

**Georgian Church Porches –
the Gate to the House of God for the Righteous**

Part II

Porches of Bagrat'i Cathedral of Dormition

Bagrat'i Cathedral of the Dormition in Kutaisi was left in ruins from 1691. During the twentieth century and throughout a lengthy investigation and rebuilding process, the cathedral was renovated. The edifice suffered explosion on 1691 during the Turkish-Russian war, and in 1770 shelling destroyed the cupola, the dome, and the upper parts of the walls. The cathedral left in ruins. In 1911 the reconstruction of the south entrance began, from the monument's ruins to accommodate a small chapel. Meladze and Uekita stated, "In 1993, when the ICOMOS mission visited Bagrat'i Cathedral for evaluation, the walls had been raised to almost full height, and external decorations as well as the portico structures on three sides of the monument, had also been rebuilt."¹

It is now standing, supported by iron scaffolding in the edifice's missing parts. The original structure was built in 1003, during the reign of Bagrat' III (1001-1014), the adopted son of Davit III the Great (d. 1001). In the eleventh century, Kutaisi became the capital city of the newly unified Georgian kingdom while the Muslims occupied Tbilisi. It was the religious and cultural center of western Georgia and part of the Eparchy of Kutaisi, and the cathedral of Bagrat'i bears splendid testimony to it.²

There is a definite connection between the Bagrat'i Cathedral and T'ao-K'larjeti provinces and its monasteries. On Bagrat'i's northern wall, an inscription reads, "When the floor was laid firm, it was the Chronicon 223" (1003), the date according to the Georgian calendar, a few years after the death of Davit the Great, Bagrat' III's adoptive

¹ Meladze and Uekita, *Reconstructing the Sacred*.

² On the history of the cathedral, read: Dadiani, Khundadze and Kvachatadze, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture*, pp. 192-193; Natroyev, *Mtskhetskij sobor*, pp. 195-202, 283-286, 195-298; Montpereux, *Voyage Autour du Caucase*, pp. 411-424. Dubois' description of the church is not helpful to understanding the porches. He wrote his impressions, mentioning that the church is in ruins and the porch collapsed a few months before his arrival; Tsintsadze *Cathedral of King Bagrat*, pp. 11-16; Pavlinov, *Ekspeditsia na Kavkaz*, pp. 30-45; on the possible historical development of Kutaisi and area, information can be found in *Martyrdom of Arch'il* chronicle: Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 410-416; Rapp, *Medieval Georgian Historiography*, pp. 470-480; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, pp. 250-255.

father. In the 1030s, richly decorated portals were added to the west and south sides of the Bagrat'i Cathedral.¹ It is a massive edifice with three porches and many architectural and decorative elements resembling the Oshki church and other churches of the regions. The west porch comprises the main entrance to the cathedral. The second, located on the church's south side, faces the city of Kutaisi. The third porch on the north side is more modest than the others. Both the west and south porches emanate a sense of grandeur in their decorative elements.

Due to political circumstances involved in its construction, Bagrat'i Cathedral is considered the symbol of a united Georgia, representing the medieval ecclesiastical architecture of the Caucasus region. The cathedral was the main center of worship in the country, and it was also the site for the coronation and burial of several kings. The south portico was rebuilt in 1930 to accommodate a small chapel where small services could be held. With the rebuilding of the cathedral, it was returned to being an organ of the renewed edifice.²

Hagia Sophia Trebizond and its Connection to Georgia

Hagia Sophia church was an iconic landmark in the Byzantine world in the thirteenth century, and was larger than most Caucasian monuments of the period. Located on the western border of Georgia, Trebizond had various exchanges with Georgia. Hagia Sophia church was built close to the Georgian borders, and it was comparable with the twelfth-century imperial churches of Constantinople, such as the Pantokrator monastery.³ Nevertheless, the church's architecture suggests that artisans preferred a more local Pontic design. Eastmond points to regional influences on the design of Hagia Sophia.⁴ The church has three towering porches protruding from the structural line of the façades. Thus, they are highly prominent in the vicinity of the church. The porches are located on the west, north, and south façades of the church.⁵

Despite its relatively late date of construction, the porches of the Hagia Sophia can be compared to the Bagrat'i Cathedral and indicate Georgian artistic influences. The church was built and decorated during the reign of Emperor Manuel Komnenos I

¹ Mepisashvili and Tsintsadze, *Arts of Ancient Georgia*, pp. 112-113.

² UNESCO (WHC)/ICOMOS, *Report on the Mission*.

³ Eastmond, *Art and Identity*, p. 27.

⁴ Eastmond, *Art and Identity*, pp. 31, 34-39.

⁵ The interior of the church conforms to traditional Byzantine ecclesiastical design. Eastmond, *Art and Identity*, p. 28.

between 1238 to the mid-1250s.¹ Hagia Sophia at Trebizond embraces elements that resemble Bagrat'i Cathedral and Oshki church and additional connections to Georgia. Moreover, the porches are relatively similar, and they have survived in good condition. Excavations have revealed that the porches belong to the same period as the podium and the church.² Hagia Sophia Trebizond adds another layer of development and function to the porches, besides Iviron, on the border of Georgia. Iviron conveys a crucial connection to Georgia and the T'ao-K'larjeti provinces. Hagia Sophia Trebizond church presents diverse approaches to the subject. Byzantine architecture usually does not feature porches, while they were integral to Georgian architecture for centuries.³

In eleventh-century Georgia, porches became omnipresent and were even added to old edifices. Manglisi is only one example of a porch added to a fifth-century church between 1020-1027. Eastmond regards this as accentuating the southern entrance to the church, which was the main one. According to Kaffenberger, the changes to Manglisi church resulted from the ruler's political considerations.⁴ The ongoing construction and usage of porches points to their role in liturgy, gatherings, and as a processional entrance into the church.⁵ The porches and narthex certainly were a vital part of the architecture and functioning of Georgian churches. Eastmond asserts that at Hagia Sophia Trebizond, the south porch was always the main entrance, as evidenced by its prominence, quality, and iconography, as in the case of Georgian churches. Thus, he suggests that the south porch was fundamental to Georgian liturgical procession practices. Accordingly, Georgian architecture and liturgy "influence the Trebizond Empire at its birth."⁶ Nevertheless, the two other porches of Hagia Sophia are less evident in their adoption of Georgian architecture.

1. West Porch. Bagrat'i and Hagia Sophia

The Bagrat'i west porch functions as the main entrance to the cathedral (Fig. 9), thus breaking with Georgian tradition. It is a large organ made to accommodate worshippers, and it is ornamented by stone reliefs of various themes and adorned with niches. The porch is a large chamber with two open arches. The first is a triumphal arch to the

¹ Eastmond, *Art and Identity*, p. 15.

² Eastmond, *Art and Identity*, p. 35.

³ Eastmond, *Art and Identity*, pp. 35-37 and n. 22.

⁴ Further discussion on Manglisi, here on 46-48.

⁵ In Oshki's discussion here, I suggested that processions may have taken place along the south façade.

⁶ Eastmond, *Art and Identity*, p. 36.

west, and the second, to the south, rests on pillars. The west triumphal arch is tall and spacious, with two smaller side arches flanking the center. The central arch ends with a broad pediment and a wide overall archivolt of high relief attached to the pediment.

Bagrat'i's umbrella dome of the west porch was constructed with twelve high-relief ribs encircled by a high-relief medallion (Fig. 10). The ribs culminate at the pivot of the dome with a decorated keystone. Four pendentives transform the dome from a circular stone medallion to a square chamber. The door entrance to the church is located on the east wall. The inside of the porch is adorned with niches, reliefs, and capitals with rich reliefs of hybrid and fantastic animals, as well as vegetal and geometric ornaments (Figs. 11, 12).



