**“King’s Painter” Tevdore and his inscriptions**

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The paper deals with “King’s Painter” Tevdore and his inscriptions preserved in three churches of Upper Svaneti (northwestern highland region of Georgia) dated back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The textual and visual data allow us to reconstruct the status of the painter and his impact on the embellishment of these churches. The inscriptions are considered from various perspectives, with a special emphasis on their political and social context. Tevdore’s title stressing his ties with monarchical power aimed to extend the “royal presence” in Svaneti. The spatial constructs, creating semantic focuses for the display of authors’ inscriptions, permit an evaluation of his status and place in the given social system.

Keywords: painters’ inscriptions, medieval Georgian art, David IV, Georgia, Svaneti, wall painting, King’s painter Tevdore

Medieval Georgian monumental painting has preserved various types of artists’ inscriptions revealing a complex “communication system” developed within Orthodox Christian culture. Textual and visual materials demonstrate diverse forms and strategies applied by artists for their self-representation.¹ In monumental paintings the identities of artists/masters are displayed not only in the verbal form – in texts inscribed on the works of art – but also by applying multiple tools involving a sophisticated interplay of inscriptions and imagery, spatial constructs, light and color. Painters’ inscriptions preserved in medieval Georgian churches vary in their character – some of them are brief modest invocations hardly visible to the beholders,² while others are extensive, well discernable texts.³ Their layout, scale, content, literary style and “visibility” are directly connected to the painters’ status and their role in the embellishment of churches.


² In rock-cut churches (Nos. 7, 8) of Sabereebi, Davit Garedji desert, tenth century, there are surviving painters’ laconic inscriptions. One of them is located on the eastern wall of the north arm, another in the apse – between the feet of Christ. In Vardzia, a late twelfth-century painter’s inscription is inserted in the ornamental strip in the conch. Z. Surtalaje, Sabereebis’ p’reqkali carceredi, Tbilisi 1985, 67–68, 114–116; E. Privalova, Rospis’ Timotesubani, Tbilisi 1980, 129 (with earlier bibliography). Although inscriptions in Betania (late twelfth century) – one is inscribed in the floral ornament in the apse, above the altar, and another in the eastern jamb on the window in the south arm, hidden in the vegetation at the feet of Aaron – do not indicate directly that they belong to painters, their location has led scholars to hypothesize that they are masters’ “autographs” Eadem, Novye dannye o Betanii, in: Proceedings of the 4th international symposium of Georgian art, Tbilisi 1983, 16–17. The inscription inserted in the ornament of the apse of Ozaani church has also been attributed to its painter (N. Ch.?). Eadem, Rospis’ ts’erkvi “Vozneseniit’ – Amagleba” v Ozaani, Ars Georgica 9 (1987) 123–124 (with earlier bibliographic references).

³ Incription of Michael Maglakeli in Matskhvarishi church, 1140 AD, is located in the spandrels of the east blind arc of the north wall; in the Archangels Church of Zemo Krikhi, the late thirteenth-century renovator of the eleventh-century murals is mentioned in the inscription on the lower part of the north wall, in the composition with the keteroi; in the church of Sori, from the fourteenth century, an inscription belonging to two painters is written on the north wall. In Tsalenjikha church bilingual Greek and Georgian inscriptions are displayed on the western sides of the west piers. T. Varsaladze, Freskovai rospis’ khudozniika Mikaela Maglakeli v Matskhvariisba, in: idem, Graziinskai srednevekovai monumental’niia zhvropis’, Tbilisi 2007, 146; eadem, Freskovai rospis’ v ts’erkvi Arkhangelov sela Zemo Kirkl, 35; I. Čičinaże, Sxirtlaże, Tbilisi 1985, 8; Kalopissi-Verti, Painters in Late Byzantine society, 146–147, fig. 11.
Fig. 1. Sts. Archangels Church, Iprari, chancel barrier with an inscription
The earliest painters’ inscriptions preserved in Georgia date back to the tenth century. From the eleventh-twelfth century onward painters’ “signatures” appear more frequently. During the fourteenth century and in subsequent periods, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, artists’ inscriptions significantly increased in number. The “autographs” of artists occur elsewhere in the church interiors including apses, above entrance doors, or north and/or south and west walls, and on the piers of domed churches. Among the artists re-

corded in the painted inscriptions are both laymen and clergymen.

