

## **The Motive of the Ram in the Architectural Decoration of the Christian Churches in Caucasus between the 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

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**Abstract:** *The article deals with the motive of the ram's head in the Christian art of Caucasus. The origins of iconography have been traced back to the ancient local archaeological cultures (Coban-Colchis) in Caucasus and in the Mediterranean region to the Neolithic period. This motif is among the most ancient sacral signs still in use in the traditional culture of the region. It appears on the façades of the Christian churches between the 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries due to the influence of the traditional culture. Represented on the façades of the churches, it has attained protective and apotropaic functions.*

**Keywords:** apotropeia, ram, fertility, Farn, architectural decoration.

The research is dedicated to the motive of the horned skulls and their meaning in a system of the sacral signs of Caucasus. A preceding publication of the author dealt with the motif of the bull's head in the architectural decoration of the Christian churches in Caucasus in the medieval period<sup>1</sup>. The basic methodological approaches to the problem have been formulated therein.

The main point of this image's difficult interpretation by Christian canons is its possible affiliation to a system of sacral signs of the traditional culture. The typological proximity of the image to the motifs of the ancient local archaeological cultures is highly probable<sup>2</sup>. The conservatism of the material culture of Caucasus has been noticed by many ethnographers. They have argued about the methodological possibility of using the ethnographical

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<sup>1</sup> E. Endoltseva, *A Motive of the Bull's Head as a Decoration of the Medieval Churches in Southern Caucasus* // Anastasis. Research in Medieval Culture and Art. Vol. IV. No. 1 / May 2017, pp 128-142.

<sup>2</sup> N. A. Aladashvili, *Monumental'naya skul'ptura Gruzii [The Monumental Sculpture of Georgia]*, Moscow, 1977, pp. 217- 234.

material of the 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries for the interpretation of the objects that belong to the ancient archaeological periods and cultures. A. A. Miller constated the stability of the material culture of the different peoples in Caucasus, in particular those living in the mountainous regions (the Avars, the Laks). He pointed to the exceptional preservation of the “archaisms in an everyday life at least in the material culture”<sup>3</sup>. The researcher has been the first to formulate the key element of the antiquities of Caucasus: “a continuity in the development of the principal forms” of the material objects in “Caucasian Japhetic world”, “with insignificant variative changes”<sup>4</sup>. This thesis has been illustrated by the ancient sacral signs (different rosettes, horns, ornaments etc.) concerning their use in the modern traditional material culture of Dagestan. A. A. Miller also stressed a special part played by the Coban culture in the process of formation of these sacral signs system. The researcher has applied these observations to the study of the image of the dog. He has proved a possibility to trace the transformations of the image of the dog on the objects from the ritual Coban axes (the 10<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) to the different steles that can be dated back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This outstanding scholar has managed to demonstrate the continuity of the representations of this animal in Caucasus. He has also defined the main characteristics for the later images, that is stylization and convention. Besides, A. A. Miller has for the first time noticed and described another principal characteristic of the zoomorphic images in the region. Of particular interest is a part the Coban archaeological culture played in their formation. “Coban culture is determined by the intensive development of the images of animal form, this very aspect could give an abundant material for both studies of the artistic treatment of these themes and a justification of them by the data of Japhetidology”<sup>5</sup>. Another important idea formulated by A. A. Miller is essential for the studies of the zoomorphic images in the region i. e. emphasizing the “Abkhazo – Svan – Mengrel milieu” as a territory especially rich in “relict forms”<sup>6</sup>.

The idea of the continuity and conservatism of the forms in the traditional everyday culture of the Northern Caucasus has also been endorsed by Y. Y. Karpov<sup>7</sup>. The same author stressed the meaning of horns

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<sup>3</sup> A. A. Miller, *Drevnie formy v material'noy kul'ture sovremennogo naseleniya Dagestana* [Ancient Forms of the Material Culture of the Modern population of Dagestan]. *Materialy po etnografii* [Ethnographic Materials]. Leningrad, 1927, p 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 294.

