



# GEORGIA

A JOURNEY THROUGH  
LAND, HISTORY AND CULTURE



# GEORGIA

“SAKARTVELO”

**LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES:** *Georgia is bordered by Russia to the north, Turkey and Armenia to the south, Azerbaijan to the east, and the Black Sea to the west.*

**AREA:** *69,700 sq. km*

**POPULATION:** *4.6 million*

**CAPITAL:** *Tbilisi, pop. 1.3 million*

**LANGUAGE:** *Georgian is an ancient and distinctive language, which has no relationship with other languages, not even with the North Caucasian families. Its written alphabet is one of only 14 in the world. In addition to Kartuli (Georgian) there are Svanuri and Megruli languages, which are spoken in Samegrelo – the Western part of the country – and Svaneti –, in the north–west highland of Georgia.*

**RELIGION:** *Georgia was one of the first countries to embrace Christianity. Greek Orthodox Christianity became Georgia’s official religion in the fourth century AD and the Georgian Church became autonomous in the sixth century. Distinguished for their long tradition of religious tolerance throughout centuries, Georgians have enjoyed fairly good relations with other communities of various religious backgrounds, including Catholicism, Armenian Apostolicity, Judaism, Islam and etc.*

**BACKGROUND:** *Georgia is a country of fascinating landscapes, ancient history and remarkable culture. From snowy peaks to subtropical shores, from semi-arid deserts to rich vineyards and lush forests, from cities to enchanting villages, it is a place where everyone can discover something to his or her liking. Georgia is famous for its warmth and hospitality, wide variety of wines, unique cuisine, and the harmony of polyphonic songs and elegant dances. In Georgia, one will come across an ancient and still flourishing culture filled with churches, fortresses and towers, museums and exhibitions, sulfur baths and local bazaars. Here, the present co-exists with the past and modernity is fused with traditions. Georgia’s cultural heritage is rich and complex. Shaped by eastern and western ideas and influences, Georgians always guarded their distinctive and strong local culture and traditions.*

Georgia is one of the first regions in the world in which the earliest traces of human life, dating back 1.9 to 2.0 million years, were discovered. Located at a geographic meeting point between the eastern and western worlds, the country has played an important role as the crossroads of Europe and Asia over centuries. The ancient Silk Road, linking China with Italy passed through Georgia. Numerous archaeological sites dotting the landscape eloquently illustrate the advanced state of civilization that existed in the region. Such archeological finds have produced exquisite examples of bronze, silver and gold craftsmanship. This is the country of the Golden Fleece—the myth of the Argonauts, Jason and Medea—and land of Prometheus, chained to the Caucasus Mountains.

Both the spread of Christianity throughout the area beginning in the late first century and its announcement as an official religion in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century marked important turning points in Georgian culture. It brought about the Georgian Middle Ages, which is defined as period from early 4<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Though Georgians maintained close connections with the established centers of the Christian East, the influence transmitted from these centers was always tempered by strong local traditions, reflected in a distinctly Georgian style of medieval art: architecture, mural painting, repousse work, cloisonné enamel art, manuscript illumination, etc.

An independent kingdom during medieval times, Georgia subsequently was dominated by different invaders including Persia, Arabs, Turkey, Iran and finally the Russian Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the drawbacks caused by the Russian occupation, Georgia re-established contacts with European Countries and theatres, museums and newspapers were founded. The rich artistic tradition that began with medieval painting reinvented itself on the easel-mounted canvases of 20<sup>th</sup> century painters.

In 1921, Georgia was incorporated into the Soviet Union, and remained a part of the Soviet empire until gaining independence in 1991. Today, Georgia is a nation strongly connected to tradition, while, at the same time, embracing modernity and developing into democratic state that embodies western values.



Settlements at Khramis Didi-Gora  
6th millennium BC, Kartli



Female figure, Khramis Didi-Gora  
6th millennium BC, Kartli

# PREHISTORIC ERA



Ceramic shard  
Khramis Didi-Gora  
6th millennium BC,  
Kartli



Archaeologists have discovered the skull  
of a 1.8 million year old hominid at  
Dmanisi, in the foothills of the lesser  
Caucasus. This historic find provides a  
key link to humankind's earliest transitions  
between Africa and Europe.

# EARLY BRONZE AGE

4TH - 3RD MILLENNIUM BC



Dolmen. 3rd-2nd millennium BC. Eshera, Abkhazeti



Bear figurine  
3rd-2nd millennium BC.  
Azanta, Abkhazeti

## DOLMEN CULTURE



Fibula  
3rd millennium BC.  
Urnuisi, Kartli

## MTKVAR-ARAXI CULTURE

Kvatskhelebi settlement, 4th-3rd millennium BC, Kartli



Jar, 3rd millennium BC,  
Tsikhia-Gora, Kartli

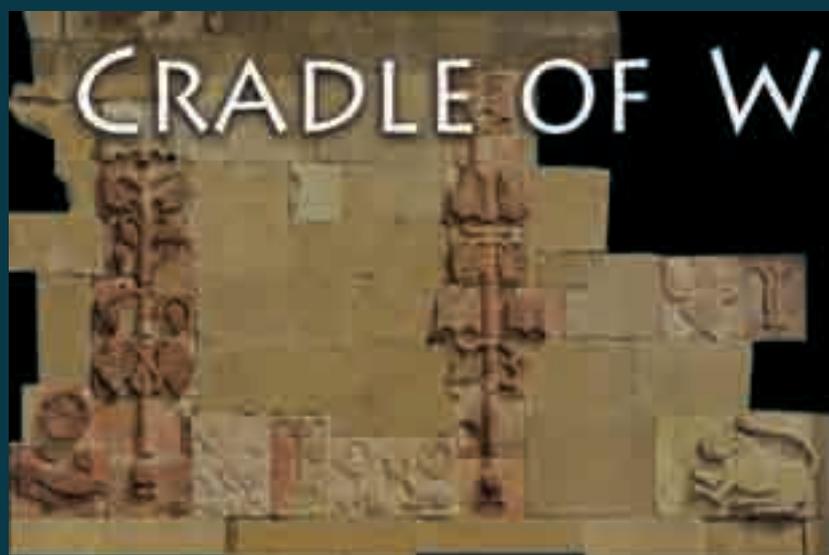


"Dergi". (Ceramic vine vessel)  
3rd millennium BC,  
Akhali jinvali, Kartli



Dagger, 3rd millennium BC,  
Tsartsis-Gora, Imereti

# CRADLE OF WINE



Svetitskhoveli, Reliefs on the south facade  
11th c. AD, Mtskheta, Kartli



Zoomorphic vessel  
8th-7th c. BC,  
Kartli.



