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Composition of Theophany on 10th-11th Centuries Georgian Church Facades¹

The present paper is an attempt to analyze some samples of Georgian medieval architecture, a small group of monuments which we believe to be outstanding for their facade decoration. i.e., churches built in the 10th-11th centuries, the facades of which are decorated with figurative relief compositions of the Savior's Glorification, the Second Coming of Christ and Theophany.

First of all, we must determine the significance of this group of monuments and the peculiarities to be concerned below. The 10th-11th centuries have been regarded as the era of the development of picturesque, baroque-like style. Not surprisingly, with regard to facade decoration, one of the principle artistic tendencies of this epoch evinced in the diminished role of figurative representation and the increased role of ornamental decoration: in that period, within the scope of development of the same picturesque style, more and more murals appear in church interiors. Since the 11th century entire walls were painted and the ideological burden shifts inside the churches. The facades are freed from thematic compositions and become extensively decorative.

From this point of view, the monuments we're willing to pay our attention to make somewhat of an exception from the overall trend: the significant figurative images on their facades are rare for the above-mentioned epoch. Moreover, the iconographic scenes (Theophany) are rarely met of the facades of Georgian churches built in different periods², but this is not true for the examples of

¹ The paper is based on the report presented at the 7th International Kartvelologian Symposium (Tbilisi, 18.11.2016).

² As opposed to this, in other spheres of Georgian fine arts, e.g., in monumental painting, different

the world's Christian art. It is commonly known that in Medieval Europe (especially in Romanesque examples) the scenes of Theophany, the Second Coming and Last Judgment are the most widespread ones in church exterior decor.

It is no secret that the thresholds of millennia have always been associated with the end of the world in some way. In West Europe these associations were reflected immediately by fine art (multiplicity of the scenes of Doomsday, the Second Coming, Repentance, the Divine Scourge, etc.). It is obvious that such tendencies were not so evident in Georgia, though at the verge of the millennia, similar themes acquired urgency to a certain extent. There are three churches of this period in Georgia, where the scenes of Theophany appear on the facades as the most important iconographic program which a visitor must recognize as soon as he/she approaches the church: Joisubani Church, Nikortsminda and Stvetitskhovel cathedral. It must also be mentioned that, beside Joisubani and Nikortsminda, there is yet another example representing a similar scene in Racha region. It's Skhieri iconostasis (early 10th c.)³ the reliefs of which have so much in common in content and style with Joisubani facade decoration that they might be considered to be pieces of art of one and the same school⁴, but as far as Skhieri reliefs adorn a iconostasis, a minor architectural form, we won't discuss it in detail.

The reliefs (the 1st half of the 10th c.)⁵ of Joisubani or Jvarisubani (so-called Mtskheta St. George) one-naved church are the most ancient ones among the examples mentioned above. They adorned the window trim of the eastern facade of the structure⁶.

versions of Theophany and the Savior's Glorification represent one of the most widespread programs among apsis compositions.

³ R. Mepisashvili. Beris Sakhdari. *Ars Georgica*, v. 7a. Tbilisi, 1971, pp. 91-110 (in Georg).

⁴ I. Nikoleishvili. Altarpiece of St. George Church in Skhieri. *Architectural Heritage*, v. 1, ed. K. Khimshiashvili, D. Khoshtaria. Tbilisi, 2001, pp. 103-140, 115-116, 122 (in Georg).

⁵ N. Aladashvili. Joisubani Reliefs. *Soviet Art #7*, Tbilisi, 1978, pp. 70-71 (in Georg).; G. Bochoridze. *Historical Monuments and Antiquities of Racha-Lechkhumi*. Tbilisi, 1994, pp. 228-231 (in Georg).

⁶ Currently preserved at Oni local Museum.



Pic. 1. Joisubani church reliefs

Notwithstanding the common practice in Georgia, these reliefs depict Theophany and Doomsday scenes: in this culture, window trims were rarely used for figurative images of such importance.

The image of the Savior appears above the window between the images of the Apostles Peter and Paul who carry their traditional attributes, the Key of Heaven and a book. On the background of the relief one can read the carved in

stone names of the Apostles, and the inscription beside the image of St. Peter reads: “*Judgment*”. Lower, we can make out the figure of the Angel Trumpeter who’s known as one of the principal characters of the Doomsday scene, and another angel with scales in his hand. There also are some naive but amazingly expressive naked figures of the sinned and the righteous. Below, the relief depicts a bearded man, the donator of Joisubani church, with the model of the building. The corresponding inscription is: “*Oh Holy Church, have mercy upon Gabriel ealdorman.*”

Joisubani church reliefs represent a rather laconic version of the comprehensive iconographic program of Last Judgment scenes. Such adaptations were characteristic of Georgian fine arts in the Early Middle Ages, exclusively depicting the key moments: In the scene of the Theophany we see only Peter and Paul, the greatest among the Apostles, while in the extensive versions, as a rule, all the twelve Apostles are represented (e.g., the apsis mosaic of San Aquilino chapel of San Lorenzo Maggiore in Milan (the 4th c.)⁷.



