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GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL ARCHITECTURAL MODELS AS ACROTERIA IN MEDIEVAL GEORGIA*

Abstract. Medieval architecture of the South Caucasus developed a unique tradition of making acroteria shaped as three-dimensional models of churches. Since the church-shaped acroteria have never been thoroughly explored in Georgia, this paper focuses on examples surviving in the region. Special attention is paid to analyzing the architectural and sculptural aspects of the acroteria, as well as their function. This paper aims at discussing both the formal and functional aspects of the church-shaped acroteria from Georgia. It is intended to explore what kind of church models were usually created in Georgia, how they were designed, and to what extent they resemble or differ from the real architecture. Typically, the model erected on the top of the gables of a church was made of stone, though glazed ceramic acroterion can be found as well, such as that of the Alaverdi Cathedral in Georgia. As the research has shown, the models do not replicate real architecture; they represent abridged images of actual buildings, repeating only their general layout (cross-domed or, rarely, single-nave structure) and a selected number of elements that were evidently considered essential or were typical elements of the architectural repertoire of the period in which the acroterion were created.

Keywords: acroteria, architectural models, roofing technique, Medieval Georgia, South Caucasus

Introduction

The tradition of making three-dimensional architectural models has a centuries-old history in Georgia. Like other countries of the Byzantine world, in Georgia, architectural models were created from various materials (stone, metal, wood, mixed media) for various purposes: acroteria, gravestones, spring structures, canopies, icon niche tops, censers, bases of processional crosses, and communion bread stamps shaped as church buildings¹. Regrettably, a substantial

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¹ Selected bibliography on the representation of architecture through various media: P. CUNEO, *Les Modèles en Pierre de L'Architecture Arménienne*, REArm 6, 1969, p. 200–231; E. LYPSMEYER, *The Donor and his Church Model in Medieval Art from Early Christian Times to the Late Romanesque*

part of these items has been destroyed or lost, while many others are kept in different depositories and churches without context, which sometimes complicates the identification of their original function. Although the extant material is incomplete and, in some cases, is represented by a single example, it is still possible to provide a general picture vivid enough to comprehend what was the meaning and purpose of the church models, how their creators perceived architecture, and how real architecture was transformed into minor architectural forms.

Three-dimensional stone acroteria in the shape of churches were widely used in medieval Georgian architecture. Apart from Georgia, they were also known in Armenia. The extant material suggests that this is a unique South Caucasian phenomenon, which could have been facilitated by the centuries-old tradition of quarrying and producing building stone and the high culture of stone processing and carving.

Academic interest in church models employed as acroteria in the South Caucasus emerged in the late 1960s. A study carried out by Paolo Cuneo is regarded as a major work on this subject². His oft-quoted work provides a comprehensive survey of Armenian examples, while Georgian ones are given only in a small number. The reason is that the author was unaware of the quantity and diversity of the Georgian material, and so referred to only the minor and architecturally and artistically insignificant examples available to him at the time (the acroteria mounted on the Svetitskhoveli, Samtavisi, Ikorta and Manglisi churches). Thus, many important acroteria from Georgia remained unknown to P. Cuneo and, accordingly, to international scholarship. P. Cuneo deals with church models in general, both two- and three-dimensional representations in medieval Armenia. Concerning acroteria, he makes the following conclusions: 1. The chronological range of the distribution of acroteria varies between the 10th and 18th centuries; 2. In Armenia and Georgia, acroteria in the shape of churches are mainly found on monastic churches. However, it must be noted that in Georgia, church-shaped acroteria topped not only monastic churches, but also both parochial churches and cathedrals. After P. Cuneo, other scholars have also discussed the South Caucasian church models³,

Period, New Jersey 1981 (unpublished PhD dissertation); E.S. KLINBERG, *Compressed Meaning. The Donor's Model in Medieval Art around 1300*, Turnhout 2009; *Architectural Models in Medieval Architecture (Byzantium, S.E. Europe, Anatolia)*, ed. Y.D. VARALIS, Thessaloniki 2009; S. ĆURČIĆ, E. HADJITRYPHONOS, K.E. McVEY, H.G. SARADI, *Architecture as Icon. Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art, Exhibition Catalogue*, New Haven–London 2010; D. STACHOWIAK, *Church Models in the Byzantine Culture Circle and the Problem of their Function*, [in:] *Sacrum et profanum. Haec studia amici et collegae Andrei B. Biernacki septuaginto dicant*, Poznań 2018 [= N.SM, 6], p. 243–256; M. DIDEBULIDZE, *Representation of Architecture in Medieval Georgian Murals*, BGNAS 13.N3, 2019, p. 149–155.