<sup>7</sup> Yu. Yu. Karpov, “*Rogatye*” *derevyannye sosudy zapadnogo Dagestana* [“Horned” Wooden Vessels of the Western Dagestan]. *Etnograficheskie tetradi* [Ethnographic papers], № 12. St. Petersburg, 1998, p. 5 – 12.

(horned skulls of different types) in a system of the traditional sacral signs in Caucasus. Meditating upon the sacral meaning of the symbol (horns), the scholar underlines its connection with “the ancient cultures of the Near and Middle East”<sup>8</sup>. G. Movchan expressed similar concerns as for the abundance of archaisms in the decoration conception of the traditional house in the mountainous regions of Caucasus (for example: the traditional Avar house)<sup>9</sup>. Analyzing these objects, the scholar noted a “really phenomenal state of preservation of ancient relict features, whose origins and the living conditions that engendered them are traceable through thousands of years”<sup>10</sup>.

V. Bardavelidze made similar conclusions concerning the continuity of forms in the traditional culture and the latter’s archaism in analyzing graphic art and a system of the decorations of the traditional house in the mountainous North-Western part of Georgia, Svanetia<sup>11</sup>.

Regarding the mountainous regions of Dagestan, the author witnessed the archaisms abundance in the material culture of those who lived there.

Meditating upon the methodological applicability of ancient archaeological artefacts to interpret the later ritual sketches, the scholar has noticed that “there are petrified forms of the most ancient motifs in Georgian folk art that have absolutely lost their original meaning, yet there are ethnographic and folk relics that, on the one hand, belong to the most ancient phase of cults’ development ; on the other hand, their form and more or less, their full conception could be reconstructed”<sup>12</sup>.

The same idea concerning the continuity of forms in the traditional culture from most ancient times to the present day has been demonstrated by R. Gagloiti by the Ossetian materials. “The Ossetians kept to their old pre-Christian cults and beliefs longer than their neighbors. It has been expressed by venerating community cults, making sacrifices, and by communal feasts”<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> G. Ya. Movchan, *Staryy avarskiy dom v gorakh Dagestana i ego sud'ba. Po materialam avtorskikh obsledovaniy 1945–1964 gg. [An Old Avar House in the Mountains of Dagestan and its Lost. Based upon the Author's Surveys, 1945–1964]*. Moscow, 2001, p. 368.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 370.

<sup>11</sup> V. V. Bardavelidze, *Drevneyshie religioznyye verovaniya i obryadovoe graficheskoe iskusstvo gruzinskikh plemen [The Most Ancient Religious Beliefs and the Ceremonial Graphic Art of the Georgian Tribes]*, Tbilisi, 1957.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 244.

<sup>13</sup> R. Kh. Gagloyty, *O nekotorykh kul'takh (barana, kozla, loshadi, ryby), dominiruyushchikh na territorii Yuzhnoy Osetii v pozdneantichnyy i rannesrednevekovyy periody (po arkheologicheskim materialam) [On Certain Cults (of the Ram, Goat, Horse, and Fish) Dominating the Territory of South Ossetia in*

There have been methodological attempts to connect not only folk art with its ancient archeological prototype,s but also this art with that of monotheistic religions, in particular with Christianity<sup>14</sup>.

The present research deals with the motif of the ram's head in the architectural decoration of the Christian churches in Caucasus in the medieval period. It has been determined that this motif is found mainly in the churches situated in the high mountainous regions (Racha in Georgia, Karabakh, Southern Ossetia).

For example, the head of the ram along with other protomes (the bull, the lion, and the eagle) decorate the cornice of the Southern and Northern façades of the church in Zenobiani (Georgia, the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries) (fig. 1)<sup>15</sup>.

