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Old Testament Prefigurations of the Mother of God in Medieval Georgian Iconography

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Events and individual persons from the Old Testament were interpreted in early Christian exegesis as prefigurations of the New Testament story, reflecting God's plan for salvation of humankind.¹ The Church Fathers explain that Old Testament narratives foreshadowed events to be fulfilled by Christ's deeds.² On account of this, the relevant textual passages were integrated into Byzantine liturgy.³ Thus, the liturgical ritual is reflected in the interplay of such textual sources and the image cycles depicted in sacred spaces, altogether aiming at emphasising the idea of Christian Truth. A striking example for such interplay are Marian prefigurations, which are based on a particularly ancient textual tradition.⁴

Exploration of Text and Image

Already in the Gospels, the Mother of God is described in typological terms associated with the Old Testament. This characterisation is pursued one step further in patristic writing starting from the fourth century.⁵ Nevertheless, it is only after the Third Ecumenical Council in 431 that exegetes began to analytically examine those Old Testament texts that might relate to the Mother of God.⁶ The liturgical offices (Vespers, Compline and Matins), especially for the four great Marian Feasts (Nativity, Entry into the Temple, Annunciation, Dormition), took their definitive form

- 1 Krueger, Derek, *The Old Testament and Monasticism*, in: *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, Eds. Magdalino, Paul and Nelson, Robert, Washington, D.C. 2010, pp. 199–221.
- 2 Schrenk, Sabine, *Typos und Antitypos in der frühchristlichen Kunst*, Bonn 1995; Pentiuć, Eugen J., *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, Oxford 2014. In the monumental art of the Early Christian period, the corresponding images appear in sacred spaces, e.g. in S. Vitale in Ravenna (547).
- 3 Ševčenko, Nancy Patterson, *Art and Liturgy in the Later Byzantine Empire*, in: *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 5: *Eastern Christianity*, Ed. Angold, Michael, Cambridge 2006, pp. 127–153.
- 4 Ladouceur, Paul, *Old Testament Prefigurations of the Mother of God*, in: *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50 (2006), pp. 15–48.
- 5 Kniazeff, Alexis, *La Mère de Dieu dans l'Église orthodoxe*, Paris 1990, pp. 43–52; Pentiuć 2014, pp. 39–61.
- 6 Constas, Nicholas, *Weaving the Body of God. Proclus of Constantinople, the Theotokos, and the Loom of the Flesh*, in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995), pp. 169–194; Cameron, Avril, *The Early Cult of the Virgin*, in: *Mother of God*, Ed. Vassilaki, Maria, Milan 2000, pp. 10–15; Ladouceur 2006, pp. 15–48.

around the 8th and 9th centuries, with the comments of the Byzantine hymnographers.⁷ The Marian reading of the Old Testament, which is emphasized in the liturgical offices, essentially serves to express, in poetic terms, a liturgical vision of the role of the Theotokos in the economy of salvation.⁸ For almost every feast, there is a biblical passage that aptly selected.⁹ The subjects of the Old Testament were explained as divine manifestations symbolizing, or prefiguring, the Incarnation through the instrumentality of the Virgin Mary.¹⁰ It is in this context that the Old Testament imagery, taken on by the Byzantine hymnographers, is included into the liturgical services and, subsequently, the iconography as well. This process begins only in the 9th century, when Mariological allegories are occasionally visualised in miniature art.¹¹ From the mid-12th century onwards, the *Kokkinobaphos* manuscript (Paris, BNF, gr. 1208; Rome, BAV, gr. 1162) contains the first instance of a pictorial cycle with scenes systematically depicting typological prefigurations of the Virgin.¹² After the end of the 13th century, Mariological prefigurations become an integral element of iconographic programs decorating church interiors.¹³ They are

- 7 Fassler, Margot, *The First Marian Feast in Constantinople and Jerusalem. Chant Texts, Readings, and Homiletic Literature*, in: *The Study of Medieval Chant*, Ed. Jeffery, Peter, Cambridge 2001, pp. 25–87; Ladouceur 2006, p. 45; Pentiuć 2014, pp. 227–236.
- 8 Generally on the introduction of the various Marian Feasts in the liturgical calendar and on the selection of the texts read at these Feasts: Kniazeff 1990, pp. 157–167; Ladouceur 2006, pp. 15–48; Cunningham, Mary, *Messages in Context. The Reading of Sermons in Byzantine Churches and Monasteries*, in: *Images of the Byzantine World. Visions, Messages and Meaning*, Ed. Lymberopoulou, Angeliki, Ashgate 2011, pp. 83–94; Pentiuć 2014, pp. 227–236.
- 9 Ladouceur 2006, pp. 44–48.
- 10 Hannick, Christian, *Exégèse, typologie et rhétorique dans l'hymnographie byzantine*, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999), pp. 207–222, here pp. 210–215; Cunningham, Mary, *The meeting of the Old and the New. The typology of Mary the Theotokos in Byzantine homilies and hymns*, in: *The Church and Mary*, Ed. Swanson, Robert, New York 2004, pp. 52–62; Hannick, Christian, *The Theotokos in Byzantine Hymnography*, in: *Images of the Mother of God*, Ed. Vassilaki, Maria, Ashgate 2005, pp. 69–76; Louth, Andrew, *John of Damascus on the Mother of God as a Link Between Humanity and God*, in: *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium*, Eds. Brubaker, Leslie and Cunningham, Mary, Ashgate 2011, pp. 153–161; Tsironis, Niki, *Emotion and Senses in Marian Homilies of the Middle Byzantine Period*, in: *The Cult of Mother of the God in Byzantium*, Eds. Brubaker, Leslie and Cunningham, Mary, Ashgate 2011, pp. 179–198.
- 11 Corrigan, Karen, *Visual Polemics in the Ninth-Century Byzantine Psalters*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 20–23, 37–9, 69; Ševčenko, Nancy Patterson, *The Mother of God in Illuminated Manuscripts*, in: *Mother of God*, Ed. Vassilaki, Maria, Milan 2000, pp. 155–166, here pp. 156–159; Cunningham 2004, pp. 52–62; Ladouceur 2006, pp. 33–38.
- 12 Ševčenko 2000, pp. 155–156; Linardou, Kelly, *Depicting the Salvation. Typical Images of Mary in the Kokkinobaphos Manuscripts*, in: *The Cult of Mother of God in Byzantium*, Eds. Brubaker, Leslie and Cunningham, Mary, Ashgate 2011, pp. 133–149; Linardou, Kelly, *The Homilies of Iakovos of the Kokkinobaphos Monastery*, in: *A Companion to Byzantine Illustrated Manuscripts*, Ed. Tsamakda, Vasiliki, Leiden 2017, pp. 383–393.
- 13 Tsigaridas, Euthymios, *The Mother of God in Wall-Paintings*, in: *Mother of God*, Ed. Vassilaki, Maria, Milan 2000, pp. 125–137, here pp. 134–135.

indicative of a renewed fervour for the cult of the Virgin and demonstrate emphatically articulate the interdependence of word and image in the liturgical space.¹⁴ Painted programs including typological scenes are geographically widespread and a remarkable lot of them dates back to the Palaiologan period. Mariological prefigurations can be found at Mount Athos, in the churches of Kosovo and FYROM, Crete, Cyprus, Chios, Georgia, Jerusalem, Trebizond, Thessaloniki, and Constantinople.¹⁵ The frequent occurrences of Old Testament prefigurations of the Theotokos in Georgia, which are discussed in this paper, are strikingly numerous in comparison to those in other Byzantine regions.

Mariological Representations in the Context of Medieval Georgian Culture

According to the literary tradition, the country was under the protection of the Mother of God.¹⁶ As pointed out by Zaza Skhirt'ladze, the important place held by the Virgin in Georgian medieval culture is mirrored in her exceptionally numerous

- 14 Maertens, Thierry, *Le développement liturgique et biblique du culte de la Vierge*, in: *Paroisse et Liturgie* 4 (1954), pp. 225–249; Ledit, Joseph, *Marie dans la liturgie de Byzance*, Paris 1967, pp. 64–97; Tsironis, Niki, *From Poetry to Liturgy*, in: *Images of the Mother of God*, Ed. Vassilaki, Maria, Ashgate 2005, pp. 91–102.
- 15 Der Nersessian, Sirarpie, *Program and Iconography of the Frescoes of the Parecclesion*, in: *The Kariye Djami, IV*, Ed. Underwood, Paul, New York 1975, pp. 303–353; Stephan, Christine, *Ein byzantinisches Bildensemble: Die Mosaiken und Fresken der Apostelkirche zu Thessaloniki*, Worms 1986, pp. 107–144. Some of the most prominent examples: Mount Athos: Church of Protaton at Karyes (end of 13th century), Church of the Presentation of the Virgin at Vatopedi (1311–1312); Church of the Presentation of the Virgin at Chilandar (1321). FYROM: Church of the Virgin Peribleptos at Ochrid (1295); Church of St. George at Staro Nagoričino (1317–1318), Church of the Archangels at Lesnovo (1349). Kosovo: Bogorodica Ljeviška at Prizren (1310); Church of the Virgin at Gračanica (1320); Church of the Virgin at Peć (before 1337); Church of Pantokrator at Dečani (1350). Israel: Church of Holy Cross at Jerusalem (first half of the 14th century). Peloponnese: Church of the Virgin Peribleptos at Mistra (1380); Church of the Virgin Pantanassa at Mistra (1428). Crete: Panagia Kera at Kritsa (14th century); Church of St. Theodore at Mertes (1344); Church of St. Georgios at Viannos (1401). Cyprus: Panagia Phorbiotissa at Asinou (mid-14th century). Chios: Theotokos tou Agrelopou at Kalamoti (1320). Trebizond: Hagia Sophia (end of the 13th century). Arta: Church of St. Theodora (14th century). Thessaloniki: Holy Apostles (1315) and St. Nicholas Orphanos (first half of the 14th century). Constantinople: Pammakaristos Church (1310) and Parekklesion of the Chora Monastery (1320).
- 16 For the literary works recounting her life and their translations: K'ek'elidze, K'orneli, *Dzveli kartuli lit'erat'uris istoria* [History of Old Georgian Literature], Tbilisi 1980, pp. 441–443. The Life of the Virgin of St. Maximos was translated into Georgian by St. Euthymios the Athonite around the turn of the 10th to 11th century. For the historical sources: Bubulashvili, Eldar, *Sakartvelos ek'lesiis sits'mindeebi* [Relics of Georgian Churches], Tbilisi 2007, pp. 127–131.

