

FLICKERING SUNRAYS: CAPTURING DIVINITY ON GEORGIAN CHURCH FAÇADES

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Abstract

Geometrical and floral ornaments such as the rosette can be found in Georgia as well as in the south and eastern areas neighboring it. Pagan societies used such decorative images for centuries. The subject has provoked discussion for over a century, generating diverse opinions, and it bears funerary context, symbolic function, concept of the divine, apostrophic function, and cosmic and solar connotations. The first source is from Mesopotamia, an abundance of Neo-Assyrian (9th – 7th centuries BCE). In the Caucasus, the rosette ornament, used in specific traditional images, is associated with the stable influence of religious beliefs and cults dating back to the Neolithic era. It was passed down from earlier local pagan beliefs into Christianity, being firmly established in this religion.

The eccentric, unconventional, and imaginary form of the rosette as well as the monumentality of its size, manifests unique creative work that, in my opinion, is endowed with religious and philosophical meanings on church façades.

The article aims to show that the rosette, disc, and zig-zag engraved in stone on façades, stone pillars, and other objects play a similar role as decorative elements. Such motifs use the sun's rays to replicate various effects, create movements of light and shadow across the intricately sculpted façade and stone pillars, vibrate, and scatter flickering rays. In this manner, they lend a sense of sacred space, generating theological ideas and thoughts about the Creation and the Divine appearance on façades.

Keywords: rosette, disc, zig-zag, light, Sacred space, Divine appearance

Reliefs of rosettes—open flowers and disc forms—embellish Georgian church façades in various shapes and sizes. While investigating façade sculptures, I encountered many motifs and scenes of outstanding beauty where even colors can still be discerned. However, the most surprising and striking one is the rosette or open flower inscribed in stone (fig. 1).

The term ‘rosette’ denotes an open flower that does not necessarily match the conventional rosette, as one finds in medieval glass works (stained glass windows). The category of a rosette in Samtavisi Cathedral will be at the center of the test case, along with its various shapes of open flowers. The discussion will also include *zig-zag* and disc patterns, all concerning Georgian façade sculpture (figs. 2, 3)¹.

Zoomorphic and floral ornaments such as the rosette are found in the eastern areas of Georgia. Pagan societies used them for centuries². According to Ekaterina Endoltseva, the rosette ornament, as shown in specific traditional images in the Caucasus, is associated with the stable influence of religious beliefs and cults dating back to the Neolithic era. It was passed down from the earlier pagan beliefs of the local Caucasians and was established in Christianity.

The rosette’s eccentric, unconventional, imaginary artistic work, and the monumentality of its size, transmit and manifest unique creative work which, in my opinion, is endowed with religious and philosophical meanings on church façades³. How should these ornaments be interpreted? Are they merely decorative elements or symbols that convey profound thoughts and ideas? Investigating Georgian façades sculpture⁴, I found that Georgian medieval art and culture were embedded with profound theological and philosophical thoughts. They echo the culture of a highly sophisticated society and leave no doubt that the motifs bear meaning beyond animating a decorative form. The sculpted façades had scenes bearing the value of

1 I am thankful to David Gurevič for his knowledge and very helpful suggestions in respect to archeological evidence in the Holy Land. I am also indebted to Lado Miranashvili for his great support in getting some Georgian images that are rare to find. His knowledge and constant willingness to help are precious to me.

Throughout the study, the reader will get acquainted with the process of the evolution of the forms through the centuries. I have omitted the category of rosette and disc medallions that encircle various symbols.

2 **Endoltseva E.**, Zoomorphic Images and Ornaments with Rosettes in Christian Art of the Caucasus: Formation Paths of the Traditional Schemes, *Anastasis: Research in Medieval Culture and Art*, 7/2, 2020, p. 198–200.

3 Façade reliefs are the main issue in this article due to their repeated use, although such reliefs can be found on stone pillars, too.

4 **Shneurson E.**, Veil of Sacredness: Framing Georgian Church Façades, *Eastern Mediterranean Texts and Contexts Series* (ed. C. Horn), Warwick: Abelian Academic, 2024 (forthcoming).

art installation, a modern term for *art in public areas*. In this context, a question arises: what was the role of such sculpture during that era? What can art installations do to the public arena, considering the early stage of their appearance in Georgia? And what is the meaning of their absence in Western churches during the same period? The rosette reliefs in stone led to the creation of related motifs, namely the disc and open flowers, and to a lesser extent, the *zig-zag* or *dog-tooth* motif in stones. The rosette was often used throughout an extended period, while the zig-zag frieze was less common. Nevertheless, both have a similar function on façades as decorative elements. Such motifs use the sunrays to reproduce various effects, create movements of light and shadow across the intricately sculpted façade, and vibrate and stir the sight with flickering rays, thus lending human senses and thoughts. However, this convention of the sunrays has a more considerable influence on the viewers by generating theological ideas, thoughts about the Creation, and the Divine appearance on the façades. In the relatively early formation stage, they imbue tricking thoughts about this practice of the forms concerning Georgia. This phenomenon occurred centuries before it arrived in the Balkan churches, and the use of the sun's rays to evoke Divine light on façades⁵. I demonstrate that *hierotopy*—the concept of creating ‘Sacred Space’, in this case, on façades⁶—resulting from the combination of the outstanding use of elements such as the rosette, zig-zag, and disc forms in stone, harnessing the sunrays on to the image. I aim to show the concept of a hierotopical sacred space with not only common symbolism but also distinctly tangible, even three-dimensional, characteristics in the art and architecture of Georgia.

In this study, I first present the source of the rosette motif and the different approaches to its form, use, and spread in the ancient Eastern Empires and cultures. I then scrutinize the motif in several Georgian churches to show how frequently and perfectly it was employed and what artistic shapes it developed. Next, I explore the different theological and philosophical theories—that influenced the art of Georgia—to provide a theoretical foundation and clarification to the rosette inscribed in stones, light, to sun-

5 **Čurčić S.**, *Divine Light: Constructing the Immaterial in Byzantine Art and Architecture, Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium* (eds. B. D. Wescoat and R. G. Ousterhout), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 307–338.

