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Propagation vs Intrusion
Islamic Influences in Medieval Georgia

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Abstract: Georgian medieval art and architecture have received little to no attention from western scholarship but have emerged in recent years as a significant field of study. Because of Georgia’s Christian ties, most historians profess that the culture of medieval Georgia was therefore relatively unaffected by the early and later Islamic conquests but was instead largely influenced by the Byzantine and Eastern Christian world. However, I do not agree with this position and believe that the archaeological record demonstrates a certain level of influence from the Islamic world as evidenced in medieval Georgian art and architecture. In this paper, I will demonstrate the Islamic influence by examining religious iconography as well as secular art. To make this analysis, I examine examples of traditional Georgian architecture and art from the Georgian Golden Age and demonstrate the influence of Islamic cultural elements in the development of Georgian art and architecture.

The political landscape of the emergent medieval Georgian nation among the predominant Islamic emirates is a relatively new field for western scholars. The medieval Georgian polity, led by King Davit IV Aghmashenebeli, rose to power in the late eleventh and early twelfth century CE. Since 645 CE the central and eastern portions of medieval Georgia had been under the suzerainty of Islamic forces. However, after Davit IV Aghmashenebeli ascended to the unified medieval Georgian throne, the monarchy increased its utility of architecture, images, and objects to convey their regional power within their political, social, and religious

spheres. The monarchy constructed a variety of churches, monasteries, and academies that held royal patron images, religious scenes, and objects. While many of those objects, frescos, and buildings were Christian in nature some Islamic elements may be observed.

Christianity’s power as poised against the influence of Islamic kingdoms was a major focus for the medieval Georgian monarchy. Georgian kings and queens consistently placed objects of Islamic political power in their churches. Despite the intense focus on Christian symbols, medieval Georgian artists and craftsmen began to adopt inherently Islamic motifs into their art and objects. However, investigation into the Islamic visual influences in medieval Georgian art has been neglected by most western scholars.

The position held by Georgian and western scholars alike has been that Georgian art and architecture were either not influenced, or received very little, from the Islamic world. Art historians, historians, and archaeologists have maintained this stance; however, I argue that there are Islamic visual influences that are extant in the art and architecture of medieval Georgia. Rusudan Mepisashvili claims that “The artistic development of Georgia did not undergo any radical changes” during the Arab occupation of Georgia. Richard Ettinghausen states that “The arts of medieval Georgia seem to have been less affected by the techniques and themes of Islamic art.” Cyril Taumanoff discusses the political history of the Caucasus and specifically that of Georgia in his chapter in the Cambridge Medieval History. He states that Caucasia was devastated by the Arabs, due to the numerous revolts and conflicts that occurred in the first century of Arab rule. He also says that “nobles and peasants began removing in large numbers to the [Byzantine] Empire.” Taumanoff, however, does not make an explicit statement on the cultural situation with the influx of the Arabs and the outflow of native Georgians to the Byzantine Empire, but he does mention the economic revival under the early Arab

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Grigor Suny focuses his history on the Arab rulers and Emirs’ political control of major centers and trade routes but argues that the periphery was left unaffected. Suny’s history seems to suggest that the periphery areas were beyond the possible influences of the central cities, such as Tbilisi, since they remained under local Georgian authorities.

The basis of this claim stems from a religious bias as well as the lack of extensive archaeological excavations and material evidence. As a Christian country since the fourth century CE, Georgia has had major ties to the Eastern Christian world. Due to this religious relationship, most historians recognize the strong influence of the Christian East, while excluding significant impacts from the Islamic world. The majority of sites analyzed by the academic community are Christian, such as churches, monasteries, or shrines. These Christian sites are important and represent a large part of the cultural identity of medieval Georgia, however, the archaeological record at large deals with the broader picture of the day-to-day lives of the individuals who lived during the medieval era and should therefore be included in any comprehensive analysis.