representations in wall paintings of the period.¹⁷ This local Mariological glorification is abundantly attested in mural paintings, on icons, on sculpture, on chancel barrier reliefs, on metalwork or on enamel, and in manuscript illuminations from the 10th century onwards.¹⁸ Whereas scenes or cycles depicting the life of the Virgin, including apocryphal episodes, were popular and manifold,¹⁹ prefigurations of the Virgin can be encountered less frequently. In Georgia, murals containing prefigurations of the Virgin are found in the Church of the Theotokos in Betania,²⁰ in the Church of the Transfiguration in Zarzma,²¹ in the Church of the Koimesis in Likhne,²² in the Church of the Koimesis in Martvili,²³ in the Church of the Saviour in Tsalenjikha,²⁴ and in the

- 17 Skhirt'ladze, Zaza, Apocryphal Cycle of the Virgin in Medieval Georgian Murals, in: Σύμμεικτα. Collections of Papers Dedicated to the 40th Anniversary of the Institute for Art History, Ed. Stevović, Ivan, Belgrade 2012, pp. 103–117. On early representations of The Mother of God in Georgia: Sabashvili, Kristine, Early Images of the Mother of God in Georgian Art (5th–10th Centuries), in: Ikon 10 (2017), pp. 63–72.
- 18 For the examples see: Skhirt'ladze 2012, pp. 103–104 (with bibliographical references).
- 19 In mural painting, depictions of the life of the Virgin are found more frequently from the first half of the 13th century onwards. Skhirt'ladze 2012, pp. 103–117.
- 20 Privalova, Ekaterina, Betaniis mokhat'uloba [The Paintings of Betania], in: Sabch'ota Khelovneba [Soviet Art] (1980), pp. 55–62; Privalova, Ekaterina, Nouvelles données sur Betania (Offprint of the 'IV^e symposium sur l'art géorgien'), Tbilisi 1984; Privalova, Ekaterina, Sur les peintures murales de Betania, in: Atti del terzo simposio internazionale sull'arte Georgiana, vol. I, Ed. Calò Mariani, Maria Stella, Galatina 1986, pp. 153–160; Privalova, Ekaterina, Certaines particularités des peintures murales géorgiennes des XII^e–XIII^e siècles, in: Studenica et l'art byzantin autour de l'année 1200, Ed. Korać, Vojislav, Belgrade 1988, pp. 415–432; Eastmond, Antony, Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia, University Park, PA 1998, pp. 154–169.
- 21 Evseeva, Lilian, La peinture murale du XIV^e siècle dans l'église du monastère Zarzma (Offprint of the 'II^e symposium sur l'art géorgien'), Tbilisi 1977; Metreveli, Roin and Vachnadze, Natela, Zarzma, Tbilisi 2007; Fyssas, Nikolaos, Monumental Painting in Medieval Georgia from the Golden Age of Queen Tamar until the Fall of Byzantium. Tradition and Artistic 'Oecumenicity', in: Medieval Painting in Georgia. Local Stylistic Expression and Participation to Byzantine Oecumenicity, Eds. Panagiotidi-Kesisoglou, Maria and Kalopissi-Verti, Sofia, Athens 2014, pp. 123–146.
- 22 Velmans, Tania, Préfigurations de l'Ancien Testament dans le bêma, in: Velmans, Tania and Alpago Novello, Adriano, Miroir de l'invisible. Peintures murales et architecture de la Géorgie (VI^e–XV^e s.), Würzburg 1996, pp. 152–155, fig. 111.
- 23 Chikhladze, Nino, Martvili Cathedral. Fragments of Murals in the Palaeologan Artistic Style, in: Georgian Art in the Context of European and Asian Cultures. 1st International Vak'htang Beridze Symposium of Georgian Culture, Eds. Skinner, Peter and Tumanishvili, Dimit'ri, Tbilisi 2009, pp. 277–280 (with comprehensive bibliography).
- 24 Lortkipanidze, Inga, La peinture de Tsaldjikha. Le peintre Cyr Manuel Eugénikos (Offprint of the 'II^e symposium sur l'art géorgien'), Tbilisi 1977; Belting, Hans, Le peintre Manuel Eugenikos de Constantinople, en Géorgie, in: Cahiers archéologiques 28 (1979), pp. 103–114; Lortkipanidze, Inga, Роспись в Цаленджика. Художник Кир Мануел Евгеникос и его место в грузинской средневековой монументальной живописи [Painting in Tsalenjikha. The Artist Kir Manuel Eugenikos and his Place in the Georgian Medieval Monumental Painting], Tbilisi 1992; Lortkipanidze, Inga and Janjalia, Mzia, Tsaldjikha. Wall Paintings in the Saviour's Church, Tbilisi 2011.

Church of the Theotokos in Dirbi,²⁵ all dating back to the 13th and 14th centuries.²⁶ In addition to these monumental complexes, the Ubisi triptych of the mid-14th century also presents a sophisticated Old Testament sequence.²⁷

Two different formulas of Marian prefigurations exist. On the one hand, Old Testament narrative scenes related to the Mother of God are shown as isolated depictions. On the other hand, there are prophets holding inscribed scrolls, accompanied by typological attributes of the Virgin.²⁸ The latter is referring more strongly and directly to literary models, due to the inscribed scrolls of the prophets.²⁹ The image of the Virgin and Christ surrounded by prophets is well known since the middle-Byzantine era on icons or on objects like the *Panagiaria*.³⁰ Each scroll is inscribed with an Old Testament text taken from a hymn associated with a Feast celebrating the Theotokos. The pericopes are read during the Marian Feasts and, more specifically, the Theotokos is evoked in a series of biblical epithets. Since the second half of the 14th century, the image of the Virgin and Christ surrounded by prophets was more frequently used in wall paintings, notably in the dome drum.³¹ In a more complex iconographic variation, prophets are holding typological

- 25 Gagoshidze, Giorgi and Chikhladze, Nino, The Monastery of Dormition at Dirbi, Tbilisi 2006.
- 26 There are also Old Testament prefigurations in Georgia, which cannot be directly related to the Theotokos, for example the depiction of Melchizedek, king of Salem with bread and wine (Gen. 14:18–20) as prototype of the Savior and his priesthood. See also: Skhirt'ladze, Zaza, The Mother of All the Churches. Remarks on the Iconographic Program of the Apse Decoration of Dört Kilise, in: Cahiers archéologiques 43 (1995), pp. 101–117.
- 27 Georgian National Museum, Museum of Georgia, Medieval Treasure, Tbilisi. Burch'uladze, Nana, Ubisi monast'ris khat'ebi da k'edlis mkhat'vroba [Icons and Wall Paintings of Ubisi Monastery], Tbilisi 2006, pp. 29–40, figs. 2–3, pls. 2–14.
- 28 Der Nersessian 1975, p. 313.
- 29 Prophets with texts referring to a New Testament event were already widely used in late antique art.
- 30 Weyl Carr, Annemarie, The Presentation of an Icon at Mount Sinai, in: Δελτιον της Χριστιανικης Αρχαιολογικης Εταιρειας [Bulletin of Society of Christian Archaeology] 17 (1993–1994), pp. 239–248; Weyl Carr, Annemarie, Icon with the Enthroned Virgin Surrounded by Prophets and Saints, in: The Glory of Byzantium, Eds. Evans, Helen and Wixom, William, New York 1997, pp. 372–373; Piatnitsky, Yuri, The Panagiarion of Alexios Komnenos Angelos and Middle Byzantine Painting, in: Perceptions of Byzantium and its Neighbors (843–1261), Ed. Pevny, Olenka, New York 2000, pp. 40–55 (with more examples). A *Panagiarion* is a small liturgical paten decorated with a representation of the Virgin.
- 31 Mouriki, Doula, Αι βιβλικαι προεικονισεις της Παναγιας εις τον τρουλλον της Περιβλεπτου του Μυστρα [The Biblical Types of the Panagia in the Dome of the Peribleptos Church in Mistras], in: Αρχαιολογικον Δελτιον [Bulletin of Archaeology] 25 (1970), Μελεται [Studies], pp. 215–271, here pp. 217–251, 267–270. The earliest surviving example of this type is the decoration of the church of the Panagia in Myriokephala (Crete, 11th century) showing the Pantocrator in the apex of the cupola and the Virgin surrounded by prophets in the cylindrical drum. It is, moreover, the first instance in which the texts of the prophets in a cupola refer to the Virgin and the Incarnation. The prophets do not hold any attributes. Spatharakis, Ioannis, Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete, Rethymnon Province, vol. I, London 1999, pp. 146–147, 345–346, figs. 177–184.

attributes.³² These objects and the contents of the biblical passages in the scrolls of the prophets depict the hymn "From above the prophets have heralded Thee", addressed to the Theotokos as bearer of the Incarnation.³³ This subject is used quite infrequently in the Byzantine period and would only become more popular in the post-byzantine period.³⁴ In the Georgian churches, the prophets holding scrolls and typological attributes appear from the 13th century onwards. In one Georgian church, the Saviour's church in Ts'alenjikha (1384–1396), they are found in the dome. Here, Moses is presenting a vase with the medallion of the Virgin.³⁵ The historical inscriptions in the church identify Manuel Eugenikos of Constantinople as its painter.³⁶ Except for this example, where the painting programme reflects Byzantine tradition, the prophets holding scrolls and typological attributes are depicted in the Georgian churches on the walls of the sanctuary rather than in the dome – those have no direct iconographic parallels elsewhere. Nevertheless, in their usual connection with the Virgin in the dome they point undoubtedly to the divine scheme of human salvation through the Incarnation. The latter was foreshadowed by the prophets but was only realised through the Theotokos, who is shown in the apse.

