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Buildings in their patrons' hands? The multiform function of small size models between Byzantium and Transcaucasia

The representation of the church model in the hands of the church's patron or founder finds its roots in the arts of Late Antiquity. Since the sixth century, this motif adorned church apses, as an image of offering to Christ or the Virgin.¹ Later, it became a strong iconic image conveying the role of the patron/founder in the construction and his devotion, which was embodied in the model as well as in the building itself. As such, the theme had particular fortune in medieval Rome and spread to the East as far as the Caucasus. After the Latin conquest of Constantinople during the fourth crusade (1204 AD), the motif was widely adopted in the Balkans and in the territories in close contact with Byzantium.² This paper will focus on church models as a motif, reflecting on their spread and role in the decoration of the external façades of the churches in the Caucasus and, specifically, in the area of Transcaucasia. In this region, church models were extremely popular, appearing in various forms in a wide range of media, from painted images to relief carvings or sculptures in the round. They became characteristic features of church programmes, as decorative elements or objects with diverse functions, such as reliquaries, acroteria on church gables and scale models.³ From the sixth century to the fourteenth century, the exterior decoration of the Transcaucasian churches often included donation scenes with architectural models in the hands of their patrons that, as we will see, after the twelfth century show strong transcultural characteristics, especially in the apparel of the donors. This is evidence of the cultural exchanges between the kingdoms and principalities controlling the area and the neighbouring populations moving towards west, such as Saljuqs and Mongols. Until recent years, the evaluation of the models' accuracy and the reflection on the donors/founders' appearance have been of major scholarly concern, while the models have been solely viewed as donations. In

order to understand the value of these models after the twelfth century – following the chronological frame of this volume – it is important to determine their importance in Caucasian visual culture, first tracing the evolution of the donation image. This will help us to evaluate the meaning of architectural models in the changed historical context of the Transcaucasian principalities between the late twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, when architectural models on church walls were enriched with new meanings.

The first appearance of the motif in the Transcaucasian area probably dates back to the sixth century. This is testified by a now-lost sculpted relief with the image of a woman holding a church model, which may have decorated the outer walls of the cathedral complex at Agarak (region of Ayrarat), formed by a fifth- or sixth-century single-nave church and a seventh-century domed church.⁴ At about the same time, generic representations of the donor, without the church model, were inserted on church façades in other areas of the Caucasus – such as in the church of the Holy Cross at Mtskheta in Georgia (historical province of Kartli, c. 567/604 AD) and possibly in the Armenian cathedral of Mren (region of Mirini-Karabakh, today in modern Turkey, c. 640 AD).⁵ From an early date in Transcaucasia, the location of donor portraits on church façades appears as a distinctive feature of church decoration in this region and distinguishes it from the Byzantine tradition, which placed the pictorial motif in church interiors in the apse or in the proximity of the sanctuary. However, only from the ninth century AD on, and especially after the re-conquest of the area from the Arabs, the church model in the hands of the donor/patron acquired significance and the theme spread in the arts of Transcaucasia.⁶ The location of the motif within the church façade varies considerably, although it is usually found near an en-

trance or a window. The architectural models may include accurate representations of the church building or schematic images, which allude to the construction without however reproducing its architecture in detail. A relief from the church of Opiza (region of Tao Klarjeti, today in north-eastern Turkey), dated to c. 826 AD, now at the Georgian National Museum of Tbilisi, shows the patron – the Bagratid king Ashot I *kuropalates* (r. 813-830 AD) – offering the building model to the enthroned Christ⁷ (fig. 1). The model, which occupies a large proportion of the composition, is a simple outline of the church with the dome at the centre being blessed by the hand of Christ. The model's large size and central location (at the centre of the sculpted panel with the image of the enthroned Christ) emphasize its great significance as an embodiment of the donor's piety and allude to the catholicon of Opiza as a place blessed by Christ. The monastery of Opiza was an important foundation, the fame of which in the ninth century was linked to the ruling dynasty of Bagratids, which was celebrated in the image. Other examples on the edges of the Transcaucasian region, which are far from cities or great monastic foundations such as Opiza — thus, far from the major centres of art production — show a similar visual emphasis on the church model.⁸



Fig. 1: King Ashot I offers the church model to Christ; stone relief from the cathedral of Opiza (c. 826 AD); Tbilisi, Georgian National Museum of Fine Arts (image in the public domain).

On the western façade of a small church at Korogo (a village located on the slopes of the Mtiuleti region, in eastern Georgia) a tenth-century relief shows a clergyman, possibly responsible for the building's construction, in the act of offering the model to the Virgin⁹ (fig. 2). The model represents a corner view of the church of Korogo: the high relief of the carving con-

veys a sense of three-dimensionality. In both the above instances, the church model occupies a considerable part of the sculpted relief and, although the representation is not architecturally accurate, it has a powerful visual effect as it immediately conveys the main architectural elements of the church. The size of the models relative to that of the rest of the relief expresses the importance of these foundations and the centrality of the church building as a pious act of donation.



Fig. 2: The donor of the church of Korogo offering the building model to the Virgin; village of Korogo (Georgia), main church, western façade, relief panel (tenth century AD). (photo: ©Kakha Khimshiashvili)

The composition of the donation scene differs from one instance to another, creating several iconographies.¹⁰ However, in Transcaucasia the image of the donor with the model is always connected to the representation of Christ, the Virgin or a saint and, in some instances, it is part of a larger decorative programme.¹¹ In the great aristocratic church foundations of the tenth century AD, models in the hand of their patrons become almost three-dimensional, thereby acquiring further significance. On the western façade of the palace church of Aghtamar, built between 915 and 921 AD and dedicated to the Holy Cross, the ruler of the Armenian kingdom of Vaspurakan, Gagik Artsruni (r. 908-936 AD) presents a church model to Christ¹² (fig. 3). The model is a small-scale, three-dimensional copy of the church carved into a single stone block, which accurately reproduces the architecture of the building and shows three façades of the structure.¹³ Its high relief makes it project from the church façade, while the rest of the donation scene with the king, Christ and the angels – carved in low relief consistently with the overall sculpted decoration of the outer walls – stand in the background. Due to

this visual effect, the model becomes the real protagonist of the scene. Moreover, after a close inspection of the model, Mabi Angar came to the conclusion that the church model may have been painted and perhaps covered with gems and pearls, thereby producing a glittering effect on the church façade.¹⁴ However, the badly damaged stone surface cannot provide sufficient evidence for this hypothesis.¹⁵ In any case, the location of the projecting model within the donation scene right above the church's main entrance, its character of a faithful three-dimensional small-sized rendering of the church and, possibly, its colourful appearance would have attracted the beholder's gaze, while looking at the façade. All these features show that the church model was not merely the centre of the donation scene and, within it, the precious embodiment of Gagik's devotion to Christ, but that it functioned as a reminder of the overall architecture of the church at a location where the viewer could not possibly see the whole building, while approaching the main entrance. At the same time, within the façade decorative programme, the architectural model expressed the function of the building as a pious gift made by Gagik.



