

Original wall paintings at the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani (Upper Svaneti, Georgia) and Byzantine art at the turn of the tenth to eleventh centuries*

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UDC 75.052:75.046.3](479.22 Chvabiani)»09/10»

DOI 10.2298/ZOG1539011Z

Оригиналан научни рад

The article deals with a little known ensemble of wall paintings at the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, Upper Svaneti, Georgia. The initial decoration of the church dated to 978–1001 has survived mainly in the apse. The badly preserved Theophany in the conch attracted the attention of scholars who analyzed its iconography. The Apostles in the lower zone, however, were considered to be repainted at a later date. Our examination of these wall paintings revealed no traces of later additions. Through the analysis of technique and style we aim to prove that the both compositions belong to the turn of the tenth to eleventh century. These wall paintings show unusually high quality and close affinities with Byzantine art of this period. In our view, they could be a work of a visiting artist, probably a Georgian trained at some major Byzantine artistic center. He may well have been among the artists working on wall paintings at the cathedrals built and decorated by order of kings and church hierarchs during the late tenth to early eleventh centuries, in Tao-Klarjeti or other lands of the Georgian kingdom still under formation.

Keywords: Byzantine art, Georgian art, wall painting, Georgia, Svaneti, Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, Bagrat III, Amroleani brothers, Theophany, Apostles

Many relics of medieval art and architecture have been preserved in Upper Svaneti, an almost inaccessible mountainous region in the northwest of Georgia, as a result of specific historical circumstances and the geographical location. Among tenth- to eleventh-century Svanetian churches the original wall paintings at the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani village, home of the Muzhali community, are remarkable for their very high quality and similarity to art from the Byzantine capital. So far there has been no research on the artistic particularities of these wall paintings. This is the main aim of the present study.

The Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani is a rather simple hall structure with a flat-arched vault and a projecting pentahedron apse, a recognised feature of other early churches in Svaneti. Later additions were made to the church, with a single-tier gallery including side chapels on the southern and northern sides. The original painting of the Church of the Saviour has been preserved mainly in the

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Fig. 1. View of the altar. Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani.
Photo by S. Sverdlova

* The publication appears as part of the project 'Black Sea Region and the Mediterranean World in the System of Relations of Rus', the East and the West in the Middle Ages', supported by the Russian Science Foundation: Agreement № 14-28-00213, signed on the 15th of August 2014, between the Russian Science Foundation and the Lomonosov Moscow State University. In this article the analysis of technique of wall painting was done by Sofia Sverdlova, the parts concerning iconography and painting style were written by Anna Zakharova.

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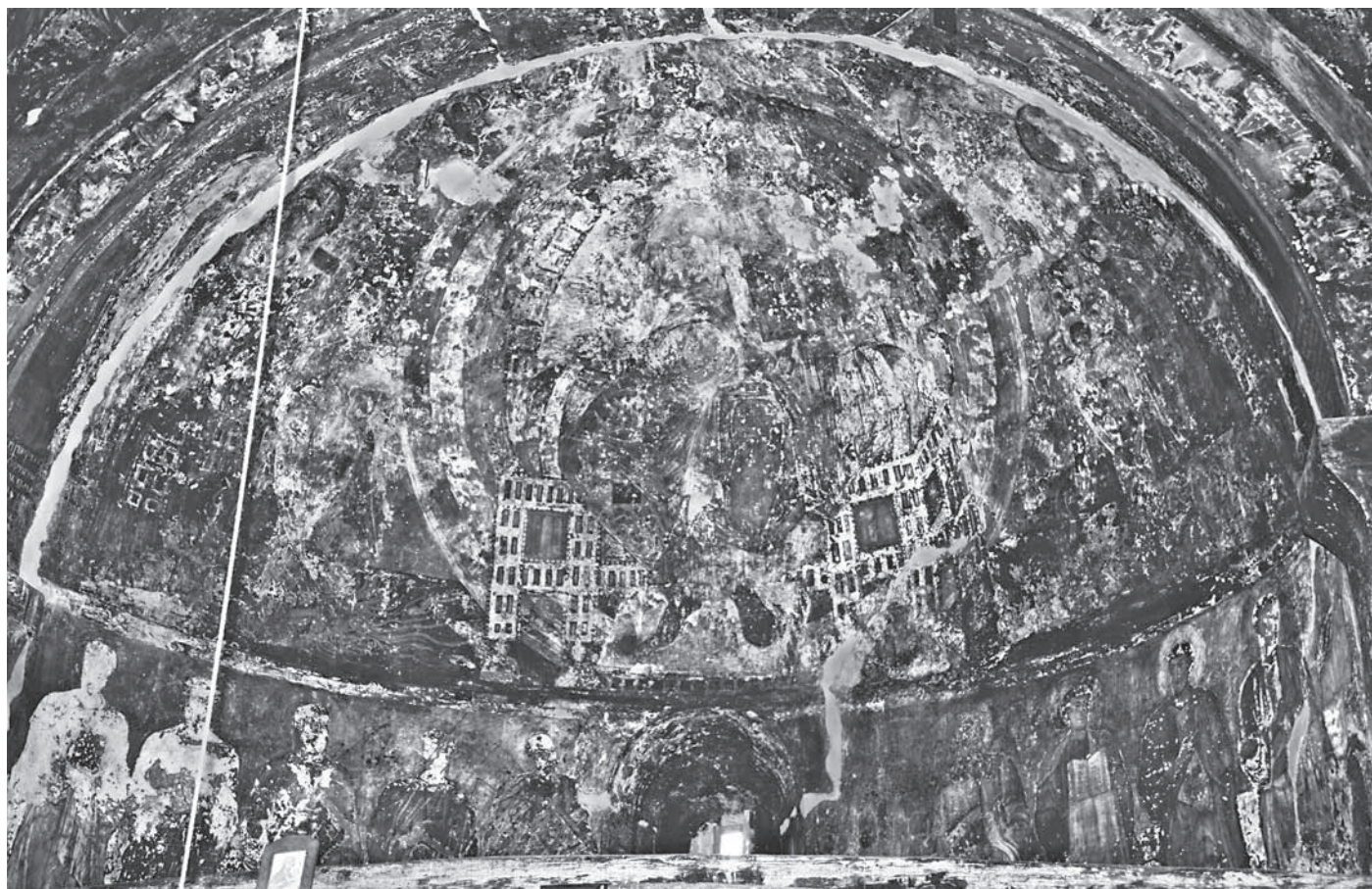


Fig. 2. *Theophany and the Apostles. Wall paintings in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, 978–1001. Photo by S. Sverdlova*

altar-space (fig. 1). Here there is a Theophany composition in the apsidal conch and the Apostles tier below. What remains of several Gospel scenes can also be seen in the naos.