Fig. 9. Bagrat'i Cathedral and West Porch. Courtesy of Giorgi Chaligava



Fig. 10. Bagrat'i's West Porch Umbrella Dome.¹

¹ All images were taken by the author unless otherwise is mentioned.

**Fig. 11. Bagrat'i Cathedral.
Inside of the West Porch.**



**Fig. 12. Bagrat'i West Porch.
Capital with Hybrid Animal.**

**Fig. 13. Hagia Sophia
Trebizond's West Porch.
Courtesy of Kayihan Bolukbasi.**



**Fig. 14. Hagia Sophia South Porch.
Courtesy of Kayihan Bolukbasi.**

Hagia Sophia's west porch (Fig. 13) is similar to the south one, yet it exudes less grandeur. Inside, there are extensive wall paintings and the triumphal entrance to the porch. It is less decorated than the west porch of the Bagrat'i Cathedral. These variances are probably due to the different functions of the porches and the time that elapsed between the two edifices' construction.¹



Fig. 15. Bagrat'i Cathedral. South Porch.
Courtesy of Giorgi Chaligava.



Fig. 15a. Inner South Porch with Blind Arches and Bench.



Fig. 16. Bagrat'i. South Porch with Umbrella Cones' Dome.

¹ Kaffenberger addresses the Hagia Sophia Cathedral, following Eastmond's book. He suggests the possible active role in the Georgian Liturgy, as a gathering point for the processional entrance into the church. Kaffenberger, *Liminal Spaces*, p. 130.

2. South Porches. Bagrat'i and Hagia Sophia

The Hagia Sophia south porch is the largest one (Fig. 14). In the Bagrat'i Cathedral, the west and south porches are large, tall, and extensively decorated, while the north porch is small and more modestly decorated. The porches protrude from the line of the cathedral façades in both cathedrals. Due to the size and prominence of both edifices' porches, one should assume that they had various functions beyond being entrances. The south porch of Hagia Sophia served as the main entrance, while the south porch of Bagrat'i did not. Rather it had some kind of liturgical purpose and was used as a second entrance. This fact can be deduced from the inner structure of the Bagrat'i porch, that includes stone benches (Fig. 15, 15 a).

The Bagrat'i south porch consists of one spacious hall, covered with an umbrella dome that is elaborately and splendidly decorated. The transition from a square chamber to a circular dome was created by four pendentives, followed by a circular relief base of the dome. The umbrella dome is divided into high ribbed reliefs to form a ceiling which consists of eight cones (Fig. 16). Each cone starts at the circular base of the dome and ends by joining the keystone. The cones were painted; some traces of the original colors can still be recognized today (Fig. 17). At the base of each cone, a frame relief of a half-open cone, with flowers painted inside, create a chain of open cone circles. The four pendentives were painted with four figures, of which three can still be seen (Fig. 18). In Byzantine art, the pendentive figures are habitually the four evangelists.¹ It seems that Bagrat'i's south porch follows this scheme; however, the figures are not clear enough to reach a definitive conclusion about their identity as there are no inscriptions today nor do they have the evangelists' symbols. They could just be local or national saints. The size, decorative richness, and architecture of the hall are outstanding.



Fig. 17. Cone with Painted Flowers.

¹ Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, pp. 26-29.



Fig. 18. Painted Pendentive.

The inner Bagrat'i south porch walls have three sides with stone benches, providing seating for worshippers, which suggests that some kind of religious services had been conducted.

In both churches, the likeness of the porches is reflected through several elements. First, the structure has a protruding hall, on one hand, which nevertheless acts as a vital organ of the whole edifice, and on the other, there is the grandeur of the porch and its functionality. However, most striking of all is the triumphal arch entrance to the porches (Figs. 14, 15). Hagia Sophia's triumphal entrance consists of three arches in which the central one is tall and wide, while the flanking arches are lower and narrower. The overall archivolt ends are attached to the pivot of the pediment. Under the archivolt of Hagia Sophia, there is a quatrefoil oculus above a register of reliefs. The arches rest on columns with decorative capitals displaying various reliefs. The structure creates an impressive entrance to the porch.

The Bagrat'i cathedral's south porch features a similar triumphal entrance consisting of three open arches. The central arch is high and wide, while those flanking the central arch are lower and narrower. The central arch is attached to the archivolt and the pediment. From the outside, the south porch's façades to the east and the west are each decorated with two blind arches and a niche. The east and west inner walls of the porch are adorned with two blind arches on each side. The porch's inner north wall features a door leading to the church through the south transept and two arched niches on each side of the door. Leaving the porch through the south triumphal arch, Kutaisi city lies ahead of the beholder. Altogether, this must have been a breathtaking sight.

The paintings on the umbrella dome are unique and rare in the iconographical programs in Georgian churches. On the other hand, reliefs of vegetation were standard

and widespread, yet no less impressive. The flowers are depicted gently and softly, with intense colors, creating a unique atmosphere within the porch. The flower images symbolize continuity and a revival of nature as it reflects humanity. These elements allude to the Garden of Eden, and being located in the dome, they reflect the heavens. At the same time, the porch is part of the earthly world.

The umbrella dome of Bagrat'i's south porch, as well as the porch and narthex of Oshki church, deserves further study, albeit from a different angle. The way in which the flowers in the dome are depicted is almost unprecedented, being so delicate, vivid, beautifully executed, and located within the cones' dome. Their allusion to the Garden of Eden is intentional, but this is only one layer of interpretation. One should learn about their appearance from theological and philosophical perspectives rooted in Georgian society of the period. The philosophical vantage point of the vegetal decorations resembles the relationship of Creator and created and hybridism (hereafter in the next sub-chapter).

3. North porches

The north porches of both churches are smaller than the other porches, with less embellishment. Nevertheless, the north porch of Hagia Sophia has the structure of the triumphal arch, while the Bagrat'i north porch is smaller and less decorated. The figure of Maria Orant can still be seen on the tympanum at the entrance.

Arboreal Decoration and Depiction of Nature. Creation and Created

The decoration of Christian churches celebrated the world through visual personifications and depictions of animals, vegetation, and plants. These appeared on the floors, walls, ceilings, vaults, and furnishings of buildings, and they all represented the power of God. However, these images of nature and its subjects were often symbolic of spiritual concepts, for example, the vine or the lamb, and they had precedents in scriptures. In Georgia, a myriad of arboreal reliefs are spread upon façades, stone pillars, domes, objects of various kinds, and materials. In Byzantium, most of these motifs are present on floor mosaics. From the tenth century onwards, nature-derived images played a minor role in Byzantine church decoration. The result was that anthropomorphic images or icons acquired a much more prominent role in the visual appearance of post-iconoclastic churches.¹ Nevertheless, in Georgia, arboreal imagery did not decline and remained steady from Christianization of the country, alongside geometric forms and the gradual process of artistic abstraction.

¹ Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion*, p. 11.