The Trialeti Goblet  
Silver  
18th-17th c. BC,  
Kartli



"Saperavi"  
Unique type of grape

Wine-growing has been a long tradition in Georgia. Archaeological research provides evidence of viniculture as far back as 7000 years in the Caucasus region. Georgia has over 500 original varieties of grape. Many say that the generic word "wine" stems from the Georgian word "Gvino".



Pitcher  
4th millennium BC  
Kartli



"Kvevri", (Ceramic wine vessel)  
4th-3rd c. BC. Kartli

# CRADLE OF WINE

Georgia is the oldest wine producing region of Europe, if not the world. Because of this, it is often referred to as “The birth place of wine” or “The cradle of wine making”. The fertile valleys of the South Caucasus, which Georgia straddles, are believed by many archaeologists to be the source of the world’s first cultivated grapevines and Neolithic wine production. The archeological excavations in Kartli, at Shulaveri, have yielded what may well be the oldest domesticated grape pipes dating from the early sixth millennium BC. The invention of pottery during the Neolithic period was crucial for processing, serving and storing wine. The earliest wine jars, complete with lees residue, and decorated with grape clusters and jubilant figures were discovered at sixth millennium BC sites of Shulaveri and Khramis Didi Gora.

Archeological findings at Trialeti and other sites of early second millennium BC further prove Georgia’s advancement of viniculture. Amongst these findings, the most important are the marvelously ornate gold and silver Trialeti goblets, the latter of which depicts a vinous ceremony scene. Unusual variety of winemaking equipment and wine vessels of ancient times attest to the high skill of Georgian craftsmen. The most impressive among these is *kvevri*, giant clay vessels in which wine was fermented and stored. Georgian museums have on display numerous clay vessels of all designations. Some, such as *kvevri*, *dergi*, *tiki*, *satskhao*, were used to ferment grape juice and to store wine; others, such as *chapi*, *khelada*, *karkara*, *azarfesha*, *doki*, *sura*, *chinchila*, *deda-khelada*, *marani*, *dzhami*, *tasi*, *piala*, *kantsi* (horn vessel), were used for serving and drinking. Many unearthened silver, gold and bronze artifacts of the third and second millennia BC bare chased imprints of vines, grape clusters and leaves.

In addition to rich archaeological material, other evident exists of Georgia’s crucial role in domesticating grapes. The Greek annals by Apollonius of Rhodes, Strabo, Procopius of Caesaria and Xenophon indicate the crucial role that Georgians played in the development of wine. In fact, many scholars argue that the generic word “wine” stems from the Georgian word “gvino”. Furthermore, the Georgian pagan gods - Aguna and Nunua - could be considered analogous to the Greek gods, Dionysus and Bacchus.

Wine production continued unabated after the country’s conversion to Christianity and throughout medieval times. The “cult of wine,” on one hand, was associated with the story of how St. Nino made the first cross in Georgia from vine branches tied together with strands of her hair, and, on the other hand, its religious importance was partly assured by the centrality of wine in the Eucharist. Incorporation of the long-lasting tradition of viniculture in Christian art is shown most clearly by the rich ornamental decoration of Georgian church facades, in which grape clusters and vines are often interwoven with stone carved foliage ornamentation. The same motives are often applied in mural painting, repousse work and manuscript illumination. As Christian symbols, grape and wine penetrated Georgian religious poetry and chorals. Among these the famous choral works, “Shen khar venakhi” (“You are a vineyard”) is of a greatest importance.

Nowadays, the best-known wine-making regions of Georgia include Kakheti (further divided onto micro-regions of Telavi and Kvareli), Kartli, Imereti, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti, and Abkhazeti. Centuries of trial has resulted in different wine styles from region to region, from light body whites to heavy bodied reds and sweet wines. There are more than 500 grape varieties in Georgia. In several parts of Georgia today, but especially in the Kakheti region of eastern Georgia where rich vineyards dominate the picturesque landscape, wine is still made in the traditional way. It is stored in large buried ceramic jars, *kvevri*, in a special cellars, *marani*. The Vintage, *Rtveli*, in Georgia becomes a real autumn celebration for everyone. The living culture of wine production extends into virtually every Georgian family. For instance, the “cult of wine” has developed into a strong tradition of a table culture, *supra*, where the essential leading role is assumed by the *Tamada*, or Toastmaster.

This long-lasting tradition of wine production, one of Georgia’s most important cultural assets, has the ability to attract tourists and thus has become an important economic resource of the country. Due to the many millennia of wine-making, in Georgian history, the traditions of its viticulture are entwined and inseparable with the country’s national identity.

# MIDDLE BRONZE AGE

## KURGAN CULTURE 24TH-15TH C. BC



Fibula  
3rd-2nd millennium BC.  
Bedeni. Kartli



Necklace  
25th-23rd c. BC.  
Ananauri. Kakheti

Tsnori Big Kurgan  
23rd-20th c. BC. Kakheti



Lion Figurine  
23rd-20th c. BC.  
Tsnori. Kakheti

Fibula  
23rd-20th c. BC.  
Tsnori. Kakheti

## TRIALETI CULTURE 20TH-16TH C. BC



The Trialeti Goblet. (Detail)  
18th-17th c. BC.  
Kartli



Necklace. 20th-18th c. BC.  
Trialeti. Kartli



The Trialeti Goblet  
18th-17th c. BC.  
Kartli

The Trialeti Bucket  
2nd millennium BC.  
Kartli

# LATE BRONZE-EARLY IRON AGE

14TH-7TH C. BC



Belt Fragment  
8th-7th c. BC.  
Mtskheta. Kartli



War chariot  
9th-8th c. BC.  
Gokhebi. Kakheti



Pectoral  
14th-13th c. BC.  
Pevrebi cemetery  
Kakheti



Buckles  
1st millennium BC.  
Imereti



Standard  
6th-5th c. BC.  
Kazbegi board



Pendant. 18th-16th c. BC.  
Brili cemetery, Racha



Hermaphroditic  
7th c. BC.  
Fersati. Imereti



Standard  
15th c. BC.  
Berikdeebi  
Kartli



Stag figurine  
14th-13th c. BC.  
Tsitelgorebi. Kakheti



Axhead  
6th c. BC.  
Ozhora cemetery  
Kartli  
(Colchis Culture)

# GOLDEN FLEECE

"The great fame this country had in early time is disclosed by the myths, which refer in an obscure way to the expedition of Jason as having proceeded as far even as Media, and also, before that time, to that of Phrixos."  
Strabo "Geography"



Medea and Jason. 320-310 BC.  
The red-figured krater from Paestum. Naples.



