The Dragon-Slayer Horseman from its Origins to the Seljuks: Missing Georgian Archaeological Evidence

Situated on the crossroads of the Christian and Islamic worlds, medieval Georgia was a site of intense artistic interaction resulting from the political, diplomatic and cultural contacts between the ruling families of the Kingdom of Georgia, the Byzantine Empire and the eastern regions. The relations between Georgia and its neighbours have always facilitated the transmission of intellectual values to Georgia, where they were creatively transformed in accordance with the local artistic tradition, reflecting political and artistic movements of the period. The chronological span of this interaction, ranging from Late Antiquity to the medieval era, is indicative of the complexity and intensity of the cultural exchange. Thus, Georgian artistic production constitutes a promising field for interdisciplinary research on the relations between Europe and Asia.

My intention in the present study is to reveal Georgian contribution in the context of the migration of visual vocabularies that took place in the Middle Ages, focusing on the possible occurrence of Georgian elements in Seljuk art.

An extremely complex cultural mixture and variety awaited the Seljuks when they arrived in Anatolia in the 11th century. The interaction between the existing Anatolian artistic heritage and Islamic culture played an important role in the formation of Seljuk art. A part of the region’s artistic background was due to the Kingdom of Georgia, which by the 11th century had already traversed a rather long path leading to Anatolia, illustrating its wide diffusion and similar function in Christian and Muslim contexts. This image offers an explicit example of the transfer of ideas through times and cultures and the iconographic and contextual adaptability of this representation, has already been explored by several scholars. These studies have shown how the motif was used by the Seljuk Seljuks of Anatolia and consequently adapted in accordance with the Turco-Islamic believes.

The hagiographic dossier and the iconography of the dragon-slayer horseman became the subject of many studies, with the most recent and comprehensive among them being those by Christopher Walter. The cult of military saints originated in the territories of Asia Minor and Palestine and soon spread widely in the East and the West. The so-called Holy Rider iconography had its roots in the ancient tradition of magical/apotropaic amulets and appeared as early as the 6th century in Byzantine Syria and Palestine, from where it also reached Anatolia.

From the 10th century and the Armenian church of the Holy Cross at Agh’tamar comes the oldest securely dated image of equestrian Saint Theodore killing a dragon. However, a number of undated and unidentified representations might be regarded as the earliest examples of Saint Theodore engaged in dragon-slaying. The corpus of these images has been recently enriched by new discoveries in Cappadocia: the dragon-slayer saint Theodore appears in the church of Saint Michael in Başköy (8th-9th centuries) and in the church of Içeride (9th century). Catherine Jolivet-Lévy who published these monuments was also able to prove the early appearance of the representation of Theodore as a dragon-slayer in the Christian Orient already in the 6th-7th centuries. Such early examples include possibly the church no. 3 of Güzelöz (Mavruca) in the same region, although the dating of the latter, ranging from the 6th to the 9th century is uncertain.

Among the images of the dragon-slayer horseman produced before the Turkish settlement of Medieval Anatolia,
Georgian examples hold an important position since they offer significant insight as to the genesis of this representation in Byzantium and its neighbouring regions.12

The representation of the dragon-slayer horseman – the image that delivers the essential message of the triumph of Good over Evil – was very popular in early Christian Georgia: substituting the veneration of ancient heroes, the worship of military saints perfectly fitted the ideology and military vision of a »feudal« country. However, in spite of the early spread of the cult of equestrian saints, their veneration developed particularly, in Georgia as in Byzantium, from the 9th-10th centuries, when they acquired the function of protectors of the terrestrial army, attributed by some scholars to the influence of emperors and military aristocracy.13 It is also from this time that the first Georgian translations of the vitae of the most venerated saints, George and Theodore, appear.14 In the 11th-13th centuries, interest in the lives of military saints increased considerably, since they presented as examples of military force, heroism and courage.15

It is generally agreed that visual and textual representations of the dragon-slayer were in a close relationship to each other.16 However, some Georgian representations of dragon-slayer equestrian saints derived from the early period confirm the precedence of the visual tradition over the textual evidence, as it has already been suggested in the case of Saint Theodore by Walter and Jolivet-Lévy on the basis of Byzantine material.17