Fig. 3: King Gagik Artsruni with the church model in his hands; Aghtamar (Van lake, Turkey), church of the Holy Cross (915-921 AD), western façade. (photo: ©Dick Osseman)

Similarly, two three-dimensional building models appear in the stone carvings decorating the outer southern wall of the southern pastophory at the cathedral of St. John the Baptist, at the monastery of Oshki. This church was built between 963 and 966 AD by the Bagratid king David III and his brother Bagrat, of the Georgian royal house of Tao Klarjeti. The sculpted reliefs show the kings, offering the architectural models to the Deesis¹⁶ (fig. 4). In this case, the models reproduce the general features and architectural decoration of the church but not the volumes, and particularly not the elongated western nave.¹⁷ Although the donors are also carved in high relief, the models project out from the background even further, thus conveying their three-dimensional appearance. Earlier close inspections of the models suggest that they were painted and, possibly, partially gilded.¹⁸ Thus, in the sculpted decoration of the southern pastophory, the models were intended to be central elements, conveying the precious nature of the church building as a gift to the Deesis. The colourful appearance of the models may have been inspired by contemporary examples in mosaic from Byzantium, as for instance the model of Hagia Sophia in the hands of Justinian above the south-western vestibule at Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, recently convincingly re-dated to the first half of the tenth century AD.¹⁹

In fact, the donation scene at Oshki shows several



Fig. 4: King David III and his brother Bagrat offering the church models to the Deesis; Monastery of Oshki (Turkey), cathedral of St. John the Baptist (963-966 AD), southern pastophory, southern wall. (detail from a photo by ©James Gordon)

Byzantine stylistic traits – such as the archaic imperial attire of the royals – while, at the same time, demonstrating local features.²⁰ Thus, the painted architectural models of Oshki may be an intended reference to

the Byzantine tradition, where models were colourful architectural representations, made in mosaic or painted in church interiors. Here, we may see a transfer of representational codes from Byzantium and, at the same time, a reinterpretation based on Caucasian visual tradition, in which architectural models adorned the exterior of church buildings as relief sculpture.

In two contemporary Armenian examples, the donation scenes acquire a purely symbolic meaning, as they simply and solely display two princes – on behalf of whom the church was built but who were not its founders or patrons – who jointly hold the church model as in an act of offering; however, there is no recipient for the gift. This scene is represented on the eastern façades of the churches of St. Saviour at the monastery of Sanahin (r. 966-972 AD) and of the Holy Sign at Haghpats (r. 976-991 AD), where Smbat and Gurgun, sons of the Bagratid ruler Ashot III (r. 952/953-977 AD) display the church model in their hands (fig. 5-6).²¹ At Sanahin, the model is a schematic representation of the church that contrasts with the detailed rendering of the figures. The model of Haghpats, however, reproduces the general features of the church and architectural details such as niches and windows, in a severe, almost abstract style consistent with the images of Smbat and Gurgun.²² The scenes are centrally inserted into the stone masonry, just below the roof's edge. Contrary to the other examples discussed above, at Sanahin and Haghpats the figural decoration of the façades is constrained within the cornice of the sculpted panels. Thus, the panels become the focus of the beholder's attention. The new compositional scheme – appearing first at Sanahin and, as we will see, having a great impact on subsequent donation scenes – highlights the value of the church building as a joint construction linked to the name of the two brothers. Therefore, the models appear as the product of the donors' efforts and perhaps, more than an act of devotion, express a political statement about the intention to jointly rule the kingdom as they jointly hold the church. Moreover, the size and the varying degree of accuracy of the models seem to show the brothers' relationship: the sketchy model at Sanahin may embody the auspices of a future peaceful communal rule by their mother, queen

Xhosrovanoush wife of Ashot III, who commissioned the church and its decoration when they were still princes of the Bagratid dynasty.²³

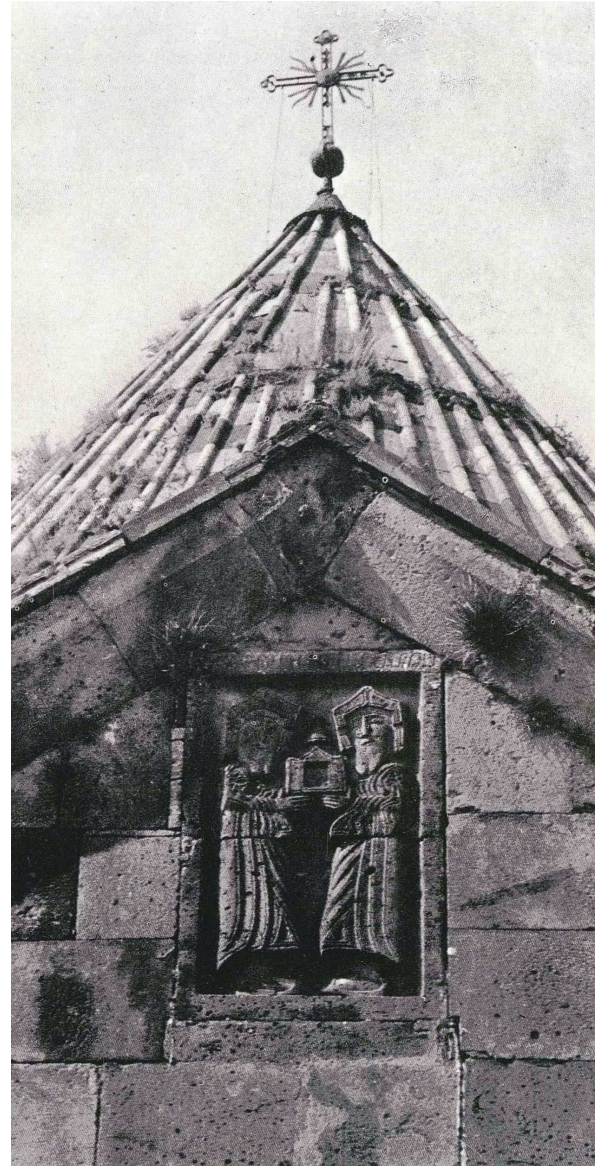


Fig. 5: The Bagratid princes Smbat and Gurgun holding the church model; Sanahin, church of St. Saviour (966-972 AD), eastern façade. (photo: ©Armen Manoukian)