6 **Lidov A.**, *The Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and Subject of Cultural History, Hierotopy: Spatial Icons and Image-Paradigms in Byzantine Culture* (ed. A. Lidov), Moscow: Design. Information. Cartography, 2009, p. 7–35 (English resume p. 305–309); Idem, *Hierotopy: the Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and Subject of Cultural History, Hierotopy: The Creation of Sacred Space in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, (ed. A. Lidov), Moscow: Progress-Tradition, 2006, p. 32–56.

rays, and the other motifs mentioned above. Finally, I investigate how these theories appear to be reproduced in the sculptures on the façades and contribute to a new understanding of the subject matter.

Like the rosette, the disc shape appears in floral and geometric forms on the façades. Surprisingly, questions emerge regarding their appearance as a predominant motif in Georgia's stone pillars and façades.

The Historical Framework of the Rosette Motif Development

The rosette and disc motifs were used in art from the early periods, generally considered the third millennium BCE. Archeological evidence points to the earliest appearance of the rosette in Mesopotamia during the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1200 BCE), which is the period of the Great Empires: Egypt in the south of the Levant, the Hittite's empire in the north, Minoan Crete, Mycenaean in the eastern Mediterranean sea⁷. Chronology points to the spread of the rosette in the Late Bronze Age (1500–1000 BCE), reflecting a substantial increase in its use in Egypt. Ugarit, Palestine Megiddo, and Canaan are also included in this category, being under the control or influence of Egypt or the Hittites. The Megiddo site displays the widespread use of the rosette ornament in the Late Bronze Age, an excellent example of the phenomenon (fig. 4)⁸.

The periods mentioned above have revealed evidence of cross-cultural contacts between entities like Assyrians, Phoenicians, Hittites, Egyptians, and Tyre, with numerous forms and shapes of vessels and objects adorned with the rosette⁹. In the Early Iron Age, the practice of using different materials and the vast repertoire of vessels grew, and the patterns and shapes developed into more complex compositions. Powerful Phoenician influence is evident in the Salamis necropolis (8th century BCE) in Cyprus. The Phoenicians were instrumental in transferring the rosette during the Late Bronze Age and into the Iron Age II up to 600 BCE¹⁰. Numerous rosette and pomegranate beads were left in the rock-hewn tombs, and a large percentage of the Nimrud ivories display rosettes during this period¹¹.

⁷ **Porter B. W.**, Assembling the Iron Age Levant: the Archaeology of Communities, Politics, and Imperial Peripheries, *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 24, 2016, p. 373–374; **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette in the Late Second Temple Period: Its Origins and Usage*, PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2008, p. 53.

⁸ **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette...*, p.56–57. Woodcock traces the Rosette at Megid do back to the period between the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1500–1200 B. C.) and Iron Age I (ca. 1200–1000 B. C.).

⁹ For instance, there are many rosette decorated fibulae from the period of 1100–900. See: **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette...*, p. 58.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 59.

¹¹ **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette...*, p. 61.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the brief chronological description presented above. Firstly, the rosette was used in the Levant for a very long period and profoundly impacted the region's art for millennia and centuries before and after Christ. Secondly, the usage of rosette can be classified into five categories according to the analysis of the data discussed: 1. Apotropaic; 2. Royal; 3. Funerary; 4. Religious; 5. Decorative¹².

Relying upon a trustworthy periodical definition relevant to Christian Georgia, I explore the motifs from the First and Second Temple periods and the surviving architectural evidence in Jerusalem. Dian Helen Woodcock's thesis on the rosette form in Judea provides samples of the period. Woodcock argues that the rosette motif has a significant meaning in Judean usage. Accordingly, she claims that using the rosette was in bathing complexes of the elite, Herod's Temple, and tombs¹³. Woodcock's connection of the rosette form with Plato's philosophy is pertinent to the Georgian perception and theological thoughts, as expressed in their writings¹⁴.

Old Testament Tradition of the Rosette Motif

Woodcock's investigation shows that the rosette's form has a long history of decorative patterns from the Bronze Age onwards. In contrast, *Old Testament* (hereafter *OT*) is the primary written source describing the rosette relevant to this study. Textual analysis and archeological evidence may clarify the use of the word 'rosette'. The biblical accounts of the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple shed light on the ideology that may have governed the

¹² Ibid, p. 62.

¹³ **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette...*, p. 21.

¹⁴ There is evidence of Georgian interest in Neoplatonism in second-hand sources as early as the 6th century, and in surviving written sources from the 10th century onward. See: **Tevzadze G.**, Ideologie und Kommentar im Mittelalterlichen Georgien (10–12 Jahrhundert), *Der kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter*, vol. 2 (eds. W. Geerlings and Ch. Schulze), Leiden: Brill, 2004, p. 163–177; **Alexidze L.**, Ioane Patrissi's Commentary on Proclus Elements of Theology, *Interpreting Proclus: From Antiquity to Renaissance* (ed. S. Gersh), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 229–244; **Raphava M.**, Georgian Translation of Nicetas Stethatos's Epistles (according to Arsen Iqaltoeli's Dogmatikon), *Georgian Christian Thought and Its Cultural Context* (eds. T. Nutzubidze, C. Horn, and B. Lourié), Leiden: Brill, 2014, p. 244–282; **Iremadze T.**, Die Philosophie des Denkens bei Ioane Petrizi, *Konzeptionen des Denkens im Neuplatonismus: zur Rezeption der Proklischen Philosophie im deutschen und georgischen Mittelalter* (eds. D. von Freiberg, B. von Moosburg, J. Petrizi), Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner, 2004, p. 161–241; **Shneurson E.**, Veil of Sacredness: Architectural Facades Sculpture in Georgia; St. John the Baptist Church in Oshki, *Le rideau, le voile et le dévoilement, du Proche-Orient ancien à l'Occident médiéval* (eds. E. Palazzo et al.), Paris: Geuthner, 2019, p. 313–338.

choice of ornament. Centuries later, these choices, employed by the Georgians, express their enduring connection with the Holy Land. Exodus: 25-40 delivered the commandment to erect the Tabernacle and the instructions for its realization.

There is continuity between the biblical Tabernacle and the building of the First Temple extracted from Exodus: 25-31, and the declaration that the Tabernacle was of divine origin. Thus, specific motifs were given the value of divinity, allowing for continuity to the Second Temple and onwards¹⁵.