Pic. 2. Apsis mosaic of San Aquilino chapel of San Lorenzo basilica in Milan

Of all the scenes of Doomsday, the reliefs from Joisubani represent the scene of Weighing Sins together with the figures of the Angel Trumpeter, the

⁷ C. Ihm. Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom 4. Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des 8. Jahrhunderts. Wiesbaden, 1960, p. 168.

sinners and the righteous. Besides, we can see the images of the Holy Horsemen (St. George and St. Theodore), who necessarily appear in the art of the mountainous parts of Georgia. In this case, beside their general mission in Christianity, they personify the most ancient rider deity who saw the souls of the dead to the other world.

So, the archaic and laconic versions of Theophany and Doomsday represented by the master of Joisubani originate from the depth of the Paleochristian art: catacomb paintings, mosaics and frescoes of Rome, Ravenna and Milan of the 4th-6th cc., sarcophagus reliefs, etc. (paintings at Commodilla (the 4th c.), St. Peter and Marcellinus (the 3rd-4th cc.) catacombs, mosaics of the churches of Saints Cosmas and Damian (the 6th c.) and Santa Costanza (the 6th c.) in Rome, etc.⁸



Pic.3. Painting from St. Peter and Marcellinus catacombs, Rome

⁸ P. Klein. The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages. in "The Apocalypse in Medieval Art", ed. by R. Emmerson and B. McGinn, Ithaca-London, 1992. pp. 158-199.

On the contrary, at Santa Pudenziana church (the 4th-5th cc., Rome)⁹, like at San Lorenzo Maggiore in Milan, we can witness a more extensive representation of Theophany. Stylistically as well as from the point of view of artistry and formal expression, Joisubani reliefs reveal the tendency of archaizing: laconic composition, hieratism and schematism, absolute focus on the principle moments instead of the less important ones... The characters are represented with the utmost expressivity, on one hand, and, on the other, the shapes are simplified, schematic and disproportionate. These are the signs of the early Christian art¹⁰ the stylistic elements of which were still preserved in the early 10th century, in Joisubani church reliefs which date back to the transitional period.

More complex and developed versions of Theophany reliefs characteristic of the High Middle ages are represented at Nikortsminda church¹¹, which has no analogue in Georgian medieval art. First of all, all the four facades of the monuments and their decor have been almost completely preserved: none of the figures in the relief compositions have been shifted from their initial places due to later modifications, the program of the entire facade decoration belongs to one and the same period and is a manifestation of a single idea, which is a rather rare case. As for the exterior adornment, it unveils a single iconographic program where the plot develops from a facade to another until it envelopes all the four facades. The Savior's Glorification and Theophany are the only idea realized through the decoration.

On the apex of the southern pediment we can see a scene of the Second Coming, in the angels are raising Christ sitting on his Throne to the Heaven (two of the angels are carrying the Throne, while the other two have trumpets in their hands).

⁹ E. Dassman. Das Apsismozaik von S. Pudenziana in Rom. Philosophische, imperiale und theologische Aspekte in einem Christusbild am Beginn des 5. Jahrhunderts. RQ, 65/1-2, 1970, fig. 3a; notwithstanding the fact that the mosaic of Santa Pudenziana church was later modified, the principle elements of its scheme, like the sketches made before the restoration works, have still been preserved.

¹⁰ K. Machabeli. Early Medieval Georgian Stone Crosses. Tbilisi, 2008, pp. 21-22 (in Georg.).

¹¹ Н. Северов, Г. Чубинашвили. Памятники грузинской архитектуры. Кумурдо и Никорцминда. Академия Архитектуры СССР, выпуск I, Москва, 1947, p. 3, 17-23.



Pic.4. The Second Coming scene on the southern facade of Nikortsminda church

In this case the image of the Glorified Savior is represented as one of the Pantocrator-Judge because according to the Holy Scripture, the Second Coming is associated with the end of the world¹². The inscription above the relief scene reads: *“Here’s the Second Coming of Jesus Christ”*. This triumphal interpretation of the composition of Theophany¹³ perfectly conforms to the elevating, festive and monumental nature of the facade decoration. Due to the peculiarities of the architectural decor, the master tries not to resort to a multi-figured narrative composition and offers a brief iconographic version: the Savior on his Throne, with two angels raising him, the *Dextera Domini*¹⁴ and two Angel Trumpeters. The master prefers not to portray any other characters (Mother of God, Apostles) of a more comprehensive version of Theophany, the so-called historic Theophany often represented in monumental paintings, miniatures or samples of icon-painting¹⁵.