Striking examples of an artist’s inscriptions are shown in the murals of painter Tevdore, who held the prestigious title of “King’s Painter”. His inscriptions clearly indicate, that between 1096–1130 AD he decorated three churches in Upper Svaneti, the northwestern highland region of Georgia. This paper will analyze the preserved textual and visual data and will attempt to reconstruct the status of the painter and his impact on the embellishment of these churches. It will also consider the functioning of these inscriptions from various perspectives, with a special emphasis on their political and social context.

The earliest painting of Tevdore decorates the interior of the Archangels’ Church in Iprari. (fig. 1, 2) The two-line inscription (240×10 cm; letters 3–3.5 cm) was executed in the ancient Georgian uncial script “asomtavruli” in white paint against a dark green background. It runs across the top of the chancel barrier (entablature). The masonry structure with a central Royal Door and two lateral openings is a typical form of chancel barriers in Svaneti. The inscription reads:

> “Christ, this holy church was painted and adorned [for pray of aznauri] of this khevi, all minors and majors, for their children and for the souls of their deceased.”

Obviously, Mikael Maglakeli, Giorgi Chari, Gerasime and Giorgi Jokhtoberidze were laymen, while the sanctuary apse of Samtavisi was painted by Meliton, bishop of Samtavisi, seventeenth century; St. Eustathios church in Ertatsminda was embellished by Meletios, the hieromonk of the Georgian monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem. [Za] charia hieromonk from Thessaloniki, hieromonk Demien from Athos contributed to the embellishing of Georgian churches as well. For bibliographic references v. n. 6.


The words of the text are separated by two or three white dots. The inscriptions use vertically elongated letters. This inscription has been published several times: T’aqlisvili, op. cit., 236; Sh. Amiranashvili, Istoriia gruzinskoii monumental’noi zhivopisi I, Tbilisi 1957, 134–135; Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Volskaia, op. cit., 30–101, for bibliography v. ibid., 131–133; V. Silogava, Svanet i epigrafskaia zhelebii II, Tbilisi 1988, 70–71. My English translation of the texts follows readings of Georgian texts published in: Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Vol’skai, op. cit.
Holy Archangels have mercy in both lives Amen. It was painted in the year $kh_g$ since the Creation, koronikon$^{12}$ tiv (316) (i.e. 780+316=1096) by the hand of Tevdore, the King’s Painter, saint Archangels. Have mercy.”

Another church painted by Tevdore is dedicated to Sts. Cyricus and Julitta. (fig. 3, 3a) The painter’s inscription written in white paint on a dark blue background appears on the west wall, over the entrance (240×30 cm, letters 4.5–5 cm). It states:

“Christ, in the name of the Lord, this holy church of St. Cyricus was painted and adorned .......... for glorification and pray of aznaurs of this khevi .......... and for all those who build this holy church.........; Saint Cyricus exalt and forgive all of them.

Was painted in the year $kh_g$ since the Creation (=1112), koronikon..........by the hand of Tevdore, the King’s Painter$^{13}$

The last painting of Tevdore dated to 1130 decorates St. George Church in Nakipari. (fig. 4) Like in the Iprari church, here Tevdore’s inscription runs across the upper part of the entablature of the templon (330×17 cm; letters 5–7 cm). (fig. 5) The white letters of the inscription are set against a dark green background:

“Christ, in the name of the Lord this holy church of St. George was painted and adorned for glorification and pray for so]uls of all aznaurs of this khevi .......... Saint George, the great martyr, forgive and rise us up Painted in the year $kh_g$ and the

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$^{12}$ Koronikon is a Georgian dating system used from the eighth century AD. Cf. V. Grumel, Traité d’études byzantines. La chronologie, Paris 1958, 146–153.

$^{13}$ Amiranashvili, Istoriiî gruzinskoi monumental’noi zhivopisi, 38; Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Võškaa, op. cit., 31; The fragmentary state of the inscription has led to various readings of the date. V. Silogava reads $kh_g$ and koriniko tiv (=1111); Silogava, op. cit., 73–74.
These inscriptions are of great importance in many respects. First, they preserved the painter's name, his title and the dates of execution of the murals. Moreover, these texts provide significant information about the painter's social status, artistic patronage and the performative role of inscriptions.