This essay will cover the Golden Period in medieval Georgian history, which spans from the late tenth to the early fourteenth century CE, as well as major developments of Islamic visual influences in Georgia. I address several visual Islamic themes; Islamic portraiture, sacred geometry, *horror vacui*, and architectural elements used in both domestic and defensive structures. I address these influences in art, architecture, and objects to demonstrate the impact of Islamic visual influences in medieval Georgia.

**The Georgian Medieval Period**

Leading up to the medieval Georgian Golden Period the area of the eventual Georgian Kingdom was composed of several fiefdoms ruled by eristavis, or local lords, some of whom were subservient to the king in Kutaisi. In centuries prior, various kings had attempted to unify the major fiefdoms of Georgia, Egrisi in the west on the coast of the Black Sea, Kartli in the center, and Kakheti in the east. The Georgian people were made up of multiple different cultures and peoples with different languages which made its unification difficult. The Arab geographer and historian, Al-Masudi (896-956 CE), reported that seventy-two nations lived within the range of the Caucasus. Al-Masudi concluded that the spread of

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Islam was slow and difficult because so many of the peoples and villages in the Caucasus were isolated.\textsuperscript{12} The Caucasus provided a diverse landscape that allowed multicultural groups to dwell together, but these diverse peoples were often not unified unless through a military confederation. Al-Masudi demonstrates the diverse cultural landscape that existed in medieval Georgia that provides a backdrop for understanding the Islamic visual influences and their adaptations in the medieval Caucasus.

When King David came to power in the late eleventh century CE, Georgia was a fragmented nation. In the East, Byzantium controlled the coast of the Black Sea north to Abkhazia and west into Lazica. Georgian nobles controlled most of the land in the central part of Georgia or what was known as Iberia. Whereas the western regions of Georgia and parts of Azerbaijan were controlled by the Arab Emirs, with Tbilisi as their capital. But in 1121 CE, the battle and subsequent victory by King David against the Islamic forces at Didgori in Tbilisi ended Arab rule in Georgia.\textsuperscript{13} It was from this great accomplishment that King David’s name, the Builder, was derived; however, the exact translation of the Georgian word აღმშენებელი (Aghmshenebeli) literally translated means the re-builder or restorer.\textsuperscript{14} After the unification of Georgia, King David the Builder set out on a new construction scheme and constructed new churches and monasteries, one of which was the Gelati Monastery, which became a symbol of Georgian virility and culture to rival its neighboring countries and empires in spiritual and academic achievement.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, the churches and monasteries were symbols of unity amongst Georgians as well as the emerging power of Georgia against its suppressors.

**Islamic Visual Influences in Medieval Georgian Art**

*Frescos*

The frescos at the Gelati Monastery provide some of the best examples of the development of Georgian art and the potential influences of Islam. Firstly, it is important to understand that the monastery was constructed at the end of the Islamic occupation of Georgia, thus representing the culmination of a possible Muslim artistic influence of over three hundred years upon Georgian culture, religion, and politics. Because of the monastery’s Christian importance, patrons continued to fund portraits and artwork for several hundred years ranging from the twelfth to

\textsuperscript{12} Al-Masudi, *Historical Encyclopedia*, 400-402.
\textsuperscript{13} Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 34.
\textsuperscript{14} Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 34.
\textsuperscript{15} Rusudan Mepisashvili, *The Arts of Ancient Georgia*, (USA: Thames and Hudson, 1979).
Along with the commissioning of portraits, wealthy patrons would provide funding for the painting and restoration of portraits and biblical scenes. This patronage was important because although a biblical scene or portrait could be commissioned by the same individual, the styles between these two genres were noticeably different. Significantly, the portraits carry more Islamic or even Ghavanid-Persian artistic influences, whereas the biblical scenes follow a traditional Byzantine-Georgian canon.

