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*Photography and the Twofold Origins of Modern Georgian Painting*

The present paper constitutes the core of one of the chapters of my doctoral dissertation in progress: *Photography in Georgian Culture Around 1900 – Art and Visual History in the Eyes of Colonialism, Nationalism, and Orientalism* (working title). It focuses on the artists and photographers of modern Georgia: Giorgi (Gigo) Gabashvili (1862-1936), Niko Piroshmanashvili (Piroshmani) (1862-1918), Alexander Roinashvili (1846-1898), and Dmitri Ermakov (1846-1916), as well as on the works of other local and foreign artists, and theoretically, on the formative role of photography in making art. I have to underline that Georgian scholarship has never treated photography as a special instrument for this approach and much of my attempts are based on the experience of comparative studies.

For this presentation I concentrate on two Georgian painters: Gabashvili, an academic artist who also embraced Orientalism and Symbolism, and self-taught Piroshmani, who enjoyed wide popularity and has been an inspiration for a whole generation of modernists. These two figures were considered in their lifetime, and still are, two founders of modern Georgian painting, each for different, even diverging qualities: a wide recourse to the artistic legacy of past times – Pagan, Christian and Islamic – with their later modifications on the one hand, and a sense of Europeanness, which earned them posthumous recognition in modernist circles and beyond, on another.

A major feature of the practices of both Piroshmani and Gabashvili is the intensive use of photography as a model/study, as an inspiration or point of departure, and therefore a reference to photography is always in one way or another present in their works. I will try in my paper to synthesize the past knowledge on two Georgian key artists, otherwise usually seen as opposed by their artistic structure, socio-cultural status or even the current scholarship. The background literature includes writings on the artists, photography of the time, as well as other historiographical and comparative materials.