¹² Н. Аладашвили. Монументальная скульптура Грузии. Москва, 1977, p. 165-166.

¹³ A. O’Hear, N. O’Hear. Picturing the Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation in the Arts over Two Millennia. Oxford, 2015, pp. 54-56.

¹⁴ Н. Кондаков. Иконография Богоматери. т. I. 1914, репринт 2003, p. 189, 206.

¹⁵ Z. Skhirtladze. Early Medieval Georgian Monumental Painting. Telovani Church of the Holy Cross. Tbilisi, 2008, pp. 35, 252, note 19 (in Georg.).



Pic.5. Theophany, a miniature from Rabula Gospel (the 6th c.)

The iconographic details of the characters of Nikortsinda relief are based upon the corresponding fragments from the Gospel of Mathew and the Book of Revelation (Mathew 14:30-31; Revelation 4:2-3, 7:1). In the entrance tympanum of the same facade we can see the composition of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross which also represents four angels. Here the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is a symbolic interpretation of the Glorification and Revelation of Jesus Christ and echoes the scene on the fronton.

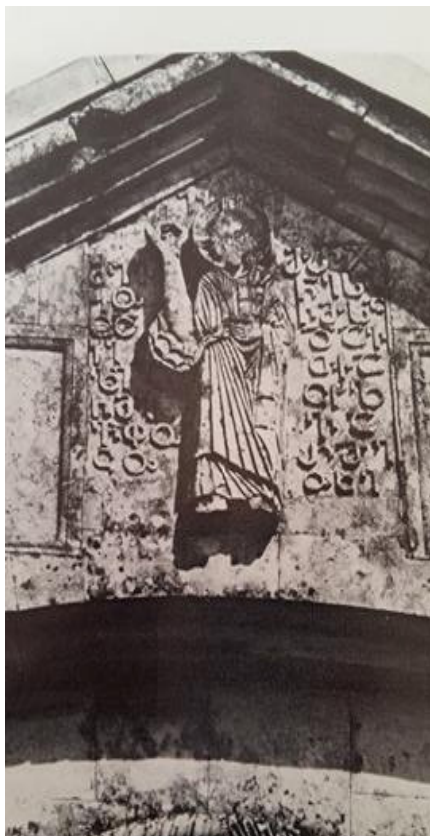
On the western facade of Nikortsminda church we can see another interpretation of the Savior's Revelation, where Christ is represented as the Judge of the Universe with his right hand raised as a sign of benediction and the Gospel in his left one.



Pic. 6. Relief of the western facade of Nikortsminda church

Though there is no explanatory inscription appended to this scene, we can find a quite close parallel in Georgian art, which provides us with substantial information about the relief from Nikortsminda. The inscription of the scene represented on the western facade of Martvili church (the 10th c.), where the image of Christ is almost similar to Christ on Nikortsminda relief, corresponds to the Apocalypse (*“I will raise my hand to the heaven and swear by my right hand and declare: I live forever and ever”*)¹⁶.

¹⁶ E. Takhaishvili. *Archaeological Voyages and Remarks*. v. 2, Tbilisi, 1914, p. 42 (in Georg.).



Pic.7. Relief of Martvili church

There are some pine cones on both sides of the image of the Savior on the western facade relief of Nikortsminda church. Cones are the most ancient symbols associated with the eternal life both, in pagan and Christian cultures. In this very relief cones highlight that Christ is the source of the eternal life¹⁷.

There is a similar image on the eastern facade of Odzun church, Armenia, where on both sides of the Savior Judge we can see stalks and fruit. Besides, there are the figures of the Archangels on the window arch. Notwithstanding the fact that Odzun church was more than once subjected to reconstruction, this very composition most likely belongs to the end of the 10th century and thus has much in common with Nikortsminda reliefs.

¹⁷ J. Strzygovski. Der Dom zu Aachen und seine Entstellung. Leipzig, 1904, pp. 16-23.



Pic. 8. Reliefs of Odzun church, Armenia

The scene of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the eastern facade of Nikortsminda was also meant as a prototype of the Second Coming. In case of this scene, the plot is abstracted from the narrative context (the Gospel narrative) and conveys the generalized, symbolic content. This facade also represents a further interpretation of the subject of Theophany: After the scene of the Second Coming and the representation of Christ as the Judge of the Universe, the composition of the Transfiguration is a manifestation of the idea of Theophany too, however it's based upon the symbolic interpretation of the plot of the Gospel.