Exploring the Book of Exodus shows that the instructions for decorating the temple mention the abundant use of floral designs. The Scriptures introduce the Hebrew noun (“צִיץ”) ‘zits’ means, according to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (hereafter NRSV), a rosette, while the King James Version (hereafter KJV) translates it as an “open flower.” The word developed in several directions until it was determined to be a rosette. The Hebrew meaning of the rosette as blossom or flower is used only concerning the High Priest’s miter. Exodus 28:36-38 (NRSV) states:

“You shall make a rosette of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, “Holy to the Lord”. You shall fasten it on the turban with a blue cord; it shall be on the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron’s forehead, and Aaron shall take on himself any guilt incurred in the holy offering that the Israelites consecrate as their sacred donations; it shall always be on his forehead, so that they may find favor before the Lord”.

NRSV version states in Exodus 39:30-31 states:

“They made the rosette of the holy diadem of pure gold, and wrote on it an inscription, like the engraving of a signet, “Holy to the Lord” They tied to it a blue cord, to fasten it on the turban above; as the Lord had commanded Moses”.

The headgear of Aaron is associated with holiness, offerings, guilt, the high priesthood, and favor before God. Wearing this motif was crucial to the correct functioning of the cult¹⁶.

The same word is used in 1 Kings 6:18, 29, 32, 35 to describe the decoration of Solomon’s temple: in Hebrew, “פִּטְוֹרֵי צִיָּצִים”, means ‘budding flower on the way to opening’ though in all the three translation versions (KJV, RSV, NRSV), it is translated as ‘open flowers’¹⁷. More variations of the word produced other meanings, like comparing flesh to the beauty, flower, human birth, or blossoming of a flower. The above scripture reflects the floral motifs. In Exodus, 1 King 6, and other texts, the floral motifs are located in a sacred

15 **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette...*, p. 188-189.

16 *Ibid*, p. 192.

17 *Ibid*, p. 190.

environment as divine images¹⁸. This interpretation of the motifs continued for centuries. The use of the rosette in the Book of Exodus symbolizes any gift experienced in the holy offering of the Israelites that was consecrated as their sacred donations. Furthermore, a holy diadem of a gold rosette which was engraved with the words “Holy to the Lord” was tied to Aaron’s turban turning into a motif of “the correct function,” as “following Moses’ commands,” as a rebirth of humans and the protection of its blossoming.

Woodcock draws attention to the biblical description of Solomon’s Temple, which resembles monuments of Phoenician art in Syria. She further provides archeological evidence compared to biblical narratives, thus creating a long thread of continuity from the ancient world throughout the First Temple to the Herodianic Temple and onward¹⁹.

Herod’s Temple

The available archeological evidence relating to the Second Temple displays the tradition of the rosette form (though we do not have remnants from the temple itself). Thanks to excavations which are still going on around the Temple Mount, archeologists have more information regarding the site as well as a repertoire of ornaments showing that the popular floral motifs primarily used in the Late Second Temple Period were pomegranates, pine cones, palm trees, lilies, and open flowers in rosettes²⁰.

The floral and rosette patterns we find nowadays appear in different places in the compound, such as in the south domes of the Double Gates, mainly in the entrance. They also appear in the north dome of the Double Gates and the Royal Stoa, located south of the Temple Mount. The debris from these areas reveal many pieces displaying abundant rosette forms²¹. The fragments from the Royal Stoa, on the whole, are consistent with those from other locations in the late Second Temple Period—a rosette of many designs, foliate branches, leaves, lilies, and geometric designs²². The historian Josephus Flavius praised the Royal Stoa as “more worthy of mention than any other [structure] under the sun” and described the building in detail²³.

¹⁸ Woodcock supports the NRSV version by leaning on other scholars’ interpretations. See: **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette...*, p. 192.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 188–195.

²⁰ **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette...*, p. 198.

²¹ Ibid, p. 201.

²² Ibid, p. 204.

²³ **Ben-Dov M.**, *In the Shadow of the Temple: The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*, New York: Harper & Row, 1985, p. 73–76; **Shimron A., Deutsch Y., Peleg-Barkat O.**, *The 70 CE Temple Mount Conflagration: First Scientific Evidence*, *New Studies on Jerusalem – Proceedings of the Tenth Conference* (eds. E. Baruch and A. Faust), Ramat-Gan:

In her article titled “The Art of Jerusalem during the Second Temple Period” and published in 2020²⁴. Orit Peleg-Barkat writes that she has found remnants of a rosette inscribed in the northwest vault of the South Double Gate. This Gate is connected with the Temple via tunnels which have four umbrella domes, one still partially carved with floral and geometric forms and rosettes of various sizes and shapes²⁵. The South Double Gate contains several areas where multiple types of rosettes appear²⁶. According to Peleg-Barkat, the Double Gate’s umbrella domes decorations belong to the Herodian Period, and she relies on Mazar’s investigation to confirm her assertion.²⁷

Herod’s massive constructions throughout Israel had architectural implications on the buildings nationwide. Private houses and the funerary complexes of the elite reflect this approach²⁸. The sarcophagi and ossuaries are found in considerable quantity around Jerusalem, Judea, and Jericho. Many of these objects are decorated with various rosette types.

Peleg-Barkat and other researchers and archaeologists generally describe Jerusalem as a large city where a lot of buildings were constructed throughout the Hellenistic and Roman Periods. The core participants of the city in the development of Christianity are apparent, and so is its influence on Georgian society, history, art, and the monasticism movement.²⁹ From the early stages of Christian development in Jerusalem, the six-point rosette is a striking pattern because it resembles the open Madonna lily.³⁰

Bar-Ilan University, 2004, p. 19–33; **Shimron A., Deutsch Y., Peleg-Barkat O.**, New Evidence of The Royal Stoa and Roman Flames, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 36, no.2, 2010, p. 57–62; **Flavius Josephus**, Antiquities of the Jews, bk. 15, chp. 11, p. 3–5, *The Complete Works of Josephus* (tr. W. Whiston), Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1981, p. 410–420.

24 **Peleg-Barkat O.**, The Art of Jerusalem during the Second Temple Period, *The History of Jerusalem: The Second Temple Period, 332 BCE–70 CE*, vol. 2 (ed. I. Gafni, R. Reich, and J. Schwartz), Jerusalem: Yadlzhak Ben-Zvi, 2020, p. 527–568.

25 Ibid, p. 542–43.

26 **Peleg-Barkat O.**, The Art of Jerusalem..., p. 543.

27 **Peleg-Barkat O.**, The Art of Jerusalem..., p. 542, 544; **Ritmeyer L.**, *The Quest: Revealing the Temple Mount in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), p. 71.