Georgian stone-carved crosses constitute a remarkably rich and diverse corpus that despite their great spread in Georgia, since the 4th and particularly during the 6th-8th centuries, remain relatively unknown to non-Georgian specialists. The crosses were supported by stone-carved pillars – or stela – and were raised mostly in rural places, far away from churches, presumably in order to mark a holy site where Christian rituals took place. The absence of relevant written sources obscures the origins and purposes of that practice. However large numbers, in which these religious monuments survived, indicate the existence of a well-organized system involved in the production of stone crosses decorated with reliefs in early medieval Georgia. Most probably, sculptural workshops functioned in various regions of the country.18

The valley Xožorni (ancient Banuš-čai, K’vemo K’art’li, region in south-eastern Georgia) was populated by Georgians since ancient time. The archaeological evidence confirms the existence of an active life in this area already in the 1st century BC.19 From that time onwards and until the 10th century, the valley counted seven important cites, among which there were Xožorni and Brdadzori. It was the region where a group of early Christian stone crosses, dated approximately by the 6th century, was discovered in the 1950s.20 Three of them bear figures on horseback impaling a large dragon or serpent. These carved fragments suggest the existence of a sculptural workshop in the valley that was apparently active already from an early period. The fact that two of the four stelae bear inscriptions in Georgian confirms the Georgian origin of the monuments.21

Much-damaged principal side of the so-called small Brdadzori cross22 shows a figure on horseback, aiming his spear at two coiled dragons (fig. 1). The scene is clearly divided into

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12 The aspects of development of the cult and iconography of equestrian saints in medieval Georgia are developed in the forthcoming book N. Iamanidzé, Culte et images en Géorgie aux VI-XIe siècles entre Byzance et l’Orient: le cas particulier des saints cavaliers.

13 Grotowski, Arms and Armour 63-74.

14 Gabidžavli, C’minda giorgi. – Kekełidze, Etudebi II. – Chahanov, Materialy. – Marr, Agiografische materialy 1-47. – Jordania, Opisanie I 380-381.

15 Kekełidze, Etudebi 6. 80.

16 Walter, Warrior Saints 44-66. – Pancaranolu, Dragon-Slayer 152.


18 For Georgian stone crosses see: Jaxavili, Stelabi. – Maťabeli, Kvavarebi. – C’khisavlivi, C’op’i 85.


20 For the inscriptions see: Gagošidze, Kvavsetebi 70.

21 C’ubinavli, Xandisi 8. – Jaxavili, Stelabi 33-34. – Gagošidze, Kvavsetebi 61-71.
two parts by a narrow relief border used as a ground for the horse. The horseman, in the upper register, spears two large dragons placed on the lower part, by inserting the lance into the mouth of one of them. The monsters cover almost two quarters of the relief and are bigger than the rider himself.

A comparable image is offered by the *stela* of Xožorni\(^{23}\) (fig. 2) which repeats almost exactly the iconography of Brdadzori: it shows an equestrian saint moving from left to right, holding the lance in his right hand while his left hand holds the shield. The large coiled dragon fills the lower register of relief separated from the figure of a horseman on the upper part by a narrow relief border. The surviving traces of inscriptions that will be examined further below render this example particularly significant.

In both cases (Brdadzori and Xožorni), it is obvious that the Good and the Evil are clearly divided. The dragon, incarnation of the Evil, is placed at the bottom of relief, while the triumphant over the Evil dragon-slayer is raised to the highest part. This is an original iconographic system, which, to the best of my knowledge, appears only on these two monuments.

Another better-preserved example is the so-called large *stela* of Brdadzori\(^{24}\) (fig. 3). It measures 6 m in height and is thus the largest stone-cross preserved in Georgia. The base of *stela* remains intact with only a small part on the top missing. The eastern side is divided into squares bearing figural and ornamental decoration. Only 13 squares are visible today. One of the squares shows the equestrian dragon-slaying saint in a similar attitude as in Xožorni. However, the iconography is quite different: the warrior aims his spear at the serpent whose tail rises up in front of the horse; he pierces the head of the monster lying down on the horizontal border of the frame. The rider, moving towards the serpent and holding a large round shield in his left hand with the spear in his right hand as in Xožorni, is surmounted by a cross.