In *Nectar and Illusion*, Henry Maguire describes evolutionary perspectives on nature and how these views changed throughout the centuries. He asserts how Late Antique viewers regarded natural images of solid material, such as marble, as a real contemporary experience of the observers. The Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, and the marble dado reflect this perspective. Their imaginative sensibilities were heightened by rhetoric, thus, learning to read more vividly into images encouraged the artists to make them less illusionistic.¹ The artists succeeded to create illusion, and the advanced abstraction of Late Antique and medieval art was channeled by people's imagination. Maguire explains the process, stating that art became more abstract; however, the viewers also learned to grasp the details of the images for themselves. Accordingly, medieval people could comprehend, for example, opus sectile floors, paintings of flowers and plants, even in abstract and schematic forms, to represent elements of nature. This trend explains what happened in Georgia as well. Viewers' perspectives changed, leading to the emergence of a different aesthetic. Rhetoric caused a dramatic change in art history, resulting in the gradual shift from naturalism to abstraction in Late Antique and Byzantine art.²

1 Kings 7:23-25 provides a valuable description of the Temple of Solomon, the Brazen Sea, and other objects using a variety of high-quality materials. These verses made it possible for the medieval artisan to use a wide range of materials reflecting the scriptures and their accounts of decorative ornaments in churches. The high quality of the materials represents artisanal and initiator's knowledge (of sacral buildings), as well as intellectual engagement with the conceptualization of the material world.³ Materiality was set against spirituality in a religious world and its uses and interpretation diverged to the realm of theology. Thus, philosophical thoughts about these issues occupied various medieval societies for centuries.

Platonic philosophy was highly influential on theological conceptualizations of nature and its rank in creation. The appearance of flowers, plants, and animals in the dome, on one hand, and the perception of the dome as resembling heaven and the cosmic realm, on the other, raise the question of the link between the Creator to the creation. The question of the ontological status of the universe and nature, compared with the divine and divinity, were reassessed in terms of the extensive use of foliate motifs in the porches and the churches.

Genesis 1:1-2 led the medieval tradition to assert that creation based on the concept of *ex nihilo* is fundamental to both Genesis and the Gospel of John.⁴ John's first sentence could refer to phrases in the Trinity such as: 'if the word,' 'was the word' and

¹ Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion*, p. 124.

² Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion*, p. 124.

³ Weinryb, *Living Matter*, p. 114.

⁴ Weinryb, *Living Matter*, p. 119.

‘is the word,’¹ and seem to address the Logos of the Greek philosophy. In John 8:12, Christ’s profound statement, “I am the light,” refers to his pre-existent status set against the universe and alludes to understanding ‘nature’ as emerging from the scriptures and Platonic philosophy of the period.

Plato in *Timaeus* described the creation with analytic and arithmetic tools. He aimed to explain the origin of the world and the Biblical story of Genesis as its allegory. Plato’s creation narrative was framed using a mathematical convention through the four elements, namely, fire, air, water, and earth. These elements govern the world’s creation, while primordial matter was in a chaotic state. Therefore, it seems that the world was not created *ex nihilo*. However, on other occasions, this is not obvious. The discussion about the creation, here, centers on primordial matter, which is crucial for interpreting depictions of nature that includes arboreal foliage in the art, like we encounter in Bagrat’i and Oshk’i and many other Georgian churches.

The Latin word *silva* was substituted for the Greek word *hyle*.² The word *silva* stands for primordial matter, the forest, the leaves or foliage, and trees. However, the word *silva* has multiple meanings. The term thus represents a temporal instant before the world was created and, at the same time, it designates a geographical and spatial location, united in time and place.

The ancients were convinced that *silva* (Latin), or *hyle* (Greek), existed, but it was disputed whether it had been created or not. There was uncertainty about whether or not the world had been created *ex nihilo*, or if there had been something from which it arose. The words “In the beginning, God made heaven and earth, but earth was invisible and unadorned,” Genesis 1:2, implied that *silva* was generated, though not in time, according to Proverbs 8:22-25.³ The meaning of those verses is that God created *silva*, but not at any point in time. *Silva* had a beginning only because God precedes it in nature and possesses it.⁴ The problem of matter was, in fact, the first material principle of things, and this was a central problem in ancient philosophy.⁵ The word ‘beginning’ can have no temporal meaning, for time did not exist before the ordering of the world.⁶

¹ The book dates back to the nineties of the first century, a time of great controversy within the Jewish community. At the backdrop of the period was the growth of the Hellenistic Jewish community, the Roman occupation of the Holy Land, and the gradual implementation of Hellenistic Greek philosophy by the communities. The Jewish community started to react to these changes, and one can hear these elements in John’s gospel that was written in the Greek language.

² Weinryb, *Living Matter*, p. 125.

³ Dronke, *The Spell of Calcidius*, p. 19.

⁴ Dronke, *The Spell of Calcidius*, p. 21.

⁵ Winden, *Calcidius on Matter*, pp. 52-53; Weinryb, *Living Matter*, p. 126.

⁶ Winden, *Calcidius on Matter*, pp. 55-56; Reydams-Schils, *Calcidius on Timaeus*, pp. 49, 51-58, 128-137. In his commentary, Calcidius debated with other philosophers of the period, such as Philo, Tertulian, and Origen. The question fundamentally occupied the theological and philosophical world of the period.

Calcidius, who was relevant to the Eastern Christian world, and later to the West, wrote about *silva*, alluding to Genesis 1:26, where human beings were made “in our image, after our likeness,” hence, he draws a parallel between macrocosm and microcosm. He generated an immaterial concept of an empty world, which was endowed with form through the act of creation. Ornaments of various artifacts functioned, like relics of saints, as intermediaries between the material world of forms and the primordial and divine realms. Depicting pictorial representations of foliage or flowers was an act of *silva*, or a visual response to two-dimensional paintings. The *silva*, even if not actualized in its own right, still played a vital role in the process of creation.¹

Bagrat'i Cathedral and Oshk'i church reliefs, paintings, and artistic works of any other church were understood as visual representations of *silva*'s potential to convey the natural world, just as the garden of Eden was communicated to the viewer. Looking upwards to the umbrella dome of the porch, the viewer could perceive a formless world incarnated to natural matter of Eden, thus realizing the sentence “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” One can realize how art of the period strove to overcome the paradox of whether nature should be interpreted as corporeal or incorporeal matter, and thus engendered spiritually or metaphysically. Studying nature is primarily a study of the metaphysical causes of the phenomena.² Nature, as incorporeal, immaterial, and spiritual, belongs to the superior cause. On the other hand, physical and edible beings, such as plants, animals, and trees, are corporeal matter, which is inferior on the ladder, thus it belongs to the principal effects, and to the sphere of human beings.

Ioane Petrits'i was one of the prominent Georgian Christian philosophers of the period, thus his works are essential to this article.³ Petritsi translated the *Elements of Theology*, of Proclus, and the Nemesius' *On Human Nature*,⁴ which was the first comprehensive anthropological treatise in Christian literature to provide Georgian readers with extensive literary sources of the period. He aimed to embrace the entire order of metaphysical reality – on one hand – and on the other, he describes with almost mathematical precision the general metaphysical laws of the relations between different levels of reality.⁵

Petrits'i defined matter as “non-being.” He stated that matter is produced, and thus, it is considered to be corporeal material. Matter, as all the combined material

¹ Dronke, *The Spell of Calcidius*, p. 27.

² Linguiti, *Physis as Heimarmene*, p. 173.

³ According to Gigineishvili's investigation, Petrits'i's life dated between the second half of the eleventh and the first half of the twelfth century. There are other scholars that dated his life not before 1150. Gigineishvili, *Platonic Theology*, pp. 17-18.

⁴ Gigineishvili provides the source: *De Natura Hominis*, in Georgian to his readers. Gigineishvili, *Platonic Theology*, p. xiii, n. 4.