- 32 Church of Trinity at Sopoćani (1270); Church of St. Achilles at Arilje (end of 13th century); King's Church at Studenica (1320), Parekklesion of the Chora Monastery (1320) at Constantinople, Church of the Virgin at Peć (before 1337); Church of the Archangels at Lesnovo (1347); Monastery at Ravanica (1377); Church of the Virgin Peribleptos at Mistra (1380); Church of the Saviour in Tsalenjikha (1384–1396); Church of St. Georgios at Viannos (1401); Church of Trinity, Manasija at Resava (1407–1408); Church of St. Nicolas at Jošanica (early 15th century). Papamastorakis, Titos, *Ο διακοσμος του τρουλου των ναων της παλαιολογιας περιουδου στη Βαλκανικη χερσονησο και την Κυπρο* [The Decoration of Domes of the Churches of the Paleologan Period in the Balkan Peninsula], Athens 2001, pp. 12–13, 26–28, 31, 33–35, 98–109, 166–248, figs. 36–51, 65–66, 81, 108, 130–133, 136, 143, 145–146.
- 33 Mouriki 1970, p. 245. The troparion should not be considered as the only source of the subject, a large number of the liturgical hymns and homiletic texts may have provided the basic features of the theme. The title assigned to the composition in the Hermeneia no doubt derives from the beginning of the well-known troparion. Hetherington, Paul, 'The Painter's manual' of Dionysius of Fourni. An English translation with commentary of cod. gr. 708 in the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library, Leningrad, London 1981, p. 51. The Painter's Manual of Mount Athos recommends decorating one of the domes of the narthex with the medallion of the Virgin and Child, borne by angels and surrounded by the prophets, and placing on the pendentives the hymnographers with appropriate words written on their books or scrolls.
- 34 Semoglou, Athanasios, La composition apsidiale à Bălinești et ses composantes hymnographiques mariales, in: *Αφιερωμα στον ακαδημαϊκο Παναγιωτη Λ. Βοκοτοπουλο* [Dedication to the Scholar Panagiotis L. Vokotopoulos], Eds. Katsaros, Basilis and Tourta, Anastasia, Athens 2015, pp. 491–502.
- 35 Lortkipanidze 2011, p. 38.
- 36 Belting 1979, pp. 103–114.

Old Testament Prefigurations in Georgian Churches: Development and Contextualization

Church of the Mother of God in the Betania Monastery

The main church of Betania Monastery, dedicated to the Mother of God, was erected under Royal patronage at the beginning of the 12th century.³⁷ The homogeneous, complex program is the result of successive campaigns. Among the series of individual saints in the lowest register are the portraits of the donors and the royal family.³⁸ In the apse, three rows of prophets, apostles, and Church Fathers are represented below a monumental image of the Deesis. The naos contains three distinct cycles including the Passion, miracle scenes, and episodes of the Old Testament.³⁹ The latter occupy the upper registers of the south and the north transepts. The decoration of the apse and the upper parts of the north and the south transepts was executed at the beginning of the 13th century, their iconographical subjects interacting within a complex typological and theological system. The episodes of the Old Testament represent prefigurations of the Virgin,⁴⁰ among the earliest in the Byzantine world.⁴¹

37 Privalova 1980, pp. 55–62; Eastmond 1998, pp. 154–169.

38 Privalova 1986, pp. 153–157; Eastmond 1998, pp. 154–169, figs. 74–78. On the north wall of the north transept, Giorgi III, Tamar and Girogi Laša are turned with raised arms to Saint George. Under the portraits, Privalova observed the first layer. On the south wall of the south transept, two men offer a model of the church to a painted icon of the Virgin and the Child. The main figure was identified as Sumbat' I Orbeli (1128–1156). The portrait was also repainted in the 13th century, originally Sumbat wore a laity dress, dating the painting to 1155–1156, before he became a monk (Fig. 1).

39 Privalova 1980, pp. 56–62; Privalova 1986, pp. 158–160.

40 Privalova 1980, p. 56.

41 At the end of the 13th century in the narthex of the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos at Ohrid, in the prothesis of the Protaton of Mount Athos, and in the north porch of the Church of Hagia Sophia at Trebizond with equally comprehensive cycles of types of the Virgin. For Ochrid: Der Nersessian, Sirarpie, Notes sur quelques images se rattachant au thème du Christ-Ange, in: *Cahiers archéologiques* 13 (1962), pp. 209–216; Hallensleben, Horst, Die Malerschule des Königs Milutin, Giessen 1963, pp. 22–25, 128–133, 148–152; Marković, Miodrag, Iconographic Program of the Oldest Wall Paintings in the Church of Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid, in: *Zograf* 35 (2011), pp. 119–143; Schellewald, Barbara, Ohrid, in: *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst* VII (2011), pp. 277–297; Grozdanov, Cvetan, The Painting of the Northern Wall of the Narthex of the Church of the Peribleptos (St. Kliment) in Ohrid, in: *Zograf* 36 (2012), pp. 109–114. For Protaton: Djurić, Vojislav, Les conceptions hagiologiques dans la peinture du Protaton, in: *ХИЛАНДАРСКИ ЗБОРНИК* [Recueil de Chilandar] 8 (1991), pp. 37–81; Tsigaridas, Euthymios, Manuel Panselinos: From the Holy Church of Protaton, Thessaloniki 2003, pp. 32–34. For Trebizond: Talbot Rice, David, The Paintings of Hagia Sophia, Trebizond, in: *L'Art byzantin du XIIIe siècle*, Ed. Djurić, Vojislav, Belgrade 1968, pp. 83–90; Talbot Rice, David, The Church of Hagia Sophia at Trebizond, Edinburgh 1968, pp. 149–155, 182–183, 243–244, figs. 112–115, pls. 63–66; Eastmond, Antony, Art and Identity in thirteenth-century Byzantium. Hagia Sophia and the Empire of Trebizond, Aldershot 2004, pp. 66–70, figs. 40–41. The interest in Marian typology can also be used to link the Grand Komnenoi in Trebizond to the Bagratid rulers of Georgia. The representations perhaps hint at residual links between the two states. Eastmond 2003, p. 171.

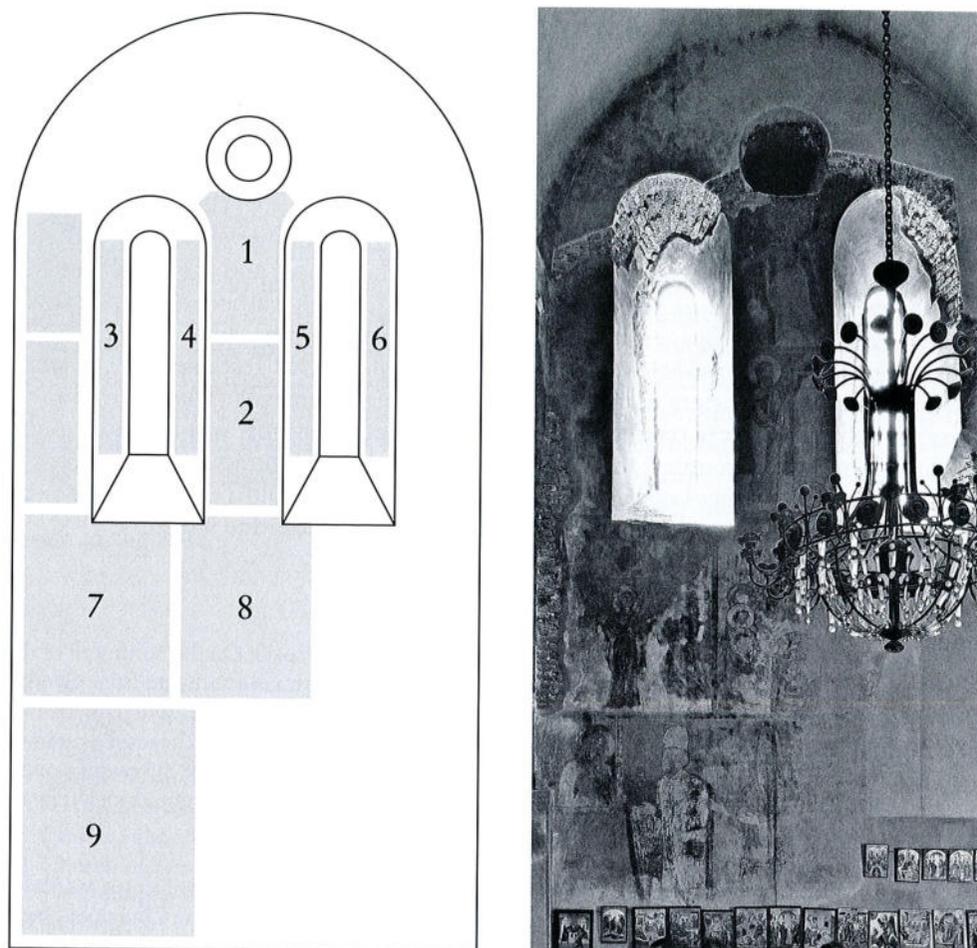


Fig. 1 – Betania Monastery, Church of the Mother of God, early 13th Century. Southern Cross Arm