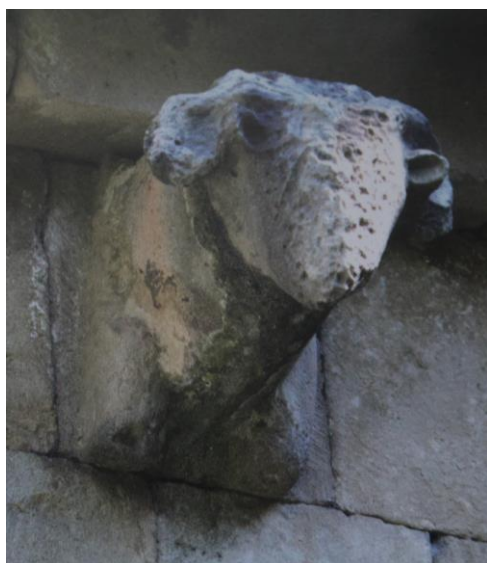


Fig. 1. The protome of the ram. Cornice on the façade of the church in Zenobiani (Georgia), X – XI c.

The façades of certain churches in Svanetia from the same period are also decorated with the protomes of animals, among them the ram. Besides, the head of the ram with the unusually depicted horns (as two circles on both

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Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval Period (Based upon Archaeological Materials)]. *Izvestiya [News]*, # XXXVI. Tskhinval, 2000, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Yu. Yu. Karpov, *Gorsko-kavkazskaya bozhestvennaya triada [The Highlander Caucasian Divine Triad]*. *Khristianstvo v regionakh mira [The Christianity in the World Regions]*. St. Petersburg, 2002, pp. 172 – 179.

<sup>15</sup> T. Dadiani, T. Khundadze, E. Kvachatadze, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture*, Tbilisi, 2017, p. 118. Fig. 291–294.

sides of the head)<sup>16</sup> is represented on the east façade of the church in Yeli<sup>17</sup> (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The ram's head on the eastern façade of the church in Yeli (Georgia).



Fig. 3. The ram's head. Zemo Krikhi, the annex. X (left)

Fig. 4. The ram's head. Zemo Krikhi, X c. (right)

<sup>16</sup> The difference from the horns of the bull is that the latter are represented in form of the crescent moon.

<sup>17</sup> T. Dadiani, T. Khundadze, E. Kvachataдзе, *Medieval Georgian Sculpture...* Fig. 297.

Such decoration may be considered typical for the region<sup>18</sup>. The head of the ram appears several times in the sculptural decoration of the church in Zemo Krikhi (Western Georgia, Racha) from the same period, the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>19</sup> ( fig. 3, 4).

On the territory of Georgia, the head of the ram also appears in a later period, in the interior of the annex of the church in Didi Khorenia (the Late Middle Ages)<sup>20</sup> ( fig. 5).



Fig. 5. The protomes. Interior of the Annex. Didi Khorenia. Late Middles Ages. The ram's head. Zemo Krikhi, annex. X c.

The ram's heads decorate the four corners of the quadrangle of the belfry in the monastery near Zemo Monasteri village (Southern Ossetia) (fig. 6); the belfry was constructed a bit later than the church, to be more precise, at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup>

The ram's head decorates the capital of the column in the gavit's interior in Gandzasar monastery (1266, Karabakh)<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, . Fig. 307, 308.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem Fig. 628.

<sup>21</sup> R. Mepisashvili, V. Tsinladze, *Arkhitektura nagornoy chasti istoricheskoy provintsii Gruzii – Shida-Kartli* [The Architecture of the Mountainous Part of the Historical Province of Georgia – Shida Kartli], Tbilisi, 1975, 130.

<sup>22</sup> A. L. Yakobson, *Iz istorii armyanskogo srednevekovogo zodchestva (Gandzasarskiy monastyr' XIII v.)* [From the History of the Armenian Medieval Architecture (Gandzasar Monastery of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.)]. *K osveshcheniyu problem istorii i kul'tury Kavkazskoy Albanii i vostochnykh provintsiy Armenii* [The Coverage

The motif of the ram's head was widespread on the territory of Caucasus (especially on both sides of the Great Caucasian ridge) in ancient times<sup>23</sup>.