Among all almost identical iconographic elements of these three compositions, the most remarkable is the large size of the dragon – or the serpent in the case of Brdadzori, which embody the evil forces and could be explained by the will to emphasize its harmful strength. We are supposed to see the triumph over the forces of evil of all forms in this image, where the rider appears as a protector and victor over the demons. This type of the dragon could possibly be connected with the real situation in Georgia; according to historical sources, during the 4th-6th centuries, the population of the eastern part of Šida K’art’li was not entirely and definitively converted to Christianity\(^{25}\). Thus, besides its symbolic connotation, the image would also reflect political and religious state of a country.

Another significant element is the cross at the end of the warrior’s spear on the so-called large cross of Brdadzori. It represents a direct indication on the nature of military saints and becomes later the essential attribute in the iconography of Saint Theodore and Saint George. It could thus be considered as an indication for the identification of the saint that in the absence of inscription remains problematic. The presence of the halo in Xožorni and the cross topping the spear in Brdadzori would suggest an identification of the depicted figure at least with Saint Theodore, whose representation, according to common belief, appeared in the Christian East already in the 6th-7th centuries, well before those of Saint George\(^{26}\).

The case of Xožorni, however, enables us to put forward another, more concrete hypothesis concerning the identification of the saint. The inscription on the *stela* is much damaged, but a readable part on the small relief border at the leg

\(^{23}\) Privalova, P’avnisi 2. – Gagolidze, C’minda giorgis 26.

\(^{24}\) Čubinašvili, Xandisi 8. – Javaxišvili, Stelabi 33-34. – Gagolidze, K’vasvetebi 67-68.

\(^{25}\) Janašia, Ŝida K’art’li 212. – Gagolidze, K’ristianoba da c’armart’oba 27.

\(^{26}\) Walter, Saint Theodore 95-106. – Jolivet-Łévy, Saint Theodore et le dragon 357-382.
of the horse names the dragon: RoutingModule/RoutingModule «this is a dragon». Some letters can also be discerned on both sides of the rider’s head. On the left side we can read: RoutingModule/RoutingModule-indicating with no hesitation the same asomt’avruli letters flanking the saint’s head – RoutingModule-indicating the part of »George« (Giorgi en Georgian). The letter RoutingModule to the right can nowadays be hardly seen. However, it was more than 30 years ago Ekaterina Privalova proposed a reading of this name, indicating with no hesitation the same asomt’avruli letters flanking the saint’s head – RoutingModule-to the left and RoutingModule-to the right. Obviously the inscription was in a better condition at the end of the 1970s. According to that reading, the inscription identifies the figure with Saint George; the iconographic type of the depicted saint also bears typical physical characteristics of Saint George that is his curly hair and absence of beard. This identification would make the Xožorni stela one of the earliest examples of Saint George as a dragon-slayer, a motif that does not occur until the 11th century in Byzantine art.

However, it leads us to consider two main problems: first, dating in the 11th century of the earliest written sources, referring to Saint George as a dragon-slayer and consequently the later origin of its image; second, the particular success that enjoyed in Georgia the image of Saint George killing a male figure instead of the dragon.

Scholars agree that early unnamed pictures of a saint killing a dragon should not be identified with Saint George first represented killing a man. Medieval Georgian art offers many examples of representations of Saint George killing Diocese-ian. The iconographic theme of the saint combating the dragon made its appearance in the 11th century and mostly in wall-paintings (Hadiši [11th century], Boč’orna [12th century], P’avnisi [12th-13th centuries]). It forms part of the miraculous rescuing by the saint of a princess in the city of Lasia, first attested in an 11th century manuscript preserved in the Greek patriarchal library in Jerusalem cod. 2.

However, it should be noted that the oldest images of the saint killing the dragon cannot be considered as illustrations of the life of Saint George, since they do not reproduce the narrative of the vita. According to the latter, Saint George defeated the dragon miraculously, only with the force of his prayer, and killed it with his sword without a fight. On the contrary, early Christian stone crosses depict the combat of the saint with the creature, attributing precise semantic importance to each element of the composition.

An episode of the victory over the dragon included in the life of Saint Theodore Tiron, dated as early as the 8th century, indicates that the idea of this battle can be counted among the heroic acts of almost all popular military saints and seems to derive from older symbolic representations. Thus, the image of Saint George or any other saint as a dragon killer in Georgia must be considered as a purely symbolical representation.