This difference in artistic styles can best be demonstrated by the frescos associated with burial chambers and the main cathedral within the Gelati Monastery. One example comes from the lower part of the southeastern wall of the eastern burial chamber from the southern entrance which hosts a painting of King David VI Narin from the thirteenth century (fig. 1). The portrait demonstrates a rounded face with slim almond-shaped eyes that are acutely angled at the ends and distinct facial hair and eyebrows. These features were contemporary with Islamic styles from the thirteenth century CE. The portrait of David VI Narin is next to another of King David VI Narin with similar features that mirror those of his earlier portrait. A comparative Islamic example comes from the Lashkari palace, which dates to the eleventh and twelfth centuries and specifically the throne room that has numerous individuals depicted in frescos. The similarities between the frescos at Lashkari and Gelati are demonstrated through the facial features (i.e., a rounded face with almond-shaped eyes).

On the northern wall of the main cathedral at Gelati, there are several figures with Ghavanid-Persian type mustaches and facial shapes. The faces of the male figures are more rounded than other figures depicted in religious scenes, and their eyes are almond-shaped, which were additional tendencies in some figural depictions

in Islamic art. Many of the figural frescos from the Gelati Monastery are dressed in the royal garb of Georgia, which is similar to Byzantium’s royal dress, but the visual representations of the facial features and the facial hair have some Islamic influences possibly coming from Persia. The religious imagery, however, retains the Byzantine canonized forms from previous centuries and is very much in the Eastern Christian Orthodox fashion.

The emerging period of the Gelati Monastery (eleventh to twelfth century CE) also saw the construction of multiple other churches and monasteries that utilized the same style of portraiture as the Gelati Monastery. An example is the Church of Betania which began construction in the late twelfth century CE and was finished in 1207 CE. The Betania church is located fifteen kilometers west of Tbilisi in the Vere River valley. Like in the Gelati Monastery, the Church of Betania also has numerous frescos adorning its walls. Specifically, on the lower part of the north wall of the sanctuary of Betania, there is a fresco of Giorgi III, King (Queen) Tamar, and Giorgi IV Lasha (fig. 2).

The three figures (two males, and one female) are depicted with rounded Islamic and Persian faces with almond-shaped eyes as well as thin-curved eyebrows. Like the frescos at the Gelati Monastery, the Church of Betania also demonstrates

19. King Tamar ruled during the twelfth century but was additionally the only woman in Georgian history who received the title of King instead of Queen.
a connection to both Islamic-Persian and Byzantine cultures. Furthermore, a similar fresco is also observed in a small church chamber from the Vardzia Complex, from the late twelfth century. This fresco also demonstrates the difference between the portraits of individuals represented and the religious iconography. Both figures demonstrate rounded faces with eyes and facial hair that was more Near Eastern in origin than Georgian. These external examples help to demonstrate that the secular imagery, especially of the Georgian nobility, held more Islamic and Persian influences than the religious iconography which tried to retain a religious Byzantine canon.

Illuminated Manuscripts

The Islamic style of portraiture was additionally employed in both secular and religious illuminated manuscripts. Religious illuminated manuscripts followed the established Byzantine canon just as the frescos did especially in the biblical scenes they would represent. However, texts such as epic poems or scientific codices were not bound to such stylistic rules and thus artists could experiment with styles that were not Christian in origin. For example, an illuminated manuscript of Mahmud of Ghazni at his court receives a robe from Caliph Al-Qadir painted by Rashid-al-Din Hamadani. In this illuminated manuscript multiple figures have similar facial hair to the portrait of David VI Narin in his old age. The facial hair is further demonstrated by later Persian paintings, such as in Buzurgmihr Masters the Game of Chess, from Iran dated to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century CE (fig. 3). These examples help demonstrate the continuous use of specific facial hairstyles in Islamic lands during the time of the Georgian golden period.