Head of Pan  
2nd c. BC.



## COLCHIS CIVILIZATION

VANI. IMERETI. WESTERN GEORGIA



Nike  
2nd c. BC.



Necklace  
3th c. BC.



Earrings  
4th c. BC.



Ancient Georgian Coins



Pectoral  
4th c. BC.



Arm rings. 4th c. BC.

"It is said that in their country gold is carried down by the mountain-torrents, and that the barbarians obtain it by means of perforated troughs and fleecy skins, and that this is the origin of the myth of the golden fleece — unless they call them Iberians, by the same name as the western Iberians, from the gold mines in the both countries."

Strabo, "Geography"

# ANCIENT GEORGIAN METALWORK

Thanks to the region's rich natural resources and its geographical location, Georgia developed metallurgical traditions which go back to the Early Bronze Age, namely the fourth to third millennium BC, when the Mtkvari-Araxian Culture (c. 3500 – 2400 BC) emerged on the territory of the East Caucasus. Unearthed artifacts from this period already demonstrate the advanced skills both in bronze metallurgy and in working with precious metals of Georgian artisans. These skills were further developed during the Middle Bronze Age, particularly during the era of the Kurgan culture. The early Kurgan culture, prevalent in south-central Georgia, is represented at two important sites: Martkopi and Bedeni. Tools and jewellery found at Martkopi and necklaces, pins, rings and temple pendants, as well as striking ornamental gold brooch discovered at Bedeni show an unusually high level of workmanship.

Alongside these artifacts a 23<sup>rd</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> century BC golden lion statuette, found in one of the kurgans in the Alazani Valley, is particularly noteworthy; it is the first sculptural image of its kind unearthed in the Transcaucasus area. The later Kurgan period, known for its Trialeti culture, demonstrates the further evolution of pre-Christian culture during 20<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> century BC. Rich burial gifts discovered include valued metal items, golden beads, standards, a golden goblet decorated with precious stones, and a famous silver bucket and goblet, the latter of which depicts a vinous ceremony scene. The first examples of golden and silver crockery - plates, jugs, mugs and other dishes – are found here.

During 14<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, known as the late bronze-Early Iron Age, two great cultural centres formed on the territory of eastern and western Georgia, the latter of which, called Colchis, was distinguished for its production of so-called Colchian axe heads. These pieces are adorned with a peculiar style of graphic ornaments that demonstrate both advanced metallurgical skills and artistic values. The middle period of the first millennium BC was notable for the wide use of iron in Colchis. Due to its especially advanced ironwork skills, one of the Georgian tribes – khalibs – were regarded by ancient Greeks as the founders of iron technology.

Between the sixth and third century AD, the western state of Egrisi, the legendary `Colchis` preserved in ancient Greek mythology and literature, and the eastern state of Kartli, called `Iberia,` flourished. The development of local goldsmithery was made possible, in part, by the regions' rich resources: gold-mines in southern Kartli and gold-bearing rivers in Egrisi. The latter, according to Greek authors, was especially `rich in gold`. These authors reported on the method of collecting gold, a method that is still practiced in the mountainous Svaneti region, from the Egrisian Rivers: using sheepskins as sieves, so that the gold grains would get caught in the fleece. Such a fleece might be the inspiration for the Golden Fleece of Argonauts. Examples of Colchian gold work from the earliest eighth to ninth century BC include temple pendants, richly decorated with granulation and sculpted heads of predators, which have been found at Ureki on the Black Sea coast. These fine metal pieces attest to the high level of skills among craftsmanship.

Gold granulation attained great variety and technical excellence in the fifth and early fourth century. Outstanding examples, discovered in Vani, include exquisitely crafted gold diadems, with braid-patterned holders; diamond-shaped plaques, adorned with repousse images of fighting animals: earrings; arm rings: and temple pendants. All suggest the work of a skilled master. The plethora of such objects offers clear evidence of the existence of a distinct and original Colchian goldsmithery style that emphasizes extensive use of the granulation technique in combination with filigree. Colchian sepulchres of the sixth to fourth century BC have yielded lavish necklaces with miniature figures of birds and the heads of calves, goats, and rams - perhaps none more impressive than a gold necklace from Vani, which is composed of dozens of tiny granulation-adorned turtles.

Meanwhile at Iberian sites contemporaneous with Vani, the evidence of Achaemenid Persian influence becomes more pronounced, as can be seen in a splendid fourth century BC pectoral discovered amongst the Akhalkgori treasure from northwest of Tbilisi. Indeed, perhaps the most extraordinary of the Akhalkgori treasures is a pair of pendants designed to hang from a horse's bridle at the temples, crafted in the shape of two horses, with chains and acorn shapes hanging below.

The further advancement of the metalwork in eastern Georgia is demonstrated by the first century AD discoveries in Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia. In addition to the abundance of unearthed golden jewellery, such as gorgeous necklaces, earrings, rings and bracelets adorned with precious stones, the necropolis of Armaziskhevi was rich in silver crockery, including second century bowls with the sculptural images in the centre. Another important example of silverwork from this period is the second or third century AD legs of a bedstead discovered in Bagineti. Overall, the rich finds at Mtskheta and the techniques employed in these objects-granulation, the use of multicoloured stone and cloisonné enamel-demonstrate that these methods, which were widely used by Georgian masters throughout the following medieval centuries were the accomplishments of ancient Georgian art.

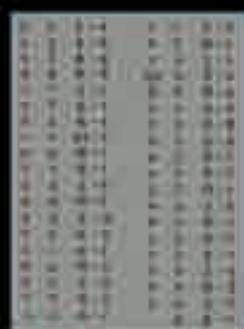
# GEORGIAN ALPHABET AND OLDEST INSCRIPTIONS



An ancient Georgian inscription from Palestine circa. 430 AD.