1. David Dancing in the Temple (2 Sam. 6:14–17)
2. Ezechiel at the Closed Gate (Ezek. 43:27–44:4); the Living Fountain Sealed (Song 4:12)
3. Moses and the Burning Bush (Exod. 3:1–6)
4. Jacob's Ladder (Gen. 28:10–17)
5. Aaron and the Flowering Rod (Num. 17:16–26)
6. Gideon with the Fleece (Judge 6:36–40)
7. Ascension of Christ
8. Pentecost
9. Sumbat' I Orbeli (1128–1156) Offering a Model of the Church to a Painted Icon of the Virgin and the Child

Fig. 2 [Pl. XII] – Betania Monastery, Church of the Mother of God, early 13th Century. David Dancing in the Temple; Ezechiel at the Closed Gate; the Living Fountain Sealed; Gideon with the Fleece; Moses and the Burning Bush; Aaron and the Flowering Rod



Furthermore, this is the most extended example of such representations in Georgia (Fig. 1).⁴² On the upper part of the southern transept wall, between two windows, the ark's entry into Jerusalem, visualized by David celebrating this event by dancing in the Temple (2 Sam. 6:14–17), is depicted (Fig. 2).⁴³ Since David is considered an ancestor of the Bagrationi family,⁴⁴ the image could also reflect the triumphant entry of King David IV in Tbilisi in 1122.⁴⁵ Directly beneath stands the prophet Ezekiel at the closed gate (Ezek. 43:27–44:4). The words on the prophet's scroll of the prophet "This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened" foretell of the

42 Privalova 1980, p. 57.

43 In the lower part the paintings of the Ascension of Christ and the Pentecost are shown.

44 For the sources describing David as ancestor of the royal house see the article of Ekaterine Gedevanishvili in this volume. For our context it is important that even Constantine Porphyrogenetos considered the Iberians as descendants of the biblical King David and consequently, the progenies of the Virgin.

45 Privalova 1980, p. 56.

Virgin birth of the incarnated God. The liturgical texts often refer to the Theotokos as 'Gate' and the prophecy of Ezekiel concerning the gate of the Temple facing east is read as a part of Vespers during her four great Feasts.⁴⁶ With his right hand, Ezekiel points at a spring under the Temple gate, which refers to the "living fountain sealed", certainly an allusion to the Song of Songs (Song of Sol. 4:12).⁴⁷ "As the king passes through the gate, so the word of God is born of the Virgin Mary to reach all humanity".⁴⁸ This text passage is read several times during the Marian Feast of the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple and the Dormition.⁴⁹

On the intrados of the left window Moses and the burning bush are depicted in the eastern (Exod. 3:1-8), and Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:10-17) in the western half (Figs. 1, 2). The Church Fathers understood the miracle of the bush that burned with fire but was not consumed by it as a typology of the Virgin's birth and this interpretation recurs frequently in the homilies and hymns.⁵⁰ Another aspect of the burning bush which provides a link to the Theotokos is that of 'vocation'. In the case of Moses, as with Mary, a particular 'vocation' is required by God. Due to this analogy, the pericope (Exod. 3:1-8) is read during the Vespers on the Feast of the Annunciation.⁵¹ In contrast, the text referring to Jacob's ladder is read during the Great Vespers, on the Feasts of the Birth of the Virgin, the Annunciation, the Dormition, and included in the odes sung on those days.⁵² According to these liturgical texts, Jacob's ladder prefigures the Mother of God in the sense that it was through her that God descended to earth, that he became incarnate. Another patristic interpretation, which occurs in the liturgical texts, refers to the intercession of the Mother of God: it is through her, as by means of a ladder, that the faithful may climb towards God.⁵³ On the intrados of the right window, on the east side, there is an image of Aaron and the flowering rod (Num. 17:16-26), a topic that has also been interpreted as a symbol of Christ's Incarnation (Fig. 1).⁵⁴ This idea is adopted in the numerous Mariological homilies and also mentioned in the different services at the Feast of the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple and the Dormition.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the episode with the priest Aaron alludes to the priesthood of Christ.

46 Babić, Gordana, *L'image symbolique de la Porte fermée à Saint-Clément d'Ochrid*, in: *Synthronon*, Paris 1968, pp. 145-151; Ladouceur 2006, pp. 8, 41-44; Pentiuć 2014, pp. 228-234; Sharman, Stephen, *The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple*, in: *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* 10 (2015), pp. 48-74.

47 Song of Sol. 4:12: "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed".

48 Ladouceur 2006, p. 44.

49 Ladouceur 2006, p. 12, pl. 4; Pentiuć 2014, pp. 227-236.

50 Mercenier, Feuillen, *La prière des Églises de rite byzantin*, vol. II, 2: *les Fêtes*, Chevetogne 1947, pp. 2, 14, 21, 347; Der Nersessian 1975, pp. 226, 336-338; Ladouceur 2006, pp. 19-22.

51 Mercenier 1947, p. 349; Ladouceur 2006, pp. 20-22; Pentiuć 2014, pp. 227-228, 234-236.

52 Mercenier 1947, pp. 98, 102, 168, 347, 367.

53 Kniazeff 1990, pp. 169-171.

54 For example this interpretation is given by Cyril of Alexandria (*Patrologia Graeca* 99, col. 472 A-B). Der Nersessian 1975, pp. 345-349.

55 Ladouceur 2009, p. 12, pl. 4.

Finally, the opposite side of the intrados shows the image of Gideon with the fleece, which is a typological allusion to the Virgin (Judge 6:36-40). The latter is represented by the fleece, in which "Christ shall come forth like dew falling from the fleece".⁵⁶ The wringing of the cloth is interpreted by John Chrysostom as a prototype for the birth of Christ.⁵⁷ Mary is referred to as 'fleece' in the hymns of the Nativity, and the bible passage of Gideon (Judge 6:36-40) belongs to an Old Testament text, which is read during the Feast of the Annunciation and the Nativity of the Virgin.⁵⁸

The portrayal of the three Hebrew youths on the northern transept is based on the Bible passage Dan. 3:19-30, which is read during the Feasts of the Nativity and the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple.⁵⁹

The interdependence between texts, images and liturgical feasts is underlined by the fact that all Old Testament texts, upon which the visual representations were based, formed part of the liturgical readings during the most important Marian Feasts.⁶⁰ The scenes are inspired by, and connected to the liturgy. In addition, the emphasis of the program is laid on the Incarnation and the Passion, since the main theme in the juxtaposed north transept is a detailed Passion cycle.⁶¹ The sophisticated program captivates the viewer across the space.

The prefigurations of the Old Testament symbolically evoke the role of the Virgin in the economy of salvation; she cannot be separated from Christ. The Old Testament scenes underline the glorification of the Theotokos and her role as intercessor on behalf of humankind before Christ, but at the same time they form a main liturgical theme and thus the antithesis to the Passion of Christ. The development of such a complex program, at a relatively early date compared to other cycles with Marian prefigurations, indicates a profound theological knowledge of the involved actors: certainly, of those, who commissioned the program, but presumably also of the intended beholders.⁶²

Church of the Transfiguration in Zarzma

The legendary foundation of the monastery of Zarzma is recounted in the *Tskhovreba* (Vita) recounting the life and deeds of its alleged founder Serapion of Zarzma.⁶³ According to the contemporary accounts, the construction of the church

56 Ladouceur 2006, p. 25.

57 Johannes Chrysostomos, *Hom. Matt.* (*Patrologia Graeca* 51, col. 36-9).

58 Mercenier 1947, p. 367; Hannick 1999, pp. 207-222; Hannick 2005, pp. 69-76; Ladouceur 2006, pp. 11-13; Pentiuć 2014, p. 251.

59 Ladouceur 2009, p. 12. This representation is depicted for example also on the west wall in St. Nicholas in Q'ints'visi (beginning of 13th century).

60 Two other sequences, Daniel with the rock and probably Balaam with the star, listed by Privalova are not any more recognizable in the church. Privalova 1980, pp. 56-57.

61 Eastmond 1998, pp. 156-161, fig. 75.

62 Eastmond 1998, pp. 168-169.

63 Metreveli and Vachnadze 2007, pp. 250-251.



Fig. 3 – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. Apse and Bema Vault

started after 1300 and its painted decoration dates to the mid-14th century.⁶⁴ During a 1901–1905 restoration, about half of the paintings were painted over by A. S. Slavtsev, a painter from St. Petersburg, hired by the Tsar's family.⁶⁵

In the apse of the Transfiguration monastery in Zarzma, the Theotokos is placed with the child between kneeling archangels (Fig. 3). The psalm 92:1–2 is written in two colours on the cornice.⁶⁶ Below, there is the Communion of the Apostles, in which Judas also participates. In the third register are depicted the concelebrating Church Fathers, the later ones shown in three-quarter view. The four central ones, are placed in red-framed niches, with those two flanking the central window appearing in a frontal position. The intrados of the window displays two bowing angels, depicted with Rhipidia. Under the window and thus over the bishop's chair, the Christ Anapeson was placed in a separate field. This scene becomes the focus

⁶⁴ Evseeva 1977, p. 1; Metreveli and Vachnadze 2007, pp. 65–74.