Then, the bigger and more detailed model of Haghpats may show the accomplishment of the brothers' kingship, Smbat as king of Ani (977-989 AD) and Gurgun as king of Lori (982-989 AD).²⁴ Above the relief with the donation scene at Haghpats, on the roof gable is an acroterium, a small sculpture positioned at the apex of the ridge of the roof, which reproduces the main features of the church: the conical dome and the aisles' roofs. Similar acroteria crown each façade and,

originally, functioned as cross holders. However, at Haghpat, the eastern acroterium – the most accurate of the four acroteria surmounting the church's façades – constitutes the apex of the donation scene,



Fig. 6: The Bagratid kings Smbat and Gurgen holding the church model; Haghpat, church of the Holy Sign (976-991 AD), eastern façade. (detail from a photo by ©Jeffrey Rozwadowski)

further enhancing its meaning.²⁵ On the same central axis of the eastern façade, in the panel the two brothers hold the donors' model as a symbolic embodiment of their work and joint kingship on earth, while the architectural model of the acroterium is located on the roof gable above. Its elevated position and faithful reproduction of the church's architecture allow for the interpretation that the acroterium depicts the church as a symbol of the Holy Church, the foundation of the Christian message – the latter being represented by the cross, which the acroterium originally held. Thus, on the church's eastern façade, the small acroterium representing the church – indeed another small-scale model of the church building – was the real object of the offer. If the church model in the brothers' hands was the product of their joint work, then the acroteri-

um above it – and the church itself – expressed the visible signs of their faith.

In the iconographic context outlined above, the now-lost model once decorating the early eleventh-century church of St. Gregory the Illuminator at Ani may similarly reflect a political intent. Originally, it was held by a statue in the round, representing king Gagik I (r. 989-1020 AD).²⁶ The model featured an accurate reproduction of the church's architectural decoration and its grand size, which paired with the extraordinary dimensions of the king holding it.²⁷ Although its original context is unknown, it is reasonable to suppose that, in the practice established at Sanahin and Haghpat by the Bagratid royal portraits, the building was not presented to a religious figure but represented the foundation of the church by Gagik. Contrary to the tradition of relief donor portraits outlined above, the statue of Gagik holding the model of his church was carved in the round: it did not merely decorate the façade of the church, rather it literally stood out from the building façade for its three-dimensionality, vast size and colourful appearance, attracting the beholder's gaze. Notwithstanding its location on the church façade, Gagik's statue represented a powerful image of the ruler – recognizable by its facial traits and ceremonial dress – as the founder. The dimensions of the statuary group (larger than life-size) conveyed a sense of the king's power. Furthermore, it represented the grandeur that the kingdom of Ani achieved during his reign through founding churches and other monumental buildings: this was indeed a political statement of the kingdom's splendour on the façade of the king's major religious foundation.

Even under different political circumstances and the changing dynasties that ruled Transcaucasian principalities, the pictorial motif of the church model in the hands of its patron did not disappear. Following the Byzantine conquest of Ani in 1045 AD and the events leading to the progressive creation of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia – including the victory of the Saljuqs over the Byzantine army at Manzikert in 1071 AD²⁸ – donor models survive in Transcaucasian monasteries. Not until the end of the twelfth century, however, do donation scenes suggest a drastic change of

meaning within the context of cross-cultural dynamics affecting the visual culture of Transcaucasia. At the monastery of Harichavank, the eastern façade of the Cathedral of the Mother of God shows a commemorative panel with the donors dating around 1201 AD. Originally, the figures represented on the sculpted panel, Zakare and Ivane Zakarian (or Mqargrdzeli), who at that time controlled northern Armenia, held a model of the church.²⁹ Unfortunately, the model no longer exists. Nevertheless, this image recalls the tenth-century Bagratid royal panels, both in the compositional scheme of the scene (the model at the centre, jointly held by the princes) and in the pose of the donors. Scholars have noticed that the apparel of the Zakarian brothers shows a syncretic style, with 'Islamicizing' traits.³⁰ However, the scene carved within the frame of a stone panel is inserted into the uppermost part of the façade, recalling earlier examples such as the Bagratid royal portraits of Sanahin and Haghpap discussed above. This type of decoration is reinterpreted here in the light of a new architectural style:³¹ whereas the Bagratid donor portraits were the only decorative elements on the smooth masonry of the church façades, the donation relief at Harichavank is framed by the articulated patterns of cornices decorating the outer walls of the church. At Harichavank, the importance of the donation relief on the eastern façade is emphasized in another architectural representation of the cathedral — an acroterium standing over the gable of the western façade, just above the original entrance of the church.³² The acroterium is a perfect, small-scale reproduction of the church building and includes an image of the donors' panel of the eastern façade that is not to scale: its dimensions are much bigger than the other reproduced architectural features.³³ At Harichavank, the emphasis on the donation panels shows the value of the church building as the princes' donation. The donor relief is the central element around which all the sculpted decoration of the eastern façade develops and, at the same time, as a distinctive feature of the whole building, it is reproduced even in the acroterium crowning the western façade. Although Zakare Zakarian, who adhered to Monophysite Orthodoxy, unlike his brother who had converted to the Chalcedonian faith³⁴, was the sole patron of the cathedral of the Mother of God, the

donor relief represented the two brothers, Zakare and Ivane holding the church model, as if they both were the founders. In this case, the donation scene does not display a communal act of devotion. Rather, it is meant to convey a message of political union between the Zakarian brothers who, at that time, ruled northern Armenia on behalf of the Georgian queen Tamar and possibly aspired to recreate a kingdom on the model of the Armenian Bagratid Kingdom of Ani of the tenth and eleventh century AD.³⁵ Thus, the microarchitectures at Harichavank reveal that, even with the passing of time and the change of dress, the political or devotional intent conveyed in the founder model was reiterated as a distinctive feature of Transcaucasian aristocracies.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, in the region known today as Nagorno-Karabakh, donors' models acquire new characteristics. At the monastery of Dadivank, two church models inserted in the eastern and southern façades of the cathedral (1214 AD) are testament of this innovation (fig. 7-8). The models are located above the central windows on both façades and appear to levitate over the hands of their donors, who are represented on a lower register at the sides of the window. They reproduce the architecture of the church in detail.³⁶ The figures of the donors, Hasan and Grigor of Artsakh, are carved with very schematic traits and low relief in both images; full figure portraits on the southern façade and bust portraits on the eastern façade.³⁷ Their hands are stretched towards the models, without holding them. On the southern façade in particular, the figures are not shown in the act of offering, rather their gesture points out the small churches as if they belonged to another dimension. The accuracy of the models and their high relief contrasts sharply with the representation of the donors. The models of considerable size project out from the façade and appear as perfect three-dimensional reproductions of the church, thereby attracting the beholder's attention as if they were the real protagonists of the scene. Thus, the donors' images at Dadivank appear completely abstract. The church models lose their meanings of offerings and achieve a further significance: their centrality in the composition, physical separation from the

donors and architectural accuracy convey the idea that they represent the cathedral as a symbol of the Heavenly Church. On the southern façade, a long inscription records that the church was built by Arzu Khatun, wife of the prince Vakhtang and mother of Hasan and Grigor, in their place of rest.³⁸ Consistent



