

## A FORGOTTEN GEORGIAN STRUCTURE IN HATAY: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE MONASTERY CHURCH OF ST. BARLAAM\*

*Hatay'da Unutulmuş Bir Gürcü Yapısı:  
Aziz Barlaam Manastır Kilisesi Üzerine Bazı Düşünceler*

*\*“6 Şubat Deprem Felaketinde Antakya'da Hayatını Kaybeden  
Tüm Akraba ve Dostlarıma İthafen”*

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**ABSTRACT:** In this study, the presence of the Georgian population in Hatay during the Byzantine Empire and information about St. Barlaam will be discussed. The Monastery Church of St. Barlaam (late 10th - early 11th century) will be introduced as an example of Christian Georgian architecture in its current state, with a particular focus on the upper cover of the church, which has not survived to the present day. Additionally, the architectural sculpture from the second construction phase of the church (late 10th - early 11th century) will be evaluated in terms of its ornamental characteristics and motif repertoire. It is observed that academic publications on Christian Georgian art in Turkey mainly focus on Northeastern Anatolia, where Georgian kingdoms existed, and Georgian works of art in the south of Turkey, especially the Monastery Church of St. Barlaam, are often overlooked, even when analogies are drawn. In this sense, our article aims to draw attention to the little-known Christian Georgian art in Hatay by introducing the St. Barlaam Monastery Church, which has not received the adequate attention from academic circles so far. Additionally, our study is also significant in demonstrating that Georgian architectural tradition dates back to ancient times and extends beyond their present borders.

**Keywords:** Georgian Art, Hatay, Kel/Kılıç (Cebel-i Akra) Mountain, St. Barlaam Monastery Church

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**ÖZ:** Bu çalışmada, Bizans İmparatorluğu döneminde Hatay’da Gürcü popülasyonunun varlığı ve Aziz Barlaam hakkında bilgi verilecek, Hristiyan Gürcü mimarisinin bir örneği olarak Aziz Barlaam Manastır Kilisesi (10. yy. sonu – 11. yy. başı) güncel durumu ile tanıtılacak ve özellikle kilisenin günümüze ulaşmamış olan örtü sistemi tartışılacaktır. Bunun yanı sıra, kilisenin ikinci yapım evresine ait (10. yy. sonu ile 11. yy. başı) mimari plastik eserler bezeme özellikleri ve kullanılan motif repertuvarları bakımından değerlendirilecektir. Türkiye’deki Hristiyan Gürcü sanatı üzerine yapılan akademik yayımların ağırlıklı olarak Gürcü Krallıklarının var olmuş olduğu Kuzeydoğu Anadolu Bölgesi’ne odaklandığı ve başta Aziz Barlaam Manastır Kilisesi olmak üzere Ülkemizin güneyinde bulunan Gürcü sanat eserlerinin analoji yaparken dahi göz ardı edildiği görülmektedir. Bu anlamda, makalemizde bugüne kadar akademik çevrelerce gerekli ilgiyi görmeyen Aziz Barlaam Manastır Kilisesi tanıtılarak Hatay’da az bilinen Hristiyan Gürcü sanatına dikkat çekilmek istenmiştir. Ayrıca, çalışmamız Gürcülerin çok eskiye dayanan ve günümüzdeki sınırlarını aşan bir mimari geleneği olduğunu kanıtlaması bakımından da önem taşımaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Gürcü Sanatı, Hatay, Kel/Kılıç (Cebel-i Akra) Dağı, Aziz Barlaam Manastır Kilisesi


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### Introduction

Today, the Monastery of St. Barlaam is located on the 116° southeastern slopes of Kel/Kılıç (Cebel-i Akra) Mountain, about 7 km. from Bezge (Yeditepe) Quarter of Yayladağı District of Hatay Province.<sup>1</sup>

The first and most comprehensive study of the Monastery of St. Barlaam was conducted by the Georgian art historian Wachtang Djobadze (1917-2007). He conducted excavations at the Monastery of St. Barlaam between

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<sup>1</sup> Today, due to its location in a military area, access to St Barlaam Monastery can be carried out under the control of Yayladağı Kayapınar Border guardhouse on the Türkiye-Syria border.