Pic. 9. Transfiguration scene on the eastern facade of Nikortsminda church

It is known that all three reliefs were chiseled by one and the same master but it is also presumed that three different masters took part in the decoration of the whole building. Scientists are mostly inclined to believe that all pediment compositions¹⁸ were cut in stone by one master. In Nikortsminda church which is the outstanding sample of the picturesque style, figurative reliefs, decorative arcades and rich ornaments are integrated into an organic, meaningful and harmonious ensemble. In general, the stylistic development of the facade decoration in Georgia, revealed the tendency of proceeding from separate unrelated images or decorative details represented on wall surfaces to a single ideological artistic system, a uniform architectural ensemble. So, the evolution of exterior decoration since the transitional period till the early 11th century might be briefly assessed as a shift from separate elements to a uniform ensemble the examples of which appeared as early as in the 10th century, e.g., the absolutely magnificent Oshki cathedral. Notwithstanding its richest fretwork for Georgian Middle Ages, the artistic emphasis here is placed on ideological reliefs which contain information about the principle provisions of the Christian dogmatic theology¹⁹.

We believe that Nikortsminda is well-preserved enough to facilitate the partial reconstruction of the decoration of Svetitskhoveli which was built in the same epoch. As it is known, the facades of the cathedral in Mtskheta were more than once remodeled²⁰. They contain elements which belong to different periods and are mostly replaced from their original places²¹. Many researchers are interested in differentiating these layers and specifying the initial places where the decorative elements were set, e.g., G. Patashuri thinks that the relief composition now represented on the western facade initially decorated the eastern one²².

¹⁸ Н. Северов, Г. Чубинашвили. Памятники грузинской архитектуры. Кумурдо и Никорц-минда, р. 17-23.

¹⁹ Н. Аладашвили. Монументальная скульптура Грузии, р. 153-154.

²⁰ I. Elizbarashvili, M. Suramelashvili, Kh. Chachkhunashvili, Kh. Churgulaia. Architectural Restoration in Georgia: Historiography, Tradition, Experience. Tbilisi, 2012, pp. 144-148 (in Georg.).

²¹ L. Muskhelishvili. The Earliest Inscriptions of Sveti-Tskhoveli and the Will of Kathalicos Melkisedek. *Ars Georgica*, v. 1, Tbilisi, 1942, pp. 133-142 (in Georg.); G. Patashuri. The Reconstruction of the Svetitskhoveli Façades and their Artistical Peculiarities. *Georgian Antiquities* 12, Tbilisi, 2008, pp. 101-128 (in Georg.); According to G. Patashuri, the western facade of the structure was completely remodeled; however, decorative elements and reliefs of the 11th p. (figures of Christ and angels, vines, etc.) have still been preserved. The image of a bigger fan together with the inscription of Catholicos Melkisedek, five false arches and the figures of a lion and an eagle on the western facade represent the layer of the 11th p. (however, all these figures have been replaced); from Arsukidze construction layer on the southern facade the central part of the facade and three windows have been preserved. As for the northern side, the central window, the space within the central arch and the trim of the upper window have been preserved (fragmentarily).

²² G. Patashuri. The Reconstruction of the Svetitskhoveli Façades and their Artistical Peculiarities, p. 112.



Pic. 10. The Eucharist scene on the western facade of Svetitskhoveli cathedral

This composition, together with other images scattered on the facade, is our particular line: we believe that, like Nikortsminda, the facade decoration of Svetitskhoveli initially complied with a single theological program and, similar to Nikortsminda again, was dedicated to the idea of Theophany. Indeed, it was impossible for the monument of this high artistic merit and paramount importance not to have an ideologically significant iconographic program, but, naturally, due to the importance and scale of Svetitskhoveli, this program was much more complex, diverse and pompous than the one at Nikortsminda.

It's our point of view that the composition of the western facade and the figures of angels on the eastern facade must be the starting point in the attempt to reconstruct this iconographic program. The images of the Savior and angels on the western facade might be interpreted quite differently: in this composition Christ is represented as the Pantocrator (sitting on his Throne, with the blessing right hand and the Gospel in his left hand) while one of the flying angels carries a jug and another has a sacramental bread in his hand. All these objects point to the Eucharist content²³, but the composition itself reminds of the Savior's Glorification, the Revelation scene. Similar to the Second Coming scene at Nikortsminda, the scene of the Eucharist lacks the Communion of the Apostles and the whole is generalized. The Eucharist, the idea of consecration (Revelation 5:11-14) is associated with the Glorification of the Lord. The composition

²³ Н. Аладашвили. Монументальная скульптура Грузии, р. 202.

finely fits the pediment apex of the western facade and is perceived as the climax of the system. But is the apex of the pediment the place where it was initially set within the completely remodeled facade of the cathedral? According to G. Patashuri, there are obvious traces of reworking on the stones and the nimbus of the Savior has been slightly cut by the cornice. Maybe, the composition really was placed on the eastern facade first. If we take this argument to be true, then we shall presume that the Eucharist was initially placed under the apex of the pediment, on the eastern side: There is no appropriate place elsewhere on the facade. And which was the initial place of the two angels now decorating the eastern facade and revealing an obvious stylistic similarity with the angels in the Eucharist scene (it presumably belongs to the layer of the same 11th century)?