⁶⁵ Before the work was finished, Taqaishvili accurately described the paintings and documented the restoration. Taqaishvili, Ekvtime, *Археологические экскурсии, разыскания и заметки* [Archaeological Tours, Studies and Notes], Tbilisi 1905. It can be concluded that the ancient compositions were taken into account. The relevant documents, especially the photographic material, are kept in the Russian Museum (Tsar Alexander III Collection) in Saint Petersburg.

⁶⁶ Psalm 92:1–2: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Highest will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord: My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust".



Fig. 4 [Pl. XIII.1] – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. Moses and the Burning Bush (Exod. 3:1–8)



Fig. 5 [Pl. XIII.2] – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. Jacob's Ladder (Gen. 28:10–17)

for worship of the Church Fathers.⁶⁷ The large Mariological cycle consists of thirteen episodes and occupies the entire southern cross-arm. It is the most extended Virgin Cycle in Georgian churches.⁶⁸

Four Old Testament prefigurations are located on the barrel vault of the bema, right in front of the apse (Figs. 3–7). In the north there is Moses and the burning bush (Fig. 4) and below it Jacob's ladder (Fig. 5).⁶⁹ Moses is depicted three times and the medallion of the Virgin appears in the bush. It is only in the Palaiologan period that the artists identified the Virgin completely with the burning bush by placing her image in the midst of the flames (Pl. XV.1).⁷⁰ In the south, the Divine Wisdom that builds a Temple (Proverbs 9:1–6) is shown (Fig. 6).⁷¹ The Divine Wisdom is depicted as an angel with three heads, which sits on the right side of the scene behind an altar. With her left hand, she holds an open book scroll, the text on which is no longer identifiable. Most likely, however, it was Proverbs 9:5.⁷² As in Zarzma, the Divine Wisdom appears as an angel with three faces in the monastery of Chilandar on Mount Athos, there placed in the narthex.⁷³ It is accompanied by four servants holding Eucharistic vessels, which were supposed to emphasise the Eucharistic aspect. The Temple of Wisdom (Proverbs 9:1) is depicted as a three-nave basilica with a portico. In the lunette, a female bust is shown. It is the head of the Mother of God, which also appears in the context of other depictions of the Divine Wisdom. On the roof of the basilica, the medaillon of the Virgin appears a second time (Pl. XV.2).⁷⁴ Proverbs 9:1–12 is recited during Vespers of the Nativity and the Dormition of the Theotokos.⁷⁵ The 'house' may be a metaphor for the Theotokos, the recipient or sanctuary

67 Lortkipanidze, Inga, Emmanuel dormant dans certaines peintures murales géorgiennes (XIV^e–XVI^e s.), in: *Atti del primo simposio internazionale sull'arte Georgiana*, Ed. Ieni, Giulio, Milan 1977, pp. 175–180; Todić, Branislav, Anapeson. Iconographie et signification du thème, in: *Byzantion* 64 (1994), pp. 135–165, here pp. 138, 149–150, 157; Fyssas 2014, p. 138.

68 Skhirt'ladze 2012, p. 112. The Virgin Cycle overlaps the same cycle represented on the lateral wings of the Ubisi icon. The scenes of the cycle are not discussed here.

69 Velmans 1996, p. 153. The inscriptions of the two scenes describe the respective topic: "The burning bush" and "The ladder of Jacob".

70 Der Nersessian 1975, pp. 336–338.

71 Meyendorff, Jean, L'iconographie de la Sagesse Divine dans la tradition byzantine, in: *Cahiers archéologiques* 10 (1959), pp. 259–277; Meyendorff, Jean, Wisdom-Sophia. Contrasting Approach to a Complex Theme, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987), pp. 391–401; Brzozowska, Zofia, Wisdom Has Built Her House (Proverbs 9:1–6). The History of the Notion in Southern and Eastern Slavic Art in the 14th–16th Centuries, in: *Studia Ceranea* 5 (2015), pp. 33–58.

72 Proverbs 9:5: "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed". The text refers to the Eucharist. Brzozowska 2015, p. 36.

73 Meyendorff 1959, p. 272; Todić, Branislav, *The Age of King Milutin*, Belgrade 1999, pp. 353–354.

74 The busts of the Virgin – a third one might have been shown in the basilica's gable, but only fragments remain – certainly allude to the Virgin interpreted as a house. The passage Proverbs 9:1–12 belongs to the paroemia of the Old Testament. Meyendorff 1959, p. 274. In addition, the text is understood in the byzantine hymns as an allusion to the sacrifice and the priesthood of the Virgin. Lidov, Aleksej M., The Priesthood of the Virgin Mary as an Image-Paradigm of Christian Visual Culture, in: *Ikon* 10 (2017), pp. 9–26, here p. 12.

75 Pentiuć 2014, pp. 230–233.

Fig. 6 [Pl. XIV] – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. The Divine Wisdom that Builds a Temple (Proverbs 9:1–6)



of Wisdom's Incarnation. In the Hesychast controversy, the question if Christ should be considered as the concept of Divine Wisdom (*Sophia*) is raised. This idea goes back to a long-developed understanding of the Trinity in Orthodoxy.⁷⁶ The patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos (14th century) wrote that *Sophia* as an important feature of the Trinity is to be identified with Christ.⁷⁷ Philotheos addressed three letters to Bishop Ignatius of Selymbria, in which he further developed the ideas of Gregory Palamas on the Trinity in connection with the 9th spell of Solomon.⁷⁸ The text of the patriarch, in turn, has influenced the 9th Eucharistic prayer on Maundy Thursday, so that the text or the image can also be associated with the celebrations on Thursday before Easter.⁷⁹

76 Meyendorff 1987, p. 392; Barker, Margaret, Wisdom Imagery and the Mother of God, in: *The Cult of Mother of God in Byzantium*, Eds. Brubaker, Leslie and Cunningham, Mary, Ashgate 2011, pp. 91–108, here p. 91.

77 Meyendorff 1959, p. 262; Pallas, Demetrios, Christ as the Holy Wisdom. The Iconographical Fortunes of a Theological Notion, in: *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* [Bulletin of Archaeology] 15 (1989–1990), pp. 119–144; Pseutonkas, Vasileios, *Φιλοθεου Κοκκινου λογοι και ομιλιες* [Sermons and Homilies of Philotheos Kokkinos], Thessaloniki 1981, p. 132.

78 Evseeva 1977, p. 6; Pseutonkas 1981, pp. 69–151; Barker, Margaret, *The Great High Priest*, London 2003, pp. 229–261.

79 On the corresponding rites or readings: Andronikof, Constantin, *Le Cycle Pascal*, Paris 1985, pp. 150–156. Evseeva 1977, pp. 6–7. Evseeva thinks that Zarzma was painted during the patriarchy of Philotheos Kokkinos (1353–1354; 1364–1376). Such a connection is purely hypothetical.

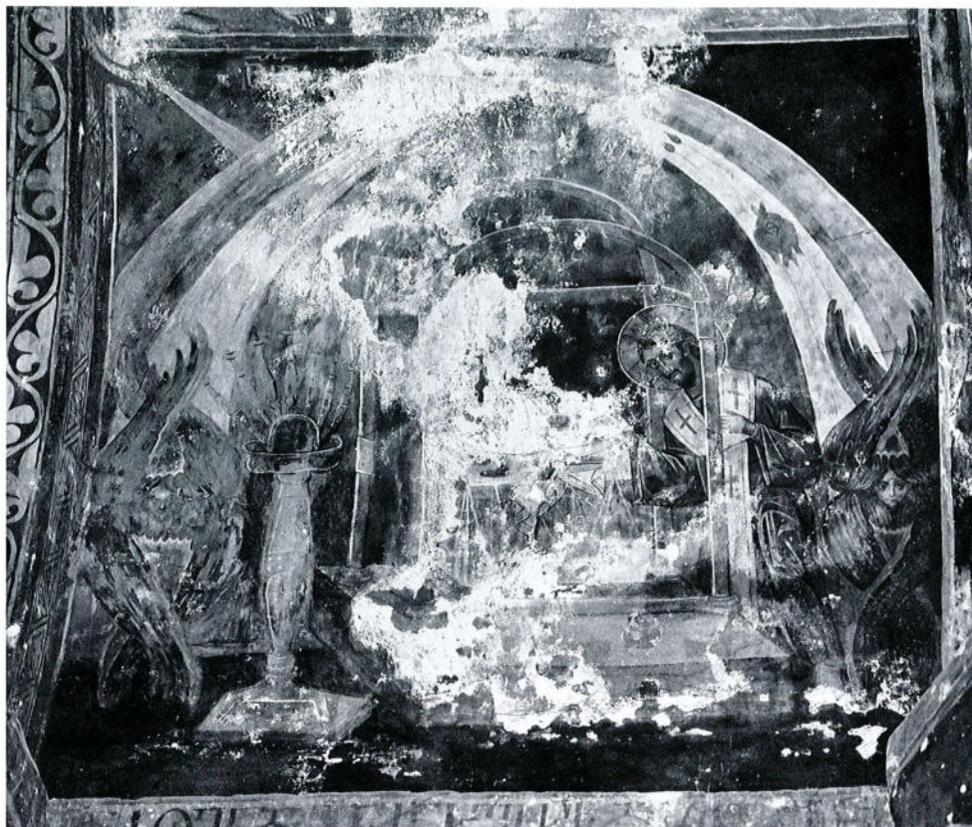


Fig. 7 [Pl. XVI.1] – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. Christ Holding Liturgy at the Tabernacle (Hebrew 8:2)