Kılıç/Kel Mountain (in Arabic, el Jebel el Aqra: Kel Dağ, colloquially known as Cebel-i Aqra), known by its ancient name Kassius, is a cone-shaped, inactive, volcanic mountain with a height of 1759 m. located 65 km. southwest of Antakya. See: George E. Post, "The Chains of Cassius and Amanus," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, Vol.8.2, 1886, p. 94; Wachtang Djobadze, *Archeological Investigations in the Region West of Antioch on the Orontes*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1986, p. 3; retrieved from <https://maps.app.goo.gl/WfxUGR72W5TXCcpT7> on 5.03.2024; retrieved from <http://www.yayladagi.gov.tr/keldag-cebel-i-akra> on 5.03.2024; retrieved from <http://www.hatay.gov.tr/manastirlar> on 5.03.2024. Furthermore, Kılıç/Kel Mountain was associated with the God of Air/Storm in cuneiform records as of the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC. See: Nurgül Yıldırım, "Çivi Yazılı Kayıtlardan Hellen Kaynaklarına Hazi'den Kasios'a Doğu Akdeniz'in Tanrılar Dağı "Kılıç Dağ"', *Cedrus*, Sayı: 10, 2022, p. 1.

1962 and 1966 (over four excavation seasons) (Djobadze, 1976: p. 90).<sup>2</sup> These studies: “Report On Archeological Activities in the Vicinity of Antakya” in Turkish Archaeological Journal S.20 (1964), “Second Preliminary Report on Excavations in the Vicinity of Antioch on the Orontes” in Turkish Archaeological Journal S.21 (1964), “Third Campaign in The Monastery of St. Barlaam” in Turkish Archaeological Journal S.22 (1965) and “Vorläufiger Bericht über Grabungen und Untersuchungen in der Gegend von Antiochia am Orontes” in Istanbuler Mitteilungen, Band:15 (1965). In addition, the researcher's book "Materials for the Study of Georgian Monasteries in the Western Environs of Antakya on the Orontes" published in 1976; copied in various monasteries in the western region of Antakya-Orontes, M.S. Si-95 (12<sup>th</sup> century), M.S. Si-56 (13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries) includes Georgian manuscripts and biographies (such as the biography of St. George Anthonite) and examines the history of Georgian monasteries around Antakya before the 13<sup>th</sup> century through historical sources and chronicles. (Djobadze, 1976: p. 90).<sup>3</sup> In 1986, W. Djobadze published a book titled “Archeological Investigations in the Region West of Antioch on the Orontes” in which he compiled the data obtained so far during his excavations at the monastery. The same researcher, in 2002, the same researcher wrote a book chapter titled “Antioch On-The-Orontes and The Monastery of St. Barlaam” in the book “Die Christianisierung Des Kaukasus/The Christianization of the Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia, Albania),” introducing the Monastery of St. Barlaam. He wrote a book chapter titled “Antioch On-The-Orontes and The Monastery of St. Barlaam,” introducing the Monastery of St. Barlaam. It is noteworthy that after Djobadze's excavations at the monastery in 1962-1966, there has been no on-site survey of the monastery and no recent research focusing specifically on the monastery church.

#### **A Brief History of Hatay in the 10th-11th Century**

Abu'l-Ali Hasan (Sayf al-Dawla) of the Hamdanids, who extended their rule to Northern Syria and Cilicia, captured Antioch in 944 (Sahillioğlu, 1991: p. 230).<sup>4</sup> During the reign of Byzantine Emperor Nikephoros Phokas II (963-969), the Byzantine Empire experienced its most brilliant period. (Gündüz, 2013: p.75). Byzantine Emperor Nikephoros Phokas II (963-969),

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<sup>2</sup> Wachtang Djobadze (1976), *Materials for the Study of Georgian Monasteries in the Western Environs of Antioch on the Orontes*, Vol. 48. Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, Louvain, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> See: Djobadze, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> Halil Sahillioğlu, “Antakya,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Cilt: 3 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1991), p. 230.

during an expedition to Syria, succeeded in 969 in capturing Antioch, one of the most important eastern centers and the seat of the patriarchate (Ostrogorsky, 2011: p. 269; Mango, 1991: p.115; Sahillioğlu, 1991: p.75).<sup>5</sup> As of this period, Antioch, which remained under Byzantine rule for more than a century, became the target of Seljuk raids operating in the region (Sahillioğlu, 1991: p.75).<sup>6</sup> In 1084, Kutalmışoğlu Süleyman Şah conquered Antioch (p. 75). On October 21, 1097, when the Crusader armies arrived in front of the city, Yağsyan, one of the leading commanders of the Great Seljuk Sultan Malik Shah, was serving as the emir of Antioch (p. 75). On June 3, 1098, Antioch came under the rule of the Crusaders and was ruled by many Crusader dynasties until 1268 (Ostrogorsky, 2011: p. 338; Sahillioğlu, 1991: p.75).

