

# The House of Vardanisdze and the Painting of Jumati Church of Archangels of the First Half of the Fourteenth Century

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## ABSTRACT

The article looks at the issues of establishing a powerful medieval Georgian feudal clan – the Vardanisdze – in Guria and, consequently, those of adopting the hereditary title of Gurieli seen through the portraits identified in the murals of Jumati Monastery. Based on the analysis of artistic style, the painting of the Church dates from the first half of the fourteenth century. The memorial portrait of the prideworthy ancestor of the Vardanisdze family was identified during the 2022 expedition of Tamaz Beradze Institute of Georgian Studies of the University of Georgia. Indeed, in the first half of the fourteenth century, the Gurieli - governor of Guria - of the Vardanisdze dynasty, who would most probably be depicted on the north wall near the altar of the church, must have been the initiator of representing the portrait of their ancestor. Regrettably, the murals succumbed to the later period painting and architectural alterations of the church, although the layer of the painting of the first half of the fourteenth century on the western part of the north wall still preserves a donor portrayal of a strange couple - a monk and a nun. It is probable that the monk was the first Vardanisdze, who was granted the title of Gurieli after losing Svaneti dukedom.

**Keywords:** *Jumati Monastery, medieval Georgian murals, portraits of historical figures, Vardanisdze-Gurieli*

## INTRODUCTION

Jumati Monastery (Ill.1) enjoyed deep respect from the Gurieli ruling Guria region for centuries. In addition, based on the reading of the artistic program, it can be assumed that during a certain period it had a function of a family church. It is also evidenced by the crosses and icons of high artistic value and rich in epigraphic material which had been preserved there until the 1920s. They mentioned not only the Gurieli but their remote ancestors – the Vardanisdze, dukes of Svaneti – too (Bakradze, 1987, pp. 218–225). The earliest of these, which dates to the first half of the eleventh century, is an embossed icon of St. George (80 x 55 cm). Its central area was adorned by an inscription of Grand Duke Vardan Vardanisdze, while the lower border featured a later-period embossed inscription of Beshken Gurieli and his son Mikel, who presumably had the icon renovated in the fourteenth century (Bakradze, 1987, pp. 218–219; Kondakov & Bakredze, 1890, pp. 107–108, il. 51; Chubinashvili, 1959, pp. 245–256). Along with other relics of the church whose major part was recognized in scientific literature, the icon (Kondakov & Bakredze, 1890, pp. 102–110) was captured during the robbery in September, shortly after the inventory carried out in Jumati Monastery by the representatives of the Bolshevik government in 1921 (Chubinashvili, 1959, p. 245). Prior to that, at the end of the nineteenth century, during the well-known ‘robbery’ committed under the protection of the exarch and the ober-procurator of the highly influential Most Holy Synod, two embossed icons adorned with extremely valuable enamel cloisonne of St. Archangel Michael and St. Archangel Gabriel, described by Dimitri Bakradze, were lost. In the early 1880s, S. Sabin-Gust, photographer or artist from St. Petersburg or Tbilisi, who was ‘equipped’ with proper documents and references, carried the icons away from Jumati, as well as from other churches of Georgia, with the promise he would restore them. However, despite being a high-profile case (even Emperor Alexander III was informed about it) and the long-standing demand of the Georgian clergy, indeed, nobody was punished and nothing was returned (Maculevič, 1926, pp. 77–78; Amiranashvili, 1963, p. 257; Khuskivadze, 1981, pp. 107–108; Tavberidze, 2005, pp. 33–67). The looted relics, as it had been expected, were distributed among private collections and museums in Russia. Later, nine out of thirteen medallions of enamel cloisonne of the icon of St. Gabriel the Archangel, which had been purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan from collector A. Zvenigorodski at a very high price, ended up in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (all nine are included in the main exhibition, and Georgia, specifically, Jumati Monastery, is indicated as the place of their origin), while one ended up in the Louvre (later submitted to the Cluny Museum) as Byzantine works of enamel (Khuskivadze, 1981,

pp. 108–109; Tavberidze, 2005, pp. 88–101).

Donor inscriptions of these two icons, as well as of the rest of the relics of Jumati, cite historical persons of different periods (Bakradze, 1987, pp. 218–225), including those whose donor images probably embellished the frescos of the church of Archangels of Jumati.