Ishkhami. King Gurgun's chapel. 10-11 c. AD  
Historical Tao-Klarjeti  
Northern Turkey



Georgian Alphabet

Urbnisi  
5th c. AD.  
Kartli



Bolnisi Sioni. 494 AD. Kartli

An ancient Georgian inscription from Palestine circa 430 AD.



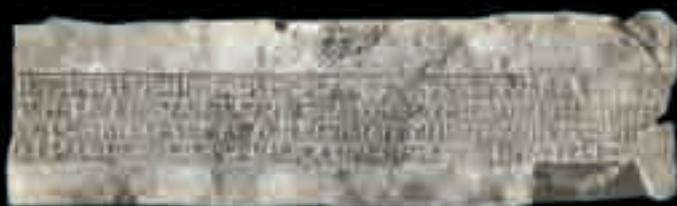
Jvari Monastery  
586-604 AD.  
Kartli



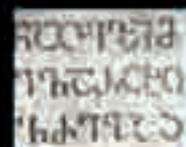
Bolnisi Sioni  
494 AD. Kartli



Davidgareja  
7th c. AD. Kakheti



Bolnisi Sioni. 494 AD. Kartli



Tsromi  
7th c. AD. Kartli

"The Georgian language is conceived for the belief in the Day of his - its Second Coming, to the judgment of Lord of every other language. And the language this is dormant till the Day, and in the language of the Gospel it is called Lazarus... For every enigma is embedded - buried in this language... And this very language, ornate and blessed by the name of Lord, humbled and degraded, is in wait of the Day of the Second Coming of the Lord."

Ioane Zosime. 10th century

# GEORGIAN LANGUAGE & LITERARY TRADITION

Georgian is an ancient and distinctive language, which has no relationship with other languages, not even with the North Caucasian families. Its written alphabet is one of only 14 in the world. In addition to Kartuli (Georgian), there are the Svanuri and Megruli languages, which are spoken in Samegrelo - the Western part of the country - and Svaneti, in the north west highland of Georgia.

Georgian, the official language of the republic, is spoken by about 4.1 million people worldwide. The origin of the Georgian alphabet is uncertain, though it was presumably a free adaptation of the Greek alphabet with new characters invented for the sounds peculiar to the Georgian language. According to the traditional accounts written down by Leonti Mroveli in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the original Georgian alphabet was created by Parnavaz, the first King of Caucasian Iberia (also called Kartli), in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. However, the first examples of that alphabet, or its modified version, date from the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries. The earliest attestation of the language is an inscription dating from 430 AD in a church in Palestine and an inscription dating from 494 AD on Bolnisi Sioni Church. However, the existence of a unique local form of Aramaic, known as “Armazuli,” which was uncovered in the findings at Mtskheta, demonstrates that local pre-Christian records, which shared several common features with the Georgian alphabet, did exist.

Georgian has been written in a variety of scripts over its history. Since its adaptation to a written structure, the Georgian alphabet has progressed through three primary forms. The examples of the earliest one, *asomtavruli* (“capital letters”) also known as *mrgvlovani* (“rounded”), are still preserved in monumental inscriptions. The *nuskhuri* (“minuscule”) or *khutsuri* (“church script”) script first appeared in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. It was mostly used in ecclesiastical works, with the *asomtavruli* still serving on occasion as capital letters in religious manuscripts. *Mkhedruli* (“secular” or “military writing”), the alphabet that is currently used, first appeared in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It was used for non-religious purposes through the eighteenth century, when it completely replaced *khutsuri*. *Mkhedruli* used to write modern Georgian, consists of 33 characters and has no distinction between upper and lowercase forms.

Georgian has a rich literary tradition, which began in the 5<sup>th</sup> century with the oldest surviving literary text - *The Martyrdom of St. Shushanik* by Iakob Tsurtaveli. The monasteries throughout the country, which also served as educational and cultural centres, were cradles of this Georgian literary heritage. Georgian religious literature offers all the genres familiar to the Greek orthodox world: translations of the commentaries, homilies, lives of Saints, treaties on monasticism, and collections of hymns. The richly adorned manuscripts that survive from these centres of enlightenment attest to the high quality of Georgian manuscript illumination. Georgian medieval secular literature culminates in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the epic poem by Shota Rustaveli entitled, “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” Its broad cadences and epic sweep has no comparables.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century King Teimuraz I and King Archil contributed extensively to the evolution of Georgia’s modern prose, and Sulkhan Saba Orbelian wrote outstanding parables. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the foremost writers were David Guramishvili and the lyric poet Besarion Gabashvili. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, romanticism was the dominant style, as seen in the writings of Alexander Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani and Nikoloz Baratashvili. The outstanding representatives of classical Georgian literature were Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli and Vazha Pshavela, who was distinguished with his unique mountain-themed stories, poems and lyrics. Among the eminent 20<sup>th</sup> century writers were Mikheil Javakhishvili, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, Niko Lortkipanidze and others. The poetry of Galaktion Tabidze, a leading Georgian poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, profoundly influenced all subsequent generations of Georgian poets.

Overall the contemporary Georgian literary heritage is a part of the continuum of language and literature that has reinvented itself throughout the centuries since the times of antiquity.

# CHRISTIANITY IN GEORGIA

## 4TH C. AD



Jvari Monastery  
586-605 AD. Kartli

"So St. Nino and her disciples were preaching to the people day and night without rest and were showing them the way to the heaven.... and all were baptized in Kartli... and became true Christians".

Leonti Mroveli



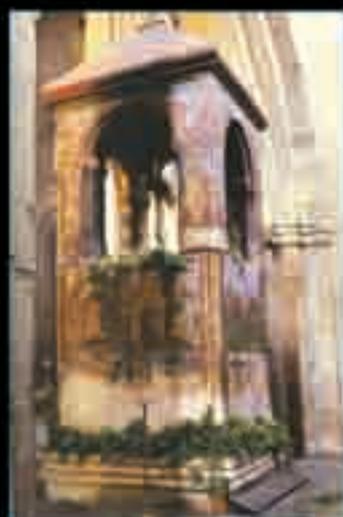
The Cross of St. Nino



St. Nino. Painted icon.  
Bodbe Monastery. Kakheti



St. Simon and St. Andrew  
14th c. Ubisi. Imereti



Svetitskhoveli. Pillar  
erected upon the burial  
of the robe of Jesus



St. Nino. Oshki. 10th c.  
Historical Tao-Klarjeti  
Northern Turkey



Church of St. Simon the Canaanite  
9th -10th c. Abkhazeti

"And in the year 38 arrived the disciples Andrew and Simeon the Canaanite. Andrew converted the Megreles and left, whereas Simeon the Canaanite died and was buried in Nikophaia".