The mentioned supplicatory inscriptions record actors who took part in the creation of these works of religious art – the commissioners and the executor of the paintings. It is clear from the inscriptions that all three churches were decorated on the order of anonymous commissioners belonging to the lower-rank local feudal elite – the azaunuri (major and minor) of khevi. Therefore, we are dealing here with collective patronage of art. It is elite – the commissioners belonging to the lower-rank local feudal churches were decorated on the order of anonymous paintings. It is clear from the inscriptions that all three religious art – the commissioners and the executor of the tors who took part in the creation of these works of re-

As epigraphic material demonstrates, Tevdore was a prestigious figure and therefore his identity is specially stressed in the painted inscriptions. Regrettably, we have no other evidence about this painter. We know nothing about his provenance. It is unknown whether he worked in the royal workshops or any other advanced artistic centers of his time or which projects he may have been involved in between decorating the mentioned churches in Svaneti. The modest size of the churches leads us to suppose that their embellishment were not long-lasting projects, and that therefore Tevdore must have been involved in other artistic activities as well. What we know is that he held the title of "King's Painter", which is not recorded in any other sources. However, the title attests that by the end of the eleventh century Tevdore was already an acknowledged painter, whose professional skills were highly esteemed by the ruling elite. Tevdore is an original master, whose works are characterized by a particular monumentality, impressive, emotionally charged characters and epic visual narration. Well-organized compositions are united together on the basis of carefully thought-out theological programs. Tevdore's visual language, powerful figures created by a dynamic linear treatment of forms, reveals the hand of a gifted master with a strongly pronounced indi-

15 As it becomes clear from the inscriptions, major and lesser azaunuri commissioned the tenth-century silver repoussé triptychs from Chukuli and Chikhareshi, a cross from Sakdari, Lower Svaneti. G. Chubinashvili, Gruzinsko kirikano sakramentsa, Tbilisi 2007, 126–201; eadem. Freskovaiat疾病的risease v Gorkoi Arkhangelaus

16 Some scholars argue that he was local. Alashavili, Alibegashvili, Vol'skai, op. cit., esp. 99–100.

17 A distant parallel for Tevdore's title could be found in the tenth-century silver repoussé triptychs commissioned by the hand of Tevdore, the King's Painter. His style could be defined as "provincial" in relation to official "pro-Byzantine" paintings, but I am more inclined to attribute them to another "non-Hellenized" visual tradition. His paintings greatly influenced the local artistic production. Some fresco cycles of the eleventh century of Svaneti demonstrate close stylistic affinities with his paintings.


19 His murals drastically differ from the stylistic trends of the "official art" of this period, particularly from the murals decorating the narthex of the cathedrals of the royal monastery of Gelati, founded by David IV as his dynastic mausoleum (1106 AD). Gelati frescos (1125–1130) reveal distinctly featured "Hellenophile", pro-Byzantine stylistic features; v. also illustrations of Alaverdi and Gelati Gospels, respectively (respectively dated to 1054 and twelfth century) illustrations; For Gelati narthex paintings v. T. Virsaladze, Fragmenty drevnet freskovoi rassvet glavnogo gelatskogo khrnova, in: idem, Gruzinsko samanievestva momentanaishvii zhivopisi, Tbilisi 2007, 95–145; v. also A. Eastmond, Royal imagery in medieval Georgia, University Park, Pennsylvania 1998, 62–67; For manuscript illuminations and related bibliography v. N. Kav'aria, Alaverdis ot'txavis (A–884) mosatulobis gajormebis t'avisbebeban, Sak'art'velos sizveleni 9 (2006) 89–112; eadem, Gelat'is ot'txavi, Sak'art'velos szveleni 11 (2007) 59–78.

have a painted ornamental pattern imitating precious textile. Over the lateral round-headed arches are two pairs of saints – the half-length frontal figures of Sts. Demetrios and Stephanos, the Proutomartyr on the right side and Sts. Cyricus and Julitta on the left. At the edges of the screen are depicted large lit candles. The shallow sanctuary apse of the single nave church has a monumental half-length trimorphon, a “Deesis”, with Christ flanked by the supplicating Virgin and St. John the Forerunner in a conch and four standing figures of the church fathers flanked by the lit candles. The nave is decorated with three Evangelic scenes and individual figures of the Archangels and saints, depicted in two registers.

The masonry screen covers an apsidal semi-cylinder and reveals to the viewers only the conch with the Deesis.

21 Ibid., 33 ff. fig. 11; V. also M. Qenia, Sitqvisa da gamo-saxulebis mimart’ebis sakit’xisat’vis k’art’ul moxatulobebši (Ip’raris mxatvrobis magalit’ze) Sakartvelos sizveleni 4–5 (2003) 147–168.

