

Images of St Eugenios in Georgia and Cultural and Political Ties with the Empire of Trebizond

Nino Chikhladze

Georgian National Museum

According to Georgian and foreign sources it is believed that Trebizond Empire was created by the help of Georgian kingdom. This political event is revealed not only in the literature sources, but also in mural painting of Georgian churches. In particular this refers to the representations of St. Eugenios of Trebizond: the patron of the newly created empire. The fact is that St Eugenios was never more than local saint and his representations are very few outside the Trebizond area. That is the reason why the representations of St Eugenios in Georgian churches are so important and could be considered as the part of contemporary Georgian politics.

There is a figure of holy soldier with old Georgian inscription "St. Eugenios of Trebizond" in the mural painting of Timotesubani dated by 1205-1215 years. Another example of declaring the political project that has been prepared by Georgian kingdom a long time ago, can be seen in Vardzia (1184 -1185), where the royal donors _ King Giorgi III and his daughter Queen Tamar are represented with St. Eugenios of Trebizond.

წმ. ევგენის გამოსახულებები საქართველოში და კულტურულ-პოლიტიკური კავშირები ტრაპიზონის იმპერიასთან

ნინო ჩიხლაძე

საქართველოს ეროვნული მუზეუმი

სადღესოდ როგორც ქართული, ისე უცხოური წერილობითი წყაროების შეკვრებით ჩვენშიც და საზღვარგარეთის მნიშვნელოვან სამეცნიერო წრეებშიც მიღებულია აზრი, რომ 1204 წელს ტრაპიზონის იმპერია ქართული სახელმწიფოს უშუალო ხელშეწყობითა და სახსრებით დაარსდა. შეიქმნა საქართველოსადმი ლოიალურად განწყობილი ქვეყანა და იმაე-

დროულად, მოხდა სამხრეთ შავიზღვისპირეთში ქართული სახელმწიფოს გაელენის სფეროს გავრცობა. მოცემულ პოლიტიკურ მოვლენათა ამსახველ თუ მათზე მიმანიშნებელ ლიტერატურულ წყაროებთან ერთად, ვფიქრობთ, მნიშვნელოვანია ქართულ ეკლესიათა მოხატულობებში დადასტურებული სახვითი წყაროებიც, რომლებიც უდაოდ შეიცავს სახელმწიფო პოლიტიკის გამოხატველ ინფორმაციას. საქმე ეხება პონტოს მიდამოების ლოკალური მნიშვნელობის წმინდანის – ეგგენი ტრაპიზონელის საქართველოში შემორჩენილ გამოსახულებებს, რომელთა რაოდენობა ტრაპიზონსა და მის მიმდებარე რეგიონშიც არ არის ბევრი, მე-12 საუკუნის დასასრულისა და მე-13 საუკუნის დასაწყისის ძეგლები კი იშვიათი გამონაკლისია.

სწორედ ამ კონტექსტში განიხილება ტიმოთესუბნის 1205-1215 წლებს შორის შესრულებული წმ. მეომრის გამოსახულება თანმდევი ასომთავრული წარწერით: “წმ. ეგგენი ტრაპიზონელია” და ვარძიის ცნობილი საქტიტორო კომპოზიცია შესრულებული ტრაპიზონის იმპერიის დაარსებამდე 20 წლით ადრე, 1184-1185 წლებს შორის, სადაც მეფე გიორგი III და თამარ მეფე მფარველობას ჩვილადი ღმრთისმშობლის ხატთან ერთად, ევედრებიან სწორედ წმ. ეგგენი ტრაპიზონელს.

The paper deals with the images of St Eugenios of Trebizond surviving in Georgia. Only a negligible number of images of the saint preserve in Trebizond and its surrounding regions, while there is not a single securely identified representation from the 12th-13th century.