² P. CUNEO, *Les Modèles...*, p. 200–231.

³ G. IENI, *La Rappresentazione dell'oggetto Architettonico nell'arte Medievale con Riferimento Particolare ai Modelli di Architettura Caucasici*, [in:] *Atti del Primo Simposio Internazionale di Arte Armena (Bergamo, 28–30 Giugno 1975)*, ed. G. IENI, L.B. ZEKIYAN, Venezia 1978, p. 247–264; C. MARANCI,

but the main emphasis was always on the Armenian artefacts, while Georgian ones remained almost beyond attention.

In Georgia, a comprehensive study in this field has yet to be conducted. Only a few artefacts of a particular historical significance have received special study, among them the church models from Sapara and Akhaldaba⁴.

The earliest preserved examples of church-shaped acroteria in Georgia are those from the Kurtskhani Valley and the Trinity Church of Tirdznisi, which date from the 10th century. After that, they gradually became an inherent part of church architecture, and were employed particularly intensively from the 13th to the 18th century. A larger share of surviving church models falls within that period⁵. They differ from each other in size, architectural form, and artistic quality. The number of models of high artistic value is comparatively small.

Judging by the preserved evidence, the area of the diffusion of acroteria in Medieval Georgia is largely limited to the Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti provinces. These are the regions where stone tiles were used rather than ceramic ones as roofing material, which led to the natural integration of stone acroteria into the whole covering. Several stone-covered buildings with acroteria can also be seen in other regions of Georgia, such as Alaverdi Cathedral and the Sagarejo Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Kakheti, the Katskhi Church of St. George in Imereti, and the Tbeti Cathedral in Shavsheti. The combination of stone acroteria with a ceramic tile roof was seldom practiced. One of the rare examples is the 16th century Jvaris Mama Church in Tbilisi. Its roofing underwent several renovations, but initially

Architectural Models in the Caucasus: Problems of Form, Function, and Meaning, [in:] *Architectural Models in Medieval Architecture*, ed. Y.D. VARALIS, Thessaloniki 2008, p. 49–55; M.C. CARILE, *Buildings in their Patrons' Hands? The Multiform Function of Small Size Models between Byzantium and Transcaucasia*, K.de 3, 2014, p. 1–14.

⁴ ვ. ბერიძე [V. BERIDZE], *სამცხის ხუროთმოძღვრება [Architecture of Samtskhe]*, თბილისი 1955, p. 52, tab. 33; ვ. სილოგავა [V. SILOGAVA], *ეკლესიის მოდელი სავარადან ხუროთმოძღვრის გამოსახულებით და წარწერით [The Church Model from Sapara with the Representation of the Architect and the Inscription]*, [in:] *მესხეთი: ისტორია და თანამედროვეობა [Meskheti: History and Modernity]*, ed. მ. ბერიძე [V. BERIDZE], ახალციხე 2000, p. 29–35; IDEM, *ეკლესიის მოდელი ახალდაბიდან და მის კედლებზე ამოკვეთილი წარწერა [The Church Model from Akhaldaba and its Inscription]*, თსუაფშკ 2, 2000, p. 67–81; დ. თუმანიშვილი [D. TUMANISHVILI], ნ. ნაცვლიშვილი [N. NATSVLISHVILI], დ. ხოშტარია [D. KHOSHTARIA], *მშენებელი ოსტატები შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში [Master Builders in Medieval Georgia]*, თბილისი 2012, p. 116–117, fig. 89; T. DADIANI, T. KHUNDADZE, E. KVACHATADZE, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture*, Tbilisi 2017, p. 275, fig. 606–607.