Fig. 7: Hasan and Grigor of Artsakh holding the church model; Dadivank, Cathedral (1214 AD), southern façade. (photo: ©Alberto Sanchez Gaidabura)

with this text, the image depicts the brothers not as donors but moving towards a heavenly realm, represented in the church models, which dominate the composition and stand for the final place achieved in the afterlife. At the same time, the image evokes the traditional Transcaucasian iconography of donor portraits established between the tenth and the eleventh century AD, as affronting figures holding the church model, conveying a further level of significance, that of the pious church patrons – probably their mother's idea when she built the church in honour of her sons. This observation is reinforced by the position of the two donor portraits with the architectural models on the

most exposed external walls of the church, on the edges of the monastery complex. The bust portrait is placed on a central position on the eastern wall corresponding to the internal sanctuary of the church, thus matching with the sacred character of the eastern orientation, where donation scenes in Trans-



Fig. 8: Hasan and Grigor of Artsakh holding the church model; Dadivank, Cathedral (1214 AD), eastern façade. (photo: ©Alberto Sanchez Gaidabura)

caucasian churches were usually located after the tenth century AD. The other scene is on the southern wall, corresponding to a large space where the donor portrait could be easily viewed and the inscription read below. The position of the models surrounding the church building was purposely designed in order to be viewed and connected to the commemorative inscription: while the location of the bust portrait on the eastern façade responded to a tradition well established in Transcaucasia since the tenth century AD,³⁹ the full-figure donor portrait with the architectural model was placed above the inscription. Thus, its location reinforced the text of the inscription with a powerful image of the deceased brothers and their otherworldly place of rest, symbolized in the church model.⁴⁰

Not far from Dadivank, in the monastery of Gandzasar, the pictorial motif of church models in the hands of their patrons acquires a new and unexpected form. In 1216 AD the monastery became the burial place of the Armenian princes of Khachen, with the building of

a cathedral dedicated to St. John the Baptist. On the northern and southern niches on the western side of the church drum, two reliefs show a man seated with his legs crossed, holding a church model above his head⁴¹ (fig. 9-10). The donors' pose and their apparel, which depart from the traditional iconography of donors' portraits outlined above, show the impact of Saljuq costumes and representation of power,⁴² revealing a substantial cross-cultural interaction that had a great effect on the development of Trans-



Fig. 9: The founder holding the church model; Gandzasar, cathedral of St. John the Baptist (c. 1216 AD), drum, south-western niche. (detail from a photo by © Matt Werner)

caucasian visual culture. Although the scenes show the same compositional scheme, the church models are not identical. The one on the south reproduces the main features of the church such as its drum and roofs, the blind arcades and the central window of the southern and northern façades. Furthermore, a portal is depicted, possibly intending to represent the original portal of the western façade, now covered by the *gavit* (a rectangular room located on the western side of church buildings)⁴³ (fig. 9). However, the model on the northern niche reproduces a centrally-planned

building: a rotunda with a large dome – similar to the actual dome of the church – the walls of which are decorated by blind arcades and circular windows (fig. 10). The male figures of the two niches are similar, as if to represent the same man, and have been interpreted as Hasan Jalal al-Dawla, ruler of the province of Artsakh (r. 1214-1261 AD) and founder of the cathedral;⁴⁴ or as the latter and his son, holding the model of the cathedral (on the southern side) and the model

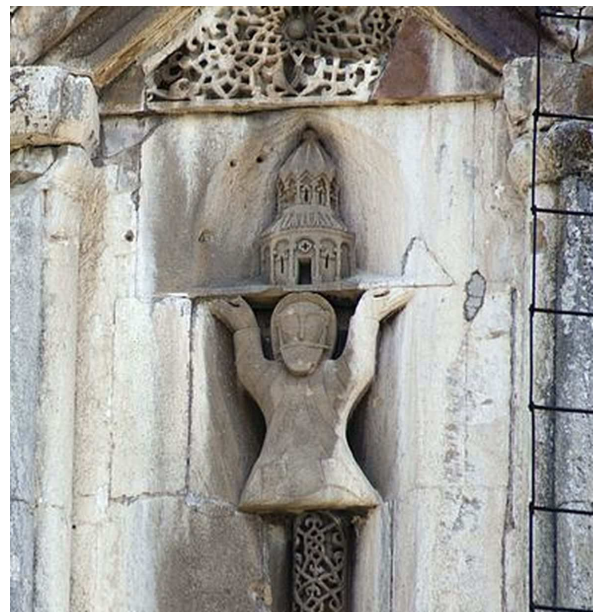


Fig. 10: The founder holding the church model; Gandzasar, cathedral of St. John the Baptist (c. 1216 AD), drum, north-western niche. (photo © Ilkin Mete)

of the church of Vadzar (northern side), another church built by the ruler, now known only from written sources.⁴⁵ Lacking explanatory inscriptions, the precise identification of the personages is impossible. However, in the Transcaucasian tradition, they are very likely to be references to the church founder Hasan Jalal al-Dawla, while the models represent two of his foundations. As in the examples of Dadivank, the models are extremely detailed and carved in high relief in contrast to the image of the men, whose dress and face are lightly carved on the stone with simple and confident traits. Located at the top of niches on the drum of the church at Gandzasar, the models are on a platform held above the donor's head – as if the patrons showed the architectural models on a tray – conveying the idea that the microarchitecture functions as a gift offered with a sol-

em gesture. Since these scenes flank a central niche decorated with an image of Christ in the act of benediction and two panels with representations of Adam and Eve, the offering of the church by the donors may be intended for Christ. However, the verticality of the representational scheme – with the men holding the church models over their heads – conveys the idea of an offering to Heaven, and thus to God who reigns from the celestial realm.