22 Compositions and individual images are depicted in two registers on the vault and walls of these one-nave churches. The Archangels’ hieratic monumental figures flanking the sanctuary are depicted in the upper register. Below them, on the north wall is St. Michael the Archangel with Joshua at his feet, the Virgin and Child accompanied by St. Anna on the south wall. The Annunciation is on the upper part of the west wall, the Nativity in the south vault and the Baptism on the north vault. The lower register displays Sts. George and Theodore on horseback. Although the Georgian inscription does not indicate Theodoret’s title (strateletes, or tyron), his facial features allow his identification as St. Theodore Stratilates. The same is true for St. Theodore depicted in Lagurka and Nakipari. The female saints, Sts. Barbara and Catherine, are on the west wall, above the Annunciation. For the decoration of the church of Ip’rari v. Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Vol’skai, op. cit., 33–55, figs. 11–14; Qenia, op. cit.

Therefore, the imagery and the inscription of the sanctuary screen are added to the dominant eschatological subject of the conch. The saints depicted on the screen could be perceived as intermediaries between Christ and the supplicants – the azaours and Tevdore. The candles depicted on the screen have numerous symbolic meanings in Christian church practice; they add to the semantics of the screen and reinforce the concept of supplication and salvation. Representations of lit candles have a liturgical connotation and allude to the Celestial Liturgy. The inclusion of candles in the iconographic programs of medieval Georgian churches (esp. in apse decoration and in the scenes of Hypapante) is explained by the Jerusalem liturgical practice followed by the Georgian church in the early stage of its history. However, it could be assumed that the lit candles depicted on the templon have both ritual and devotional connotations. They also visualize the practice of lighting candles during church services and prayers and therefore reinforce the supplicatory plea contained in the text. They could indicate the lighting of

23 In Christian worship candles were used on various occasions. Their function is rooted in the metaphor of light revealed in the Scripture. The light refers to Christ and eternal life (J 8,12; R 21, 23). On the use of candles in Byzantium v. Candles, in: ODB I, 371–372 (R. F. Taft, A. Kazhdan).

candles on behalf of others (the deceased) – the commissioners and the painter mentioned in the inscription.

The eastern part of the church and, the decoration of the conch, chancel barrier and adjacent walls are perceived as an integral whole conveying a complex theological concept. The main eschatological idea manifested in the monumental Deesis of the conch is enriched with the images of saints depicted on the screen, and the Archangels of the upper register on the adjacent parts of the vault and walls. The “entablature” of the screen corresponds to the dividing strip of the conch and sanctuary wall as well as to the registers of the nave walls. Archangel Michael with Joshua at his feet and the Virgin and Child together with St. Anna become visually bound with the screen. The overall program of the sanctuary, involving both the conch composition and the chancel barrier imagery, underlines the concepts of intercession and salvation. For the viewers facing the church apse, the horizontally unrolled inscription on the top of the chancel barrier becomes visually and conceptually engaged in the “performative” space of the sanctuary. The apse window and the western door are the only sources of light in the dimly lit small one-nave church. Therefore, the templon is situated between two beams of light. The light coming from the western and only door flashes out the chancel barrier with the inscription and emphasizes its semantic value. The layout of the sanctuary and chancel barrier offers a well-orchestrated supplicatory iconographic scheme where the inscription becomes its integral focal part. The Nakipari inscription must be considered in this context as well.

The structure of the Nakipari sanctuary screen differs from the Iprari sanctuary barrier – three arches are supported by four columns with capitals. It has painted images of saints – St. Demetrios, the two Stylites and an unidentified young saint (Cyricus?). The monumental full-length “visionary Deesis” occupies the conch of the church. Traditional figures of bishops appear on the sanctuary walls. The upper, more important zone is occupied by Christological scenes, while the lower part of the north wall represents a heraldic composition of military saints on horseback – St. George slaying Diocletian and St. Theodore. St. Theodore is shown facing the West and St. George the East. Thanks to the juxtaposition of the warrior saints, Theodore, the namesake of the painter, faces the congregation standing before the templon. In the church of Nakipari a doorway in the south wall is added to the apsidal window and western door. The inscription, owing to its location at the top of the templon, the size of the letters and the white paint, attracts the beholders’ attention.