⁵ In the course of the present research, church-shaped acroteria have been recorded in about 50 churches and monasteries, and their total number reaches 100. However, this number is incomplete. It does not include acroteria of churches located in the mountainous part of Kartli province inaccessible since 2008 because of the Russian occupation that led to a complete lockdown of the region. Some of these models are known owing to publications of previous years, such as acroteria from the churches of Vakhtana, Ikorta, Largvisi and Tiri. Acroteria from Tsromi and Sapara monastery have vanished, but were recorded by 19th and 20th-century archaeologists.

it was made of ceramic tiles and probably had a stone church-shaped acroteria from the beginning, which should be considered as the influence of stone-covered architecture.

Arrangement and function

An acroterion standing on top of the gable is an integral part of the roof and therefore is associated with roofing method and material. In Medieval Georgia, ceramic tiles and stone slabs, and rarely shingles and bricks, were used to cover buildings⁶. Stone covering is known to have been used in the South Caucasus from at least the 7th century, and became extensively applied from the 10th century⁷. It consisted of several elements: flat rectangular slabs, locks, and a ridge. The latter connects two slopes of the roof and fills the gap at the junction of the slopes where the slopes join each other. Stones employed in the ridge are joggle-jointed to fill the empty spaces between them. The acroterion is positioned on the ridge stone laid at the edge of the gable. As previously mentioned, in the South Caucasus this usually included a three-dimensional model of a church.

Mounting a three-dimensional model on the ridge was not obligatory in either Georgia or Armenia. Often, the ridge terminates without it, or, as the Georgian samples show, instead of the church model there is a sculpture of an animal – a protome projecting from the gable. Originating from folk traditions, the protomes were often erected alongside church models on different gables of the same constructions.

Based on observation of the preserved examples in the South Caucasus, two methods of attaching acroteria to the roof ridge can be identified:

1. In some cases, a church model was carved from a single piece of stone together with a ridge stone, which was then placed on the edge of the arm, upon the gable, at the joining point of two slopes. As a rule, the stone formed a small projection on the lower part of the façade, directed inwards, over which the remaining ridge stones were arranged. The part of the ridge stone where the church model was sculpted could have had a flat base, or a concavity of a strictly triangular shape or likened to the shape of a gable, by which it was fitted in its due place. However, the base of the model decorating the western ridge of the Church of Virgin in the village Gandzani (Javakheti province, Georgia) is carved in a wavy fashion, which gives additional artistic effect to the stone.

⁶ დ. თუმანიშვილი [D. TUMANISHVILI], ნ. ნაცვლიშვილი [N. NATSVLISHVILI], დ. ხოშტარია [D. KHOSHTARIA], *მშენებელი ოსტატები...*, p. 184–202.

⁷ რ. გვერდსითელი [R. GVERDTSITELI], ლორფინის სახურავი [*Stone Tile Roofing*], თბილისი 1991, p. 1; დ. თუმანიშვილი [D. TUMANISHVILI], ნ. ნაცვლიშვილი [N. NATSVLISHVILI], დ. ხოშტარია [D. KHOSHTARIA], *მშენებელი ოსტატები...*, p. 184.

2. In other cases, a church model was sculpted out of a separate stone which was placed on a specially prepared platform and fixed to it with mortar.

The appearance of acroteria in the Georgian (and Armenian) churches coincided with the general tendency of architecture towards the increase in decorative-ness and love of details, a process that began in the 10th century. However, they cannot be considered as a mere part of the embellishment, as, without doubt, the representation of a church model on the top of the gable had a symbolic meaning. They could also have been used as votive offerings by private persons, including the stonemasons themselves.