28 Peleg-Barkat also paid attention to this kind of buildings and their decoration. See: **Peleg-Barkat O.**, The Art of Jerusalem..., p. 546–553.

29 Peleg-Barkat studied the Herodian Art period in a more comprehensive way. See: **Peleg-Barkat O.**, Herodian Art and Architecture as Reflection of King Herod’s Many Faces, *Common Dwelling Place of All the Gods: Commagene in Its Local, Regional and Global Hellenistic Context* (eds. M. Blömer, S. Riedel, M. J. Versluys, and E. Winter), Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2021, p. 409–438; **Mgaloblishvili T.**, *New Jerusalem in Georgia*, Tbilisi: Center for the Exploration of Georgian Antiquity, 2013.

30 **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette...*, p. 195, 204.

Examples of Motifs in Georgian Churches

The Rosette. Stone relief sculpture occupies a significant place in the pictorial art of medieval Georgia, and the relief images played the leading role in visualizing the essence of the new religion. Stone relief preserved early visual representations of the Christian subject scenes and took part in developing Christian iconography in Georgia. The subject matter arose from Christ's life and history in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the reliefs are embedded in the antique and oriental tradition, Sassanid Persia, and localism.

From the vast repertoire of the rosette on façades and pillars, I present several examples below that display the use of the pattern throughout the centuries.

Cross Pillar, from Bolnisi (fig. 5, 6),³¹ early 7th century. The Bolnisi column is a fragment engraved with a peacock decorated with two asymmetrical rosettes dating from the early 7th century³². In this case, the rosette possesses a more significant decorative role. The fragment looks vivid and well-decorated since it is asymmetrical. Another rosette can be seen in the baptistery of a church in Bolnisi: here the rosette form is accompanied with a cross, a deer and a vine, being more characteristic of the early Christian period and symbolizing resurrection and the immortality of the soul. In Georgia, they are linked, additionally, to the story of the miracle-working tree and the legend of the Wooden Cross.

The Edzani Church of St. Demetre. The Holy Sepulcher and the Ark are seen at the top of the pillar dating from the 6th to 7th centuries (fig. 7). Above the double arches, there is a rosette encircled by a decorated band which resembles the Shavi Sopeli tympanum (discussed below). The relief's importance lies in the iconographic connection it draws between itself and the Golgotha Cross during the early stages of the Christian art of Georgia and Metzkheta³³. The Edzani emblem of the cross is embedded with Christological connotations of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. Furthermore, the relief displays double arches, alluding to the Ark of the Covenant at the top of the pillar. The relief is engraved on the church façade, its location making it even more prominent as those approaching the church face a sacred place resembling, and equivalent to, the Holy Sepulcher in Georgia.

31 **Dadiani T. et al.**, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture*, Tbilisi: George Chubinashvili National Research Center, 2017, p. 12.

32 **Dadiani T. et al.**, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture...*, p. 52, fig. 129.

33 Another example that draws a connection to the Golgotha Cross can be seen on a khandisi stone cross pillar bearing similar composition. See: **Machabeli K.**, *Early Medieval Georgian Stone Crosses*, Tbilisi: Ministry of Culture, Monument Protection and Sport, 2008, p. 123, fig. 4–6.

Ruisi Cathedral of Transfiguration, south annex. The plaque of the Transfiguration, which is located on the church tympanum, traces back to the 8th to 9th centuries when the building was renovated. A band encircling the tympanum of the east chamber is decorated with rosette reliefs³⁴. On the tympanum, the scene of *Majesťas Domini* is depicted. Initially, it was to adorn the main entrance of Ruisi Cathedral³⁵ (fig. 8, 9). The tympanum shows the *Majesťas Domini* and a man kneeling in supplication before the Virgin and Child, which is linked to the general concept of soul salvation. The appearance of the rosette on a band encircling the tympanum ties the form, once again, to historical figures and religious subject matter of Divine formation on the façades, endowed with the sanctity of the rosette form.

Shavi Sopeli. The tympanum sculpture above the church window resembles the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, and it thus reflects the long-lasting and robust ties to the Holy Land³⁶. The form of two arches became a standard way of presenting the ark. It is typically located on the tympana of church entrances or other prominent sites. Tamar Khundaze brings E. Tumanishvili's interpretation of the subject matter of the tympanum "as a *Majesťas Domini* linked with Isaiah's vision in Is. 6:2, with the image of the Ark of the Covenant, while the building in the center of the composition represents Solomon's Temple"³⁷. Tumanishvili correlates the image of the Ark to the depiction in the conch in the Germigny-des-Prés Church³⁸, a 9th century mosaic. Nevertheless, there is a similar, but earlier depiction of the Ark of the Covenant in an important site which is geographically closer to Georgia—the ancient synagogue of Dura Europos in Syria (fig. 10, 11).

According to Kitty Machabeli, the Holy Sepulcher in medieval Georgian reliefs follows the tradition common to the Christian East, the symbolic link to Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem³⁹. More specifically, it is related to the structure of the aedicule of Constantine's church. The Holy Sepulcher is depicted in the center of the composition on a façade or a stone pillar, representing the symbolic image of the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple.

Above the Ark of the Covenant, the rosette cannot be defined as a mere decoration but must stand for a much more comprehensive theological and symbolic representation. The cross and rosette, juxtaposed with the Holy Sepulcher at the top of the pillar or tympanum, typically symbolize Christ's

34 **Dadiani et al.**, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture...*, p. 20, fig. 61.

35 *Ibid*, p.21.

36 Another specimen relating to the same subject matter can be seen in Tsirkoli Church, which dates from the 8th century. See: **Dadiani et al.**, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture...*, p. 94, fig. 181.

37 *Ibid*, p. 94, notes 14–15.

38 *Ibid*, p. 94.

39 **Machabeli K.**, *Early Medieval...*, p. 35–37.

victory over death⁴⁰. It exemplifies the composition's versatility, destined to evoke religious feelings in those approaching the church. In this case, the rosette can be understood as a decorative form. However, it still carries a symbolic meaning and plays a significant role in the endeavor to create Georgia as the Second Jerusalem. The relief at Shavi Sopeli was a long-chain synthesis of the Holy Sepulcher with the Ark of the Covenant as a reflection of the ties to the Holy Land and the naming of Metzkheta as the New Jerusalem⁴¹.