Gandzasar's church models in the hands of their patrons acquire further meanings in the context of the decorative programme of the building. Above the entrance on the western side, the façade was originally dominated by a Crucifixion scene and culminated in a small acroterium representing the drum of the church⁴⁶ (fig. 11). The drum was, indeed, the main feature of the whole building, thus its reproduction in the acroterium transformed this drum model into a rep-

resentation of the entire church. Before the construction of the *gavit* around the middle of the thirteenth century, the beholder would have seen the Crucifixion and the acroterium terminating in a metal cross when looking at the western façade. Further above this is the image of Christ on the drum, flanked by the founders with the church models.⁴⁷ Thus, visually the offering of the church models on the drum was part of a major decorative programme, centred on the reiteration of church models and crosses. Located on the same central axis, the Crucifixion scene, the acroterium depicting the architectural model and the image of Christ in the act of benediction on the drum conveyed a visual message. The model in the acroterium appeared as the visual culmination of the pictorial program, thus representing the Church as the product of Christ's sacrifice on the cross; it held a metal cross, thereby displaying the foundation of the Christian cult on earth (the Church) which was blessed by Christ in



Fig. 11: Western façade and drum; Gandzasar, cathedral of St. John the Baptist (c. 1216 AD). (detail from a photo by ©Matt Werner)

the benediction scene on the drum. Beside and on top of this central visual axis, the architectural models on the drum appeared as Hasan's offerings to God, and as the visualization of his faith.

Between the end of the twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth century, the monasteries founded by the great rulers of the Transcaucasian principalities show that the church models acquired new meanings. They did not simply stand for donations and referenced the church building as evidence of the patron's devotion and earthly achievements, but represented the Church as both the Holy Church on earth or the Heavenly Church of the afterlife. Since the sixth century in Transcaucasia, the location of church models within devotional images on the outside of the churches had characterized a visual culture that departed from the Byzantine tradition, nevertheless referencing it at particular political times – as for instance in the tenth-century orthodox monastery of Oshki, whose founders had close relationships with Byzantium. Since the tenth century AD, the sculpted images of the architectural models in the hands of their patrons on the façades of church buildings had been distanced from their Byzantine antecedents, preferring the play on size, three-dimensionality and accurate rendering of the architectural features to the Byzantine use of colours and materials to create architectural representations. Furthermore, at the turn of the thirteenth century, the constant interplay between the size and three-dimensionality of Transcaucasian donors' models, as well as between the microarchitecture of models and acroteria and the larger architecture of the church, reveal meanings that relate the architectural models in the hands of their patrons to the larger programme of church exteriors.

At that time, the reiteration of church models on the outer walls of the church buildings expressed the importance that the model itself had achieved within Transcaucasian visual culture. The architectural models show an increasing adherence to the architecture of the physical church that they reproduce, focusing on details and becoming vivid reproductions of the local contemporary architecture. This is characterized by tall churches with central domes and façades decorated in cornices that appear as the product of an

on-going local tradition more than of the impact of cross-cultural tendencies.⁴⁸ The models' accurate reproduction of the local architecture contrasts sharply with the 'Islamicizing' apparel of the figures, rendered through light traits that outline the dress without reproducing it in detail – as we can see at Dadivank and Gandzasar. Precisely the donors' garment and pose, which scholars have generically identified as 'Islamicizing',⁴⁹ are evidence of the increasing cross-cultural interaction that had been taking place in the Transcaucasian regions since the ninth century.⁵⁰ Such 'Islamicizing' apparel and pose, which already appeared in the tenth-century Artsruni and Bagratid royal portraits reproducing Persian textiles or turbans, are far more evident in the image of Hasan Jalal al-Dawla wearing a caftan and sitting cross-legged in the thirteenth-century monastery of Gandzasar.

In conclusion, the development and great novelty shown in the church models of the Transcaucasian monasteries of the thirteenth century finds its roots in a wider local visual culture. On the façades of Transcaucasian buildings, the microarchitecture of the church became the embodiment of the physical church on which it was represented and, at the same time, the visualization of a sacred place on earth (the church building) but also that of the Heavenly Church. Thus, the church models conveyed the idea of a sacred place that, just as an object, could be offered as a gift in a donation scene.

Endnotes

1. For instance in the apse of Santi Cosma and Damiano at Rome, San Vitale at Ravenna and of the Euphrasian Basilica at Poreč (Maria Cristina Carile, *Memories of Buildings? Messages in Late Antique Architectural Representations*, in: *Images of the Byzantine World. Visions, Messages, Meanings. Studies presented to Leslie Brubaker*, ed. Angeliki Lymberopoulou, Farnham 2011, pp. 15-34; Jean-Pierre Caillet, *L'évolution de la notion d'évergétisme dans l'antiquité chrétienne*, in: *Donation et donateur dans le monde byzantin*, eds. Jean-Michel Spieser and Elisabeth Yota, Paris 2012, pp. 11-24).
2. Recently the subject has been widely addressed in: *Mikroarchitektur im Mittelalter: ein gattungsübergreifendes Phänomen zwischen Realität und Imagination*. Beiträge der gleichnamigen Tagung im Germanischen Nationalmuseum Nürnberg vom 26. bis 29. Oktober 2005, eds. Christine Kratzke and Uwe Albrecht, Leipzig 2008. For the West: Emanuel S. Klinckenberg, *Compressed Meanings. The Donor's Model in Medieval Art to around 1300*, Turnhout 2009. Discussing a possible interpretation of the donor models as maquettes, with reference to the Balkans: Ćedomila Marinković, *Founder's Model – Representation of a maquette of a church?*, in: *Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'Études Byzantines*, vol. XLIV, 2007, pp. 145-153.
3. Paolo Cuneo pioneered the research on Armenian stone models with the first classification of the models. Due to the nature of