In the church of Lagurka the artist’s inscription, which is located on the west wall, in the area between the door and window, is accompanied by images of saints – the window is flanked by the standing figures of Sts. Cyricus and Julitta. Sts. Barbara and Catherine are depicted on

Fig. 6. St. George Church, Nakipari, apse conch
in opposite directions: St. George towards the East, while St. Theodore is headed to the West. The direction of St. Theodore could arguably be explained by his “special mission” to provide assistance and protection to Tevdore.

It is clear that the location of the inscriptions within the sacred spaces was one of Tevdore’s main concerns. All three inscriptions have liminal locations – two of them are at the threshold of sanctuaries and the third demarcates the boundary of sacred space. It should be noted that the thresholds and liminal zones of sacred spaces regulated the social hierarchy within the feudal system.

The chancel barrier, one of the focal points of the liturgical space, is faced by the congregation during the service and/or their individual prayers. Therefore, believers look straight at the supplicatory inscriptions mentioning anonymous donors and the painter’s name and his title. The liminal place of the dedicatory inscriptions on the sanctuary screen enhances the significance of those who are mentioned there. The chancel barrier, as a threshold between the earthly and heavenly realms or tangible and intangible worlds, has a polyvalent symbolic meaning. The sanctuary enclosure, among others, was a “place of prayer”.

Thus the temple was an appropriate place for supplicatory inscriptions addressed to the Heavenly ruler. The theological interpretation of the sanctuary screen formulated later by Simeon of Thessaloniki (1386–1429) adds to the spiritual dimension of the structure: “Hence the entablature above the columns maintains the bound of love and the union in Christ of the Saints on earth with (saints) in heaven”. Such interpretation echoes the iconography of the screens discussed in this article.

The inscription on the west wall above the entrance in Lagurka attracts attention in its own way – it is viewed when one leaves the church. The place of this inscription was also “semantically oriented” as the church doors symbolize Christ, who is an entryway to Paradise (J 10, 7 “……..I am the door of the sheep………..”); J 14, 6: “I am the way and the truth and life. No one comes to the Father, but through me”). The entryway to the church is understood as the way to Salvation and to Paradise accordingly.

In the Church of Lagurka the inscription on the west wall facing the sanctuary is engaged with it in a spatial “dialogue”. The church door could be perceived as a semantic counterpart of a Royal Door, the central opening of the temple. Both serve as demarcating devices denoting the liminal zones. Such a shift in the placement of the supplicatory inscription is based on the mystagogical interpretation of a sacred space, where each component has multiple symbolic meanings and each part and structural element of a church is involved in a complex system of correlations. It also could be suggested that the place of the inscription between the window and entrance, on the

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28 Although Tevdore addresses St. Cyricus, his mother St. Julitta, together with popular female saints represented on the west wall, provide protection for the suppliants mentioned in the text. In the proximity of the west wall with the Baptism and the

ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts/0720_germanus/02_div-liturgy.htm.


31 N. P. Constas, Symeon of Thessalonike and the theology of the icon screen, in: Threshold of the sacred, 170.

32 V. The tripartite division of a church by Symeon of Thessalonike, Constas, op. cit., esp. 166–167.

33 Ibid.
western wall, was determined by the apotropaic function of inscriptions.\textsuperscript{34} The supplicatory inscriptions are placed in the vicinity of the images of patron saints, which virtually provide intercession and protection to the persons mentioned in the texts. In this respect, the west wall of Lagurka echoes the programs of the chancel screens of Ip- rari and Nakipari.

The place and arrangement of Tevdore's inscriptions create both visible and invisible links between various parts of the sacred space, supplicants and congregation, laymen and clerics, earthly and heavenly realms, tangible and intelligible. Tevdore, together with the aznaurs, appealing to the heavenly protection "virtually" (through their inscriptions), makes part of the congregation. The plea in written form is added to the pronounced prayers and supplications of the believers attending church services. The presence of saints on the altar screens and the west wall with Tevdore's inscriptions enhances the meaning and power of the written prayer. In the "hierarchy of supplication" saints have an important role and the represented saints: stylites and female martyrs together with a child martyr (St. Cyricus) could be perceived as providers of assistance in ascen to Christ.\textsuperscript{35}