In Zarzma, below the Divine Wisdom, the scene of Christ holding liturgy at the tabernacle is shown (Fig. 7), which is based on a well-known passage from the Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrew 8:2).⁸⁰ In the 8th century it was used by Andreas the Cretan in his 9th *Stasis* of the *Triodion* for Maundy Thursday.⁸¹ The text is read during the Feast of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple and on the 5th Saturday during Lent, which is dedicated in particular to the glorification of the Theotokos.⁸² The reference to the tabernacle reflects the Theotokos' role as Mother of God. She contains her son in her womb as the tabernacle contained the presence of God. Both concepts, the Wisdom that builds its Temple, as well as the tabernacle, are referred to as the dwelling-place of God during the liturgical ser-

80 Hebrew 8:2: "And who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a more human being".

81 Andronikof 1985, p. 156; Kazhdan 1999, pp. 37–54.

82 Kniazeff 1990, p. 158.

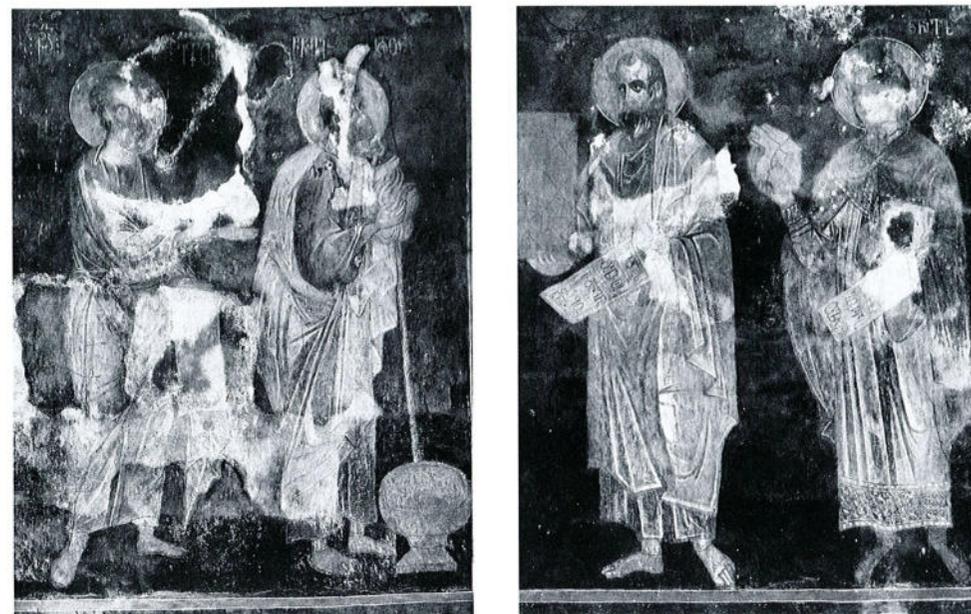


Fig. 8 and 9 [Pl. XVI.2 and 3] – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. The Judges Jephthah and Gideon; the Prophets Daniel and Ezekiel

vices at the Feast of the Presentation of the Mother of God in the Temple, thus indicating the role of the Theotokos in the Incarnation.⁸³

Below these four scenes, the walls of the bema bay are occupied by the standing figures of the judges Jephthah and Gideon on the north side (Fig. 8) and the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel on the south side (Fig. 9).⁸⁴ As mentioned above, prophets holding inscribed scrolls, accompanied by typological attributes of the Virgin are usually depicted in the dome.⁸⁵ Their depiction on the walls of the sanctuary like in Zarzma have no direct iconographic parallels elsewhere.⁸⁶ On the south side Daniel holds a rock in his right hand and an open book scroll in his left hand (Dan. 2:35; Fig. 9). His representation refers to the explication of Nebuchadnezzar's dream which is interpreted as a type of Incarnation in the Christian exegesis.⁸⁷ The liturgical texts for all Feasts of the Theotokos, which refer to the mountain, make

83 Kniazeff 1990, pp. 157–167; Ladouceur 2006, pp. 7–10; Barker 2011, pp. 91–108; Sharman 2015, pp. 63–69.

84 Evseeva 1977, pp. 1–13.

85 Only in one dome of a Georgian church, the Saviour's church in Tsalenjikha (1384–1396), painted by an artist of Constantinople, Moses is presenting a vase with the medaillon of the Virgin. Lortkipanidze 2011, p. 38.

86 A parallel could be the fragmentary depiction of David on the wall of the bema in the church of the Dormition in Martvili (second half of the 14th century). See below.

87 Cunningham 2004, pp. 52–62; Ladouceur 2006, pp. 35–38.

reference to the identification of Christ with the stone that was cut out from it.⁸⁸ The episode is read during Vespers on Christmas day.⁸⁹ Ezekiel holds the closed doors, which refer to the Virgin as 'Gate', in his right hand and an open scroll in his left (Ezek. 44:2). On the north side Jephthah is shown with an open scroll as well (Judge 2:34–40; Fig. 8). The Entry of the Theotokos in the Temple evokes the fate of Jephthah's daughter (Judge 11:34–40).⁹⁰ Gideon (Judge 6:36–40) is shown wringing the dew out of the fleece and filling a bowl full of water. Thus, the prophets in the bema reflect the liturgical use of the text passages on their scrolls with regard to the Mariological Feasts.

The extremely rare representation of the Old Testament prefigurations in the bema area indicates their liturgical significance. We can assume that the illustrations echo hymns and homilies read during the liturgical services at the Feasts of the Theotokos. In the liturgical texts, the Theotokos is presented as the Blessed Virgin, and the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. This becomes apparent in a list of names given to her in hymns, which are illustrated here. Characteristic of the decoration in the church in Zarzma is the combination of narrative and symbolic representations of the Theotokos, which highlight her glorification.

The Church of the Koimesis in Likhne

In the Church of the Koimesis in Likhne (mid-14th century) two episodes of the Old Testament are depicted in the second row of the apse, on each side of the tripartite window, below the communion of the apostles and the Theotokos with the child in the conch. The concelebrating Church Fathers are shown in the bottom register. As for the Old Testament sequences, the tabernacle with Moses and Aaron on the north side and the Philoxenia (Hospitality) of Abraham on the south side are depicted.⁹¹ Both compositions assume a strongly Eucharistic character, especially since both episodes were read during all Mariological celebrations.⁹² Elements relating to the Mother of God are the altar cloth and the vase on the tabernacle in the first scene, which are decorated with a medallion of the Virgin.⁹³ By extension of the parallel between the presence of God in the Temple and the presence of Christ in the Theotokos after the Annunciation, the furnishings and sacred vessels of the Temple are also objects embodying the sacred. The Virgin was interpreted as

88 Ladouceur 2006, p. 11, pl. 3.

89 Mercenier 1947, pp. 1, 8, 12, 93, 367.

90 Sharman 2015, pp. 54–55. Jephthah had promised to make an offering to the Lord in return for a military victory. The offering was his daughter who was accompanied to her death by a company of maidens as the Theotokos is accompanied to the Temple in Jerusalem by a company of maidens.

91 Velmans 1996, pp. 155–156, fig. 111.

92 Der Nersessian 1975, pp. 338–343; Kniazeff 1990, pp. 168–169; Ladouceur 2006, p. 10, pl.2; Skhirt'ladze 2012, pp. 115–117.

93 As a parallel we can refer to the depiction of the tabernacle in the Church of the Dormition in Gračanica (1320), where the tabernacle is also decorated with a medallion of the Theotokos. Todić 1999, pp. 105–106.

the jar or the altar cloth at the services of all principal Feasts.⁹⁴ This is an allusion to the divine motherhood of Mary, who carried Christ in her womb.

Once more, the choice of those unusual scenes for the decoration of the sanctuary emphasises the interest in visually supporting the liturgy. The medallions of the Virgin are lacking on the second image. It is noteworthy that the Hospitality of Abraham is associated with Christ rather than Mary.

The Church of the Koimesis in Dirbi

The principal Church of Dirbi Monastery was built in the 10th century and extended several times.⁹⁵ The program of the paintings, dating back to the second half of the 14th century, is entirely dedicated to an apocryphal cycle of the Mother of God composed of eleven scenes. The most remarkable of these is the Assumption of the Theotokos in the eastern blind arch of the northern nave wall. Above an image of the Koimesis, Mary is shown in a mandorla flanked by angels above the empty sarcophagus.⁹⁶ The Marian Hymn of John of Damascus dedicated to the Koimesis compares the birth of Mary with the Ascension, as Mary had kept her perpetual virginity after the nativity and her body had remained uncorrupted in the tomb.⁹⁷ Like the incarnated Christ, the Virgin left her body after three-days in a tomb and in the moment the Son of God descended to the Virgin falling asleep, she ascended upward to receive her heavenly reward.⁹⁸ In the apse conch, the enthroned Virgin and the Child are flanked by archangels, complemented by half-figures of the apostles in the second register (turning towards the apse centre), and by a liturgy of Church Fathers in the lower register.⁹⁹ The Virgin and the Child are echoed by the Mandyllion, the image of the Incarnation, placed on the apex of the central transversal vault arch.¹⁰⁰

The Mandyllion is flanked by the busts of four prophets holding scrolls with texts referring to the Incarnation of the Lord and future salvation with symbolic

94 Ladouceur 2006, pp. 9–10, pl. 2.

95 Gagoshidze and Chikhkladze 2006, pp. 78–80.

96 According to Skhirt'ladze the empty coffin is singled out in the Assumption because in the sources Dirbi is referred to as "monastery of the coffin". Skhirt'ladze 2012, p. 113. In Georgia, other representations of the Dormition combined with the Assumption are depicted in the Church of the Koimesis at Likhne (mid 14th century) and in the Church of the Saviour at Tsalenjikha (1384–1396).