Or maybe the facade owes its damages and inaccuracies to decoration replacements and the relief was initially meant for the western side? It is clear that the figures of the Eucharist scene as well as the angels at the eastern facade, the large scale of the images of a lion and an eagle, all the generalized and monumental shapes, intense modeling, alto relievo and rich shades were calculated for being recognized from afar: the figures were placed at the top of the facade.



Pic. 11. Figures of angels on the eastern facade of Svetitskhoveli cathedral



Pic. 12. Figures of a lion and an eagle on the eastern facade of Svetitskhoveli cathedral

We presume that the eastern facade of Svetitskhoveli was decorated with the scene of the Second Coming (Revelation 4:5:11) and, in compliance with the Eucharist on the western facade which also conveys the idea of the Lord's Glorification, the Theophany decorated the eastern side of the structure. Today, we can still see separate replaced fragments of this Theophany on the facade of the cathedral (flying angels with a scroll and a trumpet, figures of a lion and an eagle which are considered to be symbols of Evangelists in the context of the Second Coming)²⁴. Many researchers have already noticed that all these images have been randomly placed on the eastern wall. We might presume that initially, as is common in the iconographic program of the Theophany, the figure of the Savior sitting on his Throne among the angels and the symbols of the Apostles was placed above the false arch, within the quite spacious area under the apex of the pediment. As for the symbolic images of the Scroll and the Angel Trum-

²⁴ M. Brown. *Manuscripts from the Anglo-Saxon Age*. Toronto, 2007, p. 11; according to the rules of Christian iconography, the winged lion symbolizes Mark the Evangelist, but in the Middle Ages lion and bull symbols of the Evangelists Mark and Luke were sometimes depicted without wings, e.g., the so-called Echternach Gospels (presumably from Lindisfarne Abby, circa 690) (Paris. Bib. N. MS. Lat. 9389). The image of the lion without wings, together with the symbols of other Apostles, is also represented on the western facade of the basilica of St. Francis of Assisi.

peter, multiple samples of Medieval fine arts prove that they are necessary attributes of this scene. In this case we'd refer to Beatus manuscripts which have been regarded for the most comprehensive and extensive versions of the Apocalypse illustrations in the Christian world²⁵.

As far as Georgian reality knows no such manuscripts, we find interesting the parallels with the Medieval European art. Many researchers focus their attention on the fact that manuscript illustrations have appreciable influence upon the iconographic programs in the decoration of the Medieval monumental architecture (e.g., the reliefs of Moissac church²⁶ or Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire gateway²⁷). Due to their specific character, miniatures generally represent extensive versions of different iconographic programs, where, unlike facade sculptures, none of the details is ever neglected. Besides, manuscript illustrations are inseparable from the text and depend on its context alone instead of the goals which are topical for the other forms of art (compliance with architectural forms, viewpoint, and the neglect of detalization which is more important in case of monumental art).

In the illustrations mentioned above, the most important fragments of the Revelation of St. John the Divine, we can see many elements which are chaotically distributed on the facade of Svetitskhoveli cathedral. However, we can presume that initially they were parts of a single meaningful system. We'll try to consider all these elements below:

The scene of the Second Coming is one of the most important in the Apocalypse illustrations.

²⁵ P. Klein. La tardición pictórica de los Beatos. Actas del sinposio para es estudio de los codeces del "Comentario al Apocalipsés de Beato di Liebana". Madrid, 1980, pp. 84-106; P. Klein. Les cycles de l'Apocalypse du haut Moyen Âge (IX-XIIIe siècles). L'Apocalypse de Jean. Traditions exègetiques et iconographiques IIIe-XIIIe siècles. Geneva, 1979, pp. 135-186; M. Lawson, W.D. Wixom. Picturing the Apocalypse: Illustrated Leaves from a Medieval Spanish Manuscript. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, v. 59, # 3. New-York, 2002, pp. 10-13; The group of so-called Beatus manuscripts (manuscripts of the 10th-15th cc.) represents copies of the commentaries to the Revelation of St. John the Divine written by a monk, cartographer and theologian Beatus from Asturias (786-796). We focused our attention on the samples of the 10th-12th centuries, which, maybe, have much in common with the material to be considered (manuscripts from the Metropolitan Museum as well as manuscripts of El Escorial, Saint-Sever and Facundus).