As we have seen, in the discussed churches appear two different strategies of integration of written supplication into ongoing religious rites and rituals performed in the sacred space. The arrangement of inscriptions within the sacred space engages the audience – all three inscriptions are visible and readable and therefore the persons mentioned there are incorporated into the "social and spiritual commemoration".\textsuperscript{36} In this respect it is worth mentioning the importance of the verbalization of texts in Byzantine practices. Hearing and seeing are intertwined in religious rites and therefore the supplicatory inscriptions correlate with the liturgical texts read during services and/or individual prayers of congregation members.\textsuperscript{37}

In order to determine Tevdore's status it is necessary to compare his inscription with painters' autographs from other churches, which are also associated with royal power. In contrast to Tevdore, Mikael Maglakeli, the master painter of murals with the royal panel depicting King Demetre's (r. 1125–1156), the son and heir of Davit IV Ag- ter painter of murals with the royal panel depicting King

Eastmond, New York 2015

35 On this subject v. I. Javaxišvili, T


37 These issues are considered by A. Papalexandou, Text in context. Eloquent monuments and the Byzantine beholder, WI 17/3 (2001) 259–283.

38 For the inscription v. Virsładze, Freskovâli rospis' khudozhnika Mikaela Maglakeli, 148.

39 Privalova, Rospsi' Timotesubani, 129.

40 Eastmond, Royal imagery, 103–114 (with earlier bibliography)


execution of the frescoes. The content and topography of Mikael's inscription do not indicate his prominent social status or prestige. These murals must have been commissioned by the local elite – the eristavi of Svaneeti, who are depicted together with King Demetre I although it could be assumed that the high-rank local governors – the eristavi, "entrusted" their commission to a well-known master of their time. According to the inscription Mikael is presented just as a humble master, who was only "technically" involved in the decoration of the church. Anyhow, the Matskhvarishi panel indicates the active engagement of art in the manifestation of official political life.

Almost 50 years later, during the reign of King of Kings Tamar (r. 1184–1213) Giorgi Chari left his autograph in the north low part of the conch in the church of the Dormition in Vardzia.\textsuperscript{39} Here again we are dealing with a high-rank donor's commission. Rati Surameli, eristavi of Tori, south Georgia, is depicted on the north wall, where King of Kings Tamar (r. 1184–1213) and her father King Giorgi III (r. 1156–1184) are portrayed.\textsuperscript{40} Although Giorgi is a great master, demonstrating the advanced, "aristocratic" stylistic trends of that time, his inscription is hardly visible from the nave of the church, as it is hidden in the background decorated with small flowers. However, the place of the painter's signature on the right-hand, privileged side reserved for the righteous acknowledges that he is worthy to be "presented" in the heavenly realm.

The "spatial hierarchy" of churches elaborated by Byzantine theologians correlates the places of supplica-

tory and dedicatory inscriptions with the social status and wealth of the people mentioned there. The prominent plac-
Svaneti was one of the principalities which played an important role in the defense of the kingdom, especially of its northern borders. Its significance was already well-known in the early medieval period, as Byzantium and Persia struggled for domination over its territories.\(^{43}\) There is extremely scarce historical evidence about interrelations between Svaneti and the central power in the following periods, and the epoch of Davit IV is not an exception in this regard. It has been suggested that Svan provided an important military service to the central authorities.\(^{44}\) It is significant that Vardan eristavi of Svaneti rose against George II (1072–1089), the father of Davit IV.\(^{45}\) Therefore, it is not surprising that the establishing and reinforcing of royal power in Svaneti was on Davit's political agenda. One of the important instruments for establishing of a monarch's authority was royal artistic patronage. Although, in our case, the king was not directly involved in the commissioning of the works of art, it could be assumed that his “envoy” was entitled to decorate the churches in alliance with the local nobility. The multi-facet interrelation between the central and local representatives of power is illustrated by the Matshvartsvanishvili panel considered above. The political message conveyed by the royal panel is interpreted in a variety of ways,\(^{46}\) but it is obvious that church decoration was a part of the propaganda of royal authority and power in this strategically important highland region.

The lack of evidences makes it impossible to establish what kind of relationship Tevdore had with the royal court, the aznaurs, commissioners of the murals, and central power. The omission of a ruler's name in the inscriptions is also quite significant. This could be explained by the commissioners' intention to demonstrate their own power and the political significance of Svaneti, but at the same time, the inscriptions could be perceived as a declaration of loyalty to the royal power in the region and manifestation of the importance and “political weight” of this region and its nobility.