### **Christian Georgian Population in Hatay during the Byzantine Empire**

In light of archaeological findings, it is suggested that Christian Georgians have been living in Iberia since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The first Christians in Iberia are believed to have been of Hebrew origin, based on the analysis of artifacts from Georgian religious ceremonies (Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: p.5). King Mrian is recognised in 5<sup>th</sup>-century Georgian and Armenian sources as the first Kartlian king to convert to Christianity and establish it as the state religion (around 330 or 337) (Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: p. 6). From this early period, when Christianity was recognised as the state religion, it is assumed that the Georgian Church was affiliated with the Patriarchate of Antioch in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: p. 6; Lang, 1997: p. 89). M. Lang states that in the 5<sup>th</sup> century a Georgian prince named Narbarnugios (c. 409-488) travelled to Palestine and built a magnificent monastery near Bethlehem (Lang, 1997: p. 89). In the early sixth century (502) Kartli was conquered by the Sassanids, and during this period Georgians were persecuted for their conversion (Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: p. 6). In 532, with the peace treaty between Byzantine and Sassanids, Kartli was ceded to Sassanids. (Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: p. 6). It is known that Christian Georgians actually came to the monasteries in and around Antioch in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD in large numbers (Djobadze, 2002: p. 37). The life of the young St Symeon Stylite (521-592), a prominent cleric

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<sup>5</sup> At this time, N. Phokas described Antioch as the third city of the world, remarkable for its beauty, power, size of its population and impressive buildings (Mango, 1991: p.115).

<sup>6</sup> It is also known that from the Byzantine Emperor Basileios II (969) until the Seljuk rule (1085), Antioch was governed by governors appointed from Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire (Djobadze, 1976: p. 74; Gündüz, vd., 2013: p. 75).

who exemplified maximum detachment from the material world, and his famous monastery, which became a model for asceticism, seem to have played a role in the influx of Christian Georgians to Antioch and its environs during this period (2002: p. 37).

According to W. Djobadze, Georgian pilgrims came to the Monastery of St. Symeon in Hatay not only to worship but also to seek healing for various diseases from St. Symeon and to be blessed by him (2002: p. 37).<sup>7</sup> Some names even stayed in this monastery, such as the monk Anton, who was consecrated as Bishop of Seleucia by St Symeon himself (2002: p. 37). After the Arab capture of Antioch in 637, the pilgrimage of Georgian pilgrims to the holy places in this region almost ceased; even Georgia was occupied by the Arabs for three and a half centuries (2002: p. 37). The Arabs were defeated by Nikephoros Phokas (963-969) in 969, and after the liberation of Antioch, the Georgians largely resumed their pilgrimages (2002: p. 37). In this sense, we can consider the renewed increase in the Georgian population around Antakya around the 10th century and the monastic activities of the Georgians as a result of this development.<sup>8</sup> It is even known that during this period, the Georgians multiplied as a large colony in the southern part of Antioch and that there was a dispute between Theodosius III (1057-1059) the Patriarch of Antioch and George Athonite, the father of the Georgian Church, who was disturbed by this situation.<sup>9</sup>

In 1031, Queen Maria arrived at the Byzantine court on behalf of her son Bagrat IV (1027-1072), who had recently ascended to the throne in Georgia. In 1032, Bagrat IV, ruler of the Kingdom of Georgia, married Helena, the niece of Byzantine Emperor Romanus Argyrus III (1028-1034), and Bagrat IV was bestowed with the title of Kouropalates. This union was followed by the marriage of Bagrat IV's daughter Martha to Emperor Michael VII (1071-1078), and after his death, to Nikephoros Botaniates (1078-1081). These alliances strengthened Byzantine-Georgian relations and led to significant diplomatic gains (Djobadze, 2002: p. 39; Eastmond, 1998: p. 41-43). As a result of these developments, Georgian monasteries continued to grow

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<sup>7</sup> In addition, the authors who wrote the life stories of Saint Symeon and his famous mother Martha gave extensive information about the pilgrims who visited the monastery (Djobadze, 2002: p. 37).

<sup>8</sup> In the 11th century, although the exact number of Georgian monks in the region is not known, about 60 Georgian monks lived in the Monastery of St. Symeon, which even had a library and a church dedicated to them (Djobadze, 2002: p. 37).