Fig. 6. The ram's head. Belfry of Zemo Monasteri. XIV c.

In particular, this motif was one of the most important sacral signs in the Coban-Colchis cultural historical community (the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age). As R. Gagloiti has noticed, "the special veneration of the ram (sheep) might be connected with the leading part of small cattle in the pasture breeding, which had been generally formed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC in the mountains of Caucasus"<sup>24</sup>.

From the period of the Early Neolith, the cult of ram was gradually shaping parallel to the increase of the economic importance of the sheep. Its cult was closely connected to the idea of fertility<sup>25</sup>.

There are numerous representations of the ram's heads and its stylizations on the cult objects of different types in the burials on the territory of Ossetia (Digoria) and Western Georgia.

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*of the Problems of History and Culture of Caucasian Albania and the Eastern Provinces of Armenia*], Yerevan, 1991. p. 447.

<sup>23</sup> A. Moshinsky, *The Cult of the Double-edged Axe in Northern Caucasus. Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia. An International Journal of Comparative Studies in History and Archaeology*, vol. 7, № 1–2, 2001. pp. 71, 74.

<sup>24</sup> R. Kh. Gagloyty, *O nekotorykh kul'takh (barana, kozla, loshadi, ryby)*... p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.



For example, the ram's heads with the characteristic spiral horns decorate the bronze plate plaques from Galiat and Kumbulta (Southern Ossetia, the second rotocoban period, the 13<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) and the ritual bronze axes from Faskau<sup>26</sup>.

Besides, there are different pendants and details having the shape of the ram's horns frequent among the female jewelry from the burial complexes of central Caucasus (the 12<sup>th</sup>- 10<sup>th</sup> centuries . BC) along with the famous pins from the period of the Middle Bronze Age. Special hooks referr to the elements of the male ritual costume of the Late Bronze period (the 14<sup>th</sup>- the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC), made of bronze wire of circular section with bilateral spiral roundings (the burial of Stirfaz in Southern Ossetia)<sup>27</sup> ( fig. 7).



Fig. 7. The bronze hooks. Late Bronze Age (XIV – XII c. BC). National museum of the Republic Southern Ossetia in Tshinval.

Analyzing the meaning of the objects with the motif of the ram's head, A. P. Moshinsky has noticed that the origins of the cult of the double axes can be traced back to the ancient civilizations of the Near East (Chatal-Huyuk, the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC)<sup>28</sup>. "During several millennia, this symbol was typical for the world of the Near East. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC, the motif of the double axe was widely used on Trans-Caucasian pottery"<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> A. Moshinsky, *The cult of the double-edged axes...*, p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> From the exhibition of the National Museum of the Republic Southern Ossetia in Tskhinval.

<sup>28</sup> A. Moshinsky, *The cult of the double-edged axes...* p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.



The scholar shows that the image of the hovering bird with the wings stretched on both sides with the pommel in form of the ram's head (as on the bronze plate plaques) is an allusion to the double axe. He also points out the similarity in the interpretation of the images of the bird and of the ram in Trans-Caucasia and in Asia Minor using the Iranian concept of *farn*, offering the following explanation. "The *farn* in the mythology of Iranian-speaking peoples could assume the form of either a bird of prey or a ram. The actual concept of *farn* is not clearly defined: it can be the sun, water as a gift of the sun, abundance and a symbol of royal power. We do not, of course, assert that these Iranian ideas had already made their way to the Caucasus at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. It is possible that what we have here is a mythology shared by a variety of peoples, including the Indo-European ones. Judging based on the available materials, variations of the myth are also to be found in Greek mythology. Let us recall the myth of the Golden Fleece, in which we find the golden ram flying across the sky... to the Caucasus, to the land of Aetes, son of Helios (Apollodorus 11, 9, 1). ... The golden ram, a gift from Hermes,...figures unequivocally as a symbol of royal power (Apollodorus, Epitome, II, 11). ... Robert Graves has convincingly demonstrated that the golden ram acquired this significance in connection with the cult of fertility, or rather with *heavenly dew*"<sup>30</sup>.