As it has been demonstrated the inscriptions with the painter's name had multiple facets, which were understandable to the contemporary audience. The place, content and pictorial setting of inscriptions communicate in verbal and non-verbal form important religious and non-religious concepts. The texts addressing the heavenly protectors are seen by both clergy and congregation. The considered inscriptions, demarcating transitional zones of the churches, convey religious, social and political messages. First of all, they represent the donors' identity and ensure their permanent engagement in the services, as well as their commemoration through the ages. It should be stressed that Tevdore is the only person whose name is mentioned in the inscription. This could be explained by his advanced social and presumably economic status. Due to Tevdore's privileges implicitly indicated in the inscriptions (both in verbal and non-verbal form), he might have been of equal rank to the aznaurs – the commissioners of the paintings or have even exceeded their social status.

The inscriptions permit us to re-contextualize Tevdore's paintings: the painter's high official title associated with monarchical power introduces political aspects to the religious context and adds to his authority. The engagement of the “King's Painter” in the decoration of the churches of Svaneti, elevates the commissioners’ – the aznaurs of khevi – prestige and brings them closer to royal power. Therefore, the churches decorated by the local elite acquire wider political meaning, involving a discourse of power and the role and importance of Svaneti in the construction of the unified kingdom of Georgia.


\(^{43}\) Berženishvili, op. cit., 427–429.

\(^{44}\) Kartlis cxovreba I, ed. S. Quax'č'išvili, Tbilisi 1955, 315–316 (in Georgian).

\(^{45}\) About the meaning of this panel v. Virsaladze, Freskovai rospis' khudozshnaka Mikaela Maqaladze, 146–162; G. Abramishvili, Kidev ert'xel atenis sionis moxatulobis t'ariģisa da K'titort'a identip'ikac'iis šesaxeb, Narkvevebi (sak'rtvelos xelovnebis saxelmcip'o muzeumi) 5 (Tbilisi 1999) 72–88, esp. 76–80 (in Georgian); Eastmond, Royal imagery, 73–83.
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Мада натписи не откривају имена наручилаца, бележе име сликара и његово звање. Такав став према сликару, заједно са његовим повезивањем с владарем, наглашава значај уметниковог учешћа у украшавању три цркве у Сванетији и у исто време допринос престижу наручилаца. Ти натписи показују сложен међуоднос између наручилаца и сликара, централне власти и локалне феудалне еlite. Теодорови натписи допуштају, такође, да се прати укључивање локалних достојанственика у динамичне политичке процесе који су се одвијале у њихово доба.

Теодор је, како показује епиграфска грађа, био угледна личност и зато је његов идентитет био посебно истакнут у фреско-натписима. У метнико звање потврђује да је Теодор крајем једнаестог века већ био познат сликар, чије је професионалне вештине високо ценила владајућа еlite. Његова дела, као остварења оригиналног мајстора, одликуju посебна монументалност, импресивни карактери с емоционалним набојем и епска визуелна нарација.

Теодорови натписи изведени су на олтарским преградама (цркве у местима Ипрари и Накипари) и на западном зиду, изнад улаза у цркву (Лагурка). Место и поставка тих натписа остваруju и видљиву и невидљиву везу између различитих делова светог простора, приносилаца исписаних молитви и литургиске заједнице, лаика и клирика, земаљског и небеског царства, додирљивог и недодирљивог. Теодор, заједно са азнаурима, молећи небеску заштиту, чини „виртуелно“ (преко натписа) део литургиске заједнице.

С обзиром на „просторну хијерархију“ унутар храмова, коју су разрадили византијски богослови, место на којем су исписани молитвени и ктиторски натписи зависило је од социјалног статуса и богатства личности поменутих у тим натписима. Истакнутост места на којима су изведени натписи с поменом анонимних наручилаца – великих и мањих азнаура кевија – и сликара почастованог престижним звањем дозвољавају да се изнесу извесне сугестије о личности тог живописца. Звање „краљев сликар“, које упућује на Теодорову везу с краљевском власту, може такође указати на његов економски статус (имовинско стање). Зато је прихватљиво претпоставити да је заједно са локалним племством – азнаурама поменутим у натпису – он био ктитор зидног сликарства.

Недостатак извора онемогућује сагледавање односа између Теодора, азнаура и краљевског двора. Изостављање владаревог имена може се објаснити намером азнаура да покажу властиту моћ и политички значај Сванетије, али, истовремено, натписи могу бити виђени као израз лојалности краљевској власти у региону и манифестација значаја и „политичке тежине“ тог региона и његовог племства.