<sup>9</sup> See: Djobadze, 2002: p. 37.

around Antioch around the 11th century (2002: p. 39).<sup>10</sup> Since many manuscripts were produced in these monasteries, they also became important centres of literary activity (2002: p. 39). The 11th century seems to have been one of the most peaceful periods for the Christian Georgian population. Indeed, Djobadze reports that as a result of the fall of Antioch under Crusader rule in 1098, the number of monks at the Monastery of St. Barlaam and other Georgian monasteries in the region decreased, and literary production ceased altogether (Djobadze, 2002: p. 53; Ostrogorsky, 2011: p.338). It is known that during the invasion of the region by the Mamluk Sultan Baybars I in 1268, the Monastery of St. Barlaam and other Georgian monasteries located in the Nur Mountains (Black Mountains) west of the Asi River in Antakya were damaged. As a result, Georgian monks left these monasteries and never returned (Djobadze, 2002: p. 53; Djjobadze, 1976: p. 108).<sup>11</sup> In light of this information, it is evident that Christian Georgians resided in monasteries not only in locations such as Antioch in Palestine, northern Syria, Georgia, and the northeastern region of Turkey during the early Christian period (Lang, 1997: p. 89; Djjobadze, 2002, p. 37), but also established their own monasteries in Southern Cyprus (Djobadze, 1984: p. 196-209), Jerusalem, Mount Sinai, Mount Olympus in Montenegro, Mount Athos, and Bakovo in Bulgaria during the reign of Queen Tamara (1184-1213) (Kadiroğlu, 1997: p. 732).

#### **Who was St. Barlaam?**

It is known that St. Barlaam was born into a farming family at the foot of Kılıç/Kel Mountain in what was thought to be a village called Djubia (Jubia) in the 4th century. (Peeters, 1909: 809; Djjobadze, 1986: p. 5). In addition, studies on the subject state that the Saint was guided by a pillar of fire on his return from Jerusalem to the land of his birth, and that an angel commanded him to ascend Kılıç/Kel Mountain and destroy the demon-infested temple of Zues and the statue of Zeus there, and that Barlaam

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<sup>10</sup> In addition, the Amanus Mountains in Antiquity, the Black Mountains in the Middle Ages, and the Nur Mountains today are known to have been home to a total of 13-14 Georgian monasteries within the borders of Hatay. Although these monasteries have not survived intact to the present day, historical and hagiographic sources indicate that they existed between the late 10th and late 11th centuries. (For detailed information such as the names, locations, etc. these monasteries see: Djjobadze, 1976: p. 90-108; Hamilton and Jotischky, 2020: p. 333-335).

<sup>11</sup> In addition, I. Demirkent mentions that during Sultan Baybars I's siege of Antioch in 1268, most of the inhabitants were killed, which was a great blow for the Christians, and as a result, the Crusader domination in the East began to disappear rapidly (Demirkent, 1996: p.542).

fulfilled this mission with great success. (Peeters, 1909: p. 810; Djobadze, 2002: p. 39).<sup>12</sup> The exact date of this event is not specified in the sources; however, based on the information that the Roman Emperor Flavius Claudius Iulianus (331-363 AD) worshipped and sacrificed to Zeus in this temple, it is thought that this may have taken place some time after the death of Emperor Iulianus in 363. (Djobadze, 2002: p. 39).<sup>13</sup> Some publications refer to St. Baarlam as a martyr for the Christian faith. (Peeters, 1909: p. 812; Delehayé, 1903: p. 129, 133-134,138; “St. Barlaam of Antioch”, 2024). Djobadze, on the other hand, argues that St. Baarlam of Antioch, who was martyred under Emperor Diocletian, and St. Baarlam who lived on Kılıç/Kel Mountain are different people (Djobadze, 1986: p. 5). Although the exact year of the saint's death is unknown, it is believed that he died at the age of 80, not as a religious martyr (Djobadze, 2002: p. 40; Djobadze, 1986: p. 5).

#### **St. Barlaam Monastery Church**

In 2002, Georgian art historian Wachtang Djobadze, who conducted a series of research at the Monastery of St. Barlaam, published a brief introduction to the church in the monastery and a plan of the church within the monastery plan (Djobadze, 2002: 43-44, fig.1). In 2024, we visited the Monastery Church of St. Barlaam and tried to document the current condition of the building. The church dates to the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Djobadze, 2002: p. 52). It was built on the foundations of a basilical church dated to the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, which was probably destroyed in the 526 Antioch earthquake (2002: p. 52).<sup>14</sup>

A church in the southeastern part of the monastery has survived from the Monastery of St. Barlaam. The external dimensions of the church are 23.60 x 16.30 m. and limestone material was used in the structure (Djobadze, 2002:

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<sup>12</sup> It is also mentioned that the statue of Zeus in the Temple of Zeus at the foot of Mount Kılıç/Kel is made of gold and is of gigantic size (Downey, 1961:1 p. 28).

<sup>13</sup> For detailed information about the Cult of Zeus on Mount Kılıç/Kel See: Andrea DE GIORGI, (2016), *Ancient Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 144-148.