Further archaeological evidence could confirm the particular popularity of Saint George in early Christian Georgia. According to Niko Čubinashvili and Kiti Maĉabeli, the rep-
presentation of the 6th century Xandisi stela (fig. 4) could attest to his early cult. This image shows a martyr saint – not a military one – identified by those scholars with Saint George. However, in the absence of inscriptions, this identification remains tentative. According to Rene Šmerling, another representation of Saint George can be found on one of the pillars of the 8th century Gveldesi templon (fig. 5). The relief shows the saint standing, and not as a horse rider, spearing a long serpent with a lance topped by a cross, but the clearly visible beard would enable us to recognize rather Saint Theodore.

Instead, 7th century stela from Kataula (fig. 6) carries an interesting inscription. The representation of a woman, certainly a donor, is accompanied by an invocation in asomtavruli script: »Saint George, have mercy upon your slave«. This prayer confirms the particular esteem and respect that Saint George enjoyed in early Christian Georgia, while underlining the existence of his cult already in the 7th century. This issue becomes particularly interesting since the inscription of Kataula is not a unique case. Beside the well-known inscription of the 6th century monastery at Ezra (Zorava) in Syria.

33 Čubinashvili, Xandisi 4. – Mačabeli, K’vajvarebi 51.
34 Šmerling, Malye formy 74-76.
35 Mačabeli, K’vajvarebi 166-176.
George clearly suggest his identification (as on the 4th century) in the company of donor. The prayers to Saint George, often with a blessing gesture, indicate a saint in warrior costume, showing his emergence at an early date in the Christian East, together with the images show-ing a double-headed dragon. This image of a warrior, but not a martyr, fitted perfectly in the political and spiritual ideology of the country propagating the new state religion, was also widely spread in the other parts of the early Christian world – the fact that confirms the circulation and use of a common iconographic theme as well as direct link of Georgia with the eastern Christian spiritual centres. It could have influenced the text of the saint's life, which took a more developed and narrative form\(^{39}\). Consequently, we can consider that the iconography of the miracle of Saint George with the dragon in the city of Lasia, created in the 11th century according to the life of Saint George and soon spread widely in medieval Georgian painting, was inspired by this kind of representations\(^{41}\).

The early Georgian images of the dragon-slayer horseman allow us to incorporate Georgia in the circle of countries that contributed to the creation of this iconography. The quality and number of relevant surviving representations from the period before the 11th century confirm that the popularity of these representations increased in Georgia after the Early Christian era. This popularity went together with the creation of a different iconography: the representation of equestrian saints facing each other, with Saint Theodore impaling a serpent, and Saint George, killing a male figure.

I will draw attention to some less known monuments and to more famous representations of controversial dating.

One of the reliefs on the western façade of the Martvili church shows equestrian saints, George and Theodore, killing a double-headed dragon (fig. 7). This iconography is not common in Georgia and is related to Cappadocia, which offers a number of its examples: in Pürenli seki kilise (9th-10th centuries), Yılanlı kilise/Göreme no. 28 (11th century) Sakli kilise/Göreme no. 2a (11th century) in the Ihlara valley\(^{42}\). The triumphal character of this representation is emphasized by two flying angels glorifying the saints by holding a crown – the unusual detail for the iconography of medieval Georgia and generally characteristic for early Christian time.


\(^{37}\) Cotsonis, Processional Crosses 88-95. – Cat. Thesaloniki 2001-2002, 438-439. – Drandaki, Copper Alloy Jewellery 70. The rich Cappadocian dossier could also provide important data to confirm this hypothesis. However, the chronology of the early paintings is difficult to establish and remains controversial.

\(^{38}\) For the pre-Christian cults and the old legends related to Saint George, see: Javaxišvili, K’art’veli eris istoria 41-55. – Gagoshidze, Adrekr’istanuli xanis dzegelebi 40-43. – Barnaveli, K’art’uli meomari 36. The material culture evidence discovered during archaeological excavations confirms that the tradition of the representation of a riding saint in Georgia existed in very old times. – Gagoshidze, Adrekr’istanuli xanis dzegelebi 34-43 suggests a close link between the images of holy riders armed with the lance on the small objects found in tombs in K’an’a’et’e, dated in 2nd-3rd centuries, and that of Saint George. – Gagoshidze, K’ristianoba da c’armart’oba 27-28.