From this point of view, it is interesting to look at these relics as a fusion of *Majestas Domini* and worship of the Holy Sepulchre or a symbol of the intersection between the earthly and heavenly worlds.⁴²

The Zig-Zag Pattern

The Anchiskhati Basilica (probably, formerly called Saint Mary's Church), which was built by King Dachi Ujarmeli, King Gorgasali's son, in the 6th century, is a three-nave structure⁴³. Under its roof, several lines of zig-zag friezes were constructed during the early 17th century. The zig-zag pattern resembles that of the Gurdjaani church of the Virgin (Kvelatsminda), which dates from the 8th century. Besides being a decorative element, the zig-zag frieze also evokes Divine light on the façades with the help of sunrays. Besides being a decorative element, the zig-zag frieze subject matter uses the sunrays to evoke divine light on the façades.

The Gurdjaani Basilica of the Virgin, which traces back to the 8th century, is the only church in Georgia that has two domes built of even rows of corbel stone. Under all the roofs, several rows of zig-zag patterns run around the basilica. It is a unique structure with no continuation later on, but the pattern is dominant on the façades, and the sunrays vibrate in the beholder's eyes.

Martvili Church is considered a seventh-century building; the tenth-century renovation saw the change of the church's name⁴⁴ (fig. 2). Below the cornices of the apses, two rows of stone zig-zag elements run west to east, while underneath the more sculpted busts of saints (fig.15–16) can be seen.⁴⁵

40 **Machabeli K.**, Palestine Traditions of Early Medieval Georgian Plastic Art, *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences*, 2/1, 2008, p. 123.

41 Read more on the ties of Metzkheta and Jerusalem in: **Mgaloblishvili T.**, *New Jerusalem in Georgia*, Tbilisi, Center of the Exploration of Georgian Antiquity, 2013.

42 **Ousterhout R.**, The Temple, the Sepulcher and the Martyrion of the Savior, *Gesta*, 29 (1), 1990, p. 47–50; **Dadiani et al.**, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture...*, p. 94.

43 *The Spiritual Treasure of Georgia* (ed. V. Gabelia), vol.1, Tbilisi: Khelovneba, 2005, p. 45.

44 **Dadiani et al.**, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture...*, p. 18–19.

45 The sculptures organized on two registers, one on the east façade and another on the west, are not discussed here.

Contradicting the vibrant, lively Warrior Saints on horseback on the sculpted register below it, the bust figures under the cornices are static and motionless, functioning as corbels. Byzantium influenced Western Georgia and ecclesiastically belonged to the See of Constantinople, compiled in the 7th century⁴⁶.

The unique cornice of the church's east gable, a zig-zag stone structure, has a unique significance on church façades. The cornice comprises two bands of dogtooth-patterned stones. Slobodan Ćurčić contends that the dogtooth or zig-zag shape represents the Divine Light in Eastern Christian and Byzantine artistic and architectural traditions⁴⁷.

The motif that expresses its message symbolically, conveying the notion of the Divine Light, was executed in different media, such as mosaics, fresco paintings as well as brick and mortar⁴⁸. The fourth-century Cappadocian father Gregory Nazianzus wrote about the light illuminating Jesus on Mount Tabor. He initiated discourse on the subject that was to occupy theologians for centuries⁴⁹. To artistically depict the heavenly glory, it became necessary to transform symbolic signs and ideas into a visual form. Ćurčić examines several examples, demonstrating the development of the dogtooth motif in Balkan art, and reflects upon the theological perception of the Divine Light during the Middle and Late Byzantine periods.⁵⁰ The zig-zag lines create paintings with an illusion of three-dimensionality. The motif produces a play of shadow and light of the sun's rays on stones. I consider the dogtooth cornice in Martvili to reflect this artistic illusion, manipulating the sun's rays to produce shade and light effects on the stones and reliefs. The manner in which the dogtooth cornice encircles the apse emphasizes the exterior of the east façade, turning it into a sacred space. The form creates a performative image of glittering ornaments, dynamism, and movement. Thus, it has an inherent capacity for a hypnotic effect on the viewer who experiences the Divine Light and imagines seeing the Divine without encountering figurative representation.

The reliefs of the church resonate with an earlier version of the scheme, already in use during the period of Emperor Justinian I in St. Catherine's Monastery (6th century), to express the Divine Light in a universal, abstract

46 **Dadiani et al.**, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture...*, p. 19.

47 **Ćurčić S.**, *Divine Light...*, p. 307–337, esp. 310.

48 On the Divine Light, see chapter two.

49 On the notion of the Divine Light, see: **Andreopoulos A.**, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2005, p. 15–22.

50 The specimens include Hosios Lukas Monastery (early 10th century) as well as Cefalù Cathedral, and Daphni Monastery (both dating from the 12th century). See: **Ćurčić S.**, *Divine Light...*, p. 313.

language of symbolic signs (fig. 16). The churches of Martvili (7th to 10th centuries) and Gurdjaani (8th century) (fig. 18) are unique early examples of the sophistication of Georgian façade sculptures contextualizing religious thought in art.

Nikortsminda Cathedral was built in 1011 and 1014⁵¹ (fig. 14, 15). An inscription on its western façade mentions the royal sponsor, King Bagrat III, who ruled from 1001 to 1027 (fig. 17, 18). The church is enveloped with a system of blind arches on three façades, the central scene being flanked by two discs on each of them.

The uniqueness of this cathedral is reflected in its sophisticated system of blind arches and sculpted reliefs which show Christological-biblical scenes.

Thus, this system exemplifies a metaphorical “parochet” covering the church edifice, which is inlaid with a wide range of decorative reliefs and figurative scenes on four façades. From a broader perspective, the subject matter of the depicted settings is that of the Revelation, in which various themes such as Traditio Legis, the Ascension, Transfiguration, Majestas Domini, Christ’s Second Coming, the Day of the Last Judgment, and others, have been encapsulated.

The Samtavisi Cathedral features outstanding geometric non-figurative symbolic façades. The southern and northern ones are adorned with blind arches and a central motif. It is a striking monumental rosette (fig. 17) on each side, emblazoned on the stone façade. The rosette shape is created through circles of leaves of different sizes and geometric forms, each circling the other. These rosette reliefs reflect the Divine presence on the surface of the façades, the Divine Light spreading upon them and turning the façades into sacred place.