## ***METHODS***

The study is based on content analysis and critical approach to literary and pictorial sources, providing a solid basis for identifying the historical figures depicted in the wall paintings of Jumati Church. The historical-comparative method determines the settlement of the first generation of Vardanisdze-Gurielis in Guria as well as the sequence of members of this family. Using the methods of comparative analysis of iconographic-iconological and artistic styles used in the research, the highly artistic wall painting of Jumati church was studied and the time of its execution was determined.

## ***DISCUSSION AND RESULTS***

The main painting fragmentarily preserved in the central nave of Jumati Church is visible in the parts of the south, west, and north walls. The vast space of the hall is divided into irregularly distributed sections with blind arched niches on the south and north walls and arches resting on high pilasters. The walls articulated with windows and architectural profiles mainly feature single figures, while scenes including, first, the Twelve Great Feasts were probably laid out on the panels of the vault. The extant part of the Twelve Great Feasts expanded with the passion cycle is depicted in the western sections of the south and north walls and the lower tiers of the west wall. On the south, near the western edge of the vault panel, one can discern a fragment of Martha's or Mary's kneeling figure from the Raising of Lazarus. Only a minor fragment of the scene of Bringing Jesus to the Cross can be identified on a narrow, arched panel in the upper tier of the south wall. Part of the body of the executioner embracing the arm of the Cross and leaning down can be discerned against the background of the mountains depicted as 'broken' rocky platforms. Even though this scene is included in the Passion cycle of Betania dated to the mid-twelfth century, the image of the executioner embracing the arm of the Cross is missing there, as well as in the thirteenth-century Byzantine murals in Greece (Chatzidakis, 1986, p. 51). This detail emerges in the wall paintings of Italy

and the Balkans from the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries (Schiller, 1972, p. 83). Then follow parts of the scenes of the Crucifixion depicted on the broader arched panel, multi-figure scenes of the Descent from the Cross and the Lamentation, loaded with emotional details, on the west wall, while the north wall features a fragment of the Descent into Hell. An extensive scene of the Dormition is also fragmentary on the second tier of the west wall. The scene is flanked by full-length figures of John of Damascus and Cosmas of Maiuma (Konstantinidi, 2018, p. 87) holding open scrolls. The figures are separated from the main scene by a line but are essentially connected to it. They are identified by iconographic features and fill the scene up with liturgical content (Etingof, 2000, pp. 213–217).

This layer of the wall painting of Jumati, whose iconographic program comprises Twelve Great Feasts expanded with the scenes of the passion cycle of Jesus, reveals clearly indicated features of the high Palaiologan artistic style with the compositions loaded with narrative details, gestures expressing the figures' strong emotions, volumetric bodies, and pictorial artistic means of depicting images. It is also indication of the highly artistic decor of the first half of the fourteenth century distinguished by theological knowledge. Furthermore, the elongated, elegant proportions approximated to the so-called Classical ones, the volumetric forms shaped with free strokes, the manner of painting images 'modelled' with colorful layers reveal common features of the so-called 'golden age' of the late thirteenth – first decades of the fourteenth century - the Palaiologan Renaissance (Mouriki, 1975, pp. 65, 70; Jurich, 2000, p. 54). Although the fragmentary and damaged painting does not allow to restore the complete picture, certain tendencies are still very obvious. While constructing the bodies of the figures, the artist chooses elongated proportions; however, excessively 'inflated' shapes characteristic to the first decades of the fourteenth century are not encountered. Conversely, the painting of flowing draping, which is free of sharp and broken lines, conveys elegant figures approximated to the 'Constantinopolitan' standard. Deprived of compact, narrative episodes and detailing, striking are the compositions communicating the sense of monumentality. Such an artistic interpretation is different from artistic approach of the high Palaiologan style, which is loaded with architectural background and landscape elements indicating spatiality (Mouriki, 1975, p. 70).

