

NIKOLOZ ALEKSIDZE – EKATERINE GEDEVANISHVILI (eds.), *Warrior Saints in Medieval Georgian Art*. Tbilisi: Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation 2025. 460 pp., 370 ill. – ISBN 978-9941-8-7414-7 [open access](#)

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The volume under review provides an accessible and comprehensive treatment of the imagery that developed around the cult of warrior saints in Georgia from the fifth to the seventeenth century. An introduction addresses the historical development and iconography of the cult as a whole. This is followed by five chapters that focus on the warrior saints most frequently represented in Georgian art: St. George, St. Demetrios of Thessaloniki, St. Theodore the Recruit (*Teron*), St. Theodore the General (*Stratelates*), and St. Eustathios Plakidas. An invaluable appendix by NIKOLOZ ALEKSIDZE and KETEVAN MAMASAKHLISI lists the liturgical and hagiographic texts for *all* warrior saints in the Georgian tradition (not just the five enumerated above). Generously illustrated, this magisterial work brilliantly highlights the breadth and creativity of Georgian religious culture.

ALEKSIDZE's introduction synthesizes scholarship on the cult of the warrior saints, tracing its rise in frontier regions, its role in negotiating center/periphery relations, its links to Byzantine expansionist policies, and its regional variations. The author casts his net widely, situating the Georgian cult in relation to broader trends in the East Orthodox world. GEDEVANISHVILI's Chapter 1 surveys the places where images of the warrior saints appear, including specific types of objects and locations within churches. Throughout, she highlights differences from the Byzantine tradition, situates production within shifting political contexts, and also treats figures associated with the warrior saints, such as the archangel Michael and the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. Together, these chapters provide a crucial foundation for the focused studies that follow.

Chapter 2, also by GEDEVANISHVILI, centers on the most popular and famous warrior saint associated with Georgia: St. George. After outlining the history of his cult in Georgia, the chapter provides a comprehensive survey and analysis of his imagery according to iconographic types. The author systematically interprets iconography in relation to its ecclesiastical

and political contexts, incorporating numerous textual sources and epigraphy. The chapter highlights a wealth of local developments, including practices of veneration, the expansion of St. George's images through life cycles, and the depiction of miracles that appear nowhere else in the eastern Orthodox world. The church of the Ubisi monastic complex, decorated with a phenomenal fourteenth-century St. George cycle and once home to a monumental vita icon, receives special treatment.

In Chapter 3, GEDEVANISHVILI brings a similar treatment to St. Demetrios, situating his cult and images within royal patronage and providing new analyses of the links between Abraham (of the Old Testament) and Demetrios. She then focuses on the Chapel of Dodork'a at Davit'gareja, proposing that it formed a 'copy' of the tomb of St. Demetrios in Thessaloniki.

Chapter 4, by TAMAR DADIANI, discusses St. Theodore the Recruit and St. Theodore the General, who were often conflated in Georgian iconography. Perhaps the most intriguing insight from this chapter is the link among church wall paintings, folk traditions, and epic narratives.

The final chapter, co-written by GEDEVANISHVILI and IRMA MAMASAKHLISI, brings welcome attention to St. Eustathios Plakidas. Though less well known than the other saints, his cult thrived in the Middle Ages, finding popularity in both the eastern Orthodox sphere and western Europe. As the two authors show, it also enjoyed great popularity in Georgia. In an excellent introduction to his cult, the co-authors identify thematic parallels among the story of his martyrdom, royal conversion narratives, and Georgian epics. The greater part of the chapter addresses images of Eustathios, which typically portray his miraculous vision of Christ in the antlers of a stag, emphasizing hunting themes.

The volume will certainly become the standard reference on the visual traditions of warrior saints in medieval Georgia and essential reading for anyone interested in St. George. Yet it should also be on the reading list of any scholar interested in the cult of the warrior saints in the Byzantine Empire or adjacent regions. What makes it such a valuable resource is the meticulous treatment of imagery in relation to hagiographic, epic, religious, and liturgical practices, which demonstrate the extent to which artists, authors, and patrons acted in concert to propagate the cult of the warrior saints. Beyond that overarching contribution, the first two chapters provide important updates to CHRISTOPHER WALTER's *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (2003), presenting a fresh analysis of the cult's political contexts and functions. Their approach, discussing interactions with the

Byzantine Empire and Georgian political programs, also makes the book a valuable resource for scholars investigating the intersection of images, politics, and religion; warfare; masculinity; connections between pre-Christian and medieval imagery; and the localization of widespread cults. Finally, the warrior saints were so popular that they appear on nearly every media created in the Georgian context, from pre-altar crosses and pendant reliquaries to exterior relief sculptures. For scholars unfamiliar with medieval Georgian visual culture, this book will offer an introduction to its peculiar forms, presented with sensitivity to the links among images and the media in which they appear.

Warrior Saints in Medieval Georgian Art makes the Georgian tradition accessible to a wide audience, drawing on a vibrant body of scholarship (most of it published in Georgian) and bringing together a wealth of images previously treated in single-monument or single-media monographs. While the authors synthesize a vast body of material, they also offer many new insights into the sites and images they investigate. Paired with scholarship on the warrior saints by WALTER, WHITE, IMMERZEEL, and others, the volume will offer scholars a kaleidoscopic view of a cult important across the eastern Orthodox world.¹

Keywords

cult of saints; East Christian iconography; medieval Georgian art; Saint George

1. CHRISTOPHER WALTER, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*. Aldershot 2003; MONICA WHITE, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus, 900–1200*. Cambridge 2013; MAT IMMERZEEL, *Holy Horsemen and Crusader Banners*. *Eastern Christian Art* 1 (2004) pp. 29–60, as well as many other articles by the same author.