Who is St Eugenios of Trebizond and how did his cult evolve? This is a local saint, who gained popularity in the environs of Trebizond as early as the Middle Ages. The first epic text describing his martyrdom, presumably written not earlier than the 6th century, tells a story of St Eugenios, instrumental in spreading Christianity in Trebizond under Roman Emperors Diocletian and Maximian in the 3rd century, as well as about his three companions, St Kanidios, St. Valerianos and St. Akylas, all of whom are commemorated on 21 January. The story has it that St Kanidios, St. Valerianos and St. Akylas were arrested together, tortured and executed, while St Eugenios was found slightly later hiding in the environs of Trebizond, in a place called ‘thorny’. After being tortured through different means, he, as well as his companions, was beheaded (J.O. Rosenqvist, 2003, 194-195). On the one hand, the popularity of St Eugenios in the region in the early Middle Ages is without doubt, which is

indicated by a legend concerning a trial in Constantinople preserved in the collection of the miracles of St Eugenios compiled by Metropolitan Johnnes Lazaropulos of Trebizond. The merchants from Trebizond summoned to the court as witnesses cited only Eugenios. Each of them being called Eugenios, the judge raised a question as to why a Trapezuntine referred only to St Eugenios while there was a multitude of other saints and why their majority bore this name. Later, as for example in the period of the Empire of Trebizond, the situation with respect to this name changed, due to which the description given in the legend is assigned to an earlier period (J.O. Rosenqvist, 2003, pp. 199-200; F. Uspenskij, 1929, p.13). However, despite its popularity, the cult of St Eugenios failed to fully emerge in the Early Middle Ages: only several prerequisites of the evolution of the cult of the saint could be observed. The text on the martyrdom mentioned neither the day of the death nor the precise place of burial. Nor the image, social status and appearance of the saint were specified (J.O. Rosenqvist, 2003, p.195). Moreover, even the 11th century revised version of the martyrdom presented by the Greek writer of Trebizond origin, Joannes Xiphilinus, fails to reveal much about the evolution of the cult, which allows us to assume that by the beginning of the 11th century, St Eugenios's church and monastery as a pilgrimage centre was not of major importance in Trebizond (J.O. Rosenqvist, 2003, p. 197). It became such only after the establishment of the Empire of Trebizond, when the cult reached new height. With the help of the state, the saint was declared official protector of Caesar, the city of Trebizond and the entire empire (J.O. Rosenqvist, 2003, pp. 197-9; A. Eastmond, 2004, p. 146). His image was imprinted on the coat of arms and the seals of the ruling dynasty of the Komnenoi, as well as on aspers, silver coins struck in Trebizond. St Eugenios's Church was named among the three holiest sites in the Empire of Trebizond the other two being Virgin Chrysokephalos ('Gold-headed') and Hagia Sophia (F. Uspenskij, 1929, p. 14). Originally built as a basilica and later transformed into a domed church, it attracted particular attention after the victory of the second emperor of Trebizond, Andronikos Gidos over Seljuk Melik, since the victory was associated with the miraculous patronage of St Eugenios (A. Eastmond, 2004, pp. 51-53, A. Bryer, 2002, part 2, p. 90). Described in the typicon of St Eugenios's monastery, the celebration of the day of the commemoration of the saint that started a day before, on 20 January and was attended by a large number of people, demonstrates the pompousness which characterized the event dedicated to the patron saints of the Empire (J.O. Rosenqvist, 2003, p. 200). The reverence to the cult of St Eugenios was pursued in the same way throughout the existence of the Empire of Trebizond. The saint was considered to be a protector of the population of Trebizond in their struggle against enemies

and at the same time, a symbol of the independence of the state and of the sovereign policy free of the influence of Byzantium which had claims over the country. This can also explain the reason why St Eugenios remained a local saint at all stages of the evolution and expansion of the cult, and despite a few exceptions, failed to reach outside the borders of Trebizond (J.O. Rosenqvist, 2003, pp. 200-201, 210).