Vakhushti Bagrationi

# CHRISTIANITY IN GEORGIA

The Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church is one of the world's most ancient Christian churches. Tradition traces its origin to the mission of the Apostles St. Andrew, St. Simeon the Canaanite and St. Matthias in the first century.

Along with the Apostles' mission to the region, the beginning of Christianity in Georgia is also linked to the burial of Christ's robe in the royal garden in Mtskheta. According to tradition, in the first century AD, the robe of Christ was brought to Mtskheta by Rabbi Elio, who was met by his sister Sidonia at the city gate. She became so moved upon gripping the robe that she fell dead on the spot, clasping the robe so tightly that she was buried with it in her hands. Thus the city of Mtskheta became home to the nation's most sacred relics: A church was later built on the site of a cedar of Lebanon that grew from Sidonia's grave. It was named Svetitskhoveli, Georgian for "life-giving pillar," when, according to legend, one of its pillars, made from the wood of Sidonia's cedar tree, exuded a life-giving balm and amazed everyone with its miraculous radiance.

The declaration of Christianity as an official state religion in 320-330s is associated with two figures, King Mirian II and St. Nino of Cappadocia. St. Nino taught the faith of Jesus Christ for six years and performed miracles with the power of the Holy Cross. She destroyed pagan idols by praying to Jesus and healed the sick Queen Nana. The conversion of King Mirian is also associated with a miracle: According to legend, the King was hunting near Mtskheta, when suddenly he found himself in complete darkness. Only by uttering the name of St. Nino's God did the night disperse allowing the sun to shine again. After this experience, King Mirian accepted Christianity and declared it the state religion. He sanctified the churches and made the Kingdom of Kartli one of the first Christian states. Since then, Georgia has always been part of the wider Eastern Orthodox world. From the 320s until 466, the Georgian Orthodox Church was under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic See of Antioch. After which, it became Autocephalous and began to use the Georgian vernacular in its liturgy.

Between the sixth and ninth centuries, Georgia underwent a cultural transformation as monasticism flourished. Important monasteries that soon transformed into educational and cultural centres, including the David Gareja monastic complex, Zedazeni, Shiogvime and Tao-Klarjeti monasteries, were founded at a number of locations throughout the country and abroad. One of the most notable examples is the Iviron monastery on Mount Athos in Greece, where many important religious works were translated from Greek into Georgian. In addition, the renowned Icon "Wonderworking Iberian Icon of the Mother of God" is located at this centre. Other well-known Georgian centres of Christian culture include the Georgian Monastery of the Black Mountain in Palestine, the Petritsoni Monastery in Bulgaria and the Gross Monastery in Jerusalem. Prominent Georgian figures in Christian culture included Evagrius Ponticus (4<sup>th</sup> century); Peter the Iberian (5<sup>th</sup> century); Euthimius the Athonite (955-1028); Giorgi the Athonite (1009-1065); Arsen Ikaltoeli (11<sup>th</sup> century); and Epraim the Lesser (11<sup>th</sup> century).

Georgia's identification as a bastion of Christianity is also associated with the Golden Age of its history, during the reigns of King David IV the Builder (1089-1125) and Queen Tamar (1184-1213). The country united under the authority of Bagrationi family, which declared itself to be direct descendant of the biblical King David, became a leading Christian power in region. Extraordinary victories over Muslim conquerors spread among the Crusaders in the holy land, who fought for Christian allies in this region. Afterwards, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Georgians played an important role in returning the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem to Christians and, according to legend, possessed the keys to the church.

But for all its dramatic accomplishments, the unification of medieval Georgia was relatively short-lived. Because of its location on the crossroads between the East and the West and its proximity to Muslim countries, Georgia's Christian-based national identity has been tested through out its history. This continuous struggle in Georgian history is demonstrated by the cults of local Saints-kings, noblemen, clergy, as well as common people - who sacrificed their lives to their faith. The constant invasions of Muslim neighbours after the 13<sup>th</sup> century greatly disrupted and disintegrated the kingdom. Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, both church and state were divided into eastern and western regions. In 1801, the Kingdom of Eastern Georgia was occupied and annexed by the Tsarist Russian Empire. Subsequently, the autocephalous status of the Georgian Church was abolished in 1811. The Soviets, who invaded the country in 1921, subjected members of the Georgian Orthodox Church to intense harassment. Only after Georgia's independence in 1991 did the Georgian Orthodox Church experience a major revival in fortunes.

Despite being overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian, Georgia has been historically known for religious tolerance towards the different ethnic and religious groups residing the country. This tradition of hospitality and tolerance, handed down through the centuries, is still alive today.

# IBERIA OF CAUCASUS KARTLI KINGDOM

4TH C. BC - 3RD C. AD

"Iberia has mostly densely populated towns and cities. Houses have tiled roofs, they are designed well, and they have markets and other social establishments".

Strabo, "Geography"



Seal-rings, 4th c. BC. Akhalgori



Temple pendant  
4th c. BC. Akhalgori

Uplistsikhe cave-town, 5th c. BC - 3rd c. AD.