At the same time, application of this kind of approach in the dcor of Jumati promotes highlighting the tendencies inclined to dramatization of the emotions created in the murals of the second quarter of the fourteenth century and depicting them with dynamic movements (Longinus the Centurion in the Crucifixion), gestures (mourning women in the Descent from the Cross and in the Lamentation) and facial

expressions (John the Theologian in the Crucifixion, Peter the Apostle in the Dormition). However, it should be mentioned that neither in this case can one identify the growing tendency towards exaggeration, exaltation, and deformation of figures, which took place from the second quarter of the fourteenth century and was referred to as the so-called ‘cult of the ugliness’ (Mouriki, 1975, p. 65). In Jumati artistic means and methods of execution are moderate and reserved, but as far as the iconography of the scenes is concerned, it chooses the rarer versions of the traditional schemes of the time, which enhance the urge of dramatization of emotions typical of the Palaiologan style of the second quarter of the fourteenth century. Thus, the artist of Jumati, who is loyal to the common artistic approaches formed in the early stage of development of the Palaiologan artistic style in the monuments of Thessaloniki-Mount Athos and Mystras-Constantinople and who renders compositional and painting tasks inclined to dramatization of emotions typical of the monuments of the second quarter of the fourteenth century, also seems to maintain local artistic traditions to some extent.

Figures of the holy martyrs depicted in the eastern part of the south wall, as well as separately standing figures of the holy warriors that, according to iconographic features, are identified as St. George, St. Theodor Stratilat, and St. Demetrios, shown in the first tier, belong to the same painting layer. In the same group are included the historical figures whose deplorable remnants are visible in the western part of both south and north walls.

A partly preserved portrait of a historical figure is independently depicted near the altar, east of the entrance on the south wall of the central nave of the church of the Archangels (Ill. 2). The man’s image portrayed against the light yellowish-white background is ‘cut’ at the chest by the brownish-red line of the frame, while the rest of the body is covered with the late medieval portrayal of St. Michael the Archangel. The face of the elderly donor is frontal, but, according to the position of the shoulders (the left shoulder seems to be narrower), he must have been turned towards east and his arms were probably raised in supplication towards the altar. The man’s trapezoidal white hat flared at the top and adjoining the dark red line dividing the tier is like the headdresses of the donors depicted in Achi, which date to the end of the thirteenth century (Iosebidze, 1989, pp. 49–50; Chikhladze, Datunashvili, & Gvelesiani, 2017, p. 197, pl. 286). It also appears similar to the presently lost four portraits of secular figures of Likhauri Church, whose garments and headdresses reminded Dimitri Bakradze of those of the donors of Achi (Bakradze, 1987, p. 99). The shapes of the facial features, as well as the gaze enlivened by white beams, convey the manner of painting images in the high Palaiologan style, which shows direct

link with the main painting of the second quarter of the fourteenth century. The damaged asomtavruli inscription made in black color against the white background on both sides of the donor's head (Ill. 3) is read in three lines (we are grateful to Mr. George Gagoshidze for reading the inscription and performing its schemes):

...rdan/ sZ...vrdn/ did

...Vardan/[i]sdz[e] Vardan /Didi... (Vardanisdze Vardan The Great...)

There is no mention of Vardan Vardanisdze among the historical figures ruling Guria in the fourteenth century, although Vakhushti Batonishvili indicated stemming of the Gurieli from the Vardanisdze (Batonishvili Vakhushti, 1973, pp. 37). The nineteenth-century researchers knew that the dynasty of Vardanisdze - grand dukes of Svaneti, were predecessors of the Gurieli (Bakradze, 1987, pp. 101, 225). It is clearly evidenced by the epigraphy of the eleventh-thirteenth-century crosses and icons of the churches of Guria. These inscriptions mention different Vardanisdzes: Marushiani on the icon of St. James of Likhaura (Bakradze, 1987, p. 99), Liparit on the enamel icon of the Archangels of Jumati (Kondakov & Bakredze, 1890, pp. 104–106, fig. 50), Ivane, the duke, mandaturtukhutsesi (master of ceremonies) and msakhurtukhutsesi (great chamberlain) of Svaneti on the icon of St. Gabriel the Archangel of Jumati (Bakradze, 1987, p. 220). However, the earliest is Grand Duke Vardan Vardanisdze, mentioned in the inscription of the eleventh-century embossed icon of St. George of Jumati, who is identified by some historians as the fighter against the royal authority, 'Vardan, Duke of the Svans' and contemporaneous with King Giorgi II (1072–1089) (Meskhia, 1979, p. 123; Bakhtadze, 2003, p. 217). Whether it is the correct identification and he really is the figure of the second half of the eleventh century or the first half of the eleventh century (for instance, Giorgi Chubinashvili dates the icon of St. George of Jumati by the 1030s (Chubinashvili, 1959, p. 262), we consider that the Great Vardan Vardanisdze, depicted in the church of the Archangels of Jumati must be the memorial image of the grand duke mentioned on the icon of St. George, which was commissioned by a Gurieli, or Gurielis, representatives of Vardanisdze dynasty.