After the fall of the Empire of Trebizond in 1461, the importance of the cult of St Eugenios began to diminish gradually. It is noteworthy that none of the works of architecture or fine arts associated with St Eugenios can be found among post-Byzantine (second half of the 15th century through the 19th century) samples collected by scholars specializing in the history and culture of the Pontos, namely A. Bryer, D. Winfield, S. Balance and G. Isaac (A. Bryer, 2002). In the early 20th century the Russian researcher, F. Uspenskij could not hide his surprise over the fact that the patron saint of the city was given to oblivion by local Orthodox Greeks and despite applying to various clerics, he failed to find a single image of St Eugenios even among old icons (F. Uspenskij, 1929, pp. 113,42). The archbishop of Kartli and Metropolitan of Kutaisi, Timote Gabashvili, who visited Trebizond among other holy sites toured by him from 1755 to 1759, provides an interesting note in his *Momosvla*. Of three great relics of the city of Trebizond, seized by the Turks, which included the Monastery of St Eugenios, he identified only Hagia Sophia (Timote Gabashvili, 1983, pp. 456-457). With respect to the cult of St Eugenios, he noted the following: 'And from there we reached Chaldia (now called Gumishkhana), where St Eugenios, St Kanidios and St. Valerianos were martyred. Thereafter we studied the churches and they were built by the Georgians. And we enquired about it and were said that Gumishkhana belonged to the kings of Georgia, as the silver mined here was for Georgia. The source of the Chorokhi river forms the boundary of Georgia' (1983, p. 561). Georgians here certainly meant inhabitants of Chaldia since Gumishkhana, modern-day Giumushene (Argyropolis) located in the mountains near Trebizond, was the centre of the settlement of the Chans with a medieval castle from which the Chans controlled a highly important pass of Zigani (E. Zhordania, 2002, p. 14). What is interesting in this passage is that the cult of the patron saint of the Empire is no more in evidence in Trebizond proper in the 18th century but is rather localized in Chaldia, in the settlement of the Georgian tribes.

Thus the overview of the stages of the evolution of the cult of St Eugenios allows us to assume that St Eugenios, instrumental in the spread of Christianity in Trebizond together with his three companions, all of whom were martyred in Trebizond, was popular with local people back in the 11th century. Yet the cult failed to further develop even in the 11th century when a

metaphrastic text describing the miracles of his martyrdom was created. The next and the most important stage of the evolution of the cult is related to the transformation of the image of the popular saint into the patron of the Empire and the icon of the guardian of battles. The final stage saw the gradual disappearance of the cult of the saint in the region together with the fall of the Empire of Trebizond. It also demonstrates that in the 18th century it was alive on the territory populated by the Georgians, while no trace of the worship of the cult is evident in Trebizond, the city of St. Eugenios.

The emergence of the images of St Eugenios and the formation of its iconographic type are assigned to the period of the evolution of the cult. The iconography of the saint was far from being formulated in the early period, which is evidenced by several images of St Eugenios from the 10th-11th century to the 1204, among which note must be made of a miniature in the Menologion of Basil II showing the beheading of the saint, as well as two seals of individuals, the figures featured on which are considered to be St Eugenios (J.O. Rosenqvist, 2003, pp. 207-208).