Armaziskhevi. Bath. 2nd c. AD. Mtskheta



Dagger sheath  
2nd c. AD. Armaziskhevi



Bowls, 2nd c. AD,  
Armaziskhevi



Leg of a bedstead  
2nd-3rd c. AD.  
Bagineti



"Armazi Bilingual"  
2nd c. AD.  
Mtskheta



The tomb.  
1st c. AD.  
Mtskheta



# EARLY MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURE

## 5TH-7TH CENTURIES



Ateni Sioni. 7th c. Kartli

Martvili  
The Ascension  
7th c. Samegrelo



Bichvinta Mosaic  
The deer at the fountain  
5th c. Abkhazeti



Tsromi Church Mosaic  
7th c. Kartli



Bolnisi Sioni. The capital relief,  
Kartli

Tsebelda  
Panel from  
an altarscreen  
7th-8th c.  
Abkhazeti



Jvari Monastery  
Tympanum of the south entrance  
The Ascension of the cross

Urbnisi. 5th-6th c. Kartli



Bolnisi Sioni. 478-493 AD. Kartli

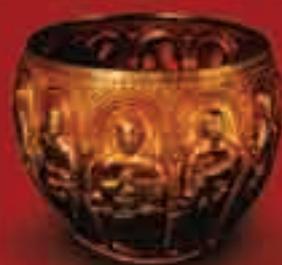


Jvari Monastery  
386-604 AD. Kartli



Oshki. 10th c.  
Historical Tao-Klarjeti  
Northern Turkey

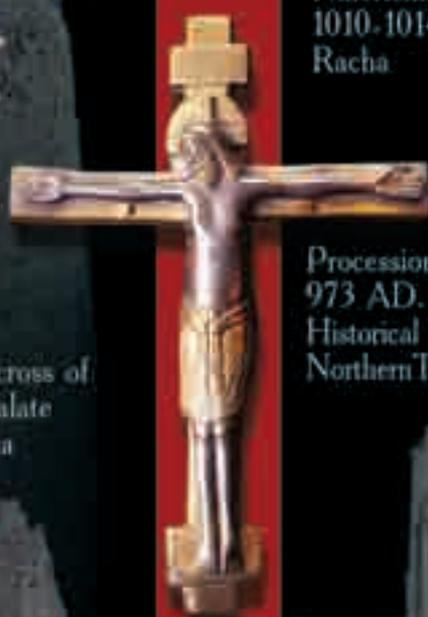
# THE UNIFICATION OF GEORGIA KING BAGRAT III 10TH-11TH C.



The Berdia Cup  
999 AD, Abkhazeti



Processional cross of  
David Kuropalate  
10th. c. Racha



Nikortsminda  
1010-1014 AD.  
Racha

Processional cross, detail  
973 AD. Ishkhani  
Historical Tao-Klarjeti  
Northern Turkey



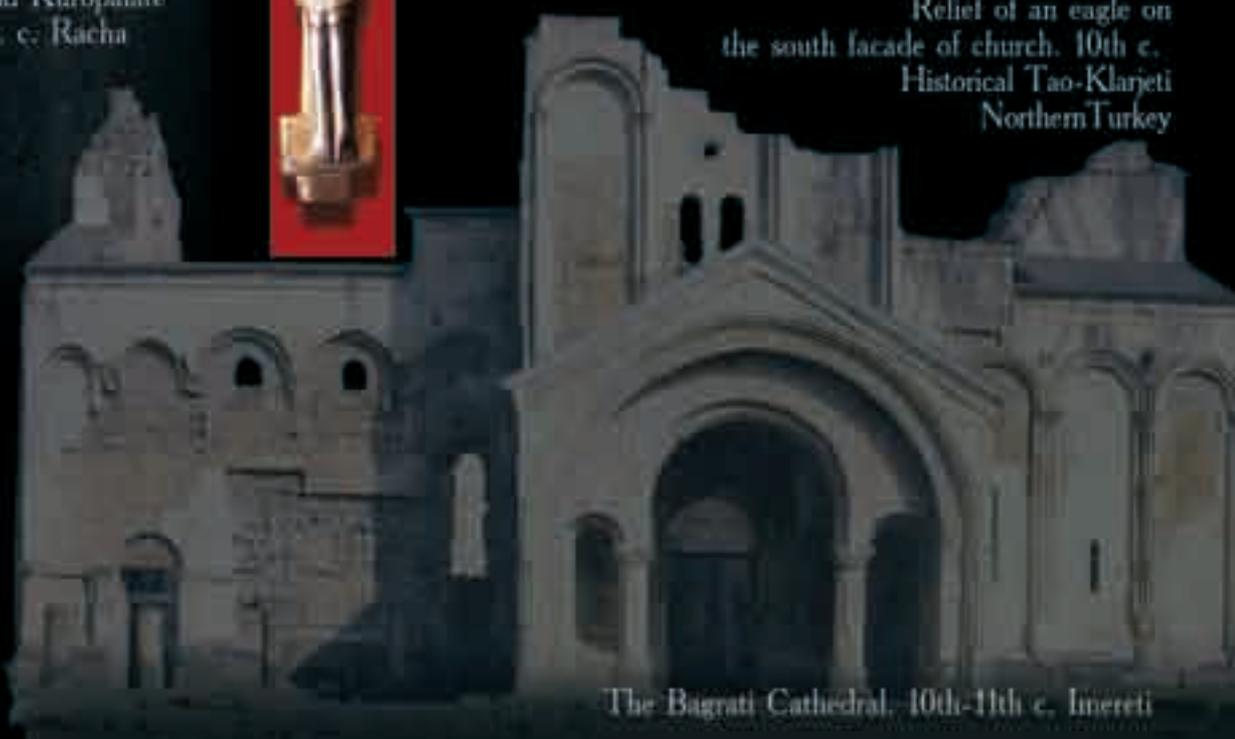
Kvetera  
10th c. Kakheti



Gishi. 10th 11th c.  
Historical Hereti  
Azerbaijan



Khakhuli  
Relief of an eagle on  
the south facade of church. 10th c.  
Historical Tao-Klarjeti  
Northern Turkey



The Bagrati Cathedral. 10th-11th c. Inereti

# GEORGIAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Amongst the various fields of Georgian art, architecture is one of the most important branches, distinguished with its richness in types and styles. The earliest examples of architectural enterprise found in Shulaveris Gora and Imiris Gora derive from the late Neolithic period (5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> millennia BC). The dwellings of this period consisted of a “beehive” type of building, with the circular floor plans, built of curving mud bricks, with opening at the apex of the hut roof. In some parts of Georgia a type of dwelling combined the domed roof with a square ground plan (3<sup>rd</sup> millennium). According to the group of scholars, this square plan domed type of house was an archetype upon which the local traditions of centralized dome buildings draw. Around 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC the emergence of two political states on the territory of Georgia: Iberia/Kartli in the east and Colchis/Egrisi in the west, determined the growth and development of ancient towns and cities (Rustavi, Mtskheta, Uplistsikhe, Poti and etc) along the trade rout from the eastern countries to the Black Sea. The architecture of ancient Georgian cities with their canal systems, fortifications, marketplaces, public buildings, palaces and richly decorated houses is repeatedly mentioned by the Greek and Roman authors.