Above the capitals of the triumphal arch in the apse there are extensive inscriptions dating from the first stage of construction and decoration of the church, and close examination of these produced more precise dating. The inscriptions were initially deciphered by Rene Schmerling, who refers to them in a work published in 1962 and assigns them to the tenth century, based on paleographic data.¹ They record that the church was built and decorated by the three Amroleani brothers, Bende, Amrola and Michael, during the reign of Bagrat, ‘King of the Abkhazians’. Zaza Aleksidze has identified this king as Bagrat III, who bore the title from 978 to 1001.² At that period Svan-

eti formed part of the Abkhazian kingdom that Bagrat III subsequently united with other Georgian lands.

The Chvabiani wall paintings are mentioned in various works on the art of Georgia as a whole and Svaneti in particular; moreover, almost all researchers note the high level of professional accomplishment they display.³ In these books and also in several specialised works, attention is focused on iconography of the composition in the conch.⁴ One of Zaza Skhirtladze’s recent articles was devoted to the Chvabiani wall paintings.⁵ Primarily this examines features of the iconography in the conch composition as compared to other examples of Georgian monumental painting, defines certain details of the ketor inscriptions and describes later layers of wall painting. The author also mentions that the entire Apostles register in the apse was considerably renewed at a later date. The presence of repaintings on the figures of the Apostles is

¹ R. Schmerling, *Malye formy v arkhitekture srednevekovoi Gruzii*, Tbilisi 1962, 234. The inscriptions are published in the article by V. Silogava, *Dedicatory inscriptions in Svaneti*, Svaneti 1 (Tbilisi 1977) 46–49, 79 (in Georgian, abstract in Russian), and also in the book: N. A. Aladashvili, G. V. Alibegashvili, A. I. Vol’skaia, *Zhivopisnaia shkola Svaneti*, Tbilisi 1983, 28.

² Z. Aleksidze, *Concerning the Date of the Mural Inscriptions of the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani*, in: *Matsne. Herald of the Department of Social Sciences of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. History, Archaeology, Ethnography and History of Art*, Tbilisi 1978, 3, 171–177 (in Georgian, abstract in Russian). Z. Aleksidze refutes identification of the king mentioned in the inscription with Bagrat IV (1024–1078), as suggested earlier by V. Silogava. V., also, I. Iakobashvili, D. Gagochidze, G. Tcheishvili, N. Kutateladze, T. Japaridze, *Restoration of the tenth Centuries Murals in Chvabiani Church. Amroleani’s family donor inscriptions*, in: *Dzeglis megobari. 7th Congress of the Society of Conservation of Cultural Heritage of Georgia*, 1 (75), Tbilisi 1987, 62–66, 84 (in Georgian; abstract in Russian).

³ T. S. Sheviakova, *Monumental’naia zhivopis’ rannego srednevekov’ia Gruzii*, Tbilisi 1983, 16; Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Vol’skaia, *Zhivopisnaia shkola Svaneti*, 27–29; T. Velmans, A. Alpago Novello, *Miroir de l’invisible. Peintures murales et architecture de la Géorgie (VIe–XVe s.)*, Paris 1996, 26–27; T. Velmans, V. Korač, M. Šuput, *Rayonnement de Byzance*, Paris 1999, 47, 48.

⁴ T. Velmans, *L’Image de la Déisis dans les églises de Géorgie et dans celles d’autres régions du monde byzantine*, CA 29 (1980–1981) 75; N. A. Aladashvili, *Kompozitsii altarnoi konkhi v tserkvakh Svanetii*, in: 4 Mezhdunarodnyi simpozium po gruzinskomu iskusstvu, Tbilisi 1983, 4–5; Z. Skhirtladze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monumental Painting: Establishment of the System of Church Decoration*, Oriens Christianus 81 (1997) 174–175, nt. 15.

⁵ Z. Skhirtladze, *The Painting Layers in the Church of the Saviour at Chvabiani and its Donors*, Svaneti 3 (2008) 85–91 (in Georgian, abstract in English).

also stated in a study by Rusudan Kenia, who dates the renovation to a time after the thirteenth century, when the church was repainted.⁶

There has been no stylistic analysis of the original wall painting at the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani to this date. It was assumed that the Apostles tier had been substantially renovated, and it was either ignored by researchers or described only as an element of the decoration programme. But as the survey of the wall paintings we undertook from 2011 to 2013 showed, the painting in the lower tier of the apse is on the same layer as the conch wall painting; we found no traces of later over-painting. We believe the figures of the Apostles, like the composition in the conch, should definitely be attributed to the turn of the tenth to eleventh centuries. It is hard to say why scholars have previously failed to notice that these images show obvious early characteristics, and that the entire altar wall painting belongs to a single paint layer. Moreover, the absence of stylistic analysis in studies of scholars before the late 1980s can be explained by the fact that the wall paintings lay beneath a soot deposit that was only removed in restoration carried out at this period.⁷ Whatever the case, the reasonably good state of preservation found in the Apostle figures allows us to comment on stylistic characteristics of the painting that signify an outstanding late tenth-century monument unique for this geographical area.

Iconography of the apse wall painting at Chvabiani is typical for Eastern Christian monumental painting in general, and for South Caucasian art of this time as well (fig. 2). In the conch there is the Theophany, the vision of Christ in Glory. Christ is shown enthroned on a dark blue background with white stars. His left hand bears an open Gospel and the right hand is extended in blessing. A very wide throne with a curved back is abundantly embellished with precious stones and pearls. The effulgence of glory surrounds Christ. In the upper part of the composition a segment of the heavens is visible with the benedictory *Dextera Domini*, while the sun and moon appear either side in medallions. Below this are figures of four angels in flight.⁸ Either side of the Saviour are other Heavenly Powers: two six-winged Tetramorphs on fiery chariots and two Archangels. The Archangels are arrayed in Byzantine *loroi* and bear spheres and *labara*. In the lower band the Twelve Apostles are represented holding the Gospels or scrolls.

