

# Bagrat's Cathedral – two stages of power embodiment - construction and reconstruction

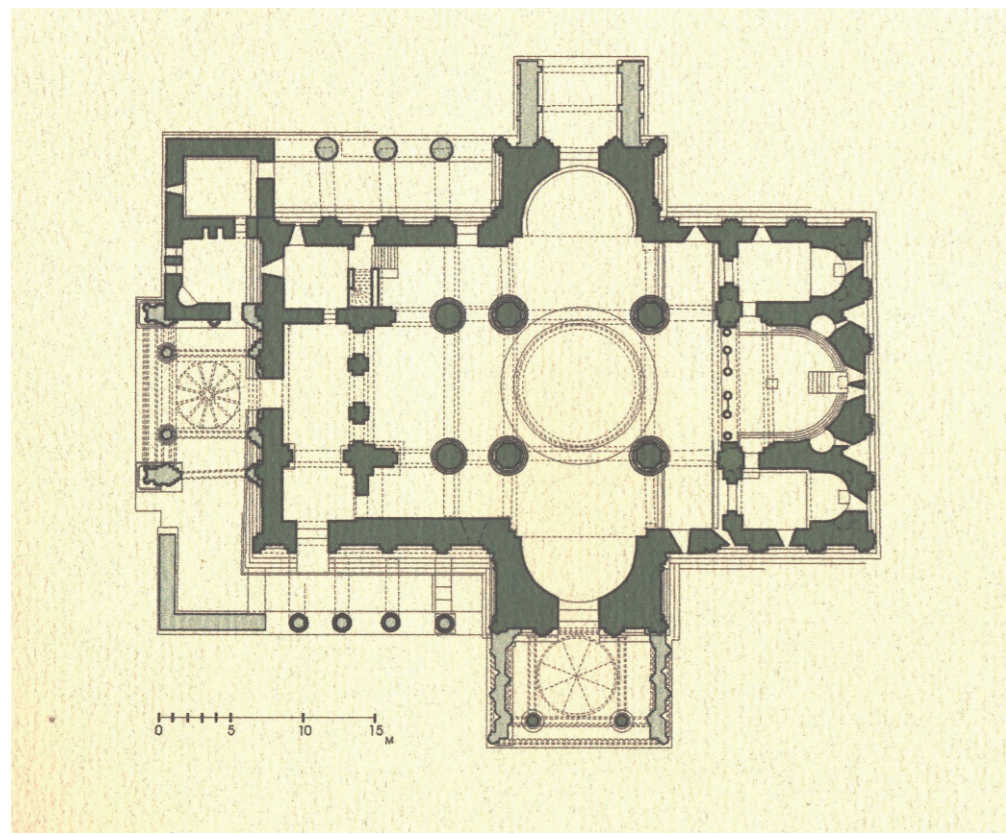
## Construction – History and Political context

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The landmark monument of the Georgian architecture – the Cathedral of the Dormition, also known as Bagrat's Cathedral is located on the highest hill in Kutaisi, Georgia and can be easily observed from around the city. It was built in the early years of the 11th century by the King Bagrat III - the first king of united Georgia. According to historical sources, consecration of the church was a glorious procession attended by kings, nobles, catholicoi, and etc.

Construction of the cathedral in the heart of capital was a significant political statement and representation of power of the ruler of the united Georgian Kingdom. As the symbol of the Kingdom of Georgia and the representation of the national identity, the cathedral has never lost its historical and cultural importance.

In 1692, the Turkish invasion destroyed the dome and vaults to leave the cathedral in ruins. Additional damage was done by Russian troops in 1771. In the 1950s archeological and restoration work under the headship of the Georgian architect Vakhtang Tsintsadze was started. The walls, exterior, and interior facing were partly restored and had been standing throughout the four decades. In cultural memory these were romantic ruins reflecting the magnificent past of Georgia.



Plan of the Cathedral



Ruins of the Cathedral, 1900s



Cathedral after the restoration, 2007

## Restoration - Historical Context and Reflection of Political Power. Birth of the National Monument

In 2009 the government of Georgia led by the President Mikheil Saakashvili decided to reconstruct the Cathedral which was consecrated in 2012. The aim was clear – to remake the history through the restoration of the symbol of united Georgia that had to become a new symbol of an ambitious newborn country, which after the fall of the Soviet Union and clashes of 1990s started rebuilding in 2003. The old symbol of united Georgia should have played the same role after one thousand years.

The case was full of controversies. Through the analysis of the process, the political background of protest was clear - objectors wanted to keep the ruins of the cathedral as a Medieval monument, though its authenticity had already been significantly damaged by the 20th century restorations. Protesters including both cultural heritage experts and society were strictly against the restoration. For professionals, the reason was either in a methodological approach or in the need for reconstruction at all. As for the society, they were against the reconstruction as wanted to keep romantic ruins as a remembrance of the great past.

In 2013, architect Andrea Bruno was awarded the Georgian State Gold Medal for his input in the Bagrat's Cathedral reconstruction and was subsequently recognized for this project with the University of Ferrara Domus International Prize for Restoration and Conservation.

UNESCO removed Bagrat's Cathedral from its World Heritage sites in 2017, considering its major reconstruction detrimental to its integrity and authenticity.

Bagrat's Cathedral within its essence and image became a symbol of the idea of the united Georgia and a reflection of a ruler at the same time.



Interior of the Cathedral after the reconstruction, 2012



Exterior of the Cathedral after the reconstruction, 2013