I argued in another work that the motifs of blind arches in the Samtavisi Cathedral (like other churches) present an unfolding veil inlaid with exceptional reliefs on the façades, before which the beholder undergoes a spiritual exaltation that is usually reserved for scholars who can ‘see the un-seeable’⁵². At the same time, the sculpted façade may have stimulated the illiterate viewer’s impulse and the drive to pursue spiritual exaltation, according to their ability to interpret an abstract symbol. The mental status of the beholder changes and transforms in front of the sculpted façade,

51 **Dadiani et al.**, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture...*, p. 193.

52 “The visible is truly the plain image of the invisible”. See: **Pseudo-Dionysius**, Letters, Letter 10, 1117B, **Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works** (ed. P. Rorem, trans. C. Luibheid), New York: Paulist Press, 1987, p. 289; **Pseudo-Dionysius**, The Mystical Theology, 1001A, **Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works...**, p.137. “By Means of the Variety and Abundance of Composite Symbols”. See: **Pseudo-Dionysius**, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, ch. 1,376B, **Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works...**, p. 198.

from being a passive viewer to an active supplicant who takes part in the hierotopical creation of sacred space.

Alexei Lidov explains hierotopy as the initiation of a group of communities to mark a place as holy due to some unique event that occurred there. He named this also the “eruption of holiness”⁵³. Even today, standing in front of the façades with their symbolic forms evokes feelings that appropriate the definition of the “eruption of sacredness”.

The monumental rosette conveys symbolic messages, hinting at Neoplatonic philosophical ideas expressed by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s theory of mystical signs and symbols⁵⁴. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite stated that the Divine descends toward the earth through the angelical levels, transmitting the Divine Light and spirit from the ultimate One to the plurality of human nature⁵⁵. The spread and descent of the Divine Light towards earthly symbols and realms of time, space, and sense perceptions, first and foremost, must be stored in memory for future recollection⁵⁶.

Light, Theory of the Optic

By the 6th century, Christianity had shifted its focus from material objects and naturalist expectations “toward the symbolism inherent in mystic contemplation”⁵⁷. As Jaś Elsner calls it, this transformation was a “mystic viewing” of the art. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, considered to be the most vigorous-spirited mystical theologian in the Christian world of his time, provided a Dionysian path through material symbols to a spiritual reality that shares Plato’s imagery of light⁵⁸. Thus, “mystical viewing” was a spiritual path to the viewers’ journey as they pursued a way to unite with the One. Neoplatonic perceptions led Christian theologians to treat the church façades as a part of the entire church’s edifice and as a unity of the place and its constructive elements. Light was the primary conveyor of the Divinity to the last and lowest body on earth. The decorative system elevates the Divine under the veil of earthly symbols⁵⁹. Pseudo-Dionysius the Are-

53 **Lidov A.**, *Hierotopy...*, p. 33.

54 **Rorem P.**, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbolism within the Pseudo-Dionysius Synthesis*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984.

55 Throughout all his works, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite discussed the subject of the Divine Descent. See **Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works**, p. 51, 61–62, 66–68, and 139–40.

56 **Carruthers M.**, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (2nd ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 22–24, 76–81.

57 **Elsner J.**, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 88.

58 **Elsner J.**, *Art and the Roman Viewer...*, p. 99.

59 **Rorem P.**, *Biblical and Liturgical...*, p. 66.

opagite, defined the mystical path of light through which material symbols lead to spiritual reality.

The discourse in Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite's corpus relates to the central role of symbols and the way they influence the human soul. Pseudo-Dionysius relied on a Jewish tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures and passed it down to Christians through Origen⁶⁰. His principal aim was to explain how light performed as a transmitter of divinity to the lower level on Earth. The theological doctrine of progressive descent of Divine Light empowers the transmission of divinity from the highest causes to the lowest beings in creation. According to his understanding, nature is replaced by the ecclesiastical and angelic orders⁶¹. In his exploration of the Divine in *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, angels appear to have an inherent capacity to mediate between the celestial and the ecclesiastical hierarchies⁶².

Thus, Dionysius introduced the idea of a celestial hierarchy in which the Divine is the One, and the angelic level is mediated between the One and the rest of the world. Heavenly knowledge is conveyed to humans through the illumination of radiant rays. Accordingly, the task of the angelical hierarchy is to move between the hierarchies, delivering the divine spirit to the last and lowest entity on Earth. Thus, it corresponds to the Platonic ladder of essences⁶³.

It was believed that the angelic hierarchy, possessing both sublime divinity and earthly corporeality, was created for the epistemological purposes of the Divine Light. This means that the “divine intelligible”—the rays of light—consistently descended to the lowest level in the same order: first to the religious leaders, and then to others through them. The descent towards the earthly hierarchy was interpreted as rays of light emanating from the One, from the “pure union,” towards the multiplicity of materiality and

60 **Harrington L. M.**, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism*, New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004, p. 104.

61 **Tavolaro A.**, Eikon and Symbolon in the Corpus Dionysiacum: Scriptures and Sacraments as Aesthetic Categories, *Pseudo-Dionysius and Christian Visual Culture, c. 500–900* (eds. F. Dell’Acqua and E. S. Mainoldi), Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 48.

62 This treatise and its methodological commentary helped to shape medieval Western and Byzantine theories about symbols in general, both biblical and liturgical. **Rorem P.**, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 49.

63 A comprehensive discussion on the angelic role and the transmitting divinity of symbols to sensibility to human being, see: **Ivanović F.**, Pseudo-Dionysius and the Importance of Sensible Things, *Pseudo-Dionysius and Christian Visual Culture, c. 500–900* (eds. F. Dell’Acqua and E. Sergio Mainoldi), Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 83–84.

earthly corporeality⁶⁴. They pass it on in a form suited to the human soul “in the diversity and multiplicity of divided symbols”⁶⁵.

According to Pseudo-Dionysius, physical extension and the chronology of time are the primary symbolic mechanisms of the sacred liturgy. The concept of the procession, namely, the descent of the Divine Light into symbols, indicates God’s self-disclosure beneath the veil of earthly symbols⁶⁶. On the lower level, human beings can only experience the simple actions of the Divine before they leave the earthly world because of their lack of knowledge and sacredness, and their need for exaltation. This idea is also expressed in Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 8:7): “How be it there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with the conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled”.