Subsequently, A. Moshinsky makes an interesting assumption concerning the spiral horns of the ram on the objects from the Coban-Colchis cultural historical community (in this case, on the plate plaques from Digoria). He supposes that they can be regarded as the symbol of the sun (as well as the spiral images). Besides, the goddess of fertility -, as a particular facet of the goddess of the animals could be made zoomorphic is represented in the shape of a hoofed animal, in particular a mountain ram<sup>31</sup>. In this context, as the scholar notices, the ram's head on the plates from Digoria can embody the head of the goddess<sup>32</sup>.

In addition, A. Moshinsky states that "the plates contained a complex system of symbols permeated with the idea of fertility, which in its turn was linked to the solar cult, the cult of the goddess of animals or the goddess of fertility and of the creature who personifies her, namely the winged ram, who at the same time was a model for an attribute of that cult – the double axe. The cult of the double axe continued to exist in Northern Caucasus right up until medieval times... (the plates of this type were still found in Ingushetia until the 8<sup>th</sup>- 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD)"<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 80.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p 82.

V. Miller meditates as well upon the possible links between the cult of the ram and the cult of fertility and female goddess<sup>34</sup>. The same idea has been supported by R. Gagloyty<sup>35</sup>.

To confirm the observations concerning the meaning of the image of the ram, considered a very important sacred sign in the spiritual culture of Caucasus during many millennia, a limestone head of the ram which decorated the Paleochristian church in Tigranokert (Karabakh), dated between the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (fig. 8) should be paid attention to. It is of note that in the Paleochristian period, even on the territory of the Byzantine empire, the ram's head appeared in the decoration of churches<sup>36</sup>.



Fig. 8. The ram's head. Limestone. Archaeological Museum of Tigranokert. V -VI c.

There are numerous fragments of clay water vessel handles having the shape of a ram's head in the collection of the above-mentioned museum in Tigranokert, dated as belonging to different historical periods (Nor Hajkajur, the 9<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, medieval vessels from the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD).

<sup>34</sup> V. F. Miller, *Osetinskie etyudy [Ossetian essays]*, Vladikavkaz, 1992, p. 252.

<sup>35</sup> R. Kh. Gagloyty, *O nekotorykh kul'takh (barana, kozla, loshadi, ryby)...*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> P. Niewöhner, *Byzantine Ornaments in Stone. Architectural Sculpture and Liturgical Furnishings*, Berlin, 2021, p. 51. Fig. 118, 119.

There are the images of the ram's head along with the solar signs and the wings in the culture of Urartu. We give as an example the ritual bronze situla from the tumulus MM (about 740 BC)<sup>37</sup>.

The motif in question was of importance for the Alans as well. The representations of the ram's heads are found on the amulets and earrings from Northern Caucasus between the 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD<sup>38</sup>.

Here are examples chosen among many others. In Ediss burial ground (the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, Dzaus region of Southern Ossetia), in the burial complex #8, a zoomorphic vessel shaped as a ram has been discovered near the buried person<sup>39</sup>. The neighboring burial complex #10 contains a silver pin with the volute-shaped pommel<sup>40</sup>.

The sacred significance of the ram's head or its derivative in shape of two symmetric spiral roundings is preserved in the traditional everyday culture of the peoples from Northern Caucasus. For example, the horned skull (or an object/image symbolizing the characteristic spiral horns of the ram) decorates the overhead post and the beam in the traditional house of the Ossetians.

The same motif can be found in the iron upholstery of the door of one of the most venerated sanctuaries of Ossetia, Recoma Uastardzi<sup>41</sup>.

The representation of the ram is also found in the carvings that decorate the wooden armchair of the elders from the National Museum of the Republic of Southern Ossetia in Tskhinval<sup>42</sup>.