The Theophany depicts the Second Coming of the Saviour foretold in Old Testament prophecies and the Apocalypse.⁹ Several different versions of this subject are known from apse wall paintings in Christian churches from the fifth century and later. A compulsory feature is the depiction of Christ in Glory on the throne, although representation of the Heavenly Powers may vary. The Apostles, often located in the lower band of the apse, are shown as participants in the Last Judgment and witnesses of Divine Glory.

In post-iconoclasm Byzantine art the Theophany with Apostles in the apse is replaced by an image of the



Fig. 3. *Theophany. Wall painting in the prothesis of the New Tokalı kilise in Göreme, Cappadocia, ca. 950–960. Photo by R. Novikov*

Holy Virgin and the Hierarchs tier.¹⁰ Nevertheless the old iconography remained for a long time in many areas. For instance, in Cappadocia there are dozens of ninth- to tenth-century cave churches with depictions of the Theophany with Apostles and other saints in the apse.¹¹ Quality of the painting in these ensembles varies considerably, from unsophisticated figures with vividly delineated Eastern-influenced features by local village painters to superb wall paintings by more accomplished visiting artists (fig. 3).

Many Early Christian traditions were preserved in Transcaucasian paintings, including the iconography of apse compositions.¹² Naturally there are differences in the detail, but in general the Theophany composition in Georgian churches greatly resembles those in Cappadocia. Among the earliest examples are the ninth- to tenth-century wall paintings in the David Gareji Monastery Complex: fragments from several cave churches of the Sabereebi Monastery and the ninth-century apse wall painting in the domical church of St. Dodo Monastery, which are closest of all to Chvabiani in terms of iconography (figs. 4, 5).¹³ Images of the Theophany with Apostles were widespread in the tenth to eleventh centuries in other areas of Georgia too, including Svaneti.¹⁴ In different versions they also featured in the cathedrals of Tao-Klarjeti, although only fragments of these wall paint-

¹⁰ O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration. Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium*, London 1948, 21, 52–55; C. Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church*, London 1982, 171–177.

¹¹ C. Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l'abside et de ses abords*, Paris 1991, 335–340; N. Thierry, *La Cappadoce de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge*, Turnhout 2002, 61, 113–120, 143–144.

¹² Aladashvili, *Kompozitsii altarnoi konkhi*, 1–5; Velmans, Al-pago Novello, *Miroir de l'invisible*, 19–30; Skhirtladze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monumental Painting*, 169–206.

¹³ Sh. Ia. Amiranashvili, *Istoriia gruzinskoi monumental'noi zhivopisi*, Tbilisi 1957, 30–35, pl. 17–23; Sheviakova, *Monumental'naia zhivopis'*, 9–16, figs. 26, 27, 34, 48–50; A. I. Vol'skaia, *Rannie rospisi Garedzhi*, in: 4 Mezhdunarodnyi simpozium po gruzinskomu iskusstvu, Tbilisi 1983, 3–13; Z. Skhirtladze, *On the System of the Mural Painting of the Domed Church of Monastery of Saint Dodo in Garedja*, Bulletin of the Georgian Academy of Sciences 144/1 (1991) 109–112; idem, *Early Medieval Georgian Monumental Painting* 178–194.

¹⁴ Sheviakova, *Monumental'naia zhivopis'*, 16–25, figs. 63–67, 96–97; Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Vol'skaia, *Zhivopisnaia shkola Svaneti* 11, 19, 27; Aladashvili, *Kompozitsii altarnoi konkhi*, 2–4.

⁶ R. Kenia, N. Aladashvili, *Upper Svaneti (Medieval Art). Guidebook. Georgian Guide II*, Tbilisi 2000, 65–66.

⁷ On the conservation works carried out in the 1980ies see: Iakobashvili et al., *Restoration*.

⁸ On this iconographic particularity v.: Velmans, Al-pago Novello, *Miroir de l'invisible*, 26.

⁹ C. Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei 4–8 Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1992².



Fig. 4. Theophany. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani. After Skhirtladze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monumental Painting*, 176, fig. 2



Fig. 5. Theophany. Wall painting in the domed church of St. Dodo monastery. After Skhirtladze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monumental Painting*, 185, fig. 9

ings have been preserved: in Otkhta Eklesia (980s), Oshki (main apse, 1036; southern pastophorium, ca. 970s), Ishkhani (before 1032) and Khakhuli (second quarter of the eleventh century), etc.¹⁵

However, if the iconography of the Chvabiani wall paintings is fully commensurate with the local context, this cannot be said of the technique or style of painting. Analysis of artistic aspects of the wall paintings lead us to assume that the painter was a visiting master, probably a Georgian taught at a major Byzantine centre of the arts or in Tao-Klarjeti, where in the late tenth century highly accomplished Georgian and Byzantine artists worked for several decades on commissions from kings and church hierarchs and an important local school developed, uniting both traditions.¹⁶

The technology of monumental painting in Upper Svaneti was studied by Irakly Iakobashvili in the 1980s.¹⁷

¹⁵ E. S. Takaishvili, *Arkheologicheskaja ekspeditsiia v iuzhnye provintsii Gruzii*, Tbilisi 1952, 35–39, 54, 74, 85–86, Pl. 27–32, 122–125; Amiranashvili, *Istoriia*, 36–37, 104–107; N. et M. Thierry, *Peintures du Xe siècle en Géorgie Meridionale et leur rapports avec la peinture byzantine d'Asie Mineure*, CA 24 (1975) 73–113 (on the paintings in the apses: 81, 84, 88); W. Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historic Tao, Klarjeti and Savseti*, Stuttgart 1992, 158–170; Z. Skhirtladze, *The Mother of All the Churches: Remarks on the Iconographic Programme of the Apse Decoration of Dort Kilise*, CA 43 (1995) 101–116; Velmans, Alpago Novello, *Miroir de l'invisible*, 27–29; E. Privalova, *Notes on the Murals of Tao-Klarjeti (X–XIII cc.)*, in: *Άγιον Όρος, Φύση – Λατρεία – Τέχνη*, Thessaloniki 2001, 61–71; T. Virsaladze, *Some Tenth-Eleventh Century Georgian Murals of Tao-Klarjeti*, in: T. Virsaladze, *From the History of Georgian Painting*, Tbilisi 2007, 10–100 (in Georgian); Z. Skhirtladze, *The Oldest Murals at Oshki Church: Byzantine Church Decoration and Georgian Art*, *Eastern Christian Art* 7 (2010), 97–134 (with a full bibliography on the paintings of Tao-Klarjeti; dating of the wall paintings in the present study correspond to those listed in this work).