⁵ Gigineishvili, *Platonic Theology*, p. 164.

properties of the universe, longs for the One. The One is the transcendent cause of the simple existence of everything.¹ However, the One is not part of this simple existence due to its primordial character. Petrits'i's hierarchical perception was that the paternal cause means altering something in a state of non-existence to existence. Matter was brought to existence from non-existence by the One. The phrase 'existence from non-existence' means to the Christians that matter was created *ex nihilo*.²

Conceptions of eternity and time belong to the earliest roots of philosophy, to the time when human thoughts first went beyond changes in the phenomenal world. Humans began to search for a permanent, eternal material from which something was made and from which it derived its unique qualities, the cause of all changes.³ In phenomenal nature, there is nothing that does not change. In Greek philosophy, nothingness cannot be imagined. From a Biblical perspective, only God is the Creator, and only He can possess fundamental permanence. Christian understanding was of God the Creator. Christianity, with the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*, was in radical contrast to the pagan conception of reality. The question arises: What existed before God created the world? This is difficult to comprehend or to answer, because it means that 'before' applies to time.⁴ However, time co-emerged with the world. Consequently, there was no 'before' prior to the world's creation. Gigineishvili claims that it is not possible to reach a rational understanding of the problem. God for Petrits'i is beyond the natural. God created the world out of the pure abundance of his goodness.⁵ In St. John 1, we read, "In the beginning, was the Word," Petrits'i's version for this is "In the Principle was the Word," which portrays the Principle as the Father-God.⁶

The world is seen in terms of absolute otherness. However, in a primary sense, this is rooted in the One, and all existence is derived from the One. Petrits'i explained the world's origin according to Trinitarian theory in a complicated circular manner. He did not believe in the independence of the material, and so he refuted others' explanations. He did not believe material can begin by itself because that would give matter a status of coexistence next to God. Rather, he introduced the Christian notion of *creatio ex nihilo* but with God's will.⁷

¹ Gigineishvili, *Platonic Theology*, p. 58.

² Gigineishvili, *Platonic Theology*, p. 58.

³ Gigineishvili, *Platonic Theology*, p. 215.

⁴ Gigineishvili, *Platonic Theology*, p. 220.

⁵ Gigineishvili, *Platonic Theology*, p. 226.

⁶ Gigineishvili, *Platonic Theology*, p. 230.

⁷ Gigineishvili, *Platonic Theology*, p. 275.

Nature Hybridism and Metamorphosis

Another aspect to be dealt with herein concerns the natural world, namely, the hybridism of various species, animals, birds, and plants. Hybridity is a blending, a merging of separate elements to create a mix resulting in a new species, space, and reality. It has implications for biology, for the socio-political and cognitive environment, and it also applies spiritually. Hybridity allows for recognition of others while acknowledging their relevance to those who are not like them. Hybridity reveals new realities and enhances individual and collective identity that is authentic. It is a newly created space that recognizes both diversity and universality, old and new alike.

Through empirical observation, medieval men, particularly intellectuals, were aware of the radical changes that species underwent and that the whole natural world was undergoing through years, seasons, and natural physical transformations. The decorations on edifices are full of images of monsters, wolftaurs, and hybrid animals and plants such as corals which are half plant and half stone, and more. They sought explanations, and, no less important, humans wanted to comfort themselves from their fearful thoughts and feelings. The possibility of radical metamorphosis, becoming something else, the transformation and continuity of natures, had a tremendous impact on them. Caroline Walker Bynum has done extensive research on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the west. However, thoughts on hybridism, metamorphosis, and beliefs in medieval commitment to species immutability started from Augustine's statement that humans do not become animals.¹ It seems that anxiety was inherent to the human experience of death and decay.² In her book, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, Bynum suggests that hybridism and metamorphosis are fundamentally distinct images and occur in different cultural contexts. She stated, "Hybrid expresses a world of natures, essences, or substances, encountered through paradox; it resists change. Metamorphosis expresses a labile world of fluidity and transformation, encountered through story."³ It means that metamorphosis is a process while hybridism is not. The fact that so many hybrids can be found on façades, porches, and narthex decorations dating back many centuries and in numerous locations

¹ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 82 and n. 20. Augustine stated that the pre-eminence of humans in creation is due to human endowment with the Imago Dei or rational soul, which surpasses the intellect of other animals. He discussed the subject in Question 30, in Augustine, *Eighty-three Different Questions*, pp. 55-57; in *City of God*, he stated that "animals lack reason, and so have no rational community with us". Augustine, *City of God (2009)*, p. 120; Sorabji, *Animal Minds*, p. 197 and n. 13; St. Augustine, *City of God (1950)*, p. 122; On animals for man's use, Augustine, *City of God (1958)*, p. 56.

² Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 83.

³ Liable means to change "emotionally." In chemistry, physics, biology, readily undergoing change or breakdown. Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 29-30.

in Georgia, and Bagrat'i cathedral is only one example, needs further attention and study. Hybridism results in a double being, an entity of parts, two or more. It is an inherently visual and spatial form, not a temporal one. Metamorphosis is the process of going from one being to another, and it is a narrative, a story.¹

Both terms, hybrid and metamorphosis, depict envy, hypocrisy, or the fragility of love. At the same time, both can destabilize expectations, and as Bynum suggests, they demonstrate that the “world either in process or in the instant, is disordered and fluid, with the horror and wonder of uncontrolled potency or violated boundaries.”² The images representing both terms can shake one’s confidence in the structure of reality. We are all searching for the world’s stability, yet these terms break categories and reshape them once again.

In her study, Bynum asserts that both terms “hybrid” and “transformations” express resistance to change, the anxiety that this provoked in the medieval viewer, and on the other hand, possible relief.³ The topic of nature’s changes, metamorphosis, and even loss, is connected to thoughts of loss of the body and thus the self. These deep thoughts reflect conviction, concepts, and discourses which hold that the human being is a psychosomatic unit whose survival necessitates bodily continuity.⁴ These apocalyptic anxieties and heretic thoughts grew more substantial and spread towards the end of the millennium, from east and west alike. However, at the same time, the end of the tenth century brought with it long-lived hopes for Georgian unification. This was realized around 1001-1014 with the death of King Davit the Great and his successor Bagrat’ the III, uniting most Georgian provinces into one entity. Body and soul are not of the same essence and cannot be placed at the same level of the Platonic ladder. The division and loss of body and soul can only be overcome by God to sustain bodily continuity in resurrection.⁵ The sense of the changeability of the world led to contemplations and recollection of mutilation, metamorphosis, perishing, and many more bodily phenomena. Bynum brings Plato’s account of the actual transformation of the elements during the origin of the universe and *mutatio* (passing from one body to another) to describe not a physical transformation of substance, but a moral change in which the soul returns to God. It is not a change of its essence but its likeness.⁶ It expresses the moral belief that the soul’s life after death returns to God, unlike the leaves, plants, trees, and nature that disappear. The leaves and

¹ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 30.

² Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 31.

³ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 32.

⁴ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 79.

⁵ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 79.

⁶ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 84-85, n. 34.

flowers, like the Green man in the myth, will disappear.¹ Arboreal frames were featured in many panels of Georgian art for centuries. So too are numerous images of hybrid animals, fantastic flowers, and plants. The arboreal frames and vegetal images appear on many façades' sculptures, columns, openings of the churches, and other Georgian artifacts. Such frames of arboreal motifs can be found on the porches' façades, and Oshk'i church is only one example, not to mention manuscripts, books, and parchments. Bagrat'i Cathedral presents natural plants in the umbrella dome of the south porch, depicting it as the Garden of Eden from a religious point of view. However, at the same time, it expresses thoughts and anxiety, fear of the unknown, hopes, as well as political and physical changes.