\(^{39}\) Javaxišvili, K’art’veli eris istoria 41-55. – Gagoshidze, Adrekr’istanuli xanis dzegelebi 40-43. – Barnaveli, K’art’uli meomari 36.

\(^{40}\) For the pre-Christian cults and the old legends related to Saint George, see: Javaxišvili, K’art’veli eris istoria 41-55. – Gagoshidze, Adrekr’istanuli xanis dzegelebi 40-43. – Barnaveli, K’art’uli meomari 36. The material culture evidence discovered during archaeological excavations confirms that the tradition of the representation of a riding saint in Georgia existed in very old times. – Gagoshidze, Adrekr’istanuli xanis dzegelebi 34-43 suggests a close link between the images of holy riders armed with the lance on the small objects found in tombs in K’an’a’et’e, dated in 2nd-3rd centuries, and that of Saint George. – Gagoshidze, K’ristianoba da c’armart’oba 27-28.

\(^{41}\) Privalova, Pavnisi 76-77 pointed out that in the 11th-century church of Hadiši and the 12th-century Boc’orma church, the equestrian saints Theodore and George appear together with the scene of the miracle in Lasia, a fact that, in her opinion, proves the autonomy of each composition.

\(^{42}\) Thierry, Aux limites du sacré 234-236 fig. 1. – Jolivet-Lévy, Saint Théodore 358-359.
Fig. 7 Martvili church. Western façade. – (After Aladašvili, Monumental’naja skul’ptura fig. 56).

Fig. 8 Martvili church. Western façade. – (After Aladašvili, Monumental’naja skul’ptura fig. 58).
The image on the right, on the same façade shows another horseman hitting with his long and massive spear a man at the feet of his horse (fig. 8). The presence of the latter – inseparable element of Saint George’s iconography – allows the identification of the scene to the traditional image of Saint George killing Diocletian and follows the general scheme, well established from the 10th century.

According to Georgian scholars, these reliefs can be dated to the 7th century and the image of Georges and Theodore killing a dragon provides the earliest example of this type. This dating is based on the presence of antique sculptural forms in the style of reliefs and on the early iconography. This opinion has been contested by Russian and European scholars, who move forward the dating of the church architecture, as well as of its reliefs towards the 10th century. This later chronology derives from a different dating of the construction of the church, the style of the figures en bloc, the late iconography with the facing saints and of the type of the horses’ harness, notably the presence of stirrups. The example of the church no. 3 of Güzeloţ (Mavrucan) that has already been mentioned could provide an excellent parallel for the early use of this iconography, however its dating in the 7th century is not certain. The resemblance of the Martvili relief to the plaque from the Benaki Museum was mentioned as a supplementary argument for a late dating. The plaque of the church Amasia in Pontus is dated by 10th-11th centuries, although its execution may suggest a later date (13th century?). The image of equestrian saints facing each other and slaying with their spears a man placed at the feet of their horses seem to be a suitable parallel: the attitude and the costumes of riders, details of horses harness are comparable to what we see on Martvili relief. But this iconography is very unusual for Georgia where the Saints George and Theodore never kill a man together. The image on the right, on the same façade shows an other horseman hitting with his long and massive spear a man at the feet of his horse (fig. 10): Saint Theodore, on the left, spears the dragon, while Saint George, on the right, kills a human figure identified by the inscription as Diocletian.

Regarding the argument of the construction date, the church of Martvili, which belongs to the group of the so-called Jvari type churches, was restored in the 10th century; some new compartments were then added to the principal building dated from the 7th century.

The program of images of the Martvili church and the abundance of »archaic« iconographic elements seem to perfectly correspond with early Christian tradition. However, these elements keep on appearing until 9th-10th centuries in the so-called archaic paintings. Instead, if we accept the 10th century date we must admit that the reliefs were executed by not very qualified artists who made use of »archaic« prototypes. The type of equestrian saints is usual of medieval iconography: the occurrence of Diocletian missing from other Georgian monuments dated before the 10th century and the similarity to the 9th-10th centuries Coptic models, as for example, manuscript Copto 66 from Vatican Apostolic Library or those from the British Museum (OR. 6801) or the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (M. 613)”, arguing in favour of the later date.