The spread of Christianity throughout the area since the late first century (apostle’s missions) and its announcement as an official religion in early 4<sup>th</sup> c. was an important turn in Georgian culture. It gave start up to Georgian Middle Ages, which are defined as period from early 4<sup>th</sup> c. up to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.

The remains of the earliest churches survived on the territory of the country prove that the first ecclesiastic buildings were of a small size and did not have any established architectural type - Svetitskhoveli, Cheremi, Nekresi, Samtavro 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD.

Further development of Christian rite led to the perfection of architectural design from simple types to advanced structures of churches. In the early medieval period (4<sup>th</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> c) two principal types of building developed in parallel - The basilica and the cross-domed building: The earliest examples of the basilica churches confirm that in Georgia at the end of 5<sup>th</sup> c the basic three-aisled design of basilica structure was altered and adapted to local needs: Dzveli Shuamta (5<sup>th</sup> c), Tskhrakara in Matani, Anchiskhati, Urbnisi and Bolnisi churches can serve as examples for these alterations. But the most unusual amongst basilica modifications is the so-called “triple-church” basilica, unique to Georgia. From the exterior these appeared to be normal basilicas, but in the interior the naïve aisles are separated by solid, continuous walls, dividing the interior lengthwise into three separated churches (Kvemo Bolnisi, Vanati, 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> c., Nekresi, Zegani 7<sup>th</sup> c etc.).

The second church type developed in Georgia was of a domed structure, which afterwards became dominant in Georgian church architecture throughout all medieval period. This type of churches evolved the clearly defined architectural designs by the 5<sup>th</sup>, beginning of 6<sup>th</sup> c. (Zegani, Idleti, Shiomgvime, Erlaant Sakdari; *Triconchs* and *Tetraconches* - Sukhbechi, Dzveli-Gavazi, Manglisi, Ninotsminda), whilst in 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. it reached its perfection in the famous series of monuments of i.e. *Classical Period* (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c). Balanced harmony of proportions and perfect adjustment of moderate decorations with tectonic architectural forms characterizes the structural design of this period. The most outstanding example of this epoch is Jvari (586-604), which culminates the artistic explorations of previous periods and gives start up to new series of monuments of i.e *Jvari Type* (The 7<sup>th</sup> c. churches in Ateni, Martvili and Dzveli Shuamta). Decoration of church facades with stone carved figural and decorative scenes observed in Jvari became common feature of Georgian churches afterwards. Furthermore, built on the cliff overlooking Mtskheta (the ancient capital of Georgia) Jvari is unique with its exceptional location and harmonious interaction with the surrounding landscape. Amongst other significant monuments of this period are Tsromi (626-634) with a dome held up by four freestanding columns and facades embellished with blind arcades and Bana (mid 7<sup>th</sup>c.) with its central *Tetraconch* space surrounded with richly decorated detour.

Despite the obstacles posed by the Arab invasion in mid 7<sup>th</sup> c. Georgian church architecture evolved further to its next stage: 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> c, known as a *Transitional Period* from *Classical Epoch* (6<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> c.) to i.e. *Baroque* of 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>c. This period is characterized by the creative exploration of new structural and artistic ideas and is distinguishable with the abundance and diversity of architectural types, varied from region

# THE RISE OF THE GEORGIAN KINGDOM

## KING DAVID IV BUILDER

1089-1125



The portrait of King David the Builder, Gelati monastery, 16th c.

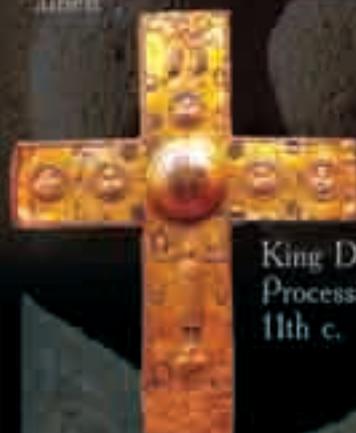


Gelati monastery Church of the Virgin 12th c. Imereti



Processional cross from Gelati 12th c.

"Lord, creator of the world, bless by your divine will, David, King of the Abkhazians, Kartlians, Heretians, and Kakhetians, sun of Christianity, amen."



King David the Builder's Processional cross 11th c.



Tondo from Gelati, 11th c.



Gelati Academy Porch. Dome 13th-14th c.

Church of the Virgin Apse mosaic 12th c.



The Gelati Gospels 12th c.

Church of the Virgin Apse mosaic Archangel Gabriel 12th c.



to region (Vachnadziani and Gurjaani double domed churches in Kakheti, Armazi, Tsirkoli and Kabeni in Kartli, Opiza, Shatberdi, Taoskari, Otkhta Eklesia, Kola, Isi, Zegani in Tao-Klarjeti).

The next stage of evolution of Georgian architecture i.e. *Baroque* (second half of 10<sup>th</sup> c. - first half of 13<sup>th</sup> c.) is the highest peak of development in medieval Georgian culture. Political and economical flourish of the country united under the rule of Bagrationi dynasty led to the further advancement in Georgian architecture. Namely, the tendency towards massive constructions was reflected in glorious architecture of Cathedrals: Oshki (60s of 10<sup>th</sup> c) and Bagrati (1003), Svetitskhoveli (first half of 11<sup>th</sup>c) and Alaverdi (first half of 11<sup>th</sup>c). Alongside the unprecedented complexity and enormous dimensions, the basic feature of this period was the profound artistic solutions in design and decor of both, the interior and exterior, enhanced by the spectacular contrast of shade, light and color. Church facades were decorated with the endless variations of rich ornamental carvings. In this regard the magnificent reliefs on the facades of 1010-1014 Nikortsminda Church and 1030 Samtavisi church are of a special importance.

Alongside the diverse church types, Georgian architecture developed the design of rock-cut ensembles, originating from the ancient rock-cut city of Uplistsikhe, advancing in David-Gareja desert monasteries and culminating in the magnificent architecture of the 12-13<sup>th</sup> c. town of Vardzia.