In conclusion, when comparing the Bagrat'i Cathedral to Hagia Sophia, the wall paintings on the porches of the latter are striking. At the same time, the inner and outer ornaments on the porches of the Bagrat'i Cathedral must have been striking as well though radically different. The porches result from different political periods and do not necessarily resemble the same motivations of the royal initiators. The influence of Georgian architecture is, on one hand, apparent, but on the other, Hagia Sophia also reflects influential developments from other parts of the eastern world.²

The porches of the churches Oshk'i, Bagrat'i, and Hagia Sophia Trebizond, demonstrate an evolutionary development axis. Oshk'i's porch is small, constructed of one open bay, and the narthex is an exceptional organ of its period. Bagrat'i Cathedral

¹ On the Green man myth, read: Bate, *Mysteries of Nature and Art*; Bernheimer, *Wild Men*; Husband, *The Wild Man*; Centerwall, *The Name of the Green Man*; Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 85. Bynum suggests, Daniel 4:33-34 verses. Reading the prophet Daniel about Nebuchadnezzar, we can think of the moral transformation he underwent, and not necessarily a bodily mutilation. "The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Highest, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation."

Another example is the Book of Job, which depicts the moral and spiritual transformation of what appeared to be a simple man at the beginning of the story. The narrative describes his belief in God as shallow and flattened. He is not a righteous man but a selfish one, detached from the suffering of other people, even his wife. Throughout the book, Job was transformed into a righteous and clever figure, and finally he became a prophet. His moral transformation reached its pinnacle in his final speech, Job 32:3 "Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not."

² Eastmond mentions the Otkhta Ek'lesia (Dört Kilise) of T'ao-K'larjeti as a point of comparison. The Otkhta Ek'lesia is a tenth-century basilica built by Davit the Great (kouropalates). King Davit had close links to Byzantium. The church has a gallery at the west end, which may have served for royal acclamation. Oshk'i church has a west second-floor gallery as well. Eastmond, *Art and Identity*, p. 51.

features large well-developed porches, consisting of one big chamber with open triumphal arches, numerous reliefs, and decorative niches. Hagia Sophia and Bagrat'i share large porches. The open triumphal arches of Bagrat'i Cathedral, their structure, size, and decorative reliefs preceding in time and posing a model for Hagia Sophia. Similarities and differences characterize both, with inspiring umbrella domes and vault decorations, each unique in its own way. Oshk'i and Bagrat'i churches were modeled towards the end of the millennium as complex architectural edifices. They express profound theological and philosophical thoughts in their form and art. These churches reflect a sophisticated society that strove for unity and created rich art and literature.

Type three: Porch – of Tripartite ‘stoa-porch’ or Porch-chapel

This type of porch belongs to the ‘stoa-porches’ of high Middle Ages, according to Gengiuri.¹ It can be perceived at Manglisi Cathedral. The use of the term ‘stoa’ derives from the porch’s resemblance to the Greek Stoa, which was a covered walkway, commonly for public use. Early Greek stoa were open at the entrance with columns – arcade, usually of the Doric order, linear structure to the building’s sides. They created a safe, enveloping, protective atmosphere surrounding the entrance to the edifice.

Nevertheless, in Georgia, these churches were not open-arcades but closed by walls and decorated from the outside with blind arches, partaking in the edifice’s overall decoration. The porches of this type featured a tripartite structure, and I use the term ‘tripartite Porch Chapel’ to designate the group.² The central elevated part of the porch is crowned with a pediment, and the entrance is arched. The sides are lower and covered with a single-pitch roof. The interior space is tripartite as well: the center is elevated and there is a richly decorated vault, while the other two adjacent spaces are lower but decorated. From the exterior, the organ can be referred to as an annex, decorated with blind arches, with an impressive appearance. This organ protrudes from the façade of the edifice and can be seen, also, as an independent addition.

¹ Gengiuri, *Georgian Churches Porches*, p. 197.

² According to Gengiuri, the tripartite porch developed from the tripartite stoa porch of an early period. During the transitional period, a new approach to church porches emerged because incorporated entrances were not sufficient anymore. Porches acquired an elevated height structure with a separate roof. Such are the Vachnadziani Q’velats’minda church (ninth c.), Eredvi (906). Each of them reflects various solutions for the entrance and ambulatory and the elevated center gable. The author describes the attempts to apply the elevated gable design to the entrance structure. The use of the ‘stoa’ as the origin of this type of porch is Nato Gengiuri’s perception. I didn’t find any other studies using the same term. Gengiuri, *Georgian Churches Porches*, pp. 197-198.

In Gengiuri's opinion, ninth-century churches, such as K'abeni and Ts'irkoli, represent further use of the arches on the façades flanking the entrance.¹ I argue that the gradual use of blind arches and niches were caused by different arguments and ideas than solely "artistic decorative design." Their grandeur created a new symbolic language on the façades, derived from sophisticated theological and philosophical aspects. The decoration of blind arches gradually became more commonplace and more affluent in style, reaching its peak in Manglisi church, Nik'orts'minda, and Samtavisi cathedrals.² This type of porch appeared in various structures in which the porch was part of an elongated façade, and the entrance was highlighted. It was sometimes constructed on two height levels, with a correlated pitch roof.³ The type was displayed in several variations and found in churches from the eighth century onward, adorning the south façades.⁴ Eleventh-century tripartite porches are found in churches, both with and without domes.⁵ Representative samples of this type are Zemo Krikhi (tenth-eleventh c.), Maghalaant Ek'lesia (twelfth c.), Manglisi (eleventh c.), Kvatakhevi and, Betania (twelfth- thirteenth c.) and Pit'areti (1213-1222).⁶

Protagonists Exemplify the Tripartite Porch-Chapel

1. The Church of Vachnadziani Q'velats'minda Monastery, ninth century

In the sixth to seventh centuries, the monastery had a basilica with three naves, yet the western section was damaged by a landslide.⁷ The church went through several changes and renovations (Fig. 19). The main monastery church was named after 'All Saints,' and in the ninth century, this was changed to Mother Church. At the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century, the church's dome was built and thus, the structure was radically changed. The church was constructed of stone and brick. The porch features a tripartite structure, constructed as an elongated façade with an elevated center, covered with a pedimented roof and an arched entrance.

¹ Gengiuri, *Georgian Churches Porches*, p. 197.

² On the exterior decoration of Oshk'i church, read Shneurson, *Veil of Sacredness (2019)*; Shneurson, *Veil of Sacredness*, forthcoming.

³ Gengiuri, *Georgian Churches Porches*, p. 197.

⁴ Gengiuri, *Georgian Churches Porches*, pp. 198-199.

⁵ Gengiuri, *Georgian Churches Porches*, p. 197.

⁶ Kaffenberger, *Liminal Spaces*, p. 124 and n. 15; Mepisashvili and Tsintsadze, *Arts of Ancient Georgia*, p. 287.

⁷ Gengiuri, *Georgian Churches Porches*, p. 197.



Fig. 19. Vachnadziani's Q'velats'minda church. Provided by Georgian Travel Guide <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1c/Watschnadsiani%2Csw.jpg> (accessed 21 June 2021).

2. Manglisi Cathedral

The church's floor plan features a centralized triconch-shaped nave, octagonal exterior, added porches, and tripartite choir, resulting from a series of construction phases (Fig. 20).¹ The core of the building remained from the late antique period consisted of tetrachonch construction. The church, according the *Georgian chronicles*, was built to bestow the relics of the true cross, and other Christological relics Emperor Constantine the Great granted the Georgian people.² The relics were kept in Erusheti and the planks left in Manglisi. The *Georgian Chronicles* mentioned Manglisi several times, which highlights the importance of the city in the formation of the Georgian culture.³ The

¹ Kaffenberger, *Transformation and Memory*, p. 207 n. 2, provides reading sources on Manglisi cathedral.