Another example can be found on the 10th-century plaque discovered in the basilica of Saint Step’ane in the monastery of Iq’alt’o (fig. 9). The plaque’s initial function is unknown. Most probably it represents the top of the altar table as it was used in the church where it was found. However, the problem of its function remains open. If it is an altar, we are dealing with an example with no direct parallels, either in Georgia, or elsewhere in the Byzantine world.

The decoration of the plaque consists of a composite program of images which, as in most religious works, expresses the Glory of Christ by underlining the theme of His Sacrifice with focusing on Incarnation and Redemption. Part of this program is also the representation of equestrian saints identified by inscriptions (fig. 10): Saint Theodore, on the left, spears the dragon, while Saint George, on the right, kills a human figure identified by the inscription as Diocletian. The idea of triumph is stressed by a medallion containing the bust of Christ blessing the warrior saints and by the important scale of the riders and their privileged location, almost in the middle of the plaque, near the Crucifixion of Christ. This arrangement certainly aims to emphasize the apotropaic function of the image, illustrating at the same time the victory of the Christian soldiers over the Evil and enjoying for its purpose the protection of the object and its users.

43 Čubinalisli, Džvari 51. – Aladislavli, Monumenta’noja skul’ptura 48-56. One of the main arguments for early dating is the presence of flying angels glorifying the saints by holding a crown.
44 Chruškova, Skul’ptura 59. – Vagner, Obraz 4. – Thierry, Aux limites 240 no. 40. – Walter, Warrior Saints 129 indicates the date 912-957, with no comments.
46 Pancaroğlu, Dragon-Slayer 154. – For this plaque and its dating see: Delivorrias, Benaki Museum 65. 69.
47 Bivar, The stirrup 61-65. – Bivar, Cavalry equipment 274, 286-288. – Haldon, Arms and Armour 66-67 no. 4. In the Byzantine textual sources they are attest-
ed already in the 6th century – in Strategikon attributed to the emperor Maurice (582-602). See: Das Strategikon. – Haldon, Arms and Armour 68. – Dawson, Syntagma Hoplôn 81. Following this path we can suppose that hypothetically they could appear in Georgia as early as in the 6th-7th centuries. – For stirrups see also: Curta, Avar-age stirrups 297-326. – Genito, Early medieval nomads 229-247.
48 Mep’isavl’i, Vale 25-52.
49 For coptic manuscripts see: Leroy, Les manuscrits coptes 185-186 pl. 105, 2; 188 pl. 107, 2; 188-189 pl. 106, 1.
50 For Iq’alt’o plaque see: lamanizde, Les installations liturgiques 61-94.
One more less known example comes from the eastern façade of the 10th century Joisubani church (fig. 11). The equestrian saints George and Theodore are integrated in a complex iconographic program as parts of one of the oldest representations of the Last Judgment. They are shown together with Christ the Judge, the figure of the donor and the archangels, surrounded by inscriptions and invocations, highlighting the devotional use of this image. They also appear as protectors and have in this case too an apotropaic function.

The earliest comparable examples of the equestrian dragon-slayer from Turco-Islamic Anatolia appear on coins dated by the 12th century; in this context the iconography conveys the message of authority and rulership. The coin types follow the standard Byzantine iconography of the theme, aiming to express the ideas of victory and power. Some of them, such as the 12th-century copper coins of the Seljuk sultan Rukn al-Din Sulayman Shah (1196-1204), show a horse-rider with a halo carrying a spear. Other issues, for example the 12th-century copper coin of the Danishmendid ruler of Malatya Nasr al-Din Muhammad (1162-1170, 1175-1178), bear the effigy of a dragon-slaying horseman. This image of authority bears the same significance of the triumph over the Evil. In media other than coins, the message of victory is sometimes emphasized by the accompanying inscription. An explicit example can be found on the 13th-century bronze candlestick from southern Anatolia decorated with large medallion bearing figure of mounted hunter fighting a dragon. The text of the inscription wishes the owner luck, wealth and victory over his enemies.

The relief plaques of the C’ebelda templon – another Georgian monument meriting special attention, offer an interesting case-study of common motifs on the boundaries of Georgian and Islamic cultures and traditions. These sculpted panels provoked much interest and were published several times. However, the dating of the reliefs is still disputed, with the proposed dating between the 6th and the 12th-13th centuries.