²⁶ M. Vidal, J. Maury, J. Porcher. Quercy Roman. Paris, 1969, p. 100.

²⁷ E. Mâle. L'arte religiosa del secolo XII in Francia. Paris, 1923, pp. 13-14.



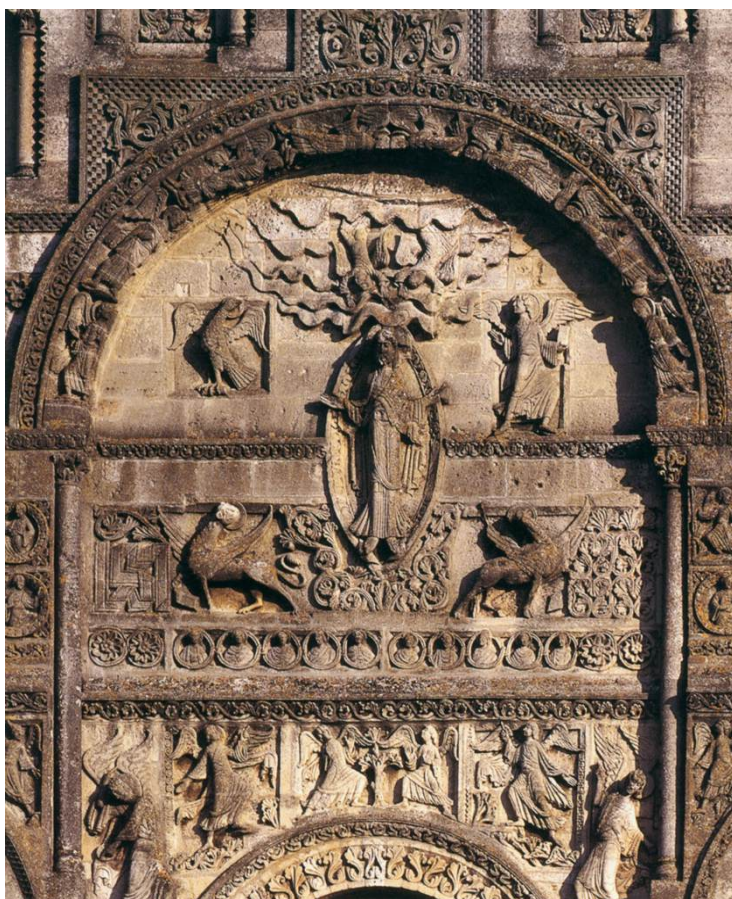
Pic. 13. The Great Theophany, the Saint-Sever Beatus (the 11th c.)



Pic. 14. The Angel Trumpeter, the Facundus Beatus (the 11th c.)

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The characters of this scene, the angel Trumpeter (Revelation 8:5) and the angel with the scroll in his hand are also depicted on the eastern facade of Svetitskhoveli cathedral, together with two of the four symbols of the Apostles (the lion and the eagle). So, if we aren't mistaken in our judgment, the architectural decoration of the 11th century lacks the figure of the Savior sitting on his Throne and the symbols of the two other Apostles (the man and the bull). Like the similar scene on the western facade, the Savior on the eastern facade might have been depicted without a mandorla. If so, it becomes clear why the hovering angels weren't carrying the mandorla and had the scroll and the trumpet in their hands (e.g., reliefs of Angouleme cathedral (1108-1128)).



Pic.15. The Savior's Revelation scene in Angouleme cathedral, France

It is also noteworthy that from the point of view of some researchers, the story depicted on the eastern facade of Svetitskhoveli cathedral was absolutely different and represented one of the most important episodes of the national ideological program, the scene of how Svetitskhoveli (the life-giving pillar) was erected²⁸, described in the Life of St. Nino²⁹. From our point of view, such story³⁰ could hardly appear on the facade decoration of a cathedral (notwithstanding the fact that the scene of erecting the life-giving pillar tells the story of how the foundation of the Svetitskhoveli cathedral was laid and symbolizes the origins of Georgian Church in general, echoing the fact of establishing the title of the Catholicos-Patriarch). We think that an iconographic plot common to all Christians would be more natural in this case than the national one and should have the festive, triumphal character responding the splendor of the cathedral's exterior. As for the context, it seems that the composition of Theophany would be the best response of the Eucharist scene on the western facade: They both represent different interpretations of the Glorification of the Lord and Nikortsinda church considered above resembles this approach most.