The number of the images began to increase from the period of the foundation of the Empire of Trebizond. The same period saw the spread of two clearly formulated iconographic representations of St Eugenios. The first, which spread earlier than the second, is St Eugenios the Martyr, who is a richly dressed courtier. He is shown as a middle-aged man with a high forehead, his dark hair combed behind reaching the neck and with short beard. Decorated with edges and precious stones, he wears a long tunic and a patterned gown. He holds a cross fixed onto a long staff in one hand, and a wrinkled edge of the gown, in the other. Similar representations can be found in the cave church of St Eugenios's monastery at Trebizond, the 'Upper Church' of Sarmashicle in the Matzuka gorge, and in the chapel of the tower of Hagia Sophia in Trebizond (A. Bryer and D. Winfield, 1985, 224f, 273f, fig.83, 236, fig.73). All these examples are from the 14th-15th century. One of the finest and best preserved images of St Eugenios is a double-side icon dating from 1374 which preserves in the Monastery of Dionisius on Mount Athos. One side of the icon shows Alexios III Komnenos together with John the Baptist, while another features St. Eugenios, St. Kanidios, St. Valerianos and St. Akylas (A. Karakatsanis, Thessalonike, 1997, pp. 96-97). Similar is the miniature of the typicon of 1346 of the Monastery of St Eugenios (O. Rosenqvist, 2003, p. 209). Similar iconographic types were presented on Trapezuntine aspers (O. Rosenqvist, 2003, p. 208), however, the mounted images of the saint were also in evidence (A. Bryer, 2002, part 2, p. 91), which is another iconographic type spread at the time. This is St. Eugenios in armour, a warrior's gown and a long dagger. For example, paintings from the late 13th and early 14th century of the chapel of

St Elijah from Vazelon Monastery in Matzuka gorge or the murals of the now inexistent palace in Trebizond (A. Bryer and D. Winfield, 1985, pp. 292, 225c, vol. II, p. 215, no 55).

Considering the peculiarities of the evolution of the cult of St Eugenios and the formation of the respective iconographic type, the images of St. Eugenios preserved in Georgian murals acquire particular relevance. Furthermore, two of them are the earliest images among those that survive to the present day. One of the images preserves at Timotesubani, which is located in the Borjomi gorge. Represented to the right of the entrance door, towards the edge of the west wall of the west arm of the cross-domed church, is a warrior saint in grey armour and a red cape with a dagger in one hand and a long spear, in another [ill.1]. The figure is accompanied with an inscription in *asomravruli* (old Georgian majuscule) script, which reads as 'Evgeni Trapizoneli' (Eugenios of Trebizond) (E. Privalova, 1980, p. 100). The painting was thoroughly studied in the 1970s by the prominent art historian, Ekaterine Privalova, who believed that it was executed by a representative of the Toreli dynasty, possibly the most powerful official at the royal court of Queen Tamar, minister of interior Shalva Toreli of Akhaltsikhe between 1205 and 1215. Moreover, E. Privalova shared a view expressed back in the 1930s by the researcher, Dimitri Gordeev, according to which the representation of the saint of Trebizond points to the timeframe within which the painting was made. It was the period when the relationship of Georgia and Trebizond reached its height. It has been argued that brothers Shalva and Ivane of Akhaltsikhe were immediately involved in the Trebizond military campaign, while the inclusion of the figure of St Eugenios among warrior saints could have served to indicate the political and military might of the Georgian state in Trebizond. However, it was also noted Timotesubani was the only Georgian site where the image of St Eugenios could be found (E. Privalova, 1980, pp. 121-122). Yet, there is another even more interesting example: the image of the holy martyr incorporated into the donor composition of Giorgi III and Queen Tamar in the Church of the Dormition at Vardzia, which carefully imitates the established iconographic type of St Eugenios [ill.2].

The tall arched niches on the east and west portions of the compositionally most important north wall at Vardzia are taken up by donor compositions. An arched niche in the wall to the east features the figures of the representatives of the royal family turned to the east in a three-fourth posture before the enthroned Virgin with Child and the only martyr below her. All of them are shown against the background of the now faded blue sky studded with stars and equally faded brownish-grey ground. Shown with a halo, Giorgi III and his daughter Tamar are presented to the Virgin and the martyr stand-