² Mroveli, *Conversion of Kartli*, p. 131.

³ Juanšer, *Vaxt'ang Gorgasali*, pp. 217, 235-236, 247; the last chronicle, *History of David, King of Kings*, tells that King David freed the area from the Muslims' control, including Manglisi, Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, p. 332.

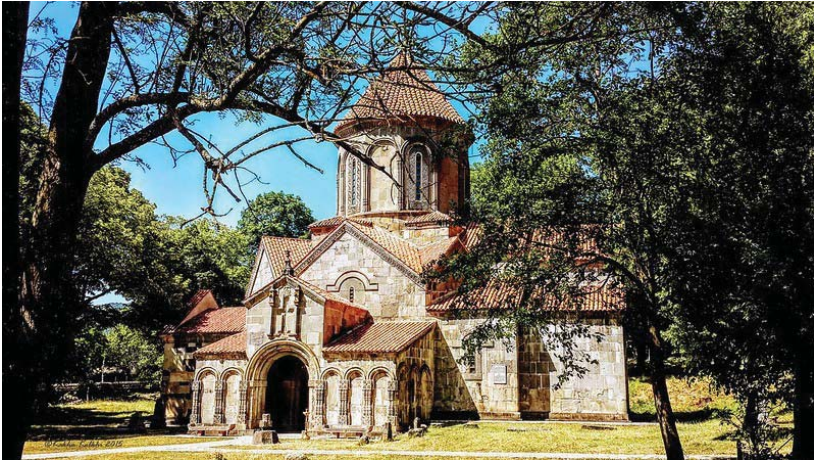


Fig. 20. Manglisi Cathedral. South Porch. From “Flickr”, <https://cutt.ly/nwhQlwIB> With permission of Potographer A. Muhranoff. <https://www.flickr.com/notifications> (accessed 21 June 2021).

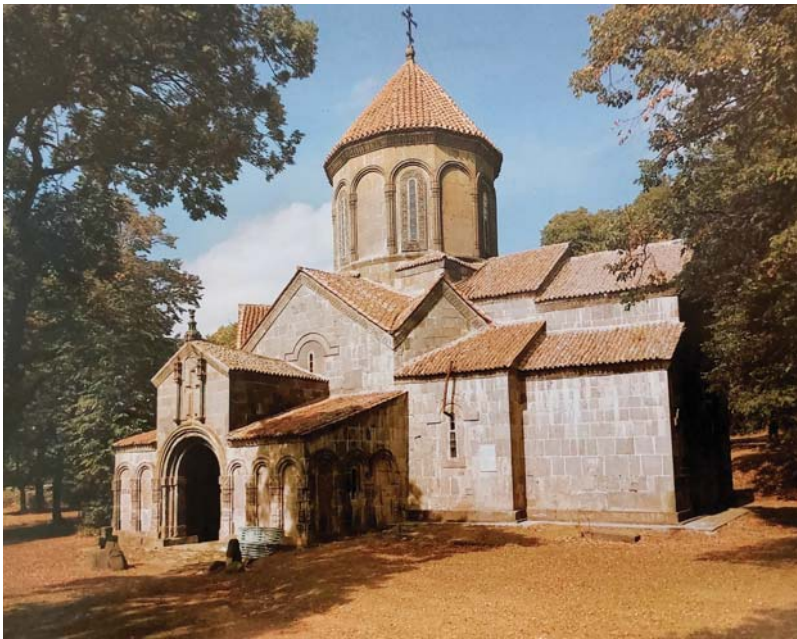


Fig. 21. Manglisi Cathedral. Courtesy of Rolf Schrade. In: *Georgien. Wehrbauten und Kirchen*, p. 128, Fig. 176.

old church was remodeled in the eleventh century. The unprecedented structure of the façades hints to the probable rite conducted there.¹

2a. The porches

The western porch of Manglisi is a deep archway opening towards the churchyard. The porch consists of a small barrel-vaulted bay, in which the central bay features a stepped corner pier, creating the impression of a cruciform domed space.² Nik'orts'minda and Manglisi featured a similar porch. The churches' exterior decorative elements are the blind arches on the façades and the colonettes with identical bases and capitals showing banderole-loop ornament. The inside decoration of the west porch appeared on the columns and the arches.³

2b. South porch

The exterior of the southern porch features the blind arches' decoration. This porch consists of large archway in the center, two blind arches to the left side, and three to right flanking the central archway (fig. 21). The gable decoration is an addition of the nineteenth century. The large central archway leads to an interior central square bay, which leads to the church's entrance doorway. The bay opens with an archway to the east and west of the tripartite porch. It resembles an elongated south annex, vaulted with an ornamented flat umbrella dome and flanked by two identical barrel-vaulted bays. To the east, the rectangular bay ends with an apse – the east chamber functions as a transitional entrance space or an autonomous chapel in dome-hall shape. The central umbrella dome of Manglisi church, with four its pendentives, is situated in front of the church entrance and creates the church's central gallery entrance.

¹ Constantine Lerner dated the first church to the fourth century, and from the fifth century, the church was one of the sites where Kartli's bishop was seated. During the reign of Gorgasal (449-502/522), Manglisi is mentioned as one of the twelve bishoprics founded by the king between 472-484. Other signs for the cathedral's importance are that in 506, a bishop Elages of Manglisi is mentioned in the synodal list of Dvin, means it was an episcopal church by that time. The church's remodeling took place during the first half of the eleventh century, a period named Golden Ages of Georgia. The first step was to add a tripartite eastern end to the octagon; the second step was to add an outer shell stone with a dome. Then, a western porch was added. It attached the vertical building on the north-eastern corner of the octagon. The northern side was changed by the new porch that started after the remodeling of the octagon. The southern porch was added later in a further stage of the construction process. Manglisi's historical architecture development are given in Kaffenberger, *Transformation and Memory*, pp. 212-223; Lerner, *Conversion of Kartli*, p. 106; Toumanoff, *Christian Caucasus*, p. 184; Rapp, *Medieval Georgian Historiography*, p. 179 and n. 1; Toumanoff, *On the Relationship*.

² Kaffenberger, *Transformation and Memory*, p. 223.

³ Kaffenberger, *Transformation and Memory*, p. 223.

The Manglisi south narthex partially share with Oshk'i narthex, the east end with an apse and decorative motifs.¹ In the apse and below the window, the traces of an inscription can be detected. The inscription is somewhat covered by the altar. The inscription is hard to read, and scholars rely on different translations and interpretations. According to Kaffenberger, K'atskhi and Manglisi are linked in various ways. Up until the middle of the eleventh century, the Liparit' family owned both of them. One of the founding members of the family was buried in K'atskhi.² Manglisi cathedral was the Living Cross convent (according to the legend that Constantine the Great provided the Georgians with relics of the true cross).³ Thus it was an important center for relics and legendary history that became one of the formative myths of Georgia. The Synaxarium of Zosime, in a letter to the Armenian Catholicos Abraham,⁴ mentions the celebration of the Feast of the Cross in Manglisi on 20th May, fixed in the tenth century.⁵

Katzkh'i church dates to the early eleventh century (Fig. 22). The church bears structural resemblance to the Manglisi's porches, the type of tripartite Porch Chapell, and it partly shares historical elements. The ambulatory was added before the mid-eleventh century and represents a third occurrence of a folded roof around the center of the edifice.⁶ Initially, Katzkh'i church was dedicated to the name of the Holy Trinity, and the site was owned by and served as a family crypt for the powerful feudal dynasty Baghvashi.⁷



Fig. 22. Katzkhi Cathedral. Provided by Georgian Travel Guide, Courtesy of Jaba Labadze

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a5/Church_of_Katskhi%2C_Georgia.jpg (accessed 21 Jun 2021).