97 Gagoshidze and Chikhkladze 2006, pp. 114–116, 177–178, fig. 64.

98 Mercenier 1947, pp. 427–428; Mimouni, Simon Claude, Dormition et Assomption de Marie. Histoire des traditions anciennes, Paris 1995, pp. 163–167; Die grossen Feste. Homilien der Hl. Väter und andere Texte, Ed. Monastery of St. John Prodromos, Chania 2011, pp. 328–330. The visualization of the Marian hymn of John of Damascus to the Koimesis is also present in the southern lunette of the western wall in the narthex of the church of Bogorodica Ljeviška at Prizren (1309–1313). Hallensleben 1963, pp. 44–45; Der Nersessian 1975, p. 315; Panić, Draga and Babić, Gordana, Bogorodica Ljeviška, Belgrade 1975, p. 139.

99 Gagoshidze and Chikhkladze 2006, pp. 86–87, figs. 1, 35–44.

100 Skhirt'ladze 2012, p. 113. Similar to them is the earlier Georgian wall painting of the main church of Bertubani at David Gareja.



Fig. 10 [Pl. XVII] – Dirbi, Church of the Koimesis, Second Half of the 14th Century. Prophets on the Transversal Vault Arch

topoi alluding to the Virgin (Fig. 10).¹⁰¹ On the southern half of the arch, Solomon's scroll it reads "Wisdom has built her house" (Proverbs 9:1) and, underneath, on Daniel's scroll is written "until a stone" (Dan. 2:31–35).¹⁰² With his right hand Daniel points at a mountain. Opposite from them, the prophets David and Moses have been identified.¹⁰³ The prophets underline the liturgical use of their texts for the glorification of the role of the Mother of God, which is aimed primarily at the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Again, the illustration of the liturgical use of the texts through Old Testament figures, combined with the narrative Mariological scenes, is striking.

¹⁰¹ Skhirt'ladze 2012, p. 113. Other examples with the combination of Mandylion and Mariological prefigurations: Asinou, Panagia Phorbiotissa (1332–1333), Mertes, St. Theodore (1344).

¹⁰² Gagoshidze and Chikhladze 2006, pp. 86–87.

¹⁰³ Gagoshidze and Chikhladze 2006, p. 176, figs. 2–3, 32, 53, 67. The texts of their scrolls are no longer readable but Chikhladze was able to identify the prophets with the help of the iconography. David is wearing a crown and Moses is depicted as a priest.

The Church of the Koimesis in Martvili

The paintings of the Church of Dormition in Martvili date to the second half of the 14th century. The apse program focuses on the glorification of the Theotokos. In the conch, a Theotokos is shown, enthroned among the archangels. The communion of the apostles below the conch is fragmentary today. The lowest register contains an Anapeson in the centre.¹⁰⁴

Standing prophets were placed in the upper part of the lateral bema walls; unfortunately, they are very poorly preserved.¹⁰⁵ David can be seen standing alone on the north wall, holding a closed door. This visualises the psalm 117:20: "This is the gate of the Lord, the Just shall enter into it". As already noted above, liturgical texts often refer to the Mother of God as the 'Gate'.¹⁰⁶ These references point at the birth of Christ from a Virgin Mother and her perpetual virginity after his birth.

Icon from Ubisi

According to the donor's two-line inscription, written in Georgian Asomtavruli script at the bottom of the central panel (Fig. 13), the large triptych in the Treasury of the Georgian State Museum of Fine Art of Tbilisi was offered to the Virgin and donated to the Ubisi Monastery by Bablak Lashkhishvili (early 14th century).¹⁰⁷ On the wings of the triptych, eight scenes from the apocryphal texts about the life of the Virgin are depicted, starting with the rejection of Joachim's and Anna's offerings in the Temple (at the top of the left wing) and ending with the meeting of Mary and Elisabeth (at the bottom of the right wing; Fig. 11). Originally, a painted icon of the Virgin with the Child was integrated into the central panel of the triptych.¹⁰⁸ Above this rectangular recess, the Tree of Jesse is depicted – in monumental painting, this depiction appears at the same time as the emergence of Mariological programs.¹⁰⁹ The recumbent figure of Jesse is represented as the root, from which the genealogical stem in the form of vine scrolls filled with portrait busts branches

¹⁰⁴ Lortkipanidze 1977, pp. 175–180; Todić 1994, p. 149.

¹⁰⁵ Chikhladze 2009, pp. 277–280.

¹⁰⁶ Ladouceur 2006, p. 11, Table 3; Sharman 2015, p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ Burch'uladze 2006, pp. 123–126.

¹⁰⁸ This icon is conserved in a damaged state and is lacking in the composition. Its background and frame are covered with gilded silver repoussé.

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, Michael, A Historiated Tree of Jesse, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34/35 (1980–1981), pp. 125–174; Milanović, Vesna, The Tree of Jesse in the Byzantine Mural Painting of the 13th and 14th centuries. A Contribution to the Research of the Theme, in: *Zograf* 20 (1989), pp. 48–60; Velmans 2005, pp. 125–140. The number and identities of ancestors or prophets are not at all constant. There are no known examples of this theme in the Byzantine Empire prior to the 13th century, while some of the representations discovered in the west are dated as early as in the 11th century. In the 14th century this theme was already geographically widely spread in the east. In the mural paintings of the 13th and 14th centuries this theme is preserved in Georgia in St. Nicholas in Q'int's'visi, in St. Sabas



Fig. 11 [Pl. XVIII] – Icon from Ubisi, early 14th Century. Tbilisi, Treasury of the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts

out. The central vertical line, with four frontally shown busts, is particularly emphasised (Fig. 11): the vine scrolls contain David and Salomon followed by the figure of Virgin and Christ on top. Only individual figures appear in the vertical branches,¹¹⁰ eighteen half-figures of forefathers, prophets and ancestors of Christ fill the roundels. The arrangement of the figures is such that the vertical row is discernible, in which John the Forerunner and Melchisedek are flanking Christ at the top.¹¹¹ The prophets depicted here foresaw and foretold the mystery of the Incarnation. They call attention to the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies and to the genealogical tree. The theme of the Tree of Jesse appears in monumental painting because certain hymns – the literary source of the theme – are used in Byzantine church services, especially in those at the eve of the Feast of Nativity or some other Mariological Feasts.¹¹² These hymns are based on the verses from the book of Isaiah

in Ch'ule, in Sapara Monastery and in the Church of Ascension in Ozaani. As the representation in St. Nicholas in Q'int's'visi from the beginning of the 13th century is among the oldest known of the monumental paintings of the eastern Christian world, the tradition is well established in Georgia.

¹¹⁰ In contrast to the more complex type of the iconographic presentation where some figural prophetic scenes were inserted in the roundels. Milanović 1989, p. 51.

¹¹¹ Velmans 2005, p. 133.

¹¹² Ladouceur 2006, pp. 38–40.

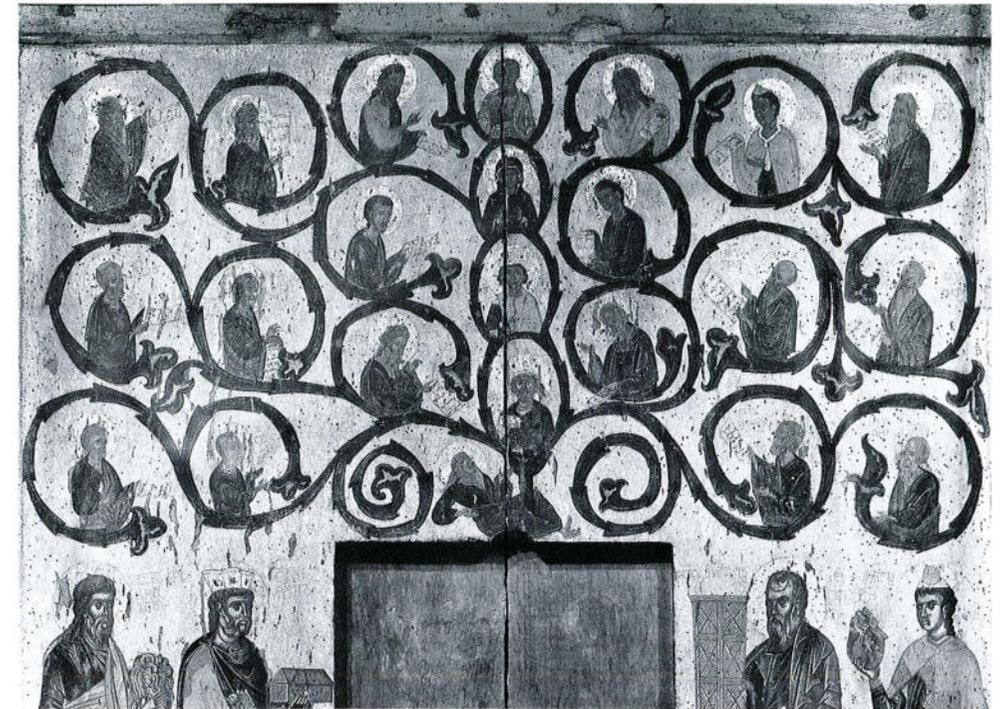


Fig. 12 – Icon from Ubisi, early 14th Century. Tbilisi, Treasury of the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts. Central Panel: The Tree of Jesse

(Isa. 11:1–5), connected with Christ's genealogy from the beginning of St. Matthew's gospel (Mt. 1:1–17).¹¹³ During this liturgy, the Mother of God is celebrated as “the branch from the root of Jesse”, and Christ as its “flower”.¹¹⁴

Below the depiction of the Tree of Jesse, four standing prophets are turned towards the lacuna, where the icon of the Virgin had been placed (Figs. 10–12, Pl. XIX.1). They reinforce the idea of virginity and sanctity of the Virgin by carrying attributes that are typologically related to the Virgin. On the left side, there is Gideon with the fleece and David with the Ark of the Covenant and an inscribed scroll. On the other side there is Ezekiel with the closed doors and Daniel with the rock, both of them holding an inscribed scroll. These prophets holding the attributes are usually included in the branches of the Tree of Jesse and rarely shown isolated.¹¹⁵ Although they relate

¹¹³ Taylor 1980–1981, pp. 125, 144. Verse Isa. 1, 1–5 begins: “There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of this root”.