Beyond poetical and historical documents, astrological texts also demonstrate the use of Islamic visual styles by medieval Georgian astronomers. Astronomy in medieval Georgia was historically more advanced than some may realize. The ruins of old observatories, fragments and remains of astrological instruments, and numerous manuscripts and books are the treasures to be rediscovered by modern
Because Georgia had long-standing relations with Muslim scientists as part of the early Islamic Caliphate and then as an independent nation, it is logical to assume that the study and science of astronomy would have had some significance. This study is further demonstrated by the various illuminated manuscripts that now lay in the national archive of Georgia. One such manuscript will be discussed here. In brief, though astronomy did not originate with the Arabs, it was certainly through them that the study progressed at such a swift rate during the medieval era in Europe.

Astronomy, or astrology as it was once known, was actively practiced by Georgians in the medieval era. Medieval Georgian astrologers created various illuminated manuscripts that have striking similarities to those created by Arab scholars. It is believed that Georgian and Muslim astronomers may have worked side by side in conducting various celestial calculations during and after the Islamic occupation of the Caucasus. Therefore, the Islamic instruments’ influence upon Georgia at this time was demonstrated through both the art of astrological science and illuminated manuscripts. One of the best-illuminated manuscripts with important astronomical elements came from an astrological treatise dating back to 1188 CE. It contains a zodiac sign of Leo as well as two other important aesthetically styled figures (fig. 4). Two major aspects are important to note about them. The human figures were done in the Persian style with rounded faces and rounded angular eyes. Additionally, the very use of these types of figures in this astronomical treatise is indicative of Islamic-Persian influences. For example, a similar Persian astronomical text, illuminated with figures and animals as constellations as well as the figures that depict both the zodiacs Leo and Sagittarius are nearly identical to

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later Persian astronomical treaties, such as Abu Ma’shar who lived and worked from the tenth to eleventh century CE (fig. 5).

These figurative works are important because they suggest that while a strong Christian image was pushed by the medieval Georgian monarchy, visual elements from Islamic populations were gaining popularity. The frescos from Gelati and Betania compared to those at Lashkari certainly demonstrate similarities that do not exist in other Byzantine or Eastern Orthodox churches outside of Georgia during the Georgian Golden Age. The illuminated manuscripts and astronomical treatises also suggest that scientific influences from Islamic lands were also permeating the medieval Georgian social realm. Specifically, in how facial features, facial hair, and some aspects of dress are depicted in both mediums. These figurative elements that have been discussed in this section are only one part of Islamic influences that are further demonstrated by visual elements in medieval Georgian churches and defensive architecture.

**Islamic Influences Upon Medieval Georgian Architecture**

**Medieval Georgian Churches**

The medieval Georgian monarchy commissioned several churches and monasteries during the Golden Period in Georgia, such as the Gelati Monastery and Betania, which have been discussed above. This section discusses two other smaller churches that have exterior embellishments that may suggest an origin from Islamic architectural embellishments. Specifically, these embellishments take the

*Figure 5: Pages from a Georgian manuscript on astrology, ca. 1188 CE, Rusudan Mepisashvili, Arts of Ancient Georgia, 286.*
form of decorative motifs that are unique because they incorporate intricate designs and are clear examples of *horror vacui*, or the fear of empty spaces, typically within art and decoration. The altar block from the Church of Gveldesi, from the eighth or ninth century, and the façade rosette on the southern exterior of the Cathedral of Chiatura, from the eleventh or twelfth century, are the two primary examples discussed here. The architects and artists who adorned the masonry of the two churches with their various Christian symbols and decorations chose to include the popular Islamic eight-pointed star or *Al-Khatam* in Arabic. This symbolism appears on the southern façade of the Cathedral of Chiatura (fig. 6) and the altar block of the church of Gveldesi (fig. 7) and indicates the tendency toward an adoption of eastern symbolic traditions as noted by the prominent Georgian art historian, Vakhtang Beridze, in his book *The Treasures of Georgia*.22 I support Dr. Beridze’s claim that from the eighth to twelfth century there were tendencies which lean toward eastern and, as I suggest, specifically Islamic traditions. Since the *Al-Khatam* also appears as architectural embellishments at both churches, I believe that the Islamic influence was growing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries CE. In an article about Georgian masonry and stone carving, author Natela Aladashvili notes that the seventh and eighth centuries were times of transition for Georgian art.23 Previously the heavy Byzantine-Christian influences were the most

prominent in Georgian art but, I argue, that the Islamic invasion during the late seventh century CE would have led the people of Georgia to various other religious ideas and visual artistic influences and have given the political elite a desire to try new artistic styles.