¹ Other parts of the narthex are different than Oshk'i.

² Kaffenberger, *Transformation and Memory*, p. 231.

³ On the cross in Manglisi read, here p. 20, n. 2-4.

⁴ Garitte, *Le calendrier palestinogéorgien*, pp. 38, 229, 429.

⁵ Kaffenberger, *Transformation and Memory*, p. 231 note 74, brings the source of Garitte, *Le calendrier palestinogéorgien*, p. 229, and Schrade, *Byzantine Ideology*, n. 39.

⁶ The church was heavily restored during the nineteenth c. Kaffenberger, *Transformation and Memory*, n. 46.

⁷ Kaffenberger, *Transformation and Memory*, p. 221.

3. Nik'orts'minda Cathedral

Nik'orts'minda Cathedral, dated to 1014, was constructed with two porches. These are not the same type of porches as we encountered in Manglisi, although they do bear structural resemblance and, in a way, belong to the type of tripartite porch-chapel (Figs. 23, 24). The porches advanced the west and south façades, constructed of one closed bay cover with one pitch roof, arched gate, and both bear reliefs inside the porch. The outside decoration consists of blind arches characterizing the whole church as well, thus merging into a single element that enveloped the church.¹



Fig. 23. Nik'orts'minda. West Porch.

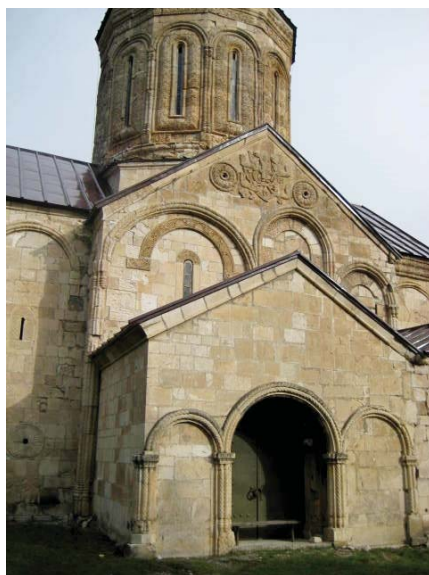


Fig. 24. Nik'orts'minda. South Porch.

Epilogue

Throughout the current study, the porch and narthex have been presented as the least holy of all other elements of the church. However, their decoration reveals high artistic qualities and a desire to harness the art of sculpture and paintings to express various messages to the approaching congregants. Nevertheless, we find that the porch and narthex acquired liturgical rituals, as reflected in the chronicles, and thus, they became a functionally diverse space in Georgian churches due to the affinity for exterior decoration of the edifices. The exonarthex was an additional side space that shared and extended the functions of the narthex.²

¹ On façades decoration in Georgia, Shneurson, *Veil of Sacredness* (2019), pp. 313-338.

² Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual*, p. 64.

Decorating the porches was an ongoing phenomenon in Georgia. From the Bolnisi Sioni church onwards, Georgia boasts a myriad of churches with exterior decorations that testify to superb artistic skills and a desire to express the country's heritage combined with theological scenes and the rulers' messages. Processions known from the *Georgian Chronicles*, conducted in front of the façades, played an essential role in daily life in the congregation. The 'Lite' procession and prayers and the 'Entrance Rite of Eucharist' are two types that could be deemed appropriate, although they originated in Byzantium.¹ The Lite may have indicated a short separate service that contains processional movement with a litany and prayers comprised of supplication liturgy. It was conducted before the Eucharistic service or another service that included processional movement with prayers to invoke divine aid.² Thus, the Lite was not only part of religious life but also part of the active civic life of the congregation. By the tenth century, the Lite became a technical term designating outdoor liturgy and processions, including supplicatory prayers accompanied by psalms and hymns.³ Georgia, during that period, was undergoing a shift from the Jerusalem liturgy to the Constantinople one. Thus, it points to the possibility of such outdoor processions being held before the Oshk'i south façade.⁴ Another possible procession and ritual in front Oshk'i south façade concerns the Stylite ritual.

The various roles of the porch are consequential from the scriptures, theology, and philosophical perceptions, to which Georgian theologians and philosophers assigned great value and consideration. Throughout the article, much attention has been devoted to these topics in relation to the roles played by the porch.

The entrance acquired its status from symbolic interpretations of an ecclesiastic building for worship and a separate organ that fulfills the edifice's wholeness. The symbolic meanings of the church structure on its horizontal axis were orientated to

¹ About these processions, read: Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*.

² Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*, p. 14.

³ Baldovin, *Urban Character*, pp. 190-197.

⁴ In regards to the Lite and the Entrance Rite of Eucharist: Baldovin, in his research on stational liturgy, stated that in early Christian usage, the Lite, meant "supplication" in general. By the fifth century, it meant supplication during a liturgical procession, and in the tenth century, it was a technical term referring only to ecclesiastical processions held outdoors. The Lite was very frequently employed in Constantinople from the end of the fourth century until the seventh or eighth century. Furthermore, according to Baldovin, the stational liturgies of Jerusalem, Rome, and Constantinople also influenced the choice of lectionary readings. The clearest example of this influence was the adoption of the Jerusalem calendar in the early fifth century, together with lessons from the liturgical celebrations, by the Armenian and Georgian churches. Another influence of Jerusalem's stational liturgy was the development of the Entrance Rite structure of the Eucharist discerned in all three liturgies. The 'Entrance Rite,' at least by the early seventh century, was an entrance psalm in the Jerusalem Eucharist, reflecting on the close connections between Jerusalem – Georgia – Byzantium in this respect. Baldovin, *Urban Character*, pp. 207, 240, 241.

theology and philosophical perceptions, patristic interpretations, and the gradual expansion of the liturgy and processions. The division between body and soul was realized by the church and its parts as a whole. The edifice represents the universe, a sacral space on Earth; the walls were considered a liminal zone between the outside world and the Lord's world; windows and entrances are open spaces connecting two worlds. Thus, the faithful saw the porch as a place where they could encounter God. The door identified with Christ in John, "I am the door of the sheepfold," John 10:7-9. The relationship of the porch juxtaposed with the whole body of the church is analogous to the relation of different four quarters of the world contrasted with the whole of it.

The myriad of reliefs of flowers, plants, and hybrid animals spread on the facades, church walls, columns, and capitals directed the worshipers' feelings and thoughts; they also expressed their anxiety and fear from the changing world. The theme of Hybridism in Christian perspective could lead to the understanding that the Christian Neoplatonic division of body and soul, and the possible loss of the body, can only be overcome by God to sustain the bodily continuity in resurrection.

Throughout this article much attention has been paid to understanding the various ways that the church gates and the entrance functioned, and the materials used to construct them. I have explored how they were designed to form the human being, in body and soul, as well as the different values and roles of the outside versus the inside world. These were not merely designated areas, because each absorbed sophisticated Christian theology and liturgy regarding how they should function. Each area reflected sophisticated philosophy in order to inspire certain groups of worshipers in their quest to unite with the One within the sacred edifices. The outstanding architecture of the porch and narthex, as well as the sculptures in different places on the façade of buildings, stimulated the mind and evoked memories of theological and historical events, and thus highlighted the essence of the sculpture. One might say that an *aide-memoire* to the relations of the part contrasted with the whole in Neoplatonic perceptions, but above all the Christian spirit, alluding to the verse "This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter through it," Ps. 117:20.