Christina Maranci, at the end of her paper, brings up a topic for consideration: *what role these miniature monuments may have played in rites of foundation, which involved the arranging and anointing of stones at the four corners of the building site*⁸. Medieval Georgian texts describing the rite of the consecration of foundation or the consecration of the churches themselves do not suggest the existence of such small monuments on top of the churches. The Rules of Laying the Church Foundation, translated from Greek into Georgian in the 18th century, contain rubrics according to which, after choosing the place for a church, on the spot where a holy altar is supposed to be erected, first a big wooden cross should be placed on a base made of stone, iron or copper. On this cross, an inscription should be made giving the information about the bishop who ordered the cross, the name of the king, and the year. After the construction of the church and installation of a holy altar, the cross should be erected on top of the church. The rubrics say nothing of exactly where and how the cross was attached to the top of the church. I think they mean the cross which was placed on the drum of the church, since it was much bigger than those erected above acroteria, judging by their recesses. Earlier manuscripts dealing with the rite of the consecration of a church, or the preparation of the foundation, say nothing regarding this custom.

Close examination of the surviving church-shaped acroteria suggests that they served as bases for crosses⁹. Almost all of them have special cavities on top and are placed in the centre of a dome, if the acroterion imitates a domed church, or on a gable roof if it represents a single-nave structure. Wooden, metal or stone crosses were fitted into these mortises, most of which did not survive destruction in the Soviet period and especially the anti-religious campaign of the 1920s. Few extant examples, such as the metal cross crowning the acroterion in the Ikorta Church (Kartli province, Georgia), dated from 1172, belong to the later period and are not original.

⁸ C. MARANCI, *Architectural Models...*, p. 55.

⁹ P. CUNEO, *Les Modèles...*, p. 218.

When discussing the architectural design of the church-shaped acroteria and their relation to real architecture, one should take into consideration their subsidiary function and their position at the top of the gables, high above the ground. Obviously, these small church models were supposed to be comprehensible and perceptible to the beholder, but there seems to have been no need to try too hard to imitate the structure and proportions of a real building, much less to show its details. In representing architecture, three-dimensional models topping churches are usually even more schematic and conventional than models depicted in donor reliefs, which were intended to show the result of the donor's dedication to Christ, and therefore bore more resemblance to real architecture.

Acroteria in the shape of domed churches

In Georgia, acroteria may have the architectural form of a church with or without a dome. The majority of them represent cross-domed churches, both inscribed cross and free cross structures. Models of domeless single-nave buildings are relatively fewer in number. Acroteria shaped as single-nave churches are known only in Georgia, while Armenian ones always represent domed architecture. The quantitative inequality between the two types of model in Georgia can be explained by the above-mentioned fact, that it was never an end in itself to provide an exact replica of a real church. The cross-domed architectural form is much easier to identify and perceive as a church than a simple rectangle of single-nave structure when seen from distance. Therefore, acroteria shaped as cross-domed buildings were often erected even on the gables of domeless churches.

One of the earliest examples of acroterion in Georgia comes from the Kurtskhani Valley in Samtskhe province in south-west Georgia (Fig. 1). It represents a domed church with gabled crossarms inscribed in a rectangular plan. The larger part of the drum is broken off. A four-line miniscule (Nuskhuri) inscription carved on one of the facets of the model mentions Michael (presumably the donor of the church) and his sons. The paleographic features of the inscription may be assigned to the 10th century.

Church-shaped acroteria are erected on the western and eastern ridges of the Trinity Church in Tirdznisi (Kartli province, East Georgia), a small single-nave structure dated from the late 10th century (Fig. 2). Their contemporaneity with the church is attested by their structural connection with its masonry. Stones of both models are inherently fitted into the stonework of the cornice and naturally continue its straight lines, which run diagonally towards the ridge and join the arched outline of the bottom of the acroterion. Further, both models are carved out of dark-red tufa, the stone applied in the church itself.

The models from Tirdznisi are similar to each other, differing only in proportion and detail. Both represent a church of the free-cross type, sculpted over a rectangular basis. The western façade of the model standing above the west gable features

a large cross and a small slot cut out below it, while the eastern façade of the model standing on the east ridge has only an aperture in the centre. The drum of the east side model is cylindrical¹⁰ and its surface is articulated with grooves indicating windows. The cylindrical drum is found in a number of Georgian churches after the 9th century¹¹, but is not usually typical for the architecture of Georgia which, as a rule, preferred a faceted shape. Both the facades and the round drum of the model from Tirdznisi are the result of the simplified transformation of real architecture into a small architectural form. This is a generic model intended to show a cross-domed building without details rather than to represent a specific church.