Other displays of Islamic artistic traditions included the use of *horror vacui*. *Horror vacui* also appeared on other architectural elements on or within medieval Georgian monasteries or churches. For example, the decoration around windows or even various rosettes which adorned the façades of churches and monasteries. The Georgian monastery at Kara Dagh, near Antioch, from the thirteenth century, displayed these elements before its destruction. This site also incorporates intricate patterns and designs of possible Islamic nature on multiple pieces. One such piece is a façade rosette which contains interlocking weaves, similar to Celtic knots, around what possibly might have been a sun piece with small rays extending from it (fig. 8). Therefore, this example is one of many that demonstrate Islamic and eastern influences through multiple mediums in the religious art and architecture of medieval Georgia.

**Fortresses of Medieval Georgia**

Fortresses in Georgia represent a collection of varying styles and designs from ancient to modern which range from ancient Greek and Roman constructions to Arab, Ottoman, and Soviet Russian. Many fortresses have had multiple layers of different conquerors who overbuilt the original structures one upon the other. This has made it difficult to determine the various architectural features of Georgian fortresses. However, the many fortresses and military structures in Georgia represent the constant military life of Georgia which was an important aspect of medieval Georgian history and culture. In this short section, I will discuss the fortress at Akhalkalaki, which, I believe, demonstrates Islamic associations via extant architecture.

The Fortress at Akhalkalaki is significant because of the extant mosque at its center. The city was founded in the early to mid-eleventh century CE and resides at a very strategic point between Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey and has therefore
been an area of contention ever since.\textsuperscript{24} For example, the Seljuk sultan, Alp Arslan, sacked the city soon after Akhalkalaki’s initial founding sometime between 1066-1068.\textsuperscript{25} Throughout its history, the city, and subsequently its fortress repeatedly switched ownership between Armenia, Turkey, and, eventually, Russia. However, at some point in the fortress’s occupations, a mosque was built within its walls (fig. 9).

The mosque has no significant distinguishing features except for its offset orientation compared to the rest of the fortress. Such an orientation must have accommodated Islamic directional prayer towards Mecca. Additionally, the structure has a single dome roof that is common to some early Ottoman mosques, such as the famous Green Mosque, as well as the qibla wall is recognizable with its mihrab niche. Unfortunately, there are no extant remains of a minaret or other separated areas for cleaning that would further denote that the structure is a mosque. Architecturally, the mosque is constructed of the same local stone as most of the rest of the fortress and is constructed in a similar manner where stones are roughly hewn to create a basic fit with some exterior finishing. Similar construction methods and materials suggest that the same people who built the fortress also built the mosque and so the two may be contemporaneous.

This mosque and its location along the central southern border of Georgia is also significant because this area was and is noted for its native Muslim populations.\textsuperscript{26} Unfortunately, without further archaeological work, the mosque cannot be dated, but since the city and the incursions by the Seljuks occurred during the Georgian Golden Period it provides important insights that are not available elsewhere. The modern city of Akhalkalaki is currently positioned southeast of the fortress, but satellite images demonstrate that there was an extensive town to the north of the fortress. The possible location of this village makes logical sense as a defensive position since it is on a small plateau between the Kirkhbulaki and Paravani rivers that allowed entry from only the fortress’ end. Such a position

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{mosque.jpg}
\caption{Mosque in the Akhalkalaki fortress. Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.}
\end{figure}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{24} Ronald Grigor Suny, \textit{The Making of the Georgian Nation}, 34.
\bibitem{25} Ronald Grigor Suny, \textit{The Making of the Georgian Nation}, 34.
\end{thebibliography}
might help explain why in *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, the historic record of the various Georgian kings, the scribes recorded that Akhalkalaki had no walls.\(^\text{27}\) Thus, the fortification was a major focal point of the town since it was its main defensive system. The mosque within the main fortress complex suggests that the defenders were predominantly Muslim. To what extent the mosque served the city to the north is currently unclear, but it is possible that it also served the village’s population especially since it is large enough to accommodate a sizeable congregation.