ing near her by an angel hovering above King Giorgi. The enthroned Virgin with Child points with her hand to the scepter held by the angel, who seems to be giving it as a token of divine authority to Giorgi III who has his hands raised in supplication. Queen Tamar stands behind her father with a church model in her hand. The inscriptions at the head of Giorgi III and Queen Tamar read as follows: King of all East/King Giorgi son Demetre/King of Kings [K. Melitauri, N. Shooshiashvili, S. Khantadze, G. Jamburia, 1955, pp. 66-67, fig. 19], Of all East/King of Kings/ son of Giorgi Tamar who is alive [K. Melitauri, N. Shoshiashvili, S. Khantadze, G. Jamburia, 1955, pp. 66-67, fig. 20]. The martyr whom 'the kings of all East' address together with the Virgin with Child, is a middle-aged man with a characteristic hair style with his hair reaching the neck and with a dark beard. He is clad in a red tunic richly embroidered with edgings and a gown decorated with tablium, the wrinkled left edge of which he holds with his left hand. In his right hand he holds a cross erected on a tall handle [ill.3]. Almost fully lost Greek inscription was reconstructed by T. Kaukhchishvili as St Eugenios of Trebizond (T. Kaukhchishvili, 2004, p. 236), which is attested by the iconographic type of the saint. The painting at Vardzia is securely dated to 1184-1185 according to the image of young Queen Tamar who is painted before marriage (D. Berdzenishvili, et al, 2000, p. 118). It appears that the local saint of Trebizond was pleaded to be a guardian of the most important endeavours, the fulfillment of which would only be possible in 20 years!

Having studied and compared Georgian and foreign written records scholars in Georgia and abroad have agreed that the foundation of the Empire of Trebizond in 1204 was made possible with the support of the Georgian state (M. Gabashvili, 1998, p. 142, A. Eastmond, 2004, pp. 18-21). Medieval Georgian and Greek sources confirm that thanks to the direct efforts, 'diligence and achievement' of Queen Tamar, a descendant of Byzantine emperors, Alexios Komnenos (1204-1222), who was also a relative of the Bagrationi royal dynasty and had grown up at the Georgian royal court, ascended the throne of Trebizond (Kartlis Tskhovreba, vol. II., 1959, pp. 142-3, Michael Parantetos, 1960, p. 16). Apart from the efforts of Georgian military units, the support provided by the aboriginal Georgian tribes inhabiting the south Black Sea coast, the promoted Laz and Chan population, played a vital role in accomplishing this. The Empire of Trebizond was formed as a vassal state of Georgia, which was associated with the expansion of the influence of the Georgian state over the south Black Sea littoral. Georgian historians hold a view that this was an outcome of a long and careful contemplation of the foreign policy of the Georgian royal court (*Sakartvelos istoriis narkvevebi*, 1979, p. 332), though, as an early 20th century emigrant researcher, Zurab Avaliani

noted regretfully, Georgian historical records preserve no trace of the aspirations, estimates and thoughts that guided Georgian public figures in their attempt to establish the kingdom of Trebizond in 1204 (Z. Avalishvili, 1989, p. 52). Historians have modestly suggested that the efforts to bring the region of Trebizond under Georgian influence, which, in its turn, implied the westward expansion of the Georgian state and its gaining control of the Black Sea basin, must have been initiated before Queen Tamar. It is assumed that King Davit Aghmashenebeli (David the Builder) had taken steps to this end by undertaking a military campaign to the region of Trebizond (V. Kopaliani, 1968, pp. 109-121). It has also been noted that bearing in mind the goals of the Georgian state with respect to Trebizond, King Giorgi III may also have made an agreement with Andronikos Komnenos, who later emerged as Byzantine Emperor though for a short time (1183-1185) (M. Gabashvili, 1998, p. 146; M. Gabashvili, 2007, No 2(28), p. 43).