Interestingly, the relief compositions on three (eastern, southern and western) facades of Nikortsinda thematically echo one another. There are no reliefs under the pediment of the northern facade which, in accordance with the traditions of Medieval Georgian architecture, is less decorated. Within the architectural composition the facade decoration repeats the quadruple symmetry to a certain extent, which is characteristic of smaller multi-facade constructions. In case of Svetitskhoveli, the eschatological relief composition is placed on the western facade³¹ and presumably there was another similar composition on the eastern facade too.

Formulated differently, we have to deal with the bilateral symmetry which we consider to be a quite logical artistic solution with regard to the elongated

²⁸ K. Cholokhashvili. An Attempt of the Reconstruction of a Particular Iconological Program the Eastern Façade of Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. TSU Papers 326, Tbilisi, 1998, pp. 91-96 (in Georg.).

²⁹ Life of Kartli. ed. S. Kaukhchishvili. v.1, Tbilisi, 1955, pp. 8, 16, 47-49, 171; Siradze R. "The Life of St. Nino" and the Origin of Georgian Hagiography. Tbilisi, 1987, pp. 8, 16, 47-49, 171.

³⁰ The episode of erecting the pillar has more than once been reconfirmed in Georgian fine arts: the refectory murals at Udabno monastery, the seals of Patriarch Besarion and Catholicos Anton, Guljavarashvili's frescos on the legendary pillar in Svetitskhoveli interior. This episode also appears in the murals of Tigran Honents Church (1125) in Ani; A. Каковкин. Сцена «Чудесное явление животворящего столпа» в росписях храма Григория в Ани. Зограф 20, Београд 1989, с. 30-32

³¹ We draw parallel between this composition and the appearance of the lamb from the illustrations of the Apocalypses (Morgan Library Beatus (the 13th c., MS M.429, fol.86v-87) and Manchester Beatus (1170); Beato de Liébana, Códice de Manchester, ed. P. Klein, Madrid, 2001.

shape of the plan of the cathedral. As is known, the present cross-in-square structure of Svetitskhoveli is a reconstructed version of the big basilica constructed by Vakhtang Gorgasali. The master maintained the form of the plan and turned the arcade which determines the rhythm of the facade decorations into the principle artistic accent. That's why we can see a couple of equal facades unlike the four more or less identical facades of Nikortsminda church and the idea of accentuating two narrow facades, the eastern and western ones, by means of the most important stories in Christian dogmatic theology seems quite logical³². As for the longitudinal facades, we unfortunately have no sufficient data to talk about the figurative compositions of the 11th century which might have continued the eschatological cycle. It may well be that there were no such reliefs on the these facades of Arsukidze's Svetitskhoveli and the master focused on decorative effects (fans, window trims, the festive rhythm of the arcade, etc.)

Other minor details of Svetitskhoveli's exterior decoration as well as the details belonging to later periods evidence the fact, to some extent, that the composition of Theophany was present on the facade of the cathedral, e.g., there is another image of an eagle under the arcade of the northern facade, which has obviously occurred at this place by accident.



Pic. The figure of an eagle on the northern facade of Svetitskhoveli cathedral

³² We exclude the possibility that there was a scene of the Assumption of Mary on the eastern facade: if we assume that the Eucharist was initially placed on the western facade, it would violate the hierarchy, which logically foresees appearance of more important characters and iconographic plots on the eastern facade.

The smaller dimensions of the eagle on the northern facade and the stylistic peculiarities of the method of execution make us believe that this figure wasn't included in the decoration of the 11th century but (presumably) echoed it thematically. On the northern facade we can also see another image which stylistically resembles the samples of the Late Middle Ages. It's a figure of cherub and is proportionate to the eagle described above.



Fig. 17. Cherub on the northern facade of Svetitskhoveli

An absolutely similar cherub is also represented on the southern facade. We're inclined to think that both details once created another iconographic version of the Savior's Glorification which complied with Ezekiel's Vision (Ezekiel 1:1-15; 10:1-22; Daniel 7:1-8) instead of the Apocalypse. Today, it isn't easy to determine the place where the composition presumed by us was set, but because of the smaller dimensions of separate images it most likely decorated the lower part of the facade. The mosaic of Latomu Monastery (the 5th-6th cc.)³³ may be taken for one of the best and most ancient artistic expressions of Ezekiel's Vision, as an interpretation of the Savior's Glorification. The frescos of Dodosrka (the 9th c.)³⁴ and Sabereebi #5 (the 9th c.) churches as well as the relief of the iconostasis of Tsebelda³⁵ are regarded as the earliest samples of Ezekiel's Vision in Georgian art.

³³ The appearance of the Prophet's image in the mosaic at Latomu Monastery (Hosios David Church) unquestionably proves the fact that it is an illustration of Ezekiel's Vision.