Conclusion

Visualizing signs and symbols on façades endowed them with the power of ideas and perceptions whose expression was beyond human language and human logic; that is why sculpted images like the rosette and the zig-zag, and metaphoric motifs such as a veil and a curtain can encapsulate so much meaning. The various sculpted scenes and the blind arches delineate the façades as sacred spaces and integral parts of the church. Thus, a new and additional theological aspect arose in Georgia for “sacred space”.

The Judeans’ use of a rosette was an indirect statement that it may have been symbolic in a sense defined with reference to Plato, Woodcock argued⁶⁷. Symbols and signs have an abstract nature⁶⁸. Plato’s philosophical concept and Greek philosophy were rooted in Georgia as early as the first century onward. The common ground in defining the term ‘symbolism’ is that it does not convey the obvious, literal meaning of its form. A more abstract concept is expressed to the participant through the symbols and alludes to the two different worlds of Plato⁶⁹. Plato’s world of ideas is permanent, unchangeable, and unreachable. In contrast, the world of phenomena (the physical world) constantly searches for ways to reach perfect ideas. In

64 **Plotinus**, *The Enneades* (trans. by Arthur Hilary Armstrong), vol IV.7, Cambridge, Mass.–London: Harvard University Press, 1984.

65 **Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite**, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, I, 376B, **Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works...**, p. 198.

66 **Roerem P.**, *Biblical and Liturgical...*, p. 67–68.

67 **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette...*, p. 23.

68 **Franel E., Teutsch B. P.**, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*, Nothvale: Jason Aronson, 1995, p. xiv.

69 **Woodcock D. H.**, *The Rosette...*, p. 46.

other words, it strives to attain the world of perfection. The world of phenomena is changeable, accessible, and never internal. The principle valid for the symbol is that “Something of its material properties inevitably becomes engaged with its abstract properties because human beings have to function in a material world”⁷⁰. This means that human beings cannot totally leave their senses and corporeality behind to reach the world of ideas. In this respect, the quest is eternal. The monumental sculpture of rosette, disc, and zig-zag carries the notion of the sun’s rays creating the flickering light on the façades, materializing the perception of Divine Presence on them.

The OT encounters light in the story of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai, carrying the Tablets. He did not know that “the skin of his face shone” (Exodos 34:29–35) because he had been talking with God. Furthermore, fire and light are signs of divine presence in the OT and the Christian Scripture. They are signs of judgment, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah and the Transfiguration of Jesus. OT fire and light are signs of divine anger for guidance. NT fire and light have a positive connotation derived from the Transfiguration⁷¹. The Book of Matthew encounters light, describing Christ’s Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, stating, “his face shone like sun, and his garments became white as light” (Mat. 17:1–8). Moses encountered God’s face when he was alone while Jesus was accompanied by three disciples, and Moses and Elijah appeared to them, joining Christ to participate in the event.

These last two quoted theophanies remind one that God is invisible and that light is the only manifestation of the divine presence. In both cases, two humans, Moses and Christ, became instruments for transmitting divine light. Their faces shone, and Christ’s garments also shone. Another significant difference was that Moses was a human elected by God and shone on the mountain facing God, and Christ was God incarnated and made visible on earth. He did not know that “the skin of his face shone” (Exodos 34:29–35) because he had been talking with God. However, how does this language of symbolic signs work for the viewer? It is reflected through the theoretical analysis of the rosette on stone, zig-zag, and disc forms as a concept of Divine Light and as flickering sunrays, capturing Divinity on Georgian church façades. The church’s interior softened and melted the various light sources that emanated from God himself or sometimes from the ruler. Rulers

70 On symbolism, see: **Hobson P.**, *The Cradle of Thought*, London: Macmillan, 2002, p. 95–97; **Eliade M.**, *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader* (eds. B. C. Wendles and D. G. William), New York: Harper & Row, 1975; **Franel E.**, **Teutsch B. P.**, *The Encyclopedia...*, p. xiv; **Maguire H.**, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 11.

71 **Lee B.**, *Fire and Light: The Polemics of the Divine Presence, Light and Fire in the Sacred Space: Material from the International Symposium* (ed. A. Lidov), Moscow: Indrik, 2011, p. 47–49.

that identified themselves with the Sun, from Nero's Domus Aurea through Domitian, Midas, to Justinian, all considered their palaces equal to heaven⁷².

In this regard, Bissera V. Pentcheva states that “the synergy between poem and *soros* enables epigram and image/relic to capture and to enforce the presence and effect of the *sōmapneumatikon*: fluidity or reversibility between the states of solid and liquid. We encountered this dynamic in the *eulogiai*, whose liquid content and glittering flasks blurred the distinction between flowing and congealed”⁷³.

The facade sculpture featuring rosettes, zig-zag, and disc forms produces energy that speaks to the vitality of inspired matter, engendering the metamorphosis of stone into an outpouring of sacredness like oil. Furthermore, this fluidity indicates the vivifying energies imbued in the matter⁷⁴. The encounter with the sacred is meant to trigger a reciprocal change in the faithful, compelling him/her to move from stony indifference to an effusion of tears from penance. So this process of “melting,” performed by the light of a fixed form of the reliquary or stone relief, can be psychologically mirrored by the viewer's repentant tears.

On church façades, these forms promote liveliness as they stem from the sunrays, and their appearance changes with the changing of time and ambient conditions, as well as with the movement of daily light and shadows across complex surfaces. The flicker of light stirred by a breeze, a strong wind, or hot weather gives glitter to church façades, making them lustrous and memorable. The sunlight, the rosette inscribed in stone and the zig-zag dramatically affect façades, creating sacred space of Divine light and God's presence. The sunlight and the rosette inscribed in stone and zig-zag dramatically affect the façades and other elements, creating a sacred space of light's divinity and God's presence.

72 **Barry F.**, The House of the Rising Sun: Luminosity and Sacrality from Domus to Ecclesia, *Light and Fire in the Sacred Space: Material from the International Symposium* (ed. A. Lidov), Moscow: Indrik, 2011, p. 52.

73 **Pentcheva B.**, Glittering Eyes: Animation in the Byzantine *Eikōn* and the Western *Imago*, *Codex Aquilarensis*, 32, 2016, p. 220.

74 **Pentcheva B.**, Glittering Eyes..., p. 220–221.