<sup>14</sup> It is stated that a Temple of Zeus once stood in the area where St. Barlaam's Church is located today, before the basilica-style church was built in the late 5th and early 6th centuries (Djobadze, 1964: p. 54; Djobadze, 1986: p. 6; Djobadze, 2002: p. 39-43). In addition, it is stated in the sources that 250.000 people lost their lives in the great Antioch earthquake on 29 May 526, and that Antakya, Defne and Seleucia Pieria were also destroyed (Downey, 1961: p. 515,519-526; Tekin, 2000: p. 6; Djobadze, 2002: p. 40, 52).



p. 43).<sup>15</sup> It has a basilical plan with three naves in the east-west direction (Figure 1). The central nave measures 5.70 m. and is wider than the side naves (Figure 2).<sup>16</sup> In addition, our measurements revealed inconsistencies, especially in the width of the nave. As a matter of fact, the width of the north nave at the west end is 3.15 meters, while at the east it is 3.10 meters; the width of the south nave at the west end is 2.85 meters, while at the east it is 2.80 meters. It is also noteworthy that the north nave (3.15 m.) is slightly wider than the south nave (2.85 m.) (Figure 3-4). During our studies, the floor could not be fully seen due to the stone debris, soil and grasses in the interior of the building. The building has three entrances in total, one on the west and one symmetrically placed on the north<sup>17</sup> and south facades. As understood from the surviving parts: The entrance doors are raised one step from the ground and are rectangular. The western, northern and southern facades are preserved to a height of about 2 meters (Figure 5-6-7) . On the eastern facade, the apse, which has a semicircular plan from the inside and is bounded by a plain wall from the outside, is about 3 meters high, while the prothesis and diaconicon cells are standing up to an average of 2 meters. In addition, the apse is illuminated by a round arched window (Figure 8).

According to W. Djjobadze, there is no connection between the prothesis and the apse in the original plan; however, in the second phase of the building, a door was added between the prothesis and the apse (Figure 9), also the apse window was enlarged and a two-step synthronon was added to the apse (Figure 10) (Djjobadze, 2002: 43).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> According to the information given by Djjobadze, the limestone material used in the church was obtained from a quarry near the monastery and these stones are 1.22 metres thick (Djjobadze, 2002: p. 43).

<sup>16</sup> Instead of emphasizing the longitudinal axis, the side naves are 1/3 to 1/4 wider than the central nave, which is considered a design approach distinct from Syrian-Armenian architecture (Bayram, 2003: p. 176; Bayram, 2005: p. 130).

<sup>17</sup> On the northwest facade of the church, there are square planned spaces adjacent to the walls of the church on both sides of the door, the function of which is not fully understood (Figure 1, 7). According to the information given by W. Djjobadze, these additional spaces were built for arcosolium purposes, belong to the third construction phase of the building and the construction materials used here consist of diverse materials (Djjobadze, 1986: p. 10) . In our studies, the outer width of the additional room west of the entrance door on the north facade is 5.60 metres and the length is 4.10 metres. The interior width of this room is 3.50 metres and the interior length is 3.30 metres. The additional space to the northeast of the entrance is 5.25 metres long and 4.10 metres long. This room has an internal width of 3.50 metres and an internal length of 3.30 metres.

<sup>18</sup> In fact, the synthronon is known to have had widespread use in early Christian church liturgy (Johnson and Cutler, 1991: p. 1996; Acara Eser, 1998: p. 189).

The upper cover of the building collapsed and has not survived to the present day. The publications about the monastery to date do not include any detailed information about the upper cover of the church. It is known that one of the plan types applied in Georgian architecture as of the early Christian period is the basilical plan with three naves. (Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: p. 26-31; Kadiroğlu, 1997: p. 731,732). It is seen that the majority of these are kept wider and higher in the middle nave than the side naves, as in the Monastery Church of St. Barlaam (Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: p. 26-31; Kadiroğlu, 1997: p. 731,732). A barrel vault was generally used for the upper cover. The central and side naves were sometimes covered with a common double chamfered roof system from the outside, and sometimes the central nave was covered with a double chamfered roof and the side naves with a single chamfered roof (Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: p. 26-31). In addition, the tiles found during the excavations of the St. Barlaam Monastery Church, which can be seen around the church today, may have been used for the upper cover in both phases of the building (late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries - late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Djobadze, 1986: p. 15.). In light of all this information, it suggests that the piers in the nave part of the building support a vaulted system. The central nave might have been covered with a double chamfered roof, while the side naves could have had a single chamfered roof. In addition, since the central nave is kept higher than the side naves, the basilical plan type, which opens to the outside with windows opened in the walls above the roofs of the side naves, is a more common practice in Georgian architecture (Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: p. 30). It is possible that such a roof type may have been applied on the exterior of the church. Indeed, in Georgian architecture, the Dört Kilise Monastery Church (c. 970) in Upper Tao, contemporary with the Monastery Church of St. Barlaam, and the Church of St. John the Baptist of the Parhal Monastery (961-973) in Klardjeti-Tao, are similar in that they have a basilical plan and their apses are bounded from the outside by a plain wall (Djobadze, 1992: p. 158-179; Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: p. 54-60).