³⁴ А. Вольская. Ранние росписи Гареджи. сборник „Гареджи“, Тбилиси, 1988, р. 3-4.

³⁵ Л. Шервашидзе. Резные камни на холме Арасахару близ Цebelды. ИАИЯЛИ, 4, 1975, р. 90-92.

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Pic. 18. Apsis mosaic at Latomu Monastery, Greece

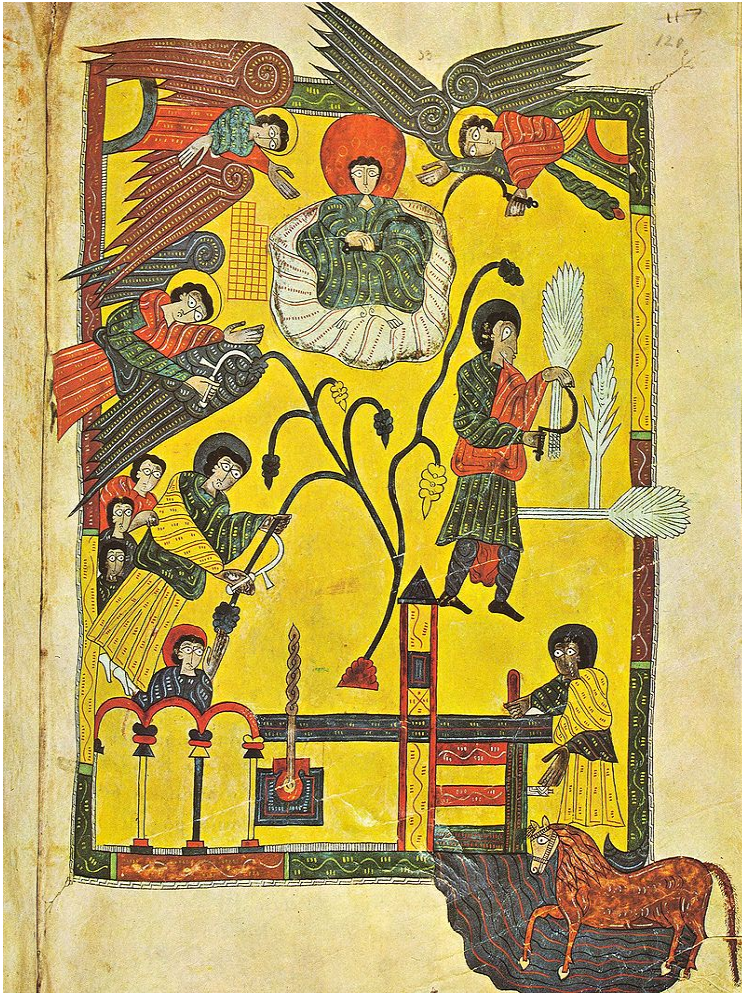
Similar compositions as parts of tympanum decoration are widely spread among the Romanesque churches (e.g., Moissac church (115-1130), Saint-Foy church (1050-1130), etc)³⁶.



Pic. 19. Reliefs at Saint Foy church in Conques, France

³⁶ However, in the monuments of the classic Romanesque style the scenes of the Lord's Glorification are represented in a more extensive context: in complicated, multi-figure compositions figures are disposed in several tiers around the central figure of the Savior. So, the decoration of Romanesque tympanums differs from the laconic decoration of Georgian churches, where compact relief compositions are easily noticeable against the wall surfaces.

Figures of vine (the Tree of Life) are also included in the illustrations depicting the Revelation of St. John the Divine and are integral parts of the Last Harvest theme.



Pic. 20. Escoreal Beatus miniature (the 11th c.)

Such vines appear twice in the exterior decoration of Svetitskhoveli cathedral, on the western facade (the 11th c.) and on the southern facade (later than the 11th c.).



Pic. 21. The Tree of Life on the western facade of Svetitskhoveli cathedral

Images of a chalice and the souls of the dead depicted in the form of birds are also significant elements of the Apocalypse illustrations. Such images appear on the southern facade of Svetitskhoveli due to its later remodeling.



Pic. 22. Cadeña Beatus miniature (the 12th c.)



Pic. 23. Decorative details of the southern facade of Svetitskhoveli cathedral

To summarize the above said, we're once again putting forward the hypothesis that it's possible to reconstruct the original form of the 11th century facade decoration of Svetitskhoveli cathedral to a certain extent in accordance with the similar reliefs of Nikortsinda. We believe that the relief decoration of Svetitskhoveli was more eschatological and thus echoed the decoration of some earlier and contemporary Georgian monuments as well as the tendencies spread throughout the Christian world in the same period.