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ԷՐԳԱ ՇՆՈՒՐՍՈՆ

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Քրիստոնյա Արևելքի և Բյուզանդիայի
հետազոտությունների բաժին
Մարտին-Լյութեր համալսարանի
Արևելյան ինստիտուտ, Հալլե-Վիտենբերգ*

Ամփոփագիր

Երկրաչափական և բուսական զարդատարրերը, որոնց թվին է պատկանում վարդյակը, կարելի է հանդիպել ինչպես Վրաստանում, այնպես էլ նրանից հարավ և արևելք գտնվող տարածքներում: Հեթանոսական միջավայրում նման դեկորատիվ տարրեր կիրառել են դարեր շարունակ: Թեման քննարկվում է ավելի քան մեկ դար՝ առաջ բերելով տարբեր կարծիքներ, որոնք անչվում են թաղման ծեսի հետ կամ ունեն խորհրդանշական, աստվածային և ապատրոպեիկ գործառույթ՝ կապվելով արևի և Տիեզերքի գաղափարների հետ: Վաղագույն օրինակները Միջագետքից են՝ հետաստրական շրջանից (մ.թ.ա. 9-7-րդ դդ.): Հարավային Կովկասում վարդյակի զարդատարրը առկա է ավանդական դարձած պատկերներում և զուգորդվում է դեռ նեոլիթից եկած կրոնական հավատալիքների և ծեսերի հետ: Վաղ հեթանոսական հավատալիքներից այն թափանցում է քրիստոնեության մեջ և հիմնովին հաստատվում:

Վարդյակների ինքնատիպ, չկրկնվող և երևակայական ձևերը, ինչպես նաև դրանց մոնումենտալ չափերը, մեր կարծիքով, միջնադարում ստեղծագործական և կրոնա-փիլիսոփայական մտքի վկայություն են:

Այս հոդվածի նպատակն է ցույց տալ, որ կառույցների ձևակառուցման, սյունների և այլ հատվածներում քանդակված վարդյակները, շրջանակները և զիգագները ունենին համարժեք դեկորատիվ գործառույթ: Նման մոտիվների դեպքում արևի ձառագայթները օգտագործվում են եկեղեցիների քանդակազարդ մակերեսներին տարբեր էֆեկտներ ստանալու համար. լույսի և ստվերի բարդ համադրություններ ստեղծելու, ինչպես նաև ձառագող լույսի տատանումներն ու տարածումը ար-

տահայտելու համար: Այս սկզբունքով նրանք սրբազան տարածության պատրանք են ստեղծում՝ եկեղեցիների ձևակառուցման աստվածաբանական գաղափարներ, Արարչության և աստվածային կերպարի մասին մտքեր արտացոլելով:

Բանալի բառեր. վարդյակ, շրջանակ, զիգզագ, լույս, սրբազան տարածք, աստվածային կերպար

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Figure Captions

1. Samtavisi Cathedral, Rosettes relief, south façade, 1030
2. Martvili, Chundidi Church, East façade with zug-zag form, 7th to 10th cc.
3. Nikorotsminda Church, 1010–1014, West façade, one of two discs
4. Jar fragment, Megiddo, Stratum VII, Late Bronze IIB, 1300–1200 BC, ivory, Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago, credit: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=41283671>
5. Bolnisi column (stèle), 6th c., fragment decorated with rosettes, © Georgian National Museum. Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia.
6. Bolnisi column (stèle), 6th c., drawing, courtesy of Offer Viskinsky
7. Edzani Pillar, relief of the east façade of the Edzani Church, 6th c., courtesy of Lado Miranashvili
8. Ruisi Cathedral of the Transfiguration, 7th c., drawing of the tympanum by V. Tsintsadze, courtesy of Gogotur Misriashvili
9. Ruisi Cathedral tympanum, 7th c., courtesy of Lado Miranashvili and Eka Kvachataдзе
10. Shavi Sopeli, 8th–9th cc., drawing of the window, courtesy of Offer Viskinsky
11. Shavi Sopeli, 8th–9th cc., detail of the window © Georgian National Museum. Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia
12. Dura-Europos, 3rd c., credit: <https://evergreene.com/projects/dura-europos-synagogue/>
13. Zalheti, 6th c., panel with two rosettes flanking the Virgin, courtesy of Offer Viskinsky
14. Nikrotsminda church, 1010–1014, Majestas Domini with two discs.
15. Nikrotsminda. Details of disc
16. Gurjaani church, 8th c., details of zig-zag patterns and light and shadows
17. Samtavisi Cathedral, 1030, Sout-East façades, detail of rosette on south façade

* The author took all photos unless otherwise written

Ընդունվել է՝ 30.03.2024

Գրախոսվել է՝ 14.04.2024

Հասնվել է րոպ.՝ 03.10.2024



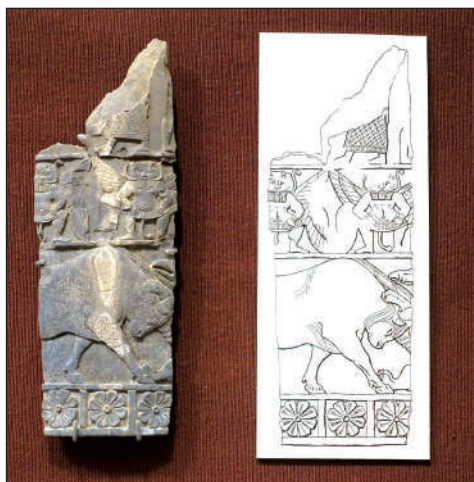
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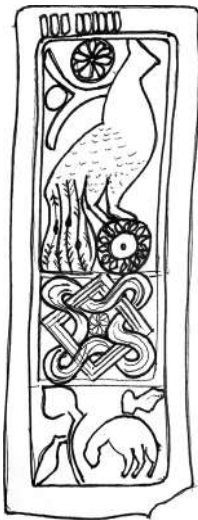
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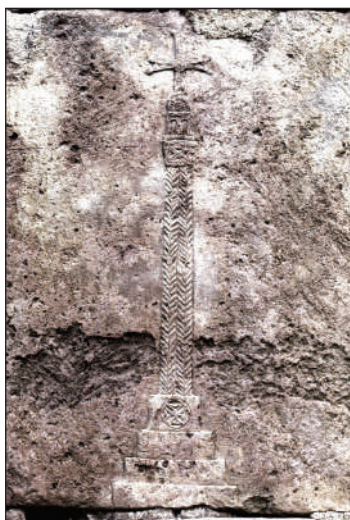
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