¹⁶ A cautious proposition on the non-local origin of the artist is expressed in the book Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Vol'skaia, *Zhivopisnaia shkola Svaneti*, 27: 'Generous use in the Chvabiani wall painting of costly imported lapis lazuli, and likewise the more professional level of execution, indicate that the artist responsible studied in some central region of Georgia'. T. Velmans briefly notes that the style of the Chvabiani wall painting is close to Byzantine art of the same period (Velmans, Alpago Novello, *Miroir de l'invisible*, 26).

¹⁷ I. P. Iakobashvili, *Materialy i tekhnika rannikh stenopisei srednevekovoi Gruzii (na primerakh stenopisei 9 – nachala 11 vv. v Zemo Svaneti)*. Abstract of Ph. D. thesis, Yerevan 1989; I. Iakobashvili,

The results of his research may be briefly summarised as follows. The wall paintings at Chvabiani were painted on dry plaster. This technique was characteristic for all Svanetian monuments until the end of the eleventh century, when it was replaced by the so-called 'combined technique' first used by acclaimed local artist Tevdore. Notably, the technique of 'combined' painting in which the outlines are made on damp plaster and the rest of the painting on dry plaster existed in the tenth century in parallel with the 'dry' technique in Tao-Klarjeti, where it had in turn been brought from Byzantium. The plaster layer at Chvabiani is thin (0.3 to 0.5 cm) and well polished, also an indication of the local tradition. No preparatory drawing was revealed in these wall paintings. A casein binder was mixed with the paints, except for the background of the conch and parts of the vestments, where lazurite was used. For this pigment the binder was oat or barley water made from local cereal crops. Use of casein as a binder for the paint layer is another characteristic of Svaneti, where it was also applied to icon painting.

Natural lazurite (the mineral pigment lapis lazuli) was an expensive imported pigment very rarely encountered in Georgian painting prior to the reign of Queen Tamar, and the Chvabiani wall painting is the sole instance discovered in Svaneti. Among the tenth- to eleventh-century Byzantine ensembles that remain, lazurite was only used in large quantities for wall paintings at New Tokalı Church in Göreme, Cappadocia.¹⁸

In Chvabiani lazurite was applied to the background of the conch and the garments of Christ and the Apostles,

Materials and methods of execution of early mediaeval murals in Upper Svaneti (<http://www.nukri.org/modules.php?temp/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=580>, accessed on 01. 08. 2015).

¹⁸ A. Wharton Epstein, *Tokalı kilise. Tenth-Century Metropolitan Art in Byzantine Cappadocia*, Washington 1986, 55. As far as we can judge from visual data, lazurite was used abundantly in wall paintings of the royal cathedrals at Tao-Klarjeti – cf. observations by N. Thierry on the coloristic system of these wall paintings and the similarity of other technical methods in the monumental painting of Tao and Cappadocia: Thierry, *Peintures*, 85, 105, 106. Unfortunately we have no information on whether chemical analysis of the pigments in these monuments was conducted. Skhirtladze mentions the copious use of gold, silver, lazurite and malachite in the wall painting of Otkhta Eklesia (Skhirtladze, *The Oldest Murals at Oshki Church*, 119).



Fig. 6. *The Apostles. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, 978–1001. Photo by S. Sverdlova*



Fig. 7. *The Apostles. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, 978–1001. Photo by S. Sverdlova*

although the lower band background in the apse was left unpainted. Probably the artist had a small amount of this pigment at his disposal and used it only for the most important areas of the painting. However, the absence of a paint layer in parts of the wall painting intended to look white is not unique in Svaneti.

The most substantial differences from local tradition in the painting technique can be seen in the face modelling system. According to the observations of I. Iakobashvili, in Svaneti the facial painting was traditionally executed in two or three separate applications at most, without a layer of dark underpaint with an ochre-coloured foundation that also served as the primary flesh tone. A characteristic feature of all tenth-century Svanetian wall paintings is the graphicality and generally primitive nature of the composition. Examples of such a painting system can be seen in all the preserved monuments of this region. Iakobashvili makes no mention of any distinction between this technique and the painting at Chvabiani.

In our view the technique for facial painting seen at Chvabiani is considerably more complex than in any other Svaneti monuments of the tenth to eleventh centuries. Let us examine, for example, the Apostle John's face (fig. 11). Here there is a transparent layer of dark underpaint with an intense green tint. Probably the first outline in black paint was traced on the underpaint. Then a layer of semi-transparent pink-tinted ochre paint was applied, to which a vivid blush was added on the cheeks, nose tip and forehead. Shadowed areas are denoted by glazing of a whitened, cold greenish tone (probably mixed on the basis of the underpaint colour). A second layer of outlining was then applied in red lead. This colour defines the upper lip. Finally the artist applied fine white lines to the most prominent parts of the face, as well as light glazing by means of oblique brushstrokes in a semi-transparent white layer above the rouged areas. The sequence of the artist's work was established by visual examination and requires further detailed study, but even at this stage we can see that the process involved considerable complexity and several successive applications by an artist who studied in a major artistic centre. This is apparent not only from the use of lazurite, but also from the system of painting.

The fact that a number of technical characteristics found in the Chvabiani wall paintings are a common feature for the entire region does not in our opinion contradict the theory that the artist originated from elsewhere. Probably the plaster features in the church were created before the artist's arrival. In this way the principle of painting 'a secco' could in this case be conditioned by the circumstances of the work, rather than the preferences of the artist. The same also applies to the binding medium, which was prepared in situ from readily available materials and certainly does not indicate that the artist belonged to the local tradition.

Let us turn to an examination of stylistic particularities of the Chvabiani wall painting. The apse wall painting is remarkable for the superb correlation between all elements of the composition and the architectural forms. The figure of Christ Enthroned is predominant. The regular circle of the effulgence complements the semi-circular arch of the apse and semi-circular back of the throne. The remaining space of the conch is skilfully filled with images of the Heavenly Powers, avoiding any excessive density or sparsity. The colour arrangement of the composition is notable for its elegance and balance, with predominance of the rich blue colour of the background, which is then repeated in Christ's himation. The Christ figure has been sufficiently well preserved for us to appreciate the classical regularity of its large yet at the same time elegant and slightly elongated proportions, the delicacy of the drapery outlines and the careful precision of plastic modelling with the aid of white highlights, now somewhat darkened.¹⁹

The Apostles in the lower band are divided into two groups of six figures by the arched window in the centre (figs. 6, 7). The state of preservation of the group left of the window is significantly worse. According to the iconography and attributes we can distinguish the Apostle Paul (left of the window), and beside him the Evangelists

¹⁹ In the literature on Chvabiani only one book refers to stylistic aspects of the composition in the conch: Aladashvili, Alibegashvili, Vol'skaia, *Zhivopisnaia shkola Svaneti*, 27–29. The authors remark on 'obvious signs of superior, we might say classical, artistic training': exquisite beauty, the subtlety and complexity of colouring, the fluidity and softness of delineation, the volume of the drapery.