According to Robert Gagloyty quoting the findings of many ethnographers and experts in Caucasian studies, "the cult of ram is preserved in certain parts of Caucasus during a very long time up to the present day. There is a tradition of nailing the ram's horns to the wall or pillar in the sanctuaries and holy houses. The other custom is to cut out the tombstones in

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<sup>37</sup> E. Simpson, *The Furniture from Tumulus MM. The Gordon Wooden Objects*, Vol. I. *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 32. 1. Leiden–Boston, 2010, p 10. Tab. VII B.

<sup>38</sup> V. B. Kovalevskaya, *Khronologiya drevnostey severokavkazskikh alan [Chronology of the Antiquities of the North Caucasian Alans]*. *Alany: istoriya i kul'tura [Alans: History and Culture]*, vol. III, pp. 123–183. Vladikavkaz, 1995. pp 161 - 176.

<sup>39</sup> R. Kh. Gagloyty, R. G. Dzattiaty, *Pamyatniki Sarmato-Alanskogo vremeni v Yuzhnoy Osetii [Monuments of the Sarmato-Alan period in Southern Ossetia]*, . Tskhinval, 2019. p. 67. Fig. 182, Tab. 128.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem. Tab. 129, Fig. 184.

<sup>41</sup> R. G. Dzattiaty, *Kul'tura pozdnesrednevekovoy Osetii [Culture of the Late Medieval Ossetia]*, Vladikavkaz, 2002, p. 419, Fig. 99:3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem p. 424. Fig. 104: 1.

the shape of a ram (in certain regions of the central Caucasus up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century)”<sup>43</sup>.

The veneration of the ram in Caucasus is possibly caused by the fact that Caucasus is one of the regions where the process of domestication of the sheep first occurred<sup>44</sup>.

Along with the above-mentioned cosmogonical meaning of the ram as the *Farn*, the deity of abundance and fertility, the Alans and the Ossetians regarded the ram as “the first and the best sacrificial animal for ritual ceremonies. Many Ossetian feasts were connected with the pilgrimage to the sanctuaries where sacrifices of rams took place”<sup>45</sup>.

The veneration of the ram in the traditional culture of the Ossetians was closely linked to the cult of fire and to agricultural cults. Special ritual pies were cooked for the New Year celebrations in honor of the ram, its figures were molded from paste, ram-like masks were put on during the singing of Christmas carols. The representations of the ram’s heads on the luminaries in houses and in sanctuaries are numerous<sup>46</sup>.

There are special sanctuaries of the ram in the mountains of Ossetia, Fari dzuar, pilgrimaged by infertile women. People go there on wedding days to plea for a male offspring. “The cult of the ram was so popular among the Ossetians, that even separate pieces of it were venerated. In mountainous Ossetia, the houses where the ram’s heads did not hang inside for magical purposes were rare. ... The ornaments in shape of the ram’s head with its horns were very popular among the Ossetians as vessel decoration as well as on other objects”<sup>47</sup>.

There is a tradition up to the present day to hang the fleece of the ram after the sacrifice by the sanctuary (which is often the Christian medieval church, where Liturgies are not served) on the tree. As soon as it is dried, it is taken to the house and used as a talisman until the next year’s celebration. I saw such a fleece by the church near Kobet village during my trip to the Christian churches of Southern Ossetia in October 2020.

It is possible that due to the influence of the traditional culture on the architectural decoration of Christian churches, the motif of the ram’s head (in stylized form) appears on the drum of the church in Largvis (fig. 9). The western façade of this church is decorated around the portal with the other apotropaic motifs popular in the traditional culture of the Ossetians (like the hand with the iron object, the flower rosettes etc.). The church is situated in a remote mountainous region near the merging of the rivers Ksani and Churta.

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<sup>43</sup> R. Kh. Gagloyty, *O nekotorykh kul’takh (barana, kozla, loshadi, ryby)*... p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> L. A. Chibirov, *Traditsionnaya dukhovnaya kul’tura osetin [Traditional Spiritual Culture of Ossetians]*, Moscow, 2008, p.184.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem p. 185.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem p. 186.