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51 Pancaroglu, Dragon-Slayer 158-159. – For figural coinage in Anatolia and their iconography, see: Spengler/Sayles, Turkoman Figural Bronze Coins I-II.
52 Cat. Genève 1985, 388 cat. 530. – For the coins of the Seljuk sultan Sulayman Shah, see: Hengevirk, Catalogue 699-705.
The complex iconography of these panels was also interpreted in different manners. All those various and contradictory testimonies leave the question of the datum open and, at the same time, raise several problems of interpretation for further research.

One of the panels bears the traditional representation of two facing equestrian saints, George and Theodore, spearing Diocletian and a dragon respectively (fig. 12). On the second panel, the hunting scene with Saint Eustathe, an episode taken from the life of a local Georgian saint, draws our attention (fig. 13). It shows a figure on horseback holding in its left hand a bow; in front of him there is a dog and a bird, followed by a stag with the image of a bearded Christ between it horns.

According to some scholars, these representations surprise with their abundance in Sassanid motifs: the garments and hats of the riders certainly bear a resemblance to those of Sassanid kings. The long sword and the way it is being carried, the horse with the tied tail and the harness are also of Sassanid type, as well as the bearded faces with their characteristic features. Others detect Arab and Iranian influences and move its dating towards the 11th-12th centuries—a time period that coincides with the Seljuk settlement in Anatolia. Nevertheless, according to the general consensus the style of the reliefs is rustic and archaic. Again, some scholars found it typically Sassanid, others characterized it as Sassanisant and »Caucasian«: a term which, in my opinion, is not very clear and needs further elaboration.

56 Chruškova, Abkhazie 145-152. – It seems that Nicole Thierry is also inclined to this later dating (pers. comm.).
57 Thierry, Le culte du cerf 80-84.
Particularly significant in this context is the scene of saint Eustathe, which evokes representations of princely hunting in the presence of dogs and an eagle, widely spread motif in the 12th and 13th centuries Anatolia, as well as in Transcaucasia, Central Asia and Iran\(^\text{58}\). It is also interesting to recall here the additional visual and conceptual absorption of the equestrian dragon-slayer into representations of princely hunting – assimilation inspired by the general theme of victory, common to both dragon-slaying and hunting. A number of candlesticks and mirrors attributed to the 12th-13th-century Anatolia reveal the association of the dragon-slayer with the notion of princely authority and prerogative\(^\text{59}\).

However, it is difficult to assert the influence of this kind of representations on the C’ebelda reliefs, since for a number of reasons their dating in the 12th-13th centuries seems to be inaccurate. Actually, the style of the reliefs, as well as their complex iconography, does not have any exact parallels. The stylistic particularity and the complexity of the iconographic program can be explained by the use of various models, or even by the participation of several artists in the execution of the panels\(^\text{60}\). The iconographic features and theological context of the C’ebelda program permits, in my opinion, a reduction of the chronological limits. In the current state of research, I would rather propose – with some hesitation – a

\(^{58}\) Ibidem 83-84.

\(^{59}\) Pancaroğlu, Dragon-Slayer 159-160.

\(^{60}\) Iamanidze, Les installations liturgiques 128.
dating in the 9th century, during the so-called transitional period of Georgian art, a period marked by an active search for new artistic forms.

The research on Sassanid, Seljuk and Iranian art would not suffice to conclude whether the particularities observed on the C'ebelda reliefs are due to Sassanid influence or rather to the survival of Sassanid elements in Arab and Iranian or Seljuk art. The source of inspiration for the C'ebelda artist remains obscure, since the question of «influences» remains open. The same holds true for certain ornamental elements on the panels. Some, which appear also in Seljuk art and have been called by scholars the »Seljuk chain«, were in use in pre-Christian and early Christian Georgian jewellery and have probably an antique origin. Thus, it is not impossible that Seljuk art was inspired by Georgian artistic elements and adopted from the latter decorative motives. In any case, the example of C'ebelda opens the way towards future research in this direction.

The representations of equestrian dragon-slayers produced in Turkic-Islamic Anatolia in close iconographic relation to earlier Byzantine examples shed light on significant aspects of artistic exchange and cultural integration. Georgian monuments complete the data provided by other regions of the Eastern Christian world and contribute to our understanding of the artistic developments of a wider Eastern world encompassing Byzantium and the Islamic Near East, and the cultural exchange that took place within it.