Some medieval acroteria imitate architectural and decorative details specific to a certain period, which makes their dating possible. The dome of the church model from Sakvirike (Tori province, southern Georgia) has a roof in the shape of a half-opened umbrella (Fig. 3). The zigzag line of a drum cornice duplicates the lower outline of the roof. This form appeared for the first time in the monastic architecture of Klarjeti, first in the Church of St. George at Khandzta, built by master mason Amona between 918 and 941 and then in the nearby Church of St. John the Baptist at Opiza, restored between 945 and 954¹². It soon expanded to other regions of Georgia (Gogiuba, Katskhi, Bochorma, Manglisi)¹³ and Armenia (Zarinja, Khtzkonk, Marmashen)¹⁴. Depiction of a dome roof in the shape of a half-opened umbrella is evidenced in the sculptural images of donors holding church models dating to the late 10th century, such as the reliefs of Akhaltsikhe and Petobani.

The architectural form of the Sakvirike model does not show any connection with the basilica of the church itself. Taking into consideration the close ties of the Tori monasteries with Klarjeti, one may assume that the design of the dome roof in the shape of a half-opened umbrella was inspired by one of the two above-mentioned monastic churches, Khandzta or Opiza. It may also be a replica of a lost model from Klarjeti. The shape of the roof suggests a time range from the mid-10th to the mid-11th century. Wide arched frames of holes representing windows in the drum allow the date to be narrowed down to the first decades of the 11th century.

The acroterion preserved in the courtyard of the monastery of Chule (Samtskhe province, southern Georgia) has three circular bosses sculpted above the “windows” of the north and south facades (Fig. 4). This decorative detail was borrowed from the monumental architecture of 13th and 14th centuries. The earliest preserved

¹⁰ The dome of the west side model had been broken off and was restored a few years ago.

¹¹ See, for instance, the Church of St. Stephan in Vachedzori Monastery (9th century), Church of the Virgin at Tseroskhevi (late 10th century), the so-called Chikvanis' church in Martvili Monastery (10th or 11th centuries), etc.

¹² W. DJOBADZE, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historic Tao, Klardjeti and Šavšeti*, Stuttgart 1992, p. 11, 31, pl. 2, 30–31.

¹³ ვ. ბერძენი [V. BERIDZE], *კაცხოს ტაძარი* [The Church of Katskhi], AG 3, 1950, p. 77–79.

¹⁴ P. CUNEO, *Architettura Armena dal quarto al diciannovesimo secolo*, Roma 1988, p. 232, 260–262, 638–641.

example is Pitareti Church, built from 1213 to 1222 (Kvemo Kartli province, South-eastern Georgia), where three ornamental bosses are carved above the frames of the western and northern windows. The church in Chule, an early 14th century structure, may also have such adornment; however, most of its facade decoration was lost during an incompetent restoration carried out in the early Soviet period. Another model of a cross-domed church from the same region and same period is preserved in the courtyard of Zarzma Monastery (Fig. 5). It has a decorated drum and framed windows. The model is particularly interesting for the design of its roof, which shows the system typical of stone tile covering. The conical roof of the dome and slopes of the crossarms are divided with fillets that indicate the convex locks of stone tiles. It should be noted that the function of this model is not quite clear: it could be an acroterion as well as a tombstone.

Several church-shaped acroteria are adorned with inscriptions. One of them, the model from the Kurtskhani Valley, was discussed above. A supplicatory inscription is carved on the acroterion with a broken-off dome which tops the northern gable of St. Sabbas Church in Sapara Monastery (Samtskhe province, southern Georgia) (Fig. 6). The inscription in old Georgian letters (Asomtavruli), carved on a plain area around the northern portal of the model, implores the patron saint of the church, St. Sabbas, to have mercy on the anonymous builder. The model is contemporaneous with the church covering made in the 1280s at the expense of Okropir Gabetsasdze who, according to the church inscription, donated 120 *botinati*¹⁵ for stone tile roofing¹⁶.