The fact that the central nave is covered with a double chamfered roof and the side naves are covered with a single chamfered roof in both the Dört Kilise Monastery Church (Figure 11) and the Church of St. John the Baptist in the Parhal Monastery (Figure 12) strengthens the idea that such a roof type may have been applied on the exterior upper cover of the Barlaam Monastery Church, at least in its second phase.

### **Motif-Based Evaluation of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Stone Artifacts of the Church**

Although there are not many examples of stone artifacts from the second construction phase (late 10<sup>th</sup> - early 11<sup>th</sup> century) due to the reuse of ancient and early Byzantine stone artifacts in the church, it is known that the architectural plastic artifacts found during the excavations and numbered as No: I. 76 a-c, No: I. 78, No: I. 79, No: I. 80, No: I. 81, No: I. 82 and dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century were created by Georgian artists (Djobadze, 1986: p. 51).<sup>19</sup> These stone artifacts have floral and geometric decorations. For example, the plate fragment No: I. 78 is decorated with interlace, ribbon, string of pearl/beads and abstract spiral motifs with palmettes. Similarly, No: I. 79 has the same repertoire of motifs (Figure 13). There are stylized ivy leaves on the plate fragment No: I. 80, and interlace insertions on the impost No: I. 81 and the column fragment No: I. 82 (Figure 14).

Although it is known that the Georgian engraving technique was applied on the stone artefacts mentioned in the paragraph above (Djobadze, 1986: p. 16), it is noteworthy that all the motifs used in the decoration belong to the Byzantine decorative repertoire. For example, the interlace motif is widely used in Byzantine art. The motif is frequently seen in late Roman - early Byzantine mosaic art (Balmelle et al., 2002: p. 224-237). In the Middle Byzantine period, it is seen extensively in wall paintings, manuscripts and stone artefacts. For example, the interlace motif is widely used in Byzantine art. The motif is frequently seen in late Roman - early Byzantine mosaic art (Balmelle et al., 2002: p. 224-237). In the Middle Byzantine period, it is seen extensively in wall paintings, manuscripts and stone artefacts.<sup>20</sup> Although the pearl (bead-valuable stone) string pattern was used as a border decoration in manuscripts that started to be used as of the early Byzantine period, it is known to have been used extensively on book covers, mosaic art and wall paintings (Frantz, 1934: p. 66; Kaya, 2021: p. 428, g.21-22). Palmette and palmette abstract spiral is another motif used in the early Byzantine

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<sup>19</sup> Since some of the artifacts found in the monastery were moved to the Hatay Archaeological Museum (Djobadze, 1986: p. 1), and the museum is currently closed to visitors due to the earthquake disaster of February 6, 2023, the relevant stone artifacts cannot be seen in situ.

<sup>20</sup> For some examples of the motif on wall paintings, see: Kaya, 2023: p. 291-318. For some examples in illuminated manuscripts, see: Keskin and Zenbilci, 2017: p. 1139-1140, fig.1-5. For an example of use in stone artefacts see: Vanderheyde, 2020: p. 173, fig.102. For information on the apotropaic meaning of the interlace motif, see also: Kaya, 2021: p. 432.

period (Fıratlı, 1990: p. 143, 146, pl.88/283a, pl.90/291a; Yalçın, 2001: p. 554).<sup>21</sup>

### Conclusion

St. Barlaam Monastery Church is a little-known example of Christian Georgian architecture in Hatay. Although the building is located in a different region from where Georgian Kingdoms existed, it is significant as a work in which Christian Georgian artists reflected their own artistic traditions. As a matter of fact, in the architecture of the church, the axis is not developed longitudinally and the central nave is emphasised by keeping it wide, which is a method applied in Georgian church architecture. In the academic studies on the monastery to date, it has been observed that there is no detailed information about the upper cover of the church, which is in ruins today. Archaeological findings reinforce the idea that tiles may have been used on the upper cover of the building. In addition, in the analogical evaluations we made in Georgian art, the idea that the central nave may have been covered with a double chamfered roof and the side naves with a single chamfered roof prevailed in the upper cover of the building. Although it is known that Georgian engraving technique was applied on the stone artefacts dated to the second construction phase of the church, the motifs of Interlace, pearl (bead-precious stone) string, palmette and spiral abstract palmette all belong to the Byzantine decorative repertoire. In this sense, it appears that the Georgian artists working in the church were familiar with the Byzantine decorative repertoire as well as their own artistic traditions.