In Georgian fresco painting the tradition of depicting memorial portraits, like, for instance, Bagrat III in the fourteenth-century murals of Bedia, David the Builder in the sixteenth-century layer of the main church of Gelati, or mandaturtukhutsesi Giorgi I Dadiani (1290s–1323) in the seventeenth-century dñcor of the central space of Khobi Church, is connected to the contribution these figures made to a particular church, whether it was founding, constructing, painting, embellishing or all together. Our case is somehow different. Vardan Vardanisdze, Grand Duke of Svaneti

of the eleventh century, had made no contribution to either building or painting of Jumati Monastery. The reason for producing his memorial portrait is likely to have been the desire of the Vardanisdzes of the first generation, who had moved from Svaneti to rule Guria, to present their noble family to the local congregation by the portrait of their most famous ancestor; moreover, they brought the family icon left by him to Guria. The epithet ‘grand’ preserved in the accompanying inscription points to the nobility of the Grand Duke and, accordingly, of the Vardanisdze family. Notably, a similar epithet – ‘great and noble man’ – has been used in a historical source to refer to another Vardanisdze, an official of Tamar’s epoch (Meskhia, 1979, pp. 115–127). Thus, it seems logical for the Vardanisdze-Gurieli of the first generation to make claim by featuring the memorial portrait of the famous ancestor in a new place – Guria.

Who was the Vardanisdze-Gurieli of the first generation that had the church painted and when could it have occurred? Indeed, after receiving lordship of Guria. The sources of Guria principality are silent about it and the term ‘Gurieli’, which is recognized as bearing the meaning of owning the land in Guria and ruling it, emerges only in the 1340s (Kartvelishvili, 2008, p. 268). It has been suggested that both in the early feudal epoch and in the eleventh–thirteenth centuries Guria must have been a royal domain and it was only from the fourteenth century that it was given to rule to the Vardanisdze, who laid foundation to the family of Gurieli (Khidureli, 1977, pp. 282–283). Vakhushti Batonishvili dates the occurrence of depriving the house of Vardanisdze of lordship of Svaneti and appointing their representative as the ruler of Guria by 1361 and associates it to King Bagrat V (Vakhushti Batonishvili, 1973, p. 261). However, historian Tamaz Beradze doubted the correctness of this date and believed that it must have occurred several decades earlier (Beradze, 2018, pp. 372–373). Researcher Goneli Arakhamia not only shares this opinion, but also suggests that the first duke of Guria from the family of Vardanisdze was Beshken Gurieli, the one mentioned on the icon of St. George of Jumati and depicted in the wall painting of the church of the Savior of Baghlebi. Pavle Ingorokva identified Beshken Gurieli with Beshken Vardanisdze, the mandaturtukhutsesi, mentioned in the agapes of the Cross Monastery of Jerusalem (Ingorokva, 1963, p. 584; Arakhamia, 2003, p. 54). This identification sounds convincing to other researchers as well (K. Chkhatarashvili, T. Kartvelishvili) (Kartvelishvili, 2008, pp. 268–269). Thus, considering the presumable date of the agape included in the Memorial Note of the Cross Monastery (Metreveli, 1962, pp. 134–135) and the date of possessing the title of mandaturtukhutsesi, Vardan Vardanisdze is regarded to be the historical figure of the first third of the fourteenth century (Arakhamia, 2003, pp. 54–56).

This date is supported by the style of the murals of Jumati.