A cruciform church-shape acroterion from Akhaldaba (Tori province, southern Georgia), dated to the 1180s or 1190s, does not stand out in architectural terms, but is remarkable for a vast inscription covering its two sides¹⁷ (Fig. 7). The inscription, which was not meant to be seen from below, is directed to Christ and is commemorative in nature: “Lord Jesus Christ, God, who has exalted the horn of holy churches, likewise lift upon the heaven Queen of Queens Vanen, with her son; let us pray for the former wife of the Duke of Dukes Gamrekel”. Interestingly, the words glorifying Christ at the beginning of the text are taken from the *irmologion*, a collection of liturgical chants (*No one is as holy as you are, Lord, our God, who has exalted the horn of Christians*). The Queen of Queens Vanen has been identified as the daughter of Duke of Dukes Ivane Abuserisdze, a powerful lord of south-west Georgia. Her brother was the scholar and writer Tbel Abuseridze,

¹⁵ *Botinati* is the Georgian name for the coin minted during the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081) and circulated in Georgia until the 14th century (D.M. LANG, *Studies in the Numismatic History of Georgia in Transcaucasia. Based on the Collection of the American Numismatic Society*, New York 1955 [= NNM, 130], p. 22, 31–32).

¹⁶ ვ. ბერიძე [V. BERIDZE], *სამცხის ხუროთმოძღვრება...*, p. 52–53.

¹⁷ The acroterion was found outside context while tilling in the village of Akhaldaba. For dating and analysis of the inscription, see: ვ. სილოგავა [V. SILOGAVA], *ეკლესიის მოდელი ახალდაბიდან...*, p. 67–81.

and her husband was Gamrekel Toreli, a successful commander-in-chief of the reign of Queen Tamar¹⁸. Apparently, she and her son had already passed away by the time the inscription was made.

The tradition of making church-shape acroteria was continued in late Medieval Georgia. One of the most remarkable models of that period has been preserved in the Church of St. Thomas (Kviratskhoveli) in Tserakvi (Kvemo Kartli province, southeastern Georgia) (Fig. 8). Its design displays obvious resemblance to the 17th century Georgian architecture which is found in colonnettes running up the edges of crossarms, and “perspective portals” with frames consisting of three concentric arches. The acroterion of Alaverdi Cathedral (now kept in the Georgian National Museum) dates from even later times. It was likely made during the last significant restoration of the cathedral carried out after the strong earthquake of 1742. Being a ceramic blue glazed model of a cross-domed structure, it remains the only preserved church-shape acroterion in Georgia made of a material other than stone¹⁹. Apart from a general architectural form, none of the features of the model shows resemblance to the Cathedral (Fig. 9). The details of its drum, such as flat pilasters and the foliage decoration of the frieze, reveal an obvious Neo-classical influence, while the 18th century restorations of Alaverdi Cathedral itself have nothing to do with European architecture. It seems that in this transitional period of Georgian history from the late Middle Ages to the early Modernity, the tendency towards the adoption of European architectural elements penetrated the models earlier than monumental architecture.

Acroteria in the shape of a single-nave church

As noted above, the acroteria of Georgian churches usually have the form of a domed church, prevailing even in domeless churches. However, some of these churches are crowned with acroteria, which in shape correspond to the church itself, i.e. they have no domes. These are the models of simple gable-roofed single-nave structures without any additional adornment.

Two acroteria from Sapara Monastery provide good examples for the discussion of single-nave church models (Fig. 10). One of them tops the late 10th century Church of St. Stephen, but would have been made together with its stone roof during the significant enlargement and reconstruction of the monastery in the 1280s. The acroterion is placed above the western gable of the single-nave church. Its south, north and east facades are plain, while the west façade, which faces the beholder, features apertures imitating the door and the window of the

¹⁸ The identification was made by V. Silogava.