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Zusammenfassung / Abstract / Résumé

Der Drachentöter-Reiter von seinen Anfängen bis zu
den Seldschuken: fehlende georgische archäologische
Belege
Unter den Bildern des Drachentöter-Reiters, die vor der türki-
schen Besiedlung des mittelalterlichen Anatoliens hergestellt
worden sind, sind die georgischen Beispiele besonders zu
nennen, weil sie einen bedeutenden Einblick in die Ursprüng
änderungen dieser Darstellung in Byzanz und den benachbarten Regionen
bietet. Das Ziel der vorliegenden Studie ist es, den georgi-
schen Beitrag im Kontext der mittelalterlichen Wanderung
visueller Vokabulare zu entdecken, indem vor allem auf die
mögliche Nutzung georgischer Elemente in der seldschukis-
schen Kunst fokussiert wird.

Die frühen Bilder des Drachentöter-Reiters in Georgien
legen nahe, dass diese Ikonographie in Georgien entstanden
ist, lange vor dem Entstehen der einschlägigen schriftlichen
Version, die auf der Grundlage alter, vorchristlicher Künste
schaffen worden ist. Das Problem der Herkunft des Bildnisses
des berittenen Drachentöters sowie die Qualität und Zahl der
relevanten erhaltenen Darstellungen vor dem 11. Jahrhundert
bestätigen die Autonomie seiner Ikonographie und die Be-
deutung Georgiens bei der Einführung dieses Bildnisses in die
Ikonographie des mittelalterlichen Anatoliens. Die Darstellung
en des berittenen Drachentöters, die im türkisch-islamischen
Anatolien in enger ikonographischer Beziehung zu früheren
byzantinischen Beispielen entstanden sind, beleuchten be-
deutende Aspekte künstlerischen Austauschs und kultureller
Integration. Georgische Monumente ergänzen die Angaben
aus anderen Regionen der östlichen Christenheit.

The Dragon-Slayer Horseman from its Origins to the
Seljuks: Missing Georgian Archaeological Evidence
Among the images of the dragon-slayer horseman produced
before the Turkish settlement of medieval Anatolia, Geo-
rian examples hold an important position since they offer
significant insight as to the origins of this representation
in Byzantium and its neighbouring regions. The aim of this
present study is to show the Georgian contribution in the
context of this migration of visual vocabularies that took
place in the Middle Ages, focusing especially on the possible use
of Georgian elements in Seljuk art.

The early images of the dragon-slayer horseman in Geo-
ria lead us to suppose that this iconography was created in
Georgia well before the relevant written version on the basis
of ancient, pre-Christian cults. The problem of the origin of the
equestrian dragon-slayer’s image and the quality and
number of relevant surviving representations from the period
before the 11th century confirm the autonomy of its iconog-
raphy and the importance of the Georgian contribution in
the course of the infiltration of this image into the iconogra-
phy of medieval Anatolia. The representations of equestrian
dragon-slayers produced in Turko-Islamic Anatolia in close
iconographic relation to earlier Byzantine examples shed light
on significant aspects of artistic exchanges and cultural in-
TEGRATION. Georgian monuments usefully augment the data
provided by other regions of the Eastern Christian world.

Le cavalier tueur de dragons des origines aux Seld-
joukides: absence de preuve archéologique géor-
gienne
Parmi les images d’un cavalier combattant avec le dragon pro-
duites avant l’installation des Turcs en Anatolie médiévale, les
exemples géorgiens occupent une place importante puisque
ils offrent un aperçu significatif sur les origines de cette représen-
tation à Byzance et ses régions voisines.

Les témoignages archéologiques les plus anciens attestent
que le culte de saint George s’est répandu en Géorgie dès
les premières années de la christianisation et amènent éga-
lement à supposer qu’en Géorgie, l’image du saint cavalier,
vainqueur du serpent/dragon a été formée indépendamment
et bien avant la création de la version écrite de la vie du saint,
dérivées de cultes préchrétiens du dieu-guerrier. Le nombre et
la qualité des images créées avant 11e siècle confirment l’autono-
mie de cette iconographie et l’importance de la contribu-
tion géorgienne sur la voie de pénétration de ce thème dans
l’art de l’Anatolie médiévale.