

On a motif in Georgian iconography



Prof. Paata Bukhrashvili
Ilia state University

A distinctive Georgian Christianity, incorporating national ideology as well as religion, developed and spread in medieval Georgia. At this time, according to some, religious and national ideals were not separable (Z. Gamsakhurdia).

One prominent feature of Georgian Christianity is the cult of the warrior saint, in particular, that of St. George, which emerged in the official Georgian Orthodox Church in the 9th century (K. Kekelidze), and which some specialists have linked to the consolidation of the feudal monarchical order and its promotion of an idealized notion of the warrior.



The evolution of this cult found expression in the Georgian art of the period. In this respect, we wish to draw attention to a specific motif in medieval Georgian iconography: the representation of St. George driving his spear through the Roman emperor Diocletian. This motif is distinctive to Georgia (G. Chubinashvili), and appears in 11th and 12th-century icons of St. George. The figure of Diocletian, dressed in a cape and wearing an imperial crown, is shown at the feet of a mounted St. George, being pierced by the warrior's lance.



181. Лифешиа



182. Сети



183. Цхинвали, Работы Асана Главанасдзе



184. Цхинвали, Работы Асана по заказу Маруши

St. George of Seti



St. George of Nakiphari



- As is well known, in the first third of the 11th century conflicts emerged between Georgia and the Byzantine Empire, whose expansionist ambitions led it to seek sovereignty over Georgia. Byzantium sought to impeded the unification and strengthening of Georgia, as well as gain control of its border regions.
- Tensions led to armed conflict, culminating in the campaign of Emperor Basil II (known as the Bulgar-Slayer) and the Battle of Shirimni of 1021. The defeated Georgian king Giorgi I was forced to agree to onerous terms of peace. Conflict with the Byzantines continued during the reign of Giorgi's son Bagrat IV. The young king's opposition with their Byzantine coreligionists drew the support of the Georgian Orthodox Church, as manifested in the campaign of the bishop Saba of Tbeti against the Byzantine forces.

Basil II, later surnamed **the Bulgar-slayer** (Greek: Βασίλειος Β΄ Βουλγαροκτόνος, *Basileios II Boulgaroktonos*, Bulgarian: Василий II Българоубиец. 958 – December 15, 1025), known in his time as **Basil the Porphyrogenitus** and **Basil the Young** to distinguish him from his ancestor Basil I the Macedonian, was a Byzantine emperor from the Macedonian dynasty who reigned from 10 January 976 to 15 December 1025.



- It is entirely likely that the bitter conflict of the Georgian state against the fellow-Orthodox Byzantines found expression in Georgian iconography