¹⁹ დ. თუმანიშვილი [D. TUMANISHVILI], ნ. ნაცვლიშვილი [N. NATSVLISHVILI], დ. ხოშტარია [D. KHOSHCHARIA], *მშენებელი ოსტატები...*, p. 143, fig. 114. The date of the model was suggested by D. Tumanishvili.

church itself; however, unlike the church openings, the “door” and the “window” of the model are surrounded with frames in accordance with the aesthetics of the 13th century. Here also, like the above-mentioned acroterion from Zarzma, one can observe the outline of stone tile roofing. The line running along the roof ridge suggests ridge stones, while fillets on the slopes imitate the convex locks of stone tiles. The proportions of the model substantially differ from the real architecture. Its length is almost equal to its width, owing to which the model looks like a cube covered with a pitched roof. Similar proportions can be seen in another single-nave church model of the same period from Sapara Monastery, which is now kept in the Samtskhe-Javakheti History Museum²⁰ (Fig. 11). The model is distinguished for its sculptural images, which will be discussed below.

The majority of acroteria shaped as single nave churches are very simple, not only in form but also in design, which makes it difficult to date them. One such Medieval model was reused in the 19th century in the Church of St. George near the now abandoned village of Muskhi (Fig. 12). Its elevated proportions are emphasized by a lofty roof with steep slopes. The only decorative detail is a relief cross carved on its western facade.

Acroteria with figurative images

Medieval masters used the facades of acroteria not only for placing inscriptions, but also as surfaces for displaying the figural representations of saints, historical persons and master builders, as well as symbolic images.

Equestrian saints are depicted on the facades of the acroteria from the Kazbegi Ethnographical Museum (14th c.) (Fig. 13) and Tkemlovana church (15th c.) (Fig. 14). They are not accompanied by inscriptions, but it is likely that in both cases, the riders would represent St. George, the most popular equestrian saint in Medieval Georgia²¹, even though neither a dragon nor the Emperor Diocletian are depicted on them.

The most developed set of reliefs is represented on the above-mentioned single-nave acroterion from Sapara (Fig. 11). Here, figures of St. Saba, an unknown saint, and master builder Pareza are depicted on each of the three facades of the model. The builder is shown holding a hammer and a square. Apparently, this is not the only case of a master being depicted on acroterion in Georgia. The 14th century

²⁰ ვ. ბერიძე [V. BERIDZE], *სამცხის ხუროთმოძღვრება...*, p. 52, tab. 33; ვ. სილოგავა [V. SILOGAVA], *ეკლესიის მოდელი საფარიდან...*, p. 29–35; დ. თუმანიშვილი [D. TUMANISHVILI], ნ. ნაცვლიშვილი [N. NATSVLISHVILI], დ. ხოშტარია [D. KHOSHTARIA], *მშენებელი ოსტატები...*, p. 116–117, fig. 89; T. DADIANI, T. KHUNDADZE, E. KVACHATADZE, *Medieval Georgian...*, p. 275, fig. 606–607.

²¹ E. GEDEVANISHVILI, *Cult and Image of St. George in Medieval Georgian Art*, [in:] *Cultural Interactions in Medieval Georgia*, ed. M. BACCI, T. KAFFENBERGER, M. STUDER-KARLEN, Wiesbaden 2018 [= SFr, 41], p. 143–168.

church model now located in the garden of the former Catholic church in Ude features the image of a man wearing a long robe with a belt around his waist and holding a tool that looks like a stonemason's pick (Fig. 15–16).

An unusual representation of clergymen can be seen on the 14th century acroterion found during archaeological works in the church of Buchuriani village (Kvemo Kartli province, southeastern Georgia)²² (Fig. 17). A rectangular door is cut in the center of the main façade of the acroterion, which is shaped like a domed church. On the right side of the door is a depiction of a clergyman turned towards the door in a three-quarter view and holding a cross in his hands stretched out in supplication. His cowl with a cross at the top identifies him as a monk. There was likely a similar representation on the other side of the door as well, which has been broken off.