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Erga Shneurson

Georgian Church Porches – the Gate to the House of God for the Righteous

Summary

Several Georgian churches and cathedrals feature porches which exhibit splendid architecture. I believe that these porches – their structure, decoration, and function – play an essential role in the church, beyond a liminal zone connecting the outside world and a spiritual-religious one. The sheltering entrance welcomed those worshipers who approached a passage area into the building which fulfilled a symbolic mission in the religious life of the congregation and liturgical rituals, both independent of the church and as an integral part of it. These architectural elements played a significant role within the Divine Liturgy of the church, reflecting theological and philosophical theories which evolved throughout the Byzantine Empire and Georgian society over the centuries.

The existence of porches and porticos raises enigmatic questions which this article will investigate. Why were they decorated so elaborately and what message did they convey? Furthermore, why did the initiators pay so much attention to them? Assuming that they fulfilled political and geopolitical purposes, what were their roles? What other functions did they hold, if any? Are there differences in structure, function, and meaning between one place and other? Studying the culture, history, and the façades decoration reveals that Georgia was a sophisticated society in which the written word was a crucial component in its cultural development.

Examining Georgian historical architectural and artistic literature, together with current research, one can find various interpretations and information about the porches, such as the articles written by Thomas Kaffenberger on Manglisi church and

Nato Gengiuri on Georgian church porches. However, the philosophical perceptions attached to this architectural element by Georgian society, as well as its theological and liturgical implications, had tremendous importance. After all, the porch was the first area which the congregant entered upon arrival to the church. What was the role of the portico/porch in the liturgy, if any? These elements have been overlooked in many case studies, and they are a central theme of this investigation.

Recognizing the meaning and symbolism behind architectural elements seems to be one aspect which led to the porch's development. Thus, the primary purpose is to establish a theoretical foundation to the porch phenomenon based on their architectural construction and decoration. In addition, the focus is on the possible liturgy conducted at the gate, entrances, porch, annex, and doors; as well as on theological and philosophical thoughts expressed from early Christianity onward; and finally, on the political climate and cultural environment of the period under discussion.

The visual elements played a significant cultural role in harnessing art and the written word to express theological and philosophical perceptions along with political messages and historical events.

ერგა შნეურსონი

ქართული ეკლესიის გალერეა – ღვთის სახლის კარიბჭე მართალთათვის

რეზიუმე

მრავალ ქართულ ეკლესიასა და საკათედრო ტაძარს აქვს გალერეა, რომელიც არქიტექტურის ბრწყინვალე ნიმუშს წარმოადგენს. ჩემი აზრით, ისინი, თავიანთი სტრუქტურით, გაფორმებით და ფუნქციით – არსებით როლს ასრულებენ ეკლესიაში, ლიმინალური ზონის მიღმა გარე და სულიერ-რელიგიურ სამყაროთა დაკავშირების თვალსაზრისით. შენობის შესასვლელთან მისულ მლოცველებს ხვდება გადახურული შესასვლელი, ეკლესიისგან დამოუკიდებელი და, ამავდროულად, მისი განუყოფელი ნაწილი, რომელსაც მრევლის რელიგიურ ცხოვრებასა და ლიტურგიკულ რიტუალებში სიმბოლური მისია ეკისრება. ამ არქიტექტურულმა ელემენტებმა მნიშვნელოვანი როლი ითამაშა ეკლესიის საღმრთო ლიტურგიაში, რომელშიც აისახა ბიზანტიის იმპერიაში და ქართულ საზოგადოებაში საუკუნეების განმავლობაში განვითარებული თეოლოგიური და ფილოსოფიური თეორიები.

გალერეათა და პორტიკების არსებობა ნამოჭრის იდუმალ შეკითხვებს, რასაც შევეცდები, წარმოდგენილ სტატიაში გავცე პასუხი. რატომ ამკობდნენ მათ ასე ზედმინევნიტ და რა იდეა იყო ამაში ჩადებული? უფრო მეტიც, რატომ აქცევდნენ ინიციატორები მათ ესოდენ დიდ ყურადღებას? თუ ვივარაუდებთ, რომ მათ პოლიტიკური და გეოპოლიტიკური მიზნები ამოძრავებდათ, მაშინ რა იყო ამ არქიტექტურულ ელემენტთა როლი? რა იყო მათი სხვა ფუნქცია, თუკი ასეთი გააჩნდათ? განსხვავდება თუ არა მათი სტრუქტურა, ფუნქცია და მნიშვნელობა ადგილმდებარეობის მიხედვით? კულტურის, ისტორიისა და ფასადების გაფორმების შესწავლა ცხადყოფს, რომ საქართველოში განვითარებული საზოგადოება იყო, რომლის კულტურულ წინსვლაში დამწერლობას გადამწყვეტი ადგილი ეჭირა.

ადრინდელ ქართულ არქიტექტურულ და მხატვრულ ლიტერატურაში, ისევე, როგორც მიმდინარე გამოკვლევებში, შეიძლება მოიძებნოს სხვადასხვა ინტერპრეტაცია და ინფორმაცია ეკლესია-მონასტრების გალერეათა თაობაზე; მაგალითად, თომას კაფენბერგერის ნაშრომში მანგლისის ეკლესიაზე და ნატო გენგიურის სტატიაში ქართული ეკლესიის გალერეის შესახებ. აღსანიშნავია, რომ ქართული საზოგადოების მიერ ამ არქიტექტურულ ელემენტთან დაკავშირებული ფილოსოფიური შეხედულებების აღქმას, აგრეთვე მის საღვთისმეტყველო და ლიტურგიკულ არსს, უდიდესი მნიშვნელობა ენიჭებოდა. სწორედ გალერეა იყო პირველი სივრცე, რომელშიც მრევლი შედიოდა ეკლესიაში მისვლისთანავე. რა როლი ჰქონდა კარიბჭეს/გალერეას ლიტურგიაში, თუკი საერთოდ ჰქონდა? ეს ელემენტები შეუმჩნეველი დარჩა მრავალი თემატური კვლევის დროს და ისინი ჩემი ამჟამინდელი გამოკვლევის მთავარ თემას წარმოადგენს.

როგორც ჩანს, გალერეის განვითარების ერთ-ერთი განმაპირობებელი ასპექტი არქიტექტურული ელემენტების მნიშვნელობის და სიმბოლიკის გაცნობიერება უნდა ყოფილიყო. ამდენად, ჩემი ძირითადი მიზანი გალერეის არქიტექტურულ კონსტრუქციასა და დეკორაციაზე დაყრდნობით მისი თეორიული საფუძვლების ჩამოყალიბებაა. გარდა ამისა, ყურადღება გამახვილებულია ჭიშკართან, შესასვლელთან, გალერეასთან, დამატებით ნაგებობასთან და კარებთან ჩატარებულ შესაძლო ლიტურგიაზე. ასევე, ადრეული ქრისტიანობის დროიდან გამოთქმულ თეოლოგიურ და ფილოსოფიურ აზრებზე და ბოლოს, განსახილველი პერიოდის პოლიტიკურ კლიმატსა და კულტურულ გარემოზე.

ხელოვნებისა და დამწერლობის გამოყენებით ვიზუალურმა ელემენტებმა მნიშვნელოვანი კულტურული როლი შეასრულეს თეოლოგიური და ფილოსოფიური აღქმების, ასევე პოლიტიკური გზავნილების და ისტორიული მოვლენების გამოსახატავად.

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სურ. 11. ბაგრატის დასავლეთი გალერეის შიდა მხარე.

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სურ. 18. მოხატული აფრა.

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