It is thus evident that the assumptions made by historians with regard to the preliminary work that took years and aimed at laying a foundation for the Empire of Trebizond, an important move in Georgian foreign policy of Middle Ages, are fairly well-grounded. Apart from the body of evidence offered by written sources, this viewpoint is further confirmed by visual sources, such as murals adorning Georgian churches, which certainly provide information on the state policy of the time. Within this context, the idea of establishing Vardzia castle acquires particular relevance. The historical composition of the period of Queen Tamar *Istoriani da azmani sharavandedtani* makes the following reference to Vardzia: 'Vardzia was started by beloved father of Giorgi, who failed to finish it and she completed it and decorated richly and donated a great number of villages' [Kartlis Tskhovreba, vol. II, 1959, p. 91]. It is possible that Vardzia was founded not only for defending the southern region, but also to ensure effective control of the neighbour area of Trebizond. The image of St. Eugenios of Trebizond at Vardzia, which is not only the earliest of the surviving images of the saint, but also precedes the foundation of the Empire of Trebizond, raises a question as to whether the Georgian royal court could play a role in the evolution of the cult of the saint and the formation of its iconographic type.

There is another question concerning St. Eugenios of Trebizond which has been raised by the paintings at Vardzia. St. Kanidios, St. Valerianos and St. Akylas mentioned together with St. Eugenios are not represented here. But in the same context with St. Eugenios depicted are four out of the five martyrs from Trebizond, namely St. Auxsentios, St. Mardarios, St. Eustratios, St. Orestes and St. Eugenios, all of whom are commemorated on 13 December. It is not only that their popularity exceeded that of St. Eugenios of Trebizond

and three martyrs mentioned together with him, but also that the image of Eugenios of Trebizond emerged from the literary and 'historical' image of St. Eugenios, namesake of St. Eugenios of Trebizond and one of the five saints (J.O. Rosenqvist, 2003, p. 194). In some cases the two saints were even mixed up. The same must be the case here, which is confirmed by the absence of the Georgian translation of *Passio* of St Eugenios of Trebizond, St. Kanidios, St. Valerianos and St. Akylas, while the *Passio* of the five saints was known in Georgia as early as the 8th-9th century. Another translation of the text was made in the 11th century by Ekvtime Atoneli (Euthimius the Athonite) (K. Kekelidze, vol., I, pp. 133-134, 184). Neither can the images of St. Kanidios, St. Valerianos and St. Akylas be found at Timotesubani, while the representations of the five martyrs are present here too. This logic seemingly explains the popularity of the five martyrs and their frequent depiction in the late medieval paintings, especially in works that reveal either an obvious affinity with Trebizond, e.g. late 13th century paintings in Achi St. George (J. Iosebidge, 1990, pp. 31, 49, 61, 77-78) or suggest only a possible kinship with the Empire, e.g. 14th century paintings at Jumati Church of the Archangel.

The emergence of the image of St Eugenios in Georgian paintings of the later period can be explained by different historical circumstances. The study of the representations of St Eugenios and martyrs related to him in will enrich the history of Georgian state policy and culture with new evidence, which is a subject of future research.

Figure 1. The Church of Timotesubani (1205-1215).
St. Eugenios as St. Warrior represented to the right of the door
towards the edge of the west wall