Some human images depicted on the models have neither inscriptions nor specific attributes that could make possible their identification. A schematized face of a bearded man carved on the outer corner of the central square bay of the 14th century model from Didi Gomareti (Kvemo Kartli province, southeastern Georgia) (now kept in the Georgian National Museum) may be a personification or represent a secular person, presumably a master builder. Two opposite facades of the 17th-century acroterion from Pirghebuli Monastery (Kvemo Kartli province, southeastern Georgia) are adorned with similar human heads, which should be understood as symbolic images, perhaps solar personifications (Fig. 18–19).

Conclusion

The medieval architecture of the South Caucasus developed a unique tradition of making acroteria in the form of three-dimensional models of churches. The study of Medieval Georgian acroteria mounted on the ridges of churches shows that they always had the form of a church, but did not replicate real architecture. Apparently, the masons who made these models were not required to closely imitate real churches²³. Therefore, instead of reproducing particular buildings, they freely used structural and decorative elements typical of their time. They changed

²² The discovery was made in 1970 by the Kazreti Archaeological Expedition: მ. სინაურძე [M. SINOURIDZE], *კაზრეთის ხეობის არქეოლოგიური ძეგლები* [Archaeological Monuments from Kazreti Gorge], თბილისი 1985, p. 41–42, pl. XXVIII.

²³ The acroterion from Harichavank Monastery (Armenia), with its unusually detailed facades, seems to be the only exception in the Caucasus. The model of the church repeats the architectural and decorative articulation of the real church, showing the donor composition on the east façade of the church. According to P. CUNEO (*Les Modèles...*, p. 220, fig. 28–29), the donors Ivane and Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli held a model of the church, although I think this tiny object between the donors is the icon of the Virgin as it was represented in the real church itself. See also: A. EASTMOND, *Tamta's World. The Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia*, Cambridge 2017, p. 54–59. The model disappeared following the recent restoration.

real proportions, accentuating domes in the models shaped as cross-domed churches, and shortening models in the form of single-nave churches almost to a cube. As a result, the models represented abridged architectural images intended to be easily recognizable and appreciable for the beholder through their general layout and a select number of elements that were evidently considered essential.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. Acroterion, Kurtskhani valley, 10th c.
Drawing by N. Chakvetadze, 2019.



Fig. 2. Acroterion, Trinity church, Tirdznisi,
10th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2014.



Fig. 3. Acroterion, Sakvirike church,
11th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2018.



Fig. 4. Acroterion, Chule monastery, 14th c. Photo
by N. Chitishvili, 2013.



Fig. 5. Acroterion, Zarzma monastery, 14th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2013.



Fig. 7. Acroterion, Akhaldaba, Georgian National Museum, 12th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2018.



Fig. 6. Acroterion, Church of St. Sabba, Sapa monastery, 13th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2018.



Fig. 8. Acroterion, Church of St. Thomas (Kviratskhoveli), Tserakvi, 17th c. Photo by N. Chakvetadze, 2015.



Fig. 9. Acroterion, Alaverdi Cathedral, Georgian National Museum, 18th c. Photo by D. Khoshtaria, 2011.



Fig. 10. Acroterion, Church of St. Stephan, Sapara Monastery, 10th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2018.



Fig. 11. Acroterion, Sapara Monastery, Samtskhe-Javakheti History Museum. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2018.



Fig. 12. Acroterion, Church of St. George, Old Muskhi. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2018.



Fig. 13. Acroterion, Kazbegi Ethnographical Museum, 14th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2007.



Fig. 14. Acroterion, Tkemlovana, Georgian National Museum, 14th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2018.



Fig. 15. Acroterion, former Catholic church in Ude, 14th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2018.



Fig. 16. Acroterion, Mason builder, former Catholic church in Ude, 14th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2018.



Fig. 17. Acroterion, Church in Buchuriani, Georgian National Museum, 14th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2018.



Fig. 18. Acroterion, Pirgebuli monastery, 17th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2019.



Fig. 19. Acroterion, Pirgebuli monastery, 17th c. Photo by N. Chitishvili, 2019.