¹¹⁴ Milanović 1989, p. 57; Ladouceur 2006, p. 40.

¹¹⁵ The only parallel is the composition in the narthex of Sveta Bogorodica Ljeviška in Prizren (1309–1313). Analogously like on the icon in Prizren the episodes of Jacob are also depicted under the Tree of Jesse. Panić and Babić 1975, pp. 109–110; Velmans 2005, pp. 133, 136.



Fig. 13 [Pl. XIX] – Icon from Ubisi, early 14th Century. Tbilisi, Treasury of the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts. Different Episodes of the Story of Moses – the Burning Bush (Exod. 3:1–8), Moses Receiving the Law (Exod. 31:18) and the Dissemination of the Commandment (Exod. 32:11–14), Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (Gen. 32:24–30) and Jacob's Ladder (Gen. 28:10–17)

to the central image on the icon, they also fit into a more complex context that is both narrative and symbolic on the triptych.¹¹⁶

On the lower part of the triptych, different episodes of the story of Moses – the burning bush (Exod. 3:1–8), Moses receiving the tables of the law (Exod. 31:18) and the dissemination of the commandment (Exod. 32:11–14) – are combined into one continuous scene. This compilation follows the numerous Mariological homilies, in which these episodes are connected and related to the Incarnation (Fig. 13).¹¹⁷ A portrait of the Virgin appears in the burning bush. As pointed out by Nana Burch'uladze, a remarkable iconographic detail is the nimbus of the angel appearing above the bush: he has a crossed nimbus, thus alluding to the concept of Incarnation.¹¹⁸ The episodes of Moses are complemented to the right by other typological representations:

¹¹⁶ Weyl Carr 1993–1994, pp. 239–248; Weyl Carr 1997, pp. 372–373. The icon at Mount Sinai presents also standing prophets as well narrative episodes of the Old Testament around the central panel with the Mother of God and the Child.

¹¹⁷ Der Nersessian 1975, p. 338; Velmans 2005, pp. 134–135.

¹¹⁸ Burch'uladze 2006, pp. 66–67.

Jacob wrestling with the angel (Gen. 32:24–30) and Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:10–17). These scenes stand for the birth of Israel as a country given to Jacob by God and the establishment of its faith.¹¹⁹ In the Mariological hymns, Jacob's ladder is considered to be a symbol of the Mary's virginity.¹²⁰ This idea is reinforced by the unique portrait of the standing Virgin, who is depicted as a sculpture on the supporting pillar of the ladder (Pl. XV.2). The image corresponds to the liturgical texts which, as mentioned before, refer to the intercession of the Mother of God – as it is through her, just like by means of a ladder, that the faithful may climb towards God.

Thus, the Mariological cycle on the triptych is combined with the Tree of Jesse, a topic that otherwise does not appear on icons of the *Palaiologan* era.¹²¹ In addition to the Tree of Jesse, the standing prophets with their attributes as well as the narrative Old Testament episodes highlight the main theme of the icon: the major role of the Virgin in the Incarnation. Various themes are used to summarise and illustrate a topic in a purposely concentrated way. As such, the triptych certainly formed part of devotional practices closely linked to the strong local tradition of a cult of the Virgin.

Conclusion

The homilies and the hymns offered a variety of types of the Virgin, some of which had already been used in miniatures or in icon painting from the 9th century onwards. These representations were further developed in monumental painting from the end of the 13th century onwards and are geographically widely spread and correlate with the strengthening of the Virgin's cult in the *Palaiologan* era.

In comparison to other areas, this theme is witnessed much earlier and more frequently in Georgia. This can certainly be explained through the particularly strong cult of the Mother of God in Georgia. However, relatively early development of these liturgical themes in the monumental painting of Georgia presupposes an intense preoccupation with the Byzantine liturgy and indicates a profound theological knowledge of the involved actors. The lyrical or liturgical dependence could also justify the unusual appearance of such scenes in the bema, underlining the important role of the hymnographic and liturgical texts for the organization of the *Palaiologan* painted programs.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Der Nersessian 1975, pp. 334–336.

¹²⁰ Kniazeff 1990, pp. 169–171; Pentiuć 2014, pp. 233–234.

¹²¹ Velmans gives as a parallel an icon from Martvili (17th/18th century). Velmans 2005, pp. 137–139, fig. 10.

¹²² As in the prothesis of the Protaton where the ladder of Jacob, the burning bush and the ark of the covenant are depicted. Djurić 1991, p. 44; Tsigaridas 2003, pp. 32–33. See also the churches in Mistra (Peribleptos and Pantanassa), where depictions of the Old Testament appear in the bema as well. Dufrenne, Suzy, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines de Mistra*, Paris 1970, pp. 11, 28, 52, figs. 38–40. Here, the scenes can be understood as referring to the Sacrifice.

The Georgian examples present a characteristic combination of narrative and symbolic motifs, the meaning of which can be resolved by reading liturgical texts. The various depictions of the Mother of God (episodes from her life, narrative prefigurations, prophets) strengthen her cult, which is related to a more precise definition of her role in the Incarnation.

The theological idea of the iconographic programs is the accentuation and glorification of the Virgin.¹²³ The scenes honour Mary, through whom Christ assumed a human body, and symbolically recall her role in the economy of salvation as the instrument of the Incarnation. In Georgia, the prefigurations of the Virgin appear early on, frequently, and together with other Mariological scenes in order to emphasize that the Iberians were the progenies of the Virgin and consequently Georgia was under the protection of the most holy Mother of God.

¹²³ Skhirt'ladze 2012, p. 109.



1 – Betania Monastery, Church of the Mother of God, early 13th Century. David Dancing in the Temple; Ezechiel at the Closed Gate; the Living Fountain Sealed; Gideon with the Fleece; Moses and the Burning Bush; Aaron and the Flowering Rod



1 – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. Moses and the Burning Bush (Exod. 3:1–8)



2 – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. Jacob's Ladder (Gen. 28:10–17)



1 – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. The Divine Wisdom that Builds a Temple (Proverbs 9:1–6)



1 – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. Moses and the Burning Bush. Detail



2 – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. The Divine Wisdom that Builds a Temple. Detail



1 – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. Christ Holding Liturgy at the Tabernacle (Hebrew 8:2)



2 and 3 – Zarzma, Church of the Transfiguration, mid-14th Century. The Judges Jephthah and Gideon; the Prophets Daniel and Ezekiel

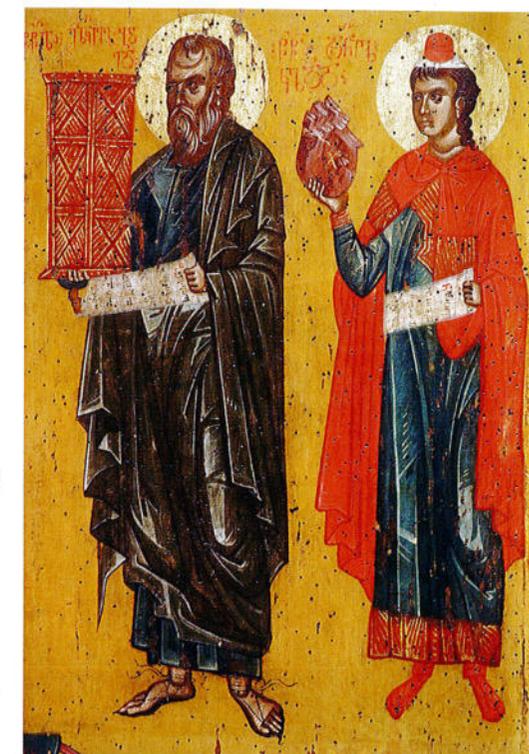


1 – Dirbi, Church of the Koimesis, Second Half of the 14th Century. Prophets on the Transversal Vault Arch



1 – Icon from Ubisi, early 14th Century. Tbilisi, Treasury of the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts

1 – Icon from Ubisi, early 14th Century. Tbilisi, Treasury of the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts. Prophets Ezekiel and Daniel



2 – Icon from Ubisi, early 14th Century. Tbilisi, Treasury of the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts. Different Episodes of the Story of Moses – the Burning Bush (Exod. 3:1–8), Moses Receiving the Law (Exod. 31:18) and the Dissemination of the Commandment (Exod. 32:11–14), Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (Gen. 32:24–30) and Jacob's Ladder (Gen. 28:10–17)