- this short contribution, in the following we will address this still-fundamental study for the catalogue and description of the models: Paolo Cuneo, *Les modèles en pierre de l'architecture arménienne*, in: *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, vol. VI, 1969, pp. 201-231, especially pp. 203-204. For stone reliquaries with the appearance of a church building: Armen Kazaryan, *Relics in Medieval Armenian Architecture*, in: *Eastern Christian Relics*, ed. Alexei Lidov, Moscow 2003, pp. 92-120 hypothesizing a possible function of the donors' model on the outer decoration of the churches as reliquaries; Jannic Durand, *Model of a church*, in: *Architecture as an icon*, ed. Slobodan Ćurčić, Princeton 2010, pp. 162-167, 170-171 (catalogue no. 3-5,7); Artur Grigoryan, *Modello di chiesa*, in: *Armenia. Impronte di una civiltà*, Catalogo della Mostra (Venezia, 16 dicembre 2011-12 aprile 2012), eds. Gabriella Uluhogian, Boghos Levon Zekyan, Vartan Karapetian, Milano, 2011, pp. 80-81 cat. no. 15, 16, 17. For donor models as scale models: Giulio 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), Venezia 1978, pp. 247-293. For the use of scale models, workshop models and architectural drawings in the Caucasian tradition: Christina Maranci, *The Architect Tradat: Building Practices and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Byzantium and Armenia*, in: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. LXII, no. 3, 2003, pp. 294-305.
4. The relief decorated a stele found among the ruins of the church complex: Lynn Jones, 'Abbasid suzerainty in the Medieval Caucasus: Appropriation and Adaptation of Iconography and Ideology', in: *Gesta*, vol. XLIII/2, 2004, pp. 143-150 especially p. 147. A similar scene was possibly represented on the west façade of the fifth-century church of St. Sargis at Tekor, now destroyed (John G. Davies, *Medieval Armenian Art and Architecture. The Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar*, London 1991, p. 121). In the Georgian church of Sion at Ateni, the theme appears on a relief showing the donor, the prince (*eristav*) Stephanos II, with the church. This was previously dated to the seventh century (Cuneo 1969, *Les modèles en pierre*, pp. 203-204). However, recent research has attributed the sculpture to the tenth-century building phase during the Baghvashe rule: Elene Kavlelashvili, *Ateni Sioni. Contemporaries and perspectives*, in: *Caucasus Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. III, no. 1, 2010, pp. 78-88.
 5. For the church at Mtskheta: Wachtang Djobadze, *The Sculptures on the Eastern Façade of the Holy Cross of Mtskheta*, in: *Oriens Christianus*, vol. XLIV, 1960, pp. 112-35 and vol. XLV, 1961, pp. 70-77. For the cathedral of Mren, its historical background and its reliefs: Christina Maranci, *Building Churches in medieval Armenia: Medieval Art at the Borders of Empire and the Edge of the Canon*, in: *The Art Bulletin*, vol. LXXXVIII, 2006, pp. 656-675 and *The Humble Heraclius: Revisiting the North Portal at Mren*, in: *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, vol. XXXI, 2008-2009, pp. 167-180.
 6. For the history of the Transcaucasian area and particularly for the period between the seventh and the tenth century AD, when the Armenian élites fought the Arab domination and progressively created powerful principalities: Bernadette Martin-Hisard, *Domination arabe et libertés arméniennes (VIIe-IXe siècle)*, in: *Histoire du peuple arménien*, ed. Gérard Dédéyan, Toulouse, 2008, pp. 213-242.
 7. Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, University Park, PA 1998, pp. 222-224 and Antony Eastmond, *Messages, meanings and metamorphoses: the icon of the Transfiguration of Zarzma*, in: *Images of the Byzantine World*, pp. 57-82 especially p. 62, revising his former dating of the relief to the tenth century.
 8. For the monasteries of the Tao Klarjeti region as centers of art production: David Winfield, *Some Early Medieval Figure Sculpture from North-East Turkey*, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 31, 1968, pp. 33-72; Wachtang Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historic Tao, Klarjet'i, and Shavshet'i*, Stuttgart, 1992.
 9. A tenth-century panel relief found near the church shows three figures and an outline of the building beside them. This image has been interpreted as a portrayal of the donors (David Khoshtaria, *Medieval Architectural Design and Building Process According to the Sculptural Images in Korogo Church*, in: *Masons at Work*, eds. Robert Ousterhout, Renata Holod, Lothar Haselberger, Philadelphia, forthcoming). However, the real donation scene is on the frieze of the western façade, where the clergyman offers the building model to the central image of the Virgin.
 10. Elsewhere the model may have become an attribute of the represented figure, distinguishing the patron/founder of the church from other personages and may not be included in donation scenes. See, for instance, the representation of pope Zacharias (741-752 AD) with a church model in his hands in the eighth-century chapel of Theodotus at St. Maria Antiqua in Rome, or several examples of patrons found in twelfth- and thirteenth-century churches in the Balkans (for a list: Marinković 2007, *Founder's Model*, p. 146 n. 2)
 11. In the area of Georgia, these appear to be inserted in general programmes celebrating Christ's Salvation or Judgment scenes (Tamar Khundadze, *Images of historical persons in Georgian architectural sculpture of the middle ages (6th through 11th century)*, in: *Georgian Art in the Context of European and Asian Cultures*, 1st International Symposium of Georgian Culture, June 21-29, 2008, Proceedings, Tbilisi 2009, pp. 152-158).
 12. For the Church of the Holy Cross at Aghtamar: Davies 1991, *Medieval Armenian Art*; Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, Cambridge 1965. For king Gagik royal portraits at Aghtamar: Lynn Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium. Aght'amar and the Visual Construction of Medieval Armenian Rulership*, Aldershot 2007, pp. 53-96.
 13. For a thorough analysis: Cuneo 1969, *Les modèles en pierre*, p. 207; Mabi Angar, *Stiftermodelle in Byzanz und bei christlich-orthodoxen Nachbarkulturen*, in: *Mikroarchitekturen im Mittelalter*, pp. 433-453.
 14. Angar, *Stiftermodelle in Byzanz*, pp. 433-453 especially 443-445.
 15. If the church model were clad in gems, its surface would have been covered in holes, necessary for the clasps holding jewels or metal plaques. On the top of the ruined dome only, a hole may indicate the original presence of a cross. For the hole: *Ibidem*, pp. 441-443.
 16. The relief sculpture with the donors and the Deesis is now in ruin. For the royal donor portraits at Aghtamar and Oshki: Wachtang Djobadze, *The Donor Reliefs and the Date of the Church at Oshki*, in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. LXIX, 1976, pp. 39-62; Antony Eastmond 1998, *Royal Imagery*, pp. 20-28, 228-230; Jones 2007, *Between Byzantium and Islam*, pp. 53-61.
 17. According to Djobadze, the model in the hands of David (on the right of the composition) shows the southern side of the church, while the one in the hands of Bagrat, on the opposite end of the composition, the southern cross arm (Djobadze 1976, *The Donor Relief*, p. 46 n. 40). However, the poor state of conservation of David's model - already severely damaged at the time of Djobadze's analysis of the sculpted reliefs - prevents any clear understanding of the architectural representation as the southern view of the church.
 18. The whole sculpted group was painted and partially gilded (*Ibidem*, p. 40).
 19. Leslie Brubaker, *Gifts and prayers: the visualization of gift giving in Byzantium and the mosaics of Hagia Sophia*, in: *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre, Cambridge 2010, pp. 33-61 with earlier references and discussion.
 20. Consistently with the Caucasian representational codes, the donors are bigger in size than the Deesis. The image, carved on the stone blocks of the façade, adorns the exterior walls of the church. For the appearance of the royals inspired from early Byzantine imperial images: Eastmond, 1998, *Royal Imagery*, pp. 20-28.
 21. For the architecture and history of these buildings: O. Kh. Ghalpaktchian and Adriano Alpago-Novello, *Sanahin*, Documenti di Architettura Armena 3, Milan 1970; Stephan Mnatsakanian and Adriano Alpago-Novello, *Haghbat*, Documenti di Architettura Armena 1, Milan 1970.
 22. For a detailed analysis of the models: Cuneo 1969, *Les modèles en pierre*, pp. 208-209. For the royal figures: Jones 2007, *Between Byzantium and Islam*, pp. 35-43 and, with a contrasting view, Dickran Kouymjian, *An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony*, in: *Journal of the Society of Armenian Studies*, vol. XVII, no. 2, 2009, pp. 111-131.
 23. For Khosrovanoush who commissioned the churches of Sanhahin and Haghpat, with the help of her husband Ashot III: Ghalpaktchian and Alpago-Novello 1970, *Sanahin*, p. 5; Mnatsakanian and Alpago-Novello 1970, *Haghbat*, p. 4.
 24. The apparel of Smbat and Gurgen seems to confirm this conclusion: at Sanahin, they wear the costume of the Bagratid princes, showing their status at the time when the church was built, while at Haghpat they display the insignia of their kingly power, the turban for Smbat - who succeeded his father Ashot III on the