Images of the representatives of the Vardanisdze-Gurieli dynasty - the main commissioners of the wall painting of Jumati Church - could, according to tradition, be assumed to be depicted in the east part of the north wall of the church (Alibegashvili, 1979, p. 30), which is also evidenced by the extant fragment of the feet of the donor. At the same time, the blind arched niche of the west part of the north wall features a donor depiction of the monk and the nun. Despite the poor condition, the composition with the Savior in blessing and the couple of religious persons seems to be contemporaneous with the main painting judging by the artistic rendering of the figures. This common iconographic scheme of the Savior blessing a royal couple established in the Christian artistic tradition is evidenced in the examples of Byzantine art from the tenth century, while it is encountered in Georgian fresco painting for the representations of the members of the royal family from the twelfth–thirteenth centuries; later it is applied by local rulers too (Skhirtladze, 2000, pp. 14–18). The man dressed in a monk’s garment is depicted on the west, while the nun is shown on the east. He is wearing a black cloak and a cowl hugging the shape of the head and spread over the shoulders (Ill. 4). The painted layer of the nun (Ill. 5) is also badly managed but, unlike the man, a fragment of an asomtavruli inscription made in white paint against green background can be identified left of her head:

...misi Tekla

... misi Tekla (...His Tekla)

It is presumed that this part of the inscription must be reconstructed as ‘his former spouse Tekla’. Donor compositions in which former spouses who had taken monastic vows are depicted side by side are rather rare. However, there had been another case in the same Guria region which Dimitri Bakradze describes in the wall painting of a stone church in Askana (Bakradze, 1987, p. 173).

The main question is who the donor monk and nun of Jumati could be. Knowing the name of nun Tekla does not assist in their identification. On the other hand, we might reminisce about another donor - who had taken monastic vows - depicted in the church of Zarzma. The inscription at the portrayal reads that he is ‘the Grand Duke, Lord Great Chamberlain, governor of the Svans Suimon Gurieli’ (Takaishvili, 2018, p. 44; Beridze, 1955, p. 133). There is a strange coincidence here. The column in Zarzma where Suimon Gurieli is depicted features a figure of St. Tekla right next to him, while no other holy mother is depicted nearby. ‘The Grand Duke, Lord Great Chamberlain, governor of the Svans Suimon Gurieli’ is contemporane-

ous with the family of the Jakeli, rulers of Samtskhe in the fourteenth century (Arakhamia, 2003, pp. 57–58; Kartvelishvili, 2006, p. 116) and his identification with his namesake Gurieli who lived in the seventeenth or the eighteenth centuries was excluded by Ekvtime Takaishvili (Takaishvili, 2018, p. 44). It is incorrect to consider him as Simon Gurieli, living in the seventeenth century (1606–1672), which emerged in an undoubtedly remarkable work of a foreign researcher Manuela Studer-Karlen about the wall painting of Zarzma Church (Studer-Karlen, 2021, p. 150). As is known from the history of the monastery of Zarzma, at the end of the 1570s, following the conquer of Samtskhe by the Ottomans, the monastery ceased to function. The Gurieli transferred the valuable crosses and icons to Shemokmedi and had the church of Zarzma in Shemokmedi built during the same period (Zakaria, 1981, p. 59; Beridze, 1997, p. 173; Kartvelishvili, 2006, pp. 60–62).

Researcher Arakhamia discusses S. Kakabadze's and P. Ingorkva's opinions with reference to the period of activities of Suimon Gurieli. He supports the date of the 1340s–50s suggested by Kakabadze, but shares P. Ingorkva's viewpoint, according to which Suimon Gurieli of Zarzma was a member of the Vardanisdze family and that he must have been the duke of Guria in the period following Beshken Vardanisdze (Arakhamia, 2003, p. 57). However, there is a particularly important point to be considered: in the inscription of Zarzma, apart from being Gurieli, Suimon Gurieli refers to himself as the lord great chamberlain and the governor of the Svans too, which should mean that prior to taking monastic vows he had been the grand duke, chamberlain, and the governor of the Svans and afterwards became Gurieli. If we also recall that Beshken is only Gurieli in the inscription of the icon of St. George of Jumati, it can be admitted that Suimon was the very first Vardanisdze – the governor of Svaneti – who was granted lordship of Guria by the royal authority. Apparently, after some time he became a monk and separated himself from the secular world. Indeed, following this, the title of Gurieli would be passed down to his son. It is difficult to claim whether the monk-donor of Jumati Monastery is 'the Grand Duke, Lord Great Chamberlain, governor of the Svans Suimon Gurieli', depicted in Zarzma, and nun Tekla – his former spouse. But one thing is obvious: the compositional scheme of the monk and the nun being blessed by God depicted in Jumati Church represents high-ranking honorable members of the Vardanisdze-Gurieli family, and the initiator of depicting the couple, who had already taken monastic vows, together was probably their son, who was the main benefactor of the wall painting and presenter of the noble house of the Vardanisdze in Guria through the memorial portrait of his famous ancestor Vardanisdze Vardan the 'Great'. It is highly likely that it was Beshken Gurieli.