According to historical witnesses, the monastery with the church inside has been built there in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by Eristav Kuenipneveli<sup>48</sup>. The church was damaged during the time of the Tamerlan invasion, it has been completely reconstructed in 1756 by Eristav David<sup>49</sup>.



Fig. 9. The stylized motif of the ram's head on the drum of the church near Largvis. XVIII c.

Despite the fact that the lamb (the ram) in canonical Christian art is always regarded as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice and of the Eucharist, in this case, it is included into a large multified composition placed in the central part of the church interior. Besides, the image of Christ as a lamb is typical for the western Christian art of the medieval period, while in Byzantine art, this type of Christ's representation is very rare. "The representation of Christ as a lamb was not recommended in the Byzantine empire from the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century as stated by the canon 82 of the council of Trullo (Quinisext), which took place in Constantinople in 692. This image, however, appears in the middle Byzantine period in the fresco decoration of some churches in

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<sup>48</sup> R. Mepisashvili, V. Tsinladze, *Arkitektura nagornoy chasti istoricheskoy provintsii...*, p. 140.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem p. 141.

Cappadocia. In this case, it can be regarded as a motif specific to the region, associated with the Word incarnated”<sup>50</sup>.

If the ram’s head appears in the architectural decoration of the churches separately from other figures, it is possible to interpret it as the influence of the local traditional culture, its images originating in deep antiquity (sometimes found in the local ancient archaeological cultures). It is actually especially found in the remote mountainous regions of Caucasus (for example, Western Georgia, Southern Ossetia, Racha, Svanetia), where the influence of the traditional culture is very strong. Some elements of this traditional culture originate from the Coban–Colchis cultural historical community. In the churches of Karabakh, the influence of the traditional culture is evident, originating from common archetypes born in Asia Minor and the Near East in the very remote antiquity. As archaeological witnesses demonstrate, the cult of the ram was widespread in Caucasus from the Bronze Age on. Considering the traditionality and archaism of the material culture in Northern Caucasus and Trans-Caucasia, an apotropaic function of the appearance of the ram’s heads in the architectural decoration of the Christian churches of the medieval period may be supposed (along with other horned heads of animals – for example the bull).

Such images usually appeared in the remote mountainous regions, where the influence of the higher level art of the Byzantine type was minimal.

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Fig. 2. The ram’s head on the eastern façade of the church in Yeli (Georgia). Dadiani T., Khundadze T., Kvachadze E. *Medieval Georgian Sculpture*. Tbilisi, 2017. Fig. 297.

Fig. 3. The ram’s head. Zemo Krikhi, the annex. X c. Dadiani T., Khundadze T., Kvachadze E. *Medieval Georgian Sculpture*. Tbilisi, 2017. Fig. 307.

Fig. 4. The ram’s head. Zemo Krikhi, X c. Dadiani T., Khundadze T., Kvachadze E. *Medieval Georgian Sculpture*. Tbilisi, 2017. Fig. 308.

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<sup>50</sup> Vanderheyde C., *La sculpture byzantine du IX au XV siècle. Contexte. Mise en œuvre. Décors. [Byzantine Sculpture between the 9<sup>th</sup>- 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries., Context. Implementation. Decorations]*. Paris, 2020. p. 69.



Fig. 5. The protomes. Interior of the Annex. Didi Khorenia. Late Middles Ages. The ram's head. Zemo Krikhi, annex. X c. Dadiani T., Khundadze T., Kvachatadze E. Medieval Georgian Sculpture. Tbilisi, 2017. Fig. 628.

Fig. 6. The ram's head. Belfry of Zemo Monasteri. XIV c. Photo of the author.

Fig. 7. The bronze hooks. Late Bronze Age (XIV – XII c. BC). National museum of the Republic Southern Ossetia in Tshinval. Photo of the author.

Fig. 8. The ram's head. Limestone. Archaeological Museum of Tigranokert. V -VI c. Photo of the author.

Fig. 9. The stylized motif of the ram's head on the drum of the church near Largvis. XVIII c. Photo of the author.

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