Fig. 8. St. John. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, 978–1001. Photo by S. Sverdlova



Fig. 9. St. Luke. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, 978–1001. Photo by S. Sverdlova

Matthew and Mark. There was obviously an image of the Apostle Peter to the right of the window, but the figure has been entirely obliterated, and after that the Apostle Andrew. Next there are representations of the Evangelists John and Luke and Apostles James and Philip, all well preserved and with accompanying inscriptions.

The figures are of large proportions: they are tall, stately, broad-shouldered and long-legged but with rather small heads. All are nearly frontal images but in natural and unconstrained poses with scarcely defined half-turns. This creates a slow, sedate rhythm, yet also gives a note of liveliness, as if the Apostles are talking between themselves. They are all clothed in chitons and himatia in colours that are very diverse and selected with a sense of refinement: brownish-red, pale or dark pink, pale ochre, light olive, light green, greenish-grey, grey-blue. The dark blue robes of the Apostles Paul, Matthew, John and Luke, painted in ultramarine, provide a bright chromatic emphasis and visually link the Apostles tier with the Theophany in the conch.

The folds of the Apostles' vestments lie naturally, delineating their body shape and their movements. Volume modelling of the drapes is achieved by a system of tonal gradations – shadows and highlights, with the aid of coloured contours in some instances. It is important to note that the delineation of contours does not play a decisive role in this painting system. Paint is applied in broad daubs that smoothly merge together. Shadows are mainly



Fig. 10. St. Jacob. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, 978–1001. Photo by S. Sverdlova



Fig. 11. St. John, detail. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, 978–1001. Photo by S. Sverdlova



Fig. 12. St. Luke, detail. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, 978–1001. Photo by S. Sverdlova



Fig. 13. St. Jacob, detail. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, 978–1001. Photo by S. Sverdlova

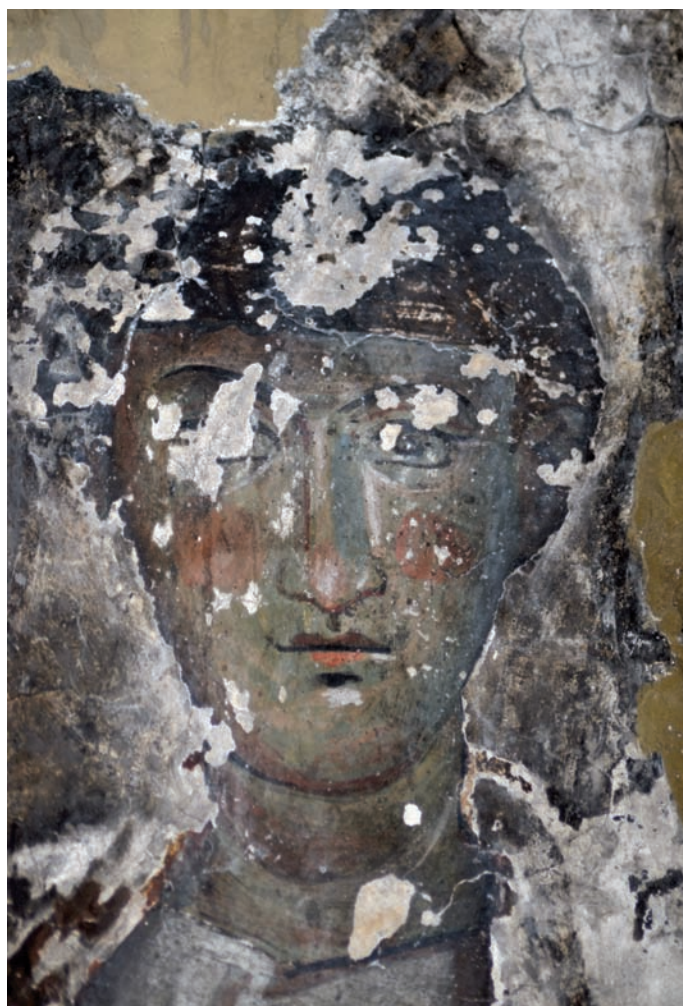


Fig. 14. St. Philip, detail. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Chvabiani, 978–1001. Photo by S. Sverdlova



Fig. 15. The Apostles. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Nesguni. First half of the tenth century. Photo by S. Sverdlova



Fig. 16. The saints. Wall painting in the Church of the Saviour in Lagami. First half of the eleventh century. Photo by S. Sverdlova

produced by intensifying the main tone, giving the effect of a soft fabric surface, shining and iridescent in the light.

All the images of the Apostles are individualised. They correspond to iconography customary in the Eastern Christian tradition, but in each of them different nuances have been expertly introduced, creating specific portrait characteristics.

The Apostle John takes one of the honorary first places in the row on the right (fig. 8, 11). The powerful wide-shouldered figure and stately frontal pose contrast with the pensive expression of his tender, youthful face turned to the side. The proportions and shapes of the facial features are almost regular, but a few details distinguish them from the classical Greek ideal. The face forms a soft oval that noticeably tapers downwards, although the forehead is quite low and the chin rather large; the nose is big but not aquiline and a little broader towards the tip; slightly slanting eyes; wide, slanted eyebrows almost joined on the bridge of the nose; a distinctively shaped mouth with wave-like configuration of the upper lip. These particularities are emphasised by energetic, supple contours. However, the artist slightly varies the thickness, colour and character of the outlines so that his images appear energetic and vivid rather than rigid and stiff, as characterised by many other Georgian frescoes. At the same time we see the multi-layer system of plastic modelling characteristic for Byzantine painting of this period. Along the edges of the face, around the nose and eyes a greenish base paint is visible, and above this gradually brighter layers of ochre, pink flushes and softly spreading white highlights that not only create an illusion of volume but even replicate a silky skin surface. But the artist uses this peculiarly Byzantine system in its simpler form: his painting is semi-transparent, like a watercolour, rather than dense and thickly opaque.