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<sup>21</sup> In addition, the door lintel of the St. Barlaam Monastery dating to the early Byzantine period is decorated with an abstract spiral motif with palmettes (See: Djobadze, 1986: p. 33, fig.29, No: I 39).

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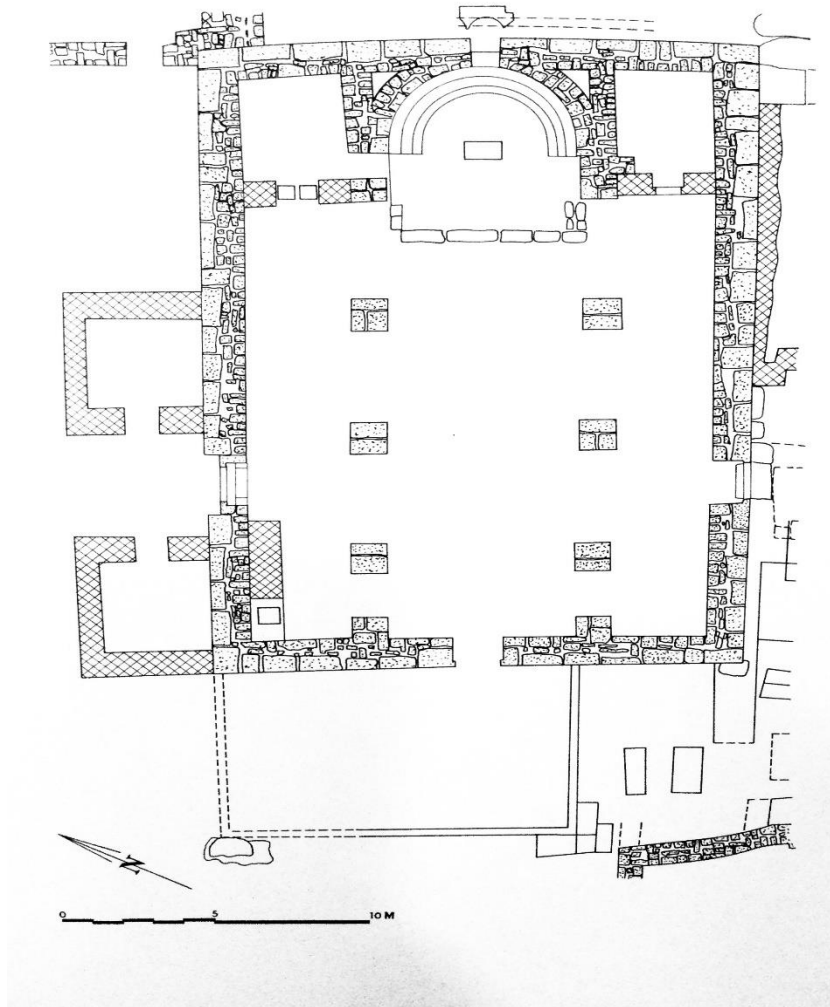
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**FIGURES**