There arises another problem. Suimon seems to be the name adopted after taking monastic vows and we are unaware of his name in his secular life. In 2016, researcher N. Zhgenti tracked down parts of an old chancel screen with a fragmentary inscription in the church of the monastery of the Archangels of Erketi. He deciphered the inscription as "...souls of thy wretched slaves Mikel, Grand Duke of the Svans and...the king and protect us and remember souls of our parents, amen" (Zhgenti, 2022, pp. 221–222). Based on paleographic analysis, the researcher identified the similarity of the inscription of Erketi with Georgian majuscule characters of the twelfth–thirteenth centuries (Zhgenti, 2022, p. 224) and, in addition, assumed that Grand Duke Mikel of the Svans lived in the mid-twelfth century (Zhgenti, 2022, p. 228). According to N. Zhgenti, following the year 1073, the Vardanisdze, lords of Svaneti, must have owned lands in Guria, while at the turn of the twelfth and the thirteenth century, a separate branch of the noble family of the Vardanisdze must have been formed (Zhgenti, 2022, p. 229). The researcher relies on the source according to which in 1073 Vardan, Duke of the Svans, rebelled against King Giorgi II, and the King put down the rebellion by granting him Askalana (Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1955, p. 316), which some historians identify with Askana in Guria (Gasviani, 1973, p. 82; Kartvelishvili, 2008, p. 267). Even in the case this assumption is accepted, in Guria the presumable representatives of a separate branch of the Vardanisdze were not grand dukes of Svaneti at the turn of the twelfth and the thirteenth century (Kartvelishvili, 2008, p. 267) and, consequently, Grand Duke Mikel of the Svans could not have been the representative of this branch of the Vardanisdze. On the other hand, it is less likely that in the eleventh–thirteenth centuries the Vardanisdze, including grand dukes of Svaneti, commissioned icons for the churches and monasteries of Guria and donated some of them to Jumati (Kartvelishvili, 2008, p. 267). This is not evidenced by the epigraphy of the icons either. Therefore, we should consider Ekvtime Takaishvili's opinion that the Vardanisdze moved the family relic from Svaneti to Guria only after they became rulers of Guria (Takaishvili, 2017, pp. 32–34). Different is the case of the donor inscription of Grand Duke Mikel of the Svans on the chancel screen of Erketi Church, which points to his rights with reference to the monastery and, accordingly, the region. It may be assumed that Mikel was the secular name of Suimon Gurieli, the grand duke, lord great chamberlain and governor of the Svans, which is indirectly supported by the fact the son of his presumable successor Beshken Gurieli is also Mikel. Therefore, it could be suggested that, after Arishiani Vardanisdze, governor of the Svans and lord great chamberlain, who, according to his agape of the Cross Monastery of Jerusalem is considered to have lived in 1273–1305 (Metreveli, 1962, p. 158; Bakhtadze, 2003, p. 218), Mikel, former Suimon, was probably the last represen-

tative of the Vardanisdze family who ruled Svaneti in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. He probably inherited the title of chamberlain from Arishiani, and after losing dukedom of Svaneti, was granted the title of Gurieli by the king.