Luke the Evangelist is also depicted in scarcely discernible movement, with an almost frontal body and head half-turned towards John the Evangelist (fig. 9, 12). His face is one of the most memorable by virtue of its distinctive, characterful appearance and particularly the clearly expressed element of determination and intellect.

Facial features show the same specific nuances we observed in the image of John: the proportions of forehead and chin, also the shape of nose and lips. Vivid outlines give the face a very unambiguous expression. The long and fluid lines of the upper eyelids and precise dots of the pupils emphasise the tranquillity and profound wisdom of his gaze. The vigorously curved arch of the eyebrows and severely drawn line of the mouth with downturned corners convey a sense of resolution. Short brushstrokes depicting sparse hair growth enhance the individuality of the image. In the painting technique used for the face we see the same specific interpretation of the Byzantine system, with a multi-layer modelling of volume that is only just noticeable.

The Apostle James is shown in frontal view and his face is more immobile, with unusual eye shape (fig. 10, 13). Here we can observe the most obvious specifically Eastern flavour present in the wall painting as a whole. This individual feature combined with soft pictorial and colour modelling of the face makes the image of the Apostle James more pensive and contemplative than remote.

Detachment and far greater inner concentration are found in the image of the Apostle Philip (fig. 14). It was undoubtedly painted by the same artist as the three figures already discussed. This is shown in the painting technique, as well as characteristic proportions and shapes of facial features (especially the outline of eyes and lips).

The Chvabiani wall paintings differ considerably from all other tenth- to early eleventh-century ensembles in Svaneti, which are characterised by their conditional and schematic form of representation, flat treatment of figures with irregular proportions, angular lines for the folds of rudimentarily depicted garments and schematically outlined faces with wide-open eyes. Examples are the early wall paintings at the Church of the Saviour in Nesguni (first half of the tenth-century), of the Archangel Michael in Atsi, at two churches of St. George in Ipkh and Nakipari (all late tenth- to early eleventh-century), two churches of St. George in Swipi (Pari) and in the fields near Adishi (both early eleventh-century), the Church of the Saviour in the village of Pkhotreri, and others (figs.



Fig. 17. St. Peter ordains seven deacons. Wall painting in the New Tokalı kilise in Göreme, Cappadocia, ca. 950–960. Photo by A. Zakharova

15, 16).²⁰ All these ensembles are works of a fundamentally different quality and type of expression.

Obviously the sources of the Chvabiani master's style should not be sought in Svaneti. We see them in Byzantine painting of the second half of the tenth century. This was an extremely interesting period in the history of Byzantine art, when classical tastes of the Macedonian Renaissance were replaced by the quest for a new and more intense mode of expression, with increased spiritual content. In the first half of the eleventh century this search led to formation of the so-called 'ascetic tendency', best represented by the great ensembles produced in the second quarter of the century, such as the mosaics and frescoes of Hosios Loukas in Greece, St. Sophia in Kiev, etc. Unfortunately nearly nothing remains of Constantinopolitan monumental painting from the second half of the tenth to first quarter of the eleventh century apart from mosaics in the southern vestibule of Hagia Sophia. Our understanding of Byzantine art of this epoch is mainly derived from miniatures in manuscripts from the capital and wall paintings preserved in distant regions of the Byzantine Empire, particularly Cappadocia.²¹

Hence the wall paintings of the New Church at Tokalı in Göreme, commissioned by the family of the future Emperor Nikephoros Phokas in the mid-tenth century, closely resemble the classical style of the Macedonian Renaissance (fig. 3, 17).²² This can be seen in the proportions of lively, agile figures and the exquisite outlines of

²⁰ Sheviakova, *Monumental'naiia zhivopis'*, 16–25, Figs. 63–68, 75–76, 81–83, 86–89, 91; Iakobashvili, *Materialy i tekhnika*, 8.

²¹ On the transitional nature of Byzantine art in the second half of the tenth – early eleventh century and on the 'ascetic tendency' see: O. S. Popova, A. V. Zakharova, I. A. Oretskaiia, *Vizantiiskaia miniatiura vtoroi poloviny X – nachala XII v.*, Moskva 2012, 12–14 (nt. 1, bibliography), 31–66, 112–235; 427–441 (abstract in English). See also: O. S. Popova *The Ascetic Trend in Byzantine Art of the Second Quarter of the eleventh Century and Its Subsequent Fate*, Nea Rome. *Rivista di ricerche bizantinistiche* 2 (2005) (= *Ampelokepion. Studi di amici e colleghi in onore di Vera von Falkenhausen*, 2), 243–257.

²² Wharton Epstein, *Tokalı kilise*; N. Thierry, *La Cappadoce de l'Antiquité au Moyen-Age*, Turnhout 2002, 169–173, fiche 35.



Fig. 18. Archangel Michael. Wall painting in the Triconch at Tağar near Ürgüp, Cappadocia, ca. 1000. Photo by A. Zakharova

drapery revealing body shapes and movements, as well as the pictorial treatment of faces with animated expressions and a natural play of light on the surface.

In the best works of the late tenth to early eleventh century few features of the classical style remain, with figures and faces close to natural proportions and forms, free pictorial modelling of surfaces and richly psychological nuances in the interpretation of images. Yet an intensity and acuity appears that is not extrinsic to classical art, seen mainly in the poses and facial expressions. We often encounter images that seem internally concentrated and detached, with fixed gazes from enlarged eyes, figures frozen in motionless poses. They clearly anticipate many stylistic features established as an accomplished system in the second quarter of the eleventh century. An example of these tendencies is the original wall paintings of the triconch at Tağar near Ürgüp, which we ascribe to the late tenth to early eleventh century (fig. 18).²³

²³ Thierry, *La Cappadoce*, 90, 183, 187 dates the frescoes ca. 1000 or to the early eleventh century. De Jerphanion (G. De Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantin. Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce*, II, Paris 1936, 187–205) suggests that the main part of the wall painting is somewhat later than the column churches of Göreme, which he dates as mid-eleventh century, but he notes certain links with 'archaic' programmes of the tenth century. Restle (M. Restle, *Die byzantinische Wandmalerei in Kleinasien*, Recklinghausen 1967, 53–56, Figs. 355–373) dates the wall paintings in the southern apse to the second half of the tenth century, the rest to the eleventh century. Jolivet-Lévy (C. Jolivet-



Fig. 19. Christ. Miniature from the Gospel Lectionary, the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, cod. 204, p. 1, ca. 1000. After Weitzmann, Galavaris, *The Monastery of St. Catherine*, I, pl. III



Fig. 20. The Prophets. Miniature from the Book of Prophets, Turin University Library, B.I.2, fol. 12r, late tenth century. © Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino

Indeed, the Chvabiani wall paintings can be compared to Byzantine works from this transitional period. The proportions of large elegant figures, natural and graceful drapery outlines, smooth modelling of the folds, beauty of colour resolution – all these find parallels in works by the finest Constantinopolitan artists: e. g. in miniatures of the Gospel Lectionaries *cod. 204* from St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai (fig. 19),²⁴ the Gospel *cod. 588* from the Dionysiou Monastery on Mt. Athos,²⁵ etc.