Though the monarchy of unified medieval Georgia ruled Javakheti, which included Akhalkalaki, there seems to have been a local Muslim population as well that lived with enough liberties to construct a mosque. Not only is this fortress indicative of Islamic influences among medieval Georgian architecture, but also suggests that while the monarchy sought to propagate a strong Christian image, other cities and economic centers, such as Akhalkalaki retained Islamic identities.

**Islamic Influences on Medieval Georgian Objects**

Medieval Georgian artists used some of the same Islamic visual influences on the objects they made as I have demonstrated in the art and architecture of the period. Specifically, the use of *horror vacui* and the use of color are two notable influences on the objects of medieval Georgia. In this section, I briefly discuss what Islamic influences affected such objects as triptychs and pottery. I have chosen these two for their stunning visuals as well as for their importance in both the secular and religious spheres in medieval Georgia. Thus, by these two types of objects, I demonstrate again the effects of Islamic visual influences upon multiple aspects of medieval Georgian life.

**Triptychs and Icons**

The Khakhuli Triptych, Gelati, twelfth century CE, is a very strong Christian religious symbol (fig. 10). At its center is an enameled piece of the Virgin Mary and around the central portrait are several other Christian symbols such as crosses and portraits of saints from the period. The specific Islamic influence, however, is in the detail of the background. The background is an intricate working of vines. The vines are not inherently Islamic since the visual arts of both the Byzantine and Islamic worlds used this motif; however, it is the intense use and pattern work of the vines that I argue is Islamic in nature. When Islamic artists would utilize *horror vacui*, they would seek to not only fill empty space but “they would let it play a decorative role of its own and by doing so accord it a positive character.”\(^\text{28}\)


The medieval Georgian artists who created the Kahkhuli Triptych were employing the Islamic method and ideology of *horror vacui* by filling the space with an intentional pattern.

Traditionally, Byzantine triptychs did not use *horror vacui* in their triptychs or icons. There are some amounts of gold work used but nothing that compares to the complexity and detail found in the Khakhuli triptych among gold icons and icon frames. For example, an Icon book cover from about 1100 CE has similar elements to the Khakhuli Triptych (precious stones, a central figure or portrait, and some background decoration), but the level to which the empty spaces are filled pale in comparison. Furthermore, the background is simpler in design.

*Pottery*

There are multiple sites where pottery was produced in Georgia during the medieval period. First is the capital, Tbilisi, which remained the seat of the Arab Emir until 1122 CE when it was conquered by King David the Builder. The second is the site of Rustavi, 16 kilometers southeast of Tbilisi, which was the seat of the local Eristavi or provincial ruler. These two sites are important because of their locations and evidence found through archaeological excavations demonstrate their
similarities in the design of glazed wares similar to those developing in northern Syria and the Islamic world during the same period.

The samples selected for my comparison were taken from a study conducted by Miriam Avissar and Edna J. Stern, members of the Israel Antiquities Authority, from their handbook on Crusader wares. Additionally, I will be taking the suggestion of Ettinghausen who wrote *Islamic Art and Archaeology* to investigate the relation between medieval, specifically the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Syrian Scraffito Glazed wares and possible Georgian contemporaries. However, I will expand this comparison beyond what Ettinghausen had first conjectured by using examples from both the sites in Tbilisi and Rustavi.