It should be mentioned that the list of the governors of Svaneti which is provided in M. Bakhtadze's monographic research dedicated to the institution of dukedom in Georgia does not cite Suimon Gurieli even though the author cites the inscription of Zarzma discussed by Ekvtime Takaishvili (Bakhtadze, 2003, pp. 222, 224). Furthermore, the author mentions two other Gurielis who, like Suimon, refer themselves to as governors of the Svans (Bakhtadze, 2003, pp. 222–223). Dimitri Bakradze identified the inscription of one of them on the fragment of a silver plaque found in the chest at the church of the Savior of Shemokmedi: "Oh, icon of God, give help and protect Grand Duke, Duke of the Svans Gurieli Kakhaber...his spouse Ana and who chased the revetment of this icon" (Bakradze, 1987, p. 129), and the other - on the back of the icon of St. Archangel Michael of Jumati: "O, powerful Archangel Michael, give help to your embellisher Grand Duke and Duke of the Svans Giorgi Gurieli, Loma and his spouse...Queen of Queens..." (Bakradze, 1987, p. 220). Researcher Bakhtadze assumes that as representatives of the house of Dadiani got hold of the lordship of Svaneti after the Vardanisdze had lost it and there was no sight of the Gurieli among them, all three of the Gurieli "took over lordship of Svaneti on the basis of their being a branch of the house of Vardanisdze and their successors". However, it should be noted that such an explanation does not sound sufficiently convincing to the researcher himself (Bakhtadze, 2003, pp. 219–223). It should also be noted that unlike Kakhaber and Giorgi, apart from being the duke of Svaneti Suimon Gurieli was the royal chamberlain too, as were earlier period dukes of Svaneti - Vardanisdze Ivane (late eleventh – early twelfth century) (Bakradze, 1987, p. 220; Meskhia, 1979, pp. 124–126) and Arishiani (second half of the thirteenth century – beginning of the fourteenth century) (Metreveli, 1962, p. 92; Bakhtadze, 2003, p. 218). However, there is a sound argument with reference to Giorgi and Kakhaber Gurieli, that they are not Vardanisdze, but later period representatives of the house of Dadiani, and if the first decade of the fifteenth century is considered the time of Giorgi's lordship, Kakhaber is thought to have ruled in the 1470s–80s (Arakhamia, 2003, pp. 59–63). The date in question is regarded as the time when the duchy of Svaneti was under the influence of the house of Dadiani (Bakhtadze, 2003, p. 222) and the Gurielis cited as dukes of Svaneti represented the same house of Dadiani.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, in 2022, identification of the memorial portrait of Vardanisdze Vardan the ‘Great’, ‘forefather’ of the Vardanidze clan, involved in the painting of the church of the Archangels of Jumati of the first half of the fourteenth century, allowed us to see the position of Vardanisdze-Gurieli, ruler of Guria, commissioner of the painting of the mentioned period. The successor of grand dukes of Svaneti, presumably Beshken Gurieli, who is mentioned together with his son Mikel in a later-period inscription of Vardan Vardanisdze’s eleventh-century icon of St. George of Jumati, presents his old and noble family name by the portrait of his worthy ancestor in a ‘new place’ – Guria.

A weird donor composition executed on the same layer of the painting that features images of a monk and a nun being blessed by the Savior provides grounds to assume that: a) an elderly man depicted in monk’s clothing is Grand Duke, Lord Great Chamberlain, and governor of the Svans Suimon Gurieli, while nun Tekla is his former spouse; b) the initiator of depicting them together is their son, presumably Beshken Gurieli; c) Suimon is the last member of the Vardanisdze family holding the title of the Grand Duke of the Svans; he is a figure of the late thirteenth – early fourteenth century who received the title of the Gurieli; d) Mikel, Grand Duke of the Svans, identified on the slab of the chancel screen of the monastery of the Archangels of Erketi in 2016, could be the secular name of Suimon, which is indirectly confirmed by the name Mikel of his assumed grandson.