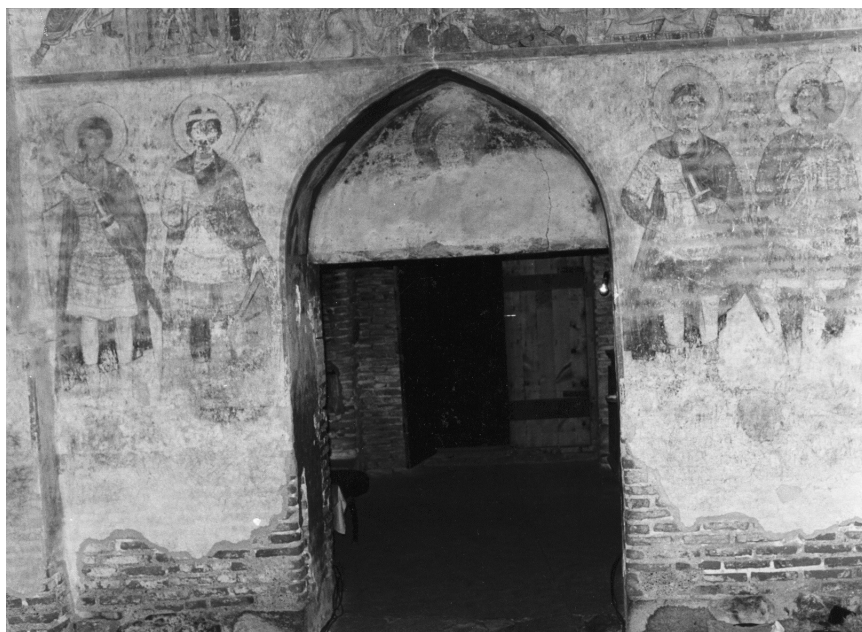


Figure 2. The Church of Vardzia (1184-1185). The donor composition of
King Giorgi III and Queen Tamar with St. Eugenios

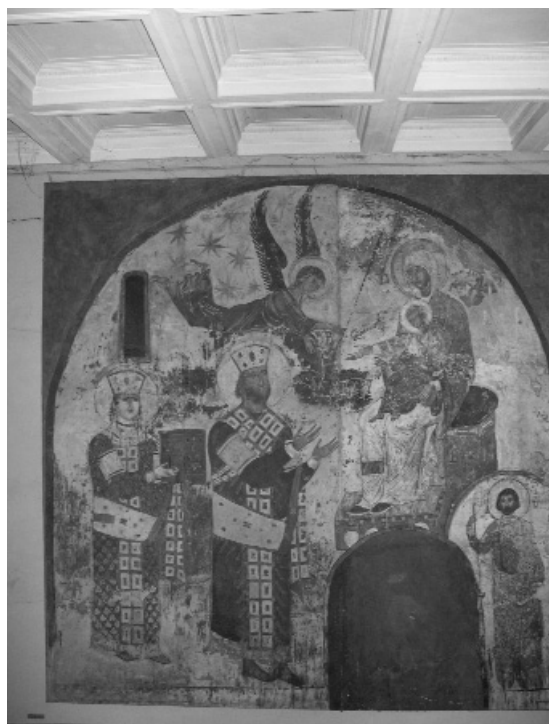
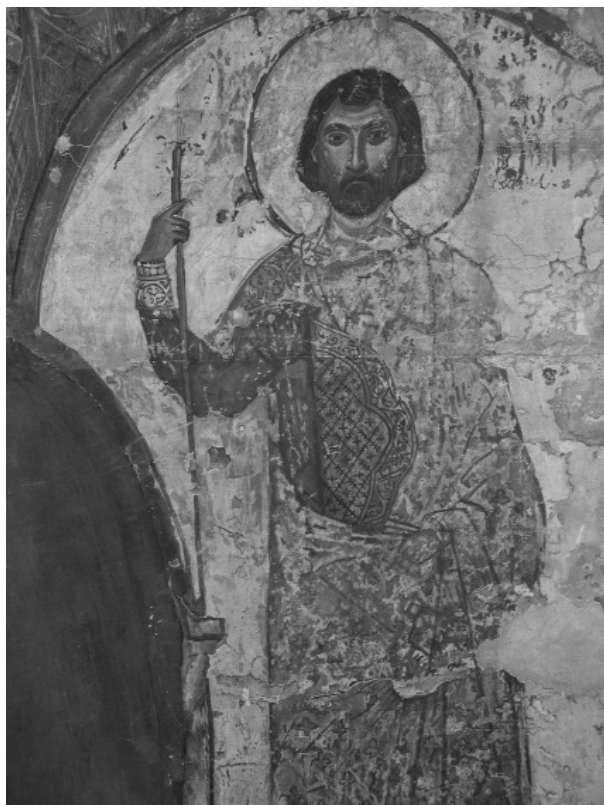


Figure 3. The Church of Vardzia (1184-1185). St. Eugenios (detail)



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