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Ecclesiastical paintings in Georgia from 1801 to 1918

The subject of my research is the nineteenth and early twentieth-century church murals in Georgia in connection with the aspects of national identity. In the Middle Ages and early Modern period, church murals visualised different attitudes towards programs, images and iconographies that were closely linked with their religious identity. In the nineteenth century, after the emergence of nationalism, church wall paintings reflected growing national and ethnic identities as well.

The chronological limits of the proposed research are determined by crucial events in the history of the country, such as the conquest of East Georgia by the Russian Empire in 1801 and the proclamation of independence of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1918.

Between these two events, are created several church murals throughout Georgia, reflecting nationalistic spirit and attitude. Georgian wall paintings of this period are vastly different from the murals of the Middle Ages and early Modern period, by atypical programmes and new iconographies where particular attention is given to Georgian saints or religious and national events connected to Georgia. On the other hand, in some of murals of this period are reflected Russian Empire's imperial identities as well.

The material to be explored includes written sources - nineteenth and early twentieth-century books, newspapers, journals, which shed a light not only on a history of that period, but some of them also lead to iconological understanding of wall painting programmes as well.

The project is important and relevant as it addresses several topical issues. Recent years have seen the increased attention of experts and society to the nineteenth and early twentieth-century art and architecture of Georgia that has revealed not merely in scholarly studies but also in lively public debates on recent ambitious restoration and rehabilitation projects. Also, the significance of the proposed research is determined by the increased interest in the nineteenth-century history of Georgia and Georgian Modernity. Finally, the project is directly linked with the issue of religious and ethnic identity which is one of the key issues in the world social science since 1970s and which has become one of the priority research subjects in Georgia as well since 1990s.

Explorers of ecclesiastical wall painting, mainly focus on the murals of Medieval period. They seldom favour with their attention of nineteenth century and early twentieth-century wall paintings. The proposed research is an endeavour to fill this gap by presenting a comprehensive study. Its innovativeness is both in the choice of material to be studied and in the research approach to be used.

The methodology of the planned study considers the works of Western Europe authors of the 2000s, which have broadened the extents of religious art discussion and present it in a wider context. The study implies multidimensional approach to the issues of art history of church, identity study and urge of postcolonial research methods. It is true that postcolonial research is dedicated to the relationships between western empires and their colonies in Eastern Europe in the first place, but it also applies to any occurrence, where interactions between imperial and local cultures exist.

The results of research will be useful for a wide circle of scholars in Georgian and international academic community, including art historians and scholars of religion, culture, and society. They will also be of great interest to general public, which is keen to know more about the history of conquered Georgia from 1801-1918 by Russian Empire.