- throne of the kingdom of Ani – and the cap-like helmet for Gurgen – who ruled the kingdom of Lori, ally of the kingdom of Ani (Nina Garsoïan, *Le royaume du Nord*, in: *Histoire du peuple arménien*, pp. 243-274 especially 271; Jones 2007, *Between Byzantium and Islam*, pp. 41-43). The two royal portraits at Sanahin and Haghat and the two church models, thus, represent an image of Smbat and Gurgen's power and status within the history of Bagratid rulership.
25. Cuneo 1969, *Les modèles en pierre*, pp. 218-219.
 26. The construction of this church, attributed to the court architect Trdat, started after 1001 (Maranci 2003, *The Architect Trdat*, pp. 301-302 with references). Fragments of the model and the king's statue were found among the ruins of the church and may have originally decorated the façade, in the tradition of the sculptures in the round decorating the outside of Islamic palaces, such as those at Khirbat al-Mafjar (724-743 AD or 743-746 AD) (Anna Ballian, *Country Estates, Material Culture and the Celebration of Princely Life: Islamic Art and the Secular Domain*, in: *Byzantium and Islam. Age of Transition (7th-9th century)*, eds. Helen C. Evans and Brandie Ratliff, New Haven and London 2012, pp. 200-208). For the statue of Gagik and the architectural model, known only through archive photographs and drawings: Georgi Leon Kavtaradze, *The Problem of the Identification of the Mysterious Statue from the Erzurum Museum*, in: *Caucasica. The Journal of Caucasian Studies*, vol. III, 1999, pp. 59-66 with bibliography; Jones 2007, *Between Byzantium and Islam*, pp. 43-45.
 27. The fragmentary statuary group reached a height of 2.26 m, therefore originally the complete sculpture should have been even bigger (Jones 2007, *Between Byzantium and Islam*, pp. 43-45).
 28. For an outline of the political events which led to the creation of the so-called Greater Armenia and Little Armenia, as well as for the Byzantine and Saljuqs interests in Transcaucasia: Nina Garsoïan and Jean-Michel Thierry, *L'indépendance retrouvée: royaume du Nord et royaume du Sud (IXe-XIe siècle)*, in: *Histoire du peuple arménien*, pp. 243-296; Gérard Dédéyan, *Principautés autonomes et territoires asservis en Grande Arménie*, in: *Histoire du peuple arménien*, pp. 327-336.
 29. For the Zakarian family and the territories under Zakare and Ivane's control: Sergio La Porta, *The Kingdom and the Sultanate were Conjoined: Legitimizing Land and Power in Armenia during the 12th and early 13th Centuries*, in: *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, vol. XXXIV, 2012, pp. 73-118 especially pp. 77-86.
 30. The apparel of the figures, however, appears to reproduce the contemporary Georgian costume of high-ranking army generals (Patrick Donabédyan and Jean-Michel Thierry, *Les arts arméniens*, Paris, 1987, p. 536).
 31. Antony Eastmond, *Art and Identity in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium. Hagia Sophia and the Empire of Trebizond*, Aldershot 2004, p. 144.
 32. Cuneo 1969, *Les modèles en pierre*, pp. 220-221.
 33. This contrasts Ieni's theory that the model was originally the scale model of the church (Ieni 1978, *La rappresentazione*, pp. 247-293).
 34. For the religious background of the Zakarian brothers and the historical context surrounding Ivane's conversion: Antony Eastmond, *'Local' Saints, Art, and Regional Identity in the Orthodox World after the Fourth Crusade*, in: *Speculum*, vol. LXXVIII, no. 3, 2003, pp. 707-749 especially pp. 734-735.
 35. Ibidem, pp. 734-735. For Bagratid rulership: Cyril Toumanoff, *Armenia and Georgia*, in: *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4/1, Cambridge 1966, pp. 593-637; Idem, *Bagratids*, in: *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. III.4, London 1988, pp. 419-422.
 36. For an analysis of the models: Cuneo 1969, *Les modèles en pierre*, p. 214, who described the relief on the southern façade as belonging to the eastern façade and the one on the eastern façade to the southern. For the monastery of Dadivank: Samuel Karapetian, *Armenian Cultural Monuments in the Region of Karabakh*, RAA Scientific Researches, vol. III, Yerevan 2001, pp. 74-122.
 37. For the donors' apparel: Helen Evans, *Kings and Power Bases. Sources for Royal Portraits in Armenian Cilicia*, in: *From Byzantium to Iran: Armenian Studies in Honour of Nina G. Garsoïan*, Jean-Pierre Mahé and Robert W. Thomson eds., Atlanta 1997, pp. 485-508 especially p. 488; Eastmond 2004, *Art and Identity*, p. 144.
 38. *Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum*, S. Barkhudarian ed., vol. V, Yerevan 1982, pp. 198-199 no. 708. According to another theory, which is however unsupported by evidence, the donor portraits on the southern façade would represent the brothers Has-
- an and Grigor, while those on the eastern façade the prince Vakhtang and an unknown saint (Donabédyan and Thierry 1987, *Les arts arméniens*, p. 512).
 39. One of the first instances of donors' model on the eastern façade is in the church of the Holy Sion at Ateni, for which see above (n. 4).
 40. Until the eleventh century AD, Armenian dedicatory inscriptions were usually located on the southern façades of the churches (Timothy Greenwood, *A Corpus of Early Armenian Medieval Inscriptions*, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 58, 2004, pp. 27-91 especially pp. 36-37).
 41. The church was completed in 1238 and consecrated in 1240. For the models: Bagrat Ulubabian and Murad Hasratian, *Gandzasar*, Documenti di Architettura Armena 17, Milan 1987, p. 9-10; Donabédyan and Thierry 1987, *Les arts arméniens*, p. 526.
 42. For an analysis of the donors' image and a comparison with Saljuq representations of royals: Eastmond 2004, *Art and Identity*, p. 92-93, 144; Antony Eastmond, *Art and Frontiers between Byzantium and Caucasus*, in: *Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261-1557): Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, Sarah T. Brooks ed., New York 2006, pp. 154-169 especially 158. For the donors' portrait as pertaining to a broad eastern tradition: Evans 1997, *Kings and Power Bases*, pp. 488-489.
 43. The *gavit* first appeared in Transcaucasian church architecture around the tenth century AD and became widespread in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries AD. Originally it had a religious and administrative function and was used for public meetings of the community; later, it became the location for burials of local nobles (Alexandr Sahinian, Armen Manoukian, Herman Vahramian, *G(h)eghard*, Documenti di Architettura Armena 6, Milan 1978, p. 6).
 44. Eastmond 2004, *Art and Identity*, pp. 92-93, 144.
 45. Aleksandr Jakobson, *Dalla storia dell'architettura armena medievale (il monastero di Gandzasar del XIII secolo)*, in: *Ricerca sull'architettura armena. fonti. Miscellanea Jakobson*, vol. IV, Documenti di Architettura Armena 25, Milan 1986 (Italian translation of an article first published in: *Vestnik Obščestvennykh Nauk*, vol. 12, 1977), pp. 107-126 especially pp. 112-113; Ulubabian and Hasratian 1987, *Gandzasar*, p. 10.
 46. In the Crucifixion, the cross is flanked by two men kneeling, portrayed as supplicants, who have been interpreted as two other portraits of the donors (Donabédyan and Thierry 1987, *Les arts arméniens*, p. 526). However, they are represented beardless and with a different dress, characterized by a pointed hat; thus, they can hardly be recognized as two other portraits of Hasan Jalal al-Dawla. For a description of the acroterium: Cuneo 1969, *Les modèles en pierre*, p. 219.
 47. The acroterium is one of a group of four decorating the church façades right above the gable and originally supporting crosses: Cuneo 1969, *Les modèles en pierre*, p. 219.
 48. For an outline of thirteenth-century architecture in this area: Dickran Koumjian, *L'architecture en Grande Arménie*, in: *Armenia sacra: mémoire chrétienne des Arméniens (IVe-XVIIIe siècle)*, eds. Jannic Durand, Ioanna Rapti, Dorota Giovannoni, Paris 2007, pp. 300-305.
 49. For the purpose of discussing the function and meaning of donors' models on Transcaucasian churches, here I have avoided a thorough analysis of the donors' portraits and costumes, which have been widely addressed in the scholarly literature referenced above.
 50. For the increasing tendency to adopt 'Islamicizing' costumes in the representation of rulers: Jones 2007, *Between Byzantium and Islam*, p. 35-52.