From Tbilisi, multiple vessels such as plates and vases have been excavated. The primary decorative method was inscribing patterns into a white-slipped clay and then applying a colorful transparent glaze on top. This method produced vegetal or figural motifs with varied colors and designs (fig. 11). The figures included human and animalistic forms. From Avissar’s and Stein’s handbook, what they call *Al-Mina* wares, hold close similarities in style and production to those in Georgia. From examples given in their texts, the incision into a white-ware pottery and covered in a colorful transparent glaze is evident. Both the use of design and

method leads me to conclude that strong Islamic influences altered the ceramic production in Georgia.

The medieval pottery from Rustavi also demonstrates similarities to the Al-Mina wares. Specifically, the Sgraffito-type glazes where the colors run naturally together (fig. 12).\textsuperscript{32} Additionally, the fine ware ceramics from Rustavi also demonstrated vegetal designs like the Al-Mina wares.\textsuperscript{33} During the medieval period, ceramics coming from Italy also bore similar characteristics to the Syrian Al-Mina wares, especially regarding their use of color and sometimes decoration.\textsuperscript{34} The distinct relationship between the Islamic caliphates and the medieval Georgian Kingdom was the use of the turquoise blue color in some of their ceramics. For example, a glazed bowl was unearthed which dates to the ninth or tenth century CE from a site in Rustavi and was decorated with a dark blue background with lighter circles of blue in the foreground. I argue that the bowl from Rustavi, as well as most of the glazed ceramics from medieval Georgia, are indicative of Islamic influences on the manufacturing and production of pottery from the ninth to eleventh century CE.

\textbf{Conclusion}

I have demonstrated that the influence of the Islamic world was far more intertwined into the artistic and cultural fabric of medieval Georgia than previously emphasized in scholarly Georgian research. Furthermore, the Islamic influences also suggest that the propagation of a strong Christian monarchy as established by Kind David the Rebuilder gradually adopted more and more elements from Islamic populations. The Islamic world influenced both the religious and secular lives of the people of Georgia over time beginning with the mentioned Islamic conquest of the region in 654 CE and especially in the Georgian Golden Age between the eleventh and fourteenth century CE. Amongst the various churches, cathedrals, and monasteries, places such as Gelati demonstrate an incorporation of Persian-Islamic methods for painting nobles in its wall frescos, while simultaneously holding onto a Byzantine canon for its more Christian religious subjects. Other religious symbols and sacred geometry used in Islamic art, such as the Al-Khatam, were utilized on altar blocks and church facades such as at the Mgvime Church at Chiautara.

\textsuperscript{32} Avisser and Edna J. Stern, \textit{Pottery of the Crusader, Ayyubid, and Mamluk Periods in Israel}.
\textsuperscript{33} Nazi Pachikashvili, \textit{Ancient Rustavi}, (Georgia: Cezanne Publishing House, 2014).
\textsuperscript{34} Avisser and Edna J. Stern, \textit{Pottery of the Crusader, Ayyubid, and Mamluk Periods in Israel}. 
The secular Georgian world was especially influenced by the magnificent art style of \textit{Dar al-Islam}. Illuminated manuscripts of both science and fiction were heavily reflective of Islamic art of the medieval period. Additionally, the Islamic-influenced pottery styles from the medieval crusader periods in the Near East had contemporaries in Georgia during the same time. And finally, the fortresses and homes of the people who lived in Georgia during the various periods of Islamic occupation or later under its influences utilized Islamic architectural attributes such as the pointed arch and decorated exterior brickwork. The previous stance by many modern scholars on Georgian art and archaeology has been that the Islamic world had little to no influence upon the core culture of medieval Georgia. However, I argue that this perspective needs revision. Christianity certainly dominated the religious life of medieval Georgia, but the historical records do not give counts of exact Muslim populations in Georgia, only clues to the fact that Islam must have been a significant minority. The artistic and architectural examples cited in the paper thus demonstrate that the Islamic world had a significant influence upon medieval Georgia in both its religious and secular cultural evolution.