge in a monastic life and remained an active political leader.

¹³⁵ D. M. Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy 1658-1832*, p. 54.

¹³⁶ D. Jghenti, *Kartlis Dedopal Mariamis Roli Sakhelmtsipo Ganmgeblobashi*, *Matsne*, p. 107.

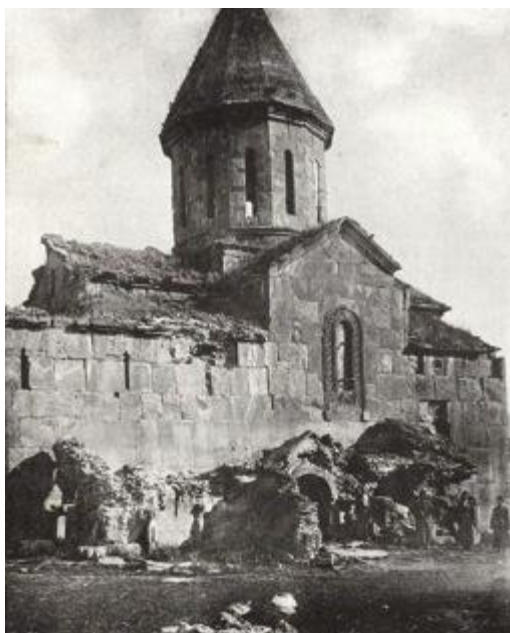


Fig. 1. Tighva. 1152. Photo by P. Uvarova



Fig. 2. Akhali Shuamta. 1530s



Fig. 3. Upper Goruli. Seventeenth century



Fig. 4. The gravestone of noblewoman Darejan, a founder of Upper Goruli Monastery. 1663



Fig. 5. Alaverdi. Eleventh century. Restored between 1479 and 1495



Fig. 6. Samtavisi Cathedral. 1030. Donor inscription by the noblewoman Gayane



Fig. 7. Koreti. 1000



Fig. 8. Koreti. Fireplace



Fig. 9. Khatissopeli. 1658-1675

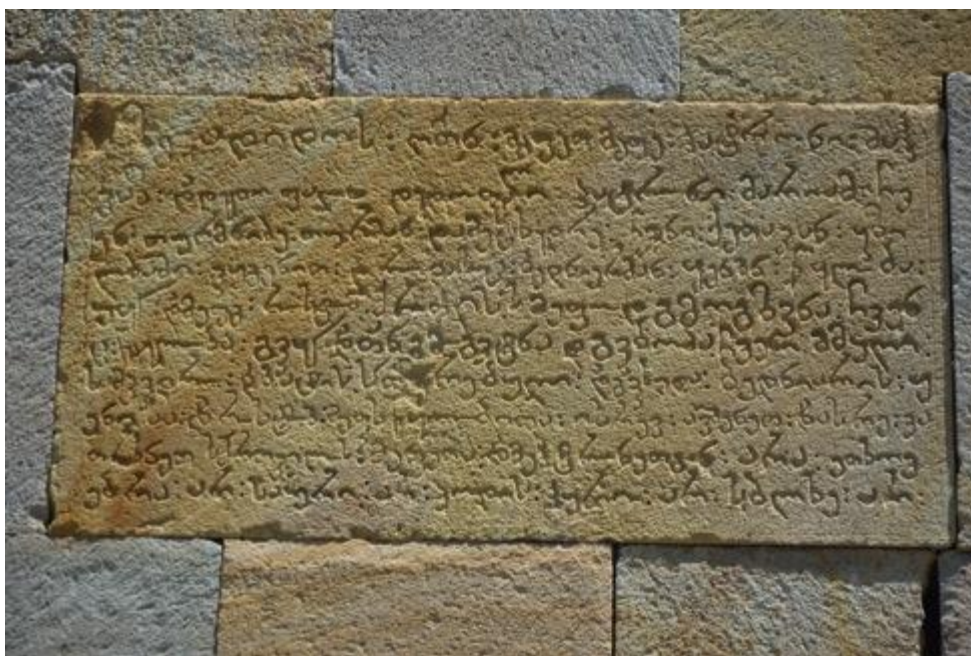


Fig. 10. Khatissopeli. Donor inscription



Fig. 11. Dmanisi St Marina's Church. 1702



Fig. 12. Dmanisi. St Marina's Church. Donor Inscription



Fig. 13. Mariam Dadiani. Tsalenjikha. 1630s



Fig. 14. Queen Mariam Dadiani. Drawing by Christiforo Castelli. 1630s



Fig. 15. View of Tbilisi by Guillaume-Joseph Grelot. 1672.
K. Anchiskhati Cathedral; B. Sioni Cathedral; N. King Rostom's Palace



Fig. 16. Tetrasheni or Queen's Church by Guillaume-Joseph Grelot. 1672



Fig. 17. Bolnisi Cathedral. Restored in 1630s.



Fig. 18. Bolnisi Cathedral.
Restored in 1630s.



Fig. 19. Church of Archangels in Gori. 1646
(Photo from Gori Historical-Ethnographical
Museum)



Fig. 20. Queen Mariam Dadiani and her son Otia Gurieli. Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. 1646



Fig. 21. Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. Donor inscription. 1656



Fig. 22. Aradeti. St Sabbas Church. 1666



Fig. 23. Urbnisi Cathedral. Restored in 1668



Fig. 24. Ruisi Cathedral. Restored in 1660s



Fig. 25. Queen Mariam Dadiani. Monastery of the Holy Cross. Jerusalem. 1643.
Photo by N. Kondakov



Fig. 26. Queen Mariam Dadiani. Epitaphion. 1660s