Moreover in different versions of the typology of images, in facial features and facial painting methods we can see the Chvabiani artist's orientation towards Byzantine models, to which he introduces a slight note of individuality. Hence the Apostle John's harmony, subtle beauty and aristocratism are closer to the classical ideal, for example such works as the miniatures of the Bible of Niketas from the late tenth century (fig. 20, prophet Zechariah in particular).²⁶ The Apostle Paul with his spi-

rituality, inner zeal expressed in an energetic turn of the head and inspired gaze with dilated eyes calls to mind frescoes at the Panagia ton Chalkeon in Thessaloniki (ca. 1028).²⁷ The image of the Apostle Philip is considerably further from classical principles customary in the second half of the tenth century, and in many ways anticipates the characteristics of works of the 'ascetic tendency', such as the mosaics and frescoes of Hosios Loukas in Greece (fig. 21).²⁸ These new features in the image of the Apostle Philip are: outer immobility and symmetry emphasised by more severe and decisive outlining of every contour; inner concentration expressed in the straight-ahead gaze and severe fold of the lips; greater conditionality of plastic modelling, where patches of rouging and light acquire rather unnatural forms.

We have therefore concluded that the Chvabiani wall paintings could rate among the best in the group of Byzantine artworks from the second half of the tenth to early eleventh century. However, they undoubtedly show specific features that preclude an assumption that the author of these frescoes was a visiting Greek. He was probably a Georgian who had studied Greek art at the very highest level.

In the second half of the tenth to early eleventh century Tao-Klarjeti was a place where Byzantine and Cauca-

-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l'abside et de ses abords*, Paris 1991, 211–215) gives a broader date of eleventh century (with renovations in the thirteenth century).

²⁴ K. Weitzmann, G. Galavaris, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Illuminated Greek Manuscripts. Vol. 1: from the ninth to the 12th century*, Princeton 1990, 42–47, Figs. 92–108, colour plates III–VIII.

²⁵ S. M. Pelekanidis, P. C. Christou, Ch. Tsioumis, S. N. Kadas, *The Treasures of Mount Athos. Illuminated Manuscripts*, I, Athens 1974, 447–448, Figs. 278–289.

²⁶ H. Belting, G. Cavallo, *Die Bibel des Niketas. Ein Werk der hofischen Buchkunst in Byzanz und sein antikes Vorbild*, Wiesbaden 1979.

²⁷ K. Papadopoulos, *Die Wandmalereien des XI. Jahrhunderts in der Kirche Παναγία τῶν χαλκίων in Thessaloniki*, Graz–Köln 1966.

²⁸ N. Chatzidakis, *Hosios Loukas*, Athens 1997.



Fig. 21. St. Panteleimon. Mosaic in the Monastery of Hosios Loukas in Greece, ca. 1030–1040. Photo by A. Zakharova



Fig. 22. St. Sergius. Wall painting in the cathedral of Ishkhani, Tao-Klarjeti, before 1032. Photo by S. Sverdlova

sian artistic traditions were juxtaposed and interwoven. It was then ruled by representatives of the Bagratid dynasty, who subsequently reigned over the unified Kingdom of Georgia. They actively engaged in cultural pursuits: many famous cathedrals were built and decorated under their auspices during this period, e. g. the above-mentioned Otkhta Eklesia, Ishkhani, Khakhuli, Oshki, etc.²⁹ Unfortunately most of the wall paintings are now lost or in very poor condition. But the fragments preserved clearly show that in this region painting from the second half of the tenth to first half of the eleventh century developed along the same lines as Byzantine art.

Thierry and other scholars have already noted the link between Otkhta Eklesia, Ishkhani and other monuments of Tao with Cappadocia, concentrating in particular on technical and iconographic aspects.³⁰ For us it is more important to focus on how the painting style of these ensembles shows the same transitional character already described above, based on the wall paintings of Cappadocia.

Therefore in the cathedral at Ishkhani, where there are Greek inscriptions next to Georgian writing in the frescoes, we see on the one hand elegant proportions and natural movements of the figures, careful and delicate drapery outlines.³¹ On the other hand, the faces of several saints have very large features and exaggeratedly expressive stares (fig. 22).

²⁹ V. n. 15.

³⁰ Thierry, *Peintures*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 88–113; Virsaladze, *Some Tenth-Eleventh Century Georgian Murals*, 58–74.

In the form that had now developed the new style is represented in somewhat later wall paintings at Khakhuli³² and Oshki (1036).³³ Particularly demonstrative are such features as the figures' enlarged proportions and slowed movements, or the enormous fixed eyes. At the same time the regional specificity of this version of the 'ascetic tendency' is obvious. It becomes apparent in the more intensive, striking expressiveness of their gaze, in a more severe and graphic treatment of all the forms and other related details.

In the late tenth to early eleventh century art of this type was undoubtedly widespread in other regions of Georgia, too. That is shown, for example, by fragments of a wall painting in Kumurdo (Javakheti) from the late tenth or early eleventh century, and in Manglisi (Kartli) from the 1020s.³⁴ Many large cathedrals were built in various re-

³² Takaishvili, *Arkheologicheskaia ekspeditsiia*, 74, Pl. 97–99; Thierry, *Peintures*, 90; N. Thierry *La peinture médiévale géorgienne*, in: *Corsi internazionali di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* 20 (1973) 412, Fig. 1; Virsaladze, *Some Tenth-Eleventh Century Georgian Murals*, 57; Skhirtladze, *The Oldest Murals at Oshki Church*, 116–117, Pl. 29–30. Virsaladze and Skhirtladze date the murals of Khakhuli to the second quarter of the eleventh century.