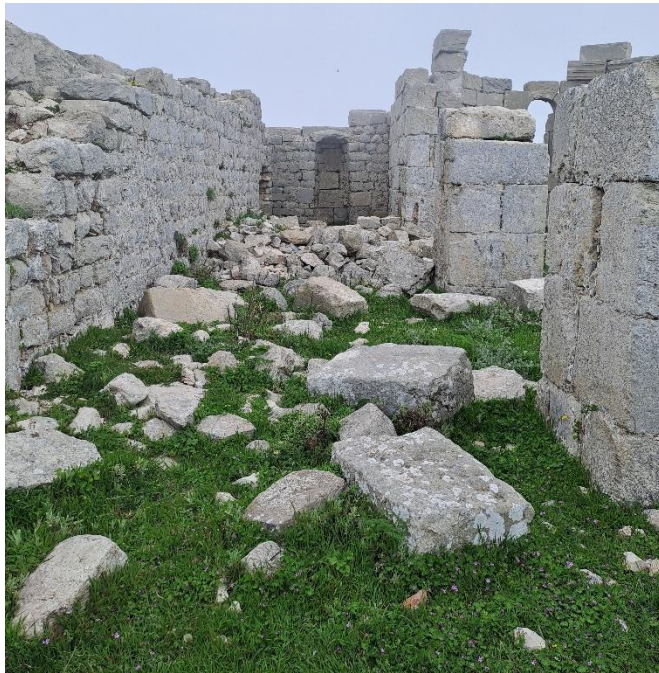


**Figure 1:** Plan of the Monastery Church of St. Barlaam (Djobadze, 1986: plan d)

Metin KAYA



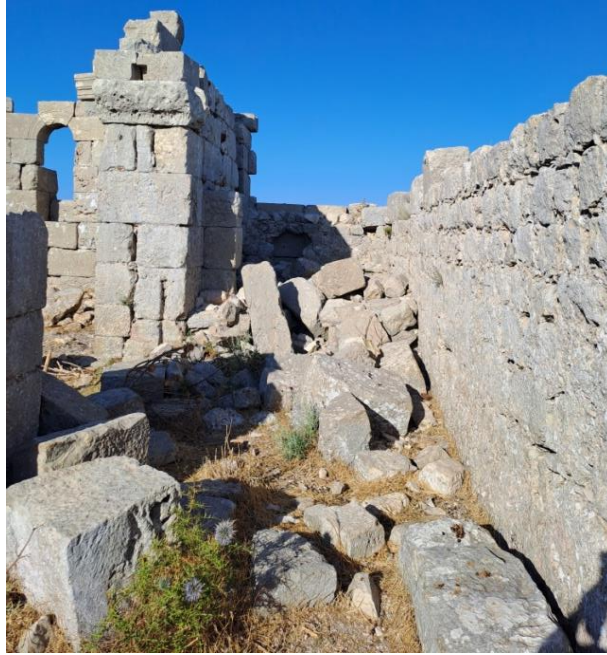
**Figure 2:** Central nave, east to west view (M. Kaya, 2024)



**Figure 3:** North nave west to east view (M. Kaya, 2024)



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**Figure 4:** South nave west to east view (M. Kaya, 2024)



**Figure 5:** West exterior facade (M. Kaya, 2024)

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**Figure 6:** South exterior facade (M. Kaya, 2024)



**Figure 7:** North-west exterior facade (M. Kaya, 2024)



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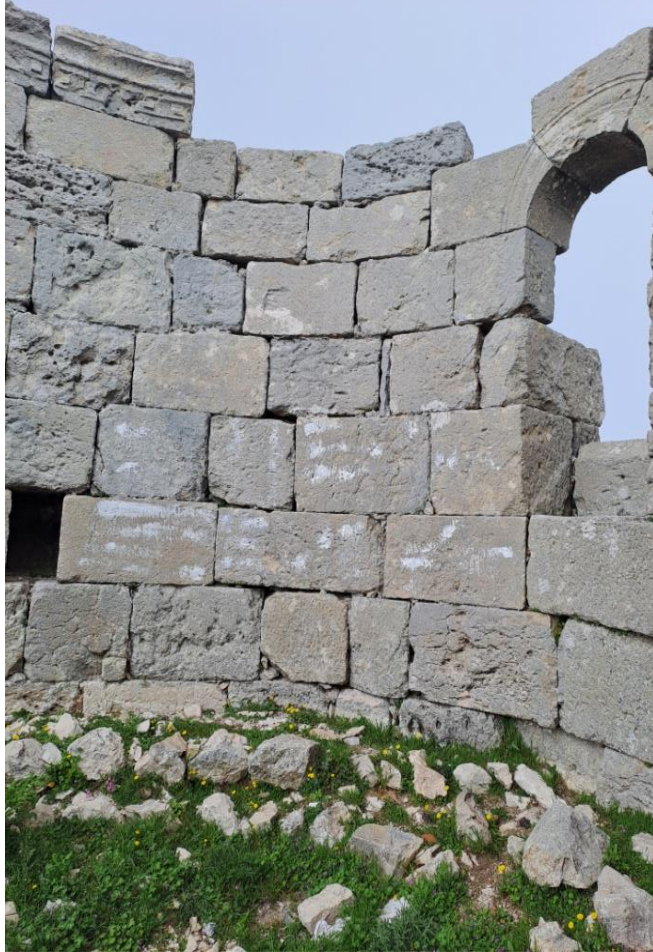


**Figure 8:** East exterior facade (M. Kaya, 2024)



**Figure 9:** Door between prothesis and apse (M. Kaya, 2024)

Metin KAYA



**Figure 10:** East facade, synthronon and apse window (M. Kaya, 2024)



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**Figure 11:** Dört Kilise Monastery Church, north-west  
(Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: fig. 46)



**Figure 12:** Church of St. John the Baptist of the Parhal Monastery, north-east  
(Kadiroğlu ve İşler, 2010: fig.52)



**Figure 13:** St. Barlaam Monastery Church, ornamented panel, No I. 78  
(Djobadze, 1986: fig. 85)



**Figure 14:** St. Barlaam Monastery Church, Small Impost or Base No. I. 81,  
(Djobadze, 1986: fig. 89)