Figures

Fig. 1: King Ashot I offers the church model to Christ; stone relief from the cathedral of Opiza (c. 826 AD) Tbilisi; Georgian National Museum of Fine Arts. (image in the public domain)

Fig. 2: The donor of the church of Korogo offering the building model to the Virgin; village of Korogo (Geor-

gia), main church, western façade, relief panel (tenth century AD). (photo: ©Kakha Khimshiashvili)

Fig. 3: King Gagik Artsruni with the church model in his hands; Aghtamar (Van lake, Turkey), church of the Holy Cross (915-921 AD), western façade. (photo: ©Dick Osseman)

Fig. 4: King David III and his brother Bagrat offering the church models to the Deesis; Monastery of Oshki (Turkey), cathedral of St. John the Baptist (963-966 AD), southern pastophory, southern wall. (detail from a photo by ©James Gordon)

Fig. 5: The Bagratid princes Smbat and Gurgen holding the church model; Sanahin, church of St. Saviour (966-972 AD), eastern façade. (photo: ©Armen Manoukian)

Fig. 6: The Bagratid kings Smbat and Gurgen holding the church model; Haghpat, church of the Holy Sign (976-991 AD), eastern façade. (detail from a photo by ©Jeffrey Rozwadowski)

Fig. 7: Hasan and Grigor of Artsakh holding the church model; Dadivank, Cathedral (1214 AD), southern façade. (photo: ©Alberto Sanchez Gaidabura)

Fig. 8: Hasan and Grigor of Artsakh holding the church model; Dadivank, Cathedral (1214 AD), eastern façade. (photo: ©Alberto Sanchez Gaidabura)

Fig. 9: The founder holding the church model; Gandzasar, cathedral of St. John the Baptist (c. 1216 AD), drum, south-western niche. (detail from a photo by ©Matt Werner)

Fig. 10: The founder holding the church model; Gandzasar, cathedral of St. John the Baptist (c. 1216 AD), drum, north-western niche. (photo: ©Ilkin Mete)

Fig. 11: Western façade and drum; Gandzasar, cathedral of St. John the Baptist (c. 1216 AD). (detail from a photo by ©Matt Werner)

Abstract

The motif of the church patron or founder carrying a building model was inserted in church decoration since Late Antiquity, and specifically in the main apses of sixth century churches. Later, it became common in the pictorial programmes of church buildings in Byzantium as in medieval Rome and, after 1204, in the Balkans. This image bears a high symbolic meaning and, at the same time, is a powerful means of communicating the patron/founder's role in the construction, as well as displaying his/her faith and devotion, all at once.

In Transcaucasia this pictorial motif first appears in Late Antiquity, probably as evidence of the cultural interaction with Byzantium, in the form of a relief sculpture decorating the exterior walls of the churches. However, with the passing of time it became a characteristic feature of Transcaucasian churches, as a part of the overall decorative programme of church exteriors or as the only figurative image on church façades.

This paper explores patterns of continuity and change in the meaning of church models in those territories on the edges of the empire, particularly Transcaucasia. Concentrating on the pictorial motif of donors' models, and principally on the value of the microarchitecture within the image and the church decoration, it reflects on its use through time, and especially in the great Transcaucasian monasteries of the late twelfth and thirteenth century AD. The analysis of church models, as reproductions of the physical building and symbolic elements of the pictorial composition, will allow for a reflection on the use of microarchitecture in the imagery of Transcaucasia. After the tenth century AD, the emphasis on donation scenes and particularly on architectural models on the façades of Transcaucasian churches displays the importance of donors' model as a feature of the Transcaucasian area, which presented political, ideological or religious messages to the beholder and, as such, was an entity of cultural history.

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Title

Maria Cristina Carile, Buildings in their patrons' hands? The multiform function of small size models between Byzantium and Transcaucasia, in: *kunsttexte.de*, Nr. 3, 2014 (14 Seiten), www.kunsttexte.de.