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## **ILLUSTRATIONS:**

*Figure 1. Church of Archangels of Jumati*



*Figure 2. Jumati. Memorial portret of Vardanisdze Vardan the Great*

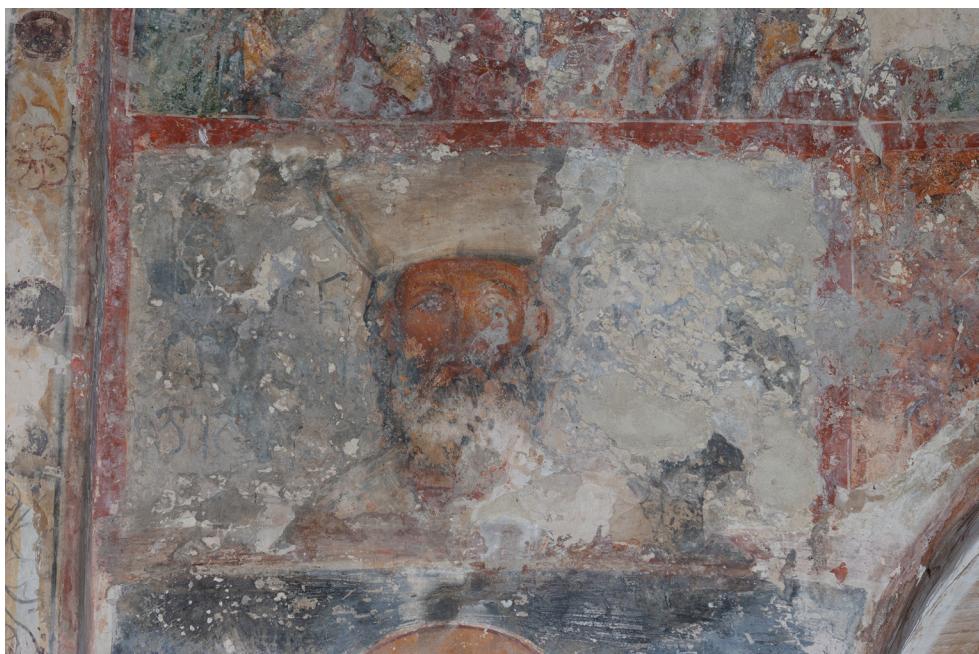


Figure 3. Jumati. Schemes of Vardanis dz Vardan the Great

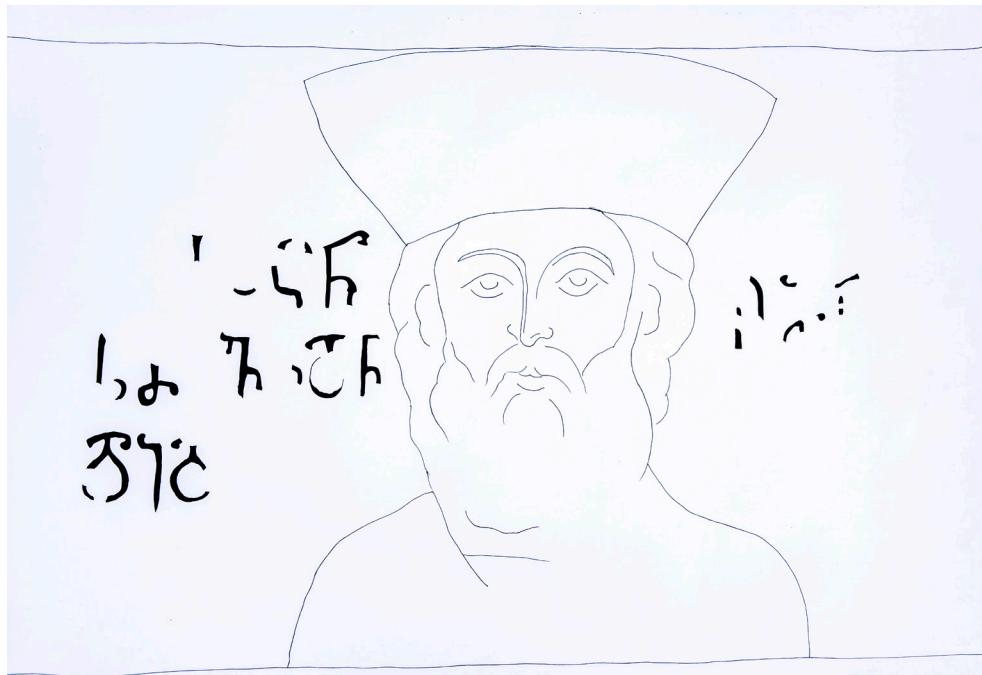


Figure 4. Jumati. Probably Suimon Vardaniszde-Gurieli



Figure 5. Jumati. Schemes of nun Tekla