³³ Takaishvili, *Arkheologicheskaia ekspeditsiia*, 54; N. Thierry, *Peintures historiques d'Oški (Tao)*, *Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes* 2 (1986) 135–153; Skhirtladze, *The Oldest Murals at Oshki Church*. Skhirtladze believes the wall paintings in the southern pastophorium to be earlier than the main bulk of paintings (1036). He ascribes them to the period when the cathedral was built (970s) and associates their style with monastic artistic centres of the tenth to eleventh century. In our view the specific stylistic character of these frescoes – severe and rather schematic – can be explained by their somewhat later date.

³⁴ T. Virsaladzé, *Étapes essentielles du développement de la peinture monumentale médiévale Géorgienne*, in: T. Virsaladzé, *La peinture*

gions apart from Tao-Klarjeti during this cultural heyday, but nothing or almost nothing survives of the original wall paintings.³⁵ In the early eleventh century a cathedral was built in Alaverdi by order of King of Kakheti Kvirike III and fragments of the original frescoes have been preserved in the apse. Bagrat III, mentioned in the inscription at Chvabiani, was ktitor of several important cathedrals, including those at Kutaisi (Imereti), Bedia (Abkhazia), Atskuri (Samtskhe) and Nikortsminda (Racha). In his reign con-

struction of a new cathedral was begun at Svetitskhoveli and completed between 1014 and 1029 by Catholicos-Patriarch Melchisedek I, who presided over the rich decorations. We suggest that the Chvabiani artist may well have been among the artists working on wall paintings at these cathedrals built and decorated by order of kings and church hierarchs during the late tenth to early eleventh centuries, in the lands of the Georgian kingdom still under formation. Yet his style is much closer to classical Byzantine art than other works of this group. Taking into account the small number of monumental painting fragments preserved from this period, we felt it was particularly important to examine the Chvabiani wall paintings as evidence of a very interesting artistic phenomenon that developed at a time of intensive political and cultural interaction between Georgia and Byzantium.

monumentale Géorgienne du Moyen Age, Tbilisi 2007, 319–320; Velmans, Alpago Novello, *Miroir de l'invisible*, 47–48, Figs. 44–46; Virsaladze, *Some Tenth-Eleventh Century Georgian Murals*, 57; Skhirtladze, *The Oldest Murals at Oshki Church* 117, 120.

³⁵ Cf. a survey and bibliography in: Skhirtladze, *The Oldest Murals at Oshki Church*, 115–122.

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Првобитни живопис Спасове цркве у Чвабијанију (Горња Сванетија, Грузија) и византијска уметност краја X и почетка XI века

А. В. Захарова, С. В. Свердлова

Студија је посвећена првобитном живопису цркве Светог Спаса у селу Чвабијани у Горњој Сванетији (Грузија). Истраживачи га датирају у време између 978. и 1001. године на основу ктиторских натписа. Првобитни живопис већином је сачуван у олтару: Христос у слави („Теофанија“) насликан је у полукалоти, док су у нижим деловима апсиде фигуре апостола.

У раду је углавном реч о иконографији композиције Христа у слави; фигуре апостола помињу се само као елемент иконографског програма. У недавно објављеној студији З. Схиртладзе износи мишљење да су фигуре апостола касније биле пресликане. Истраживање живописа Чвабијанија које су спровеле ауторке овог рада не потврђује претпоставку да је живопис у апсиди претрпео позније измене. Оне сматрају да су обе композиције настале истовремено и да је реч о првобитном сликарству.

Иконографија живописа Чвабијанија типична је за уметност Закавказја X–XI века. Као важне техничке особености тог живописа појављују се обилата употреба скупог лапис лазулија и вишеслојно сликање ликова и одеће на њима. Када је реч о стилу зидног сликарства Чвабијанија, он је битно другачији од оног што га показују други ансамбли из X и с почетка XI века у Сванетији; њих одликују особен схематичан начин приказивања, плошно сликане фигуре неправилних пропорција, угласте линије набора претерано украшене одеће и схематски изведена лица наглашених очију. Насупрот томе, живопис Чвабијанија веома је близак класичном стилу византијског сликарства друге половине X века. Правилне пропорције елегантних крупних фигура, вешто исцртане драперије, меко и вишеслојно моделовање набора, лепота боје, финоћа индивидуалних портретних одлика – све то налази паралеле у делима најбољих византијских мајстора. Та јединствена својства ових фресака не дозвољавају да оне буду приписане сликару пристиглом из Грчке. Реч је о Грузину који је добио најбоље грчко уметничко образовање.

У другој половини X века у византијској уметности класицистички укус македонске ренесансе

постепено смењује потрага за новим изразом, снажнијим и духовно богатијим. Најбољи радови с краја X и почетка XI века, с једне стране, и даље имају многе одлике класичног стила: природне пропорције фигура, богатство психолошких нијанси у њиховом приказивању и слободно моделоване живописане површине. С друге стране, појављују се и особености које су стране класичној уметности – интензитет и озбиљност, изражени првенствено ставовима насликаних фигура и изразима њихових лица. Неретко оне постају слике унутрашње усредсређености и издвојености, с ликовима на којима се истиче усмерен поглед великих очију, док су ставови смирени и чврсти. Византијску уметност тог раздобља обележавају сликарство минијатура, неколико синајских икона и поједина дела монументалног сликарства, укључујући и неке од живописаних целина пећинских цркава у Кападокији, које су извели изузетно вешти мајстори.

У другој половини X и првој половини XI века та врста уметности била је распрострањена на различитим територијама новооснованог грузијског краљевства, где су у то време активно развијане културне везе с Византијом, а грузијски и грчки уметници често су радили заједно. О томе сведоче, пре свега, остаци живописа великих саборних храмова у Тао Кларџетији (Отхта, Ишхани, Хахули, Ошки). Велике катедралне цркве изграђене су у том раздобљу и у другим грузијским областима, али њихов живопис није сачуван. Мајстор Чвабијанија могао је бити један од уметника који су радили на живописању неког од саборних храмова по налогу грузијских владара и црквене хијерархије. Његов стил, међутим, много је ближи класичној византијској уметности него другим делима монументалног сликарства у тој области. С обзиром на врло скромну очуваност монументалног сликарства наведеног периода, изузетно је важно размотрити живопис Чвабијанија као сведочанство о занимљивом уметничком феномену који се појавио у епохи изражене политичке и културне сарадње између Грузије и Византије.