The following period between second half of 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> c. is known as late Medieval Age. The latter is distinguished by constant invasions of Muslim neighbors (Mongols, Turks and Persians) which inhibited the further development of architecture. These centuries are characterized with significantly less architectural innovations as the activities were mainly related to the rehabilitation of dilapidated monuments. In this period Persian influences penetrate the decorative elements of both interior and exterior of buildings, often built of bricks instead of stone. However, as whole, Georgian architectural monuments of late Middle Ages - Metekhi (1278-1289), Zarzma (beginning of 14<sup>th</sup>c), Sapara (13<sup>th</sup>c), Gergeti, (14<sup>th</sup> c), Gremi (mid 16<sup>th</sup>c) and Ananuri churches (17<sup>th</sup>c) retained their traditional type and style established in 11<sup>th</sup> c.

The strength of local building techniques has carried into modern buildings, which are adorning various towns and cities of the country.

The history of Georgian architecture can serve as an indisputable evidence for strong national identity maintained throughout the centuries with vigor.



Pitareti, 13th c. Kartli

# THE ADVANCED MIDDLE AGES

11TH-13TH C

ARCHITECTURE AND MURAL PAINTING



"The Second Coming"  
Nikorcminda, South facade  
1010-1014 AD, Racha



The face of Christ, Vardzia  
12th c., Samtskhe-Javakheti



Samtavisi, Detail  
11th c. Kartli



Gabriel the Evangelist  
11th c. Atenis, same, Kartli



Alaverdi, 11th c. Kakheti



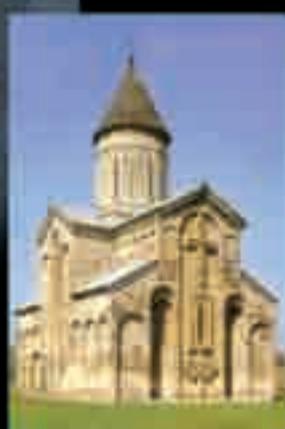
Svetitskhoveli, Entrance gate  
11th c. Mtskheta, Kartli



The Angel, Kintsvisi  
13th c. Kartli



Ikorn, 1172 AD,  
Kartli



Samtavisi, 11th c.,  
Kartli



Svetitskhoveli, 11th c.  
Mtskheta, Kartli

# GEORGIAN MURAL PAINTING

The wall painting, both murals and mosaics, have a long lasting tradition in Georgia. The first century miniature fresco fragment from Bagineti in Mtskehta, an ancient capital of Georgia, and the third century AD floor mosaics at Dzalisa, which depict the Feast of Dionysus, demonstrate that the tradition of adorning interiors with paintings did exist in pre-Christian Georgia. However, embellishment of interiors with paintings became the common practice after the spread of Christianity in the fourth century. Evolving from the early Christian period up to the late Middle Ages, Georgian mural painting went through different stages and formed one of the most valuable parts of country's cultural heritage.

Amongst the earliest Christian mosaics are the fifth century floor mosaic of Bichvinta Church, which depicts the symbolic animals, bird and fruits, and slightly later pieces in the Shukhuti Baths, exposing more abstract ornamental symbolic images. Until the end of 10<sup>th</sup> century paintings in Georgian Churches decorated only the main areas of the interior, such as the apse and the central cupola above it. During the early period, two types of wall painting emerged: non-figurative symbolic images, such as those found on early paintings in Sioni Church at Ateni, and figurative images, the earliest of which is the altar painting in Tsromi (630 AD) that depicts Christ with Angels executed in mosaic techniques and fresco images of the Virgin with apostles in the lower register.

Contrary to many other parts of Eastern Christian world, Georgia was barely affected by Byzantine iconoclasm. Icon-making and reverence for icons in Georgia continued uninterrupted throughout the medieval period. Georgian paintings of the eighth and ninth centuries, found in Telovani, Armazi, and the four rock-cut Churches at Sabereebi in the monastic complex at the Gareja desert, share similar stylistic traits and mark a first step on the way to developing a national idiom of painting. Local saints became the subject of individualized iconography and portraits of secular hierarchy, donors and patrons became the part of the program of church wall painting.

The end of 10<sup>th</sup>-beginning of 11<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of the Golden Age of Georgian mural painting. In this period, the fresco cycle for the entire church interior was developed, which shared some features with Byzantine programs, while remaining connected with earlier local patterns. Thus, for example, paintings in the cupolas of Georgian churches generally depict the Ascension of the Cross, instead of Byzantine Christ Pantocrator, while Deesis or Christ in Majesty is typical of altar compositions for Georgia, instead of the Virgin with Child peculiar to Byzantine paintings. Strong monumentality and simplicity revealed in large compositions, which present a few prominent figures, as well as simple landscapes and architectural backgrounds, distinguish the paintings of this period.

Distinct schools of painting gradually began to emerge in the 10<sup>th</sup> century in different parts of the country: in Tao-Klarjeti in the southwest, Gareja in the east and Svaneti in the mountainous northwest region of the country. Along with the high level of artistry and refinement that characterizes the paintings of the Tao-Klarjeti churches (Otkhta Eklesia, Khakhuli, Oshki and Ishkhani), its importance rests on the fact that the style incorporated by this school was later inherited by artists in the center of the country. This link is most clearly demonstrated by the 11<sup>th</sup> century fragmentary paintings of Manglisi and the 11<sup>th</sup> century magnificent frescos of the Sioni Church at Ateni, which offer the first vivid example of a unified wall painting program in Georgia. This work is distinguished by elegantly proportioned figures, picturesque poses and gestures, and expressive faces.

Meanwhile, at Gareja, in the semi-desert region of Kakheti in eastern Georgia, wall painting also flourished and its stylistic traits-simple composition and the use of a palette of yellow gold, dark red, green and blue, which interacted harmoniously with the surrounding rock-cut monastic environment-developed. Unique stylistic elements are also associated with the school of painting that evolved in Svaneti. The most striking of its works belong to the court painter Tevdor, who developed his unique monumental and expressive style demonstrated in the paintings of the Church of Archangels in Iprari (1096), the Church of Sts. Quiricus and Julitta at Lagurka (1112) and the Church of St. George at Nakipari (1130). Another important example of this school is the paintings of the Matskhvarishi Church executed by Michael Maglakeli in 1240s.

# THE GOLDEN AGE OF GEORGIAN HISTORY KING TAMAR

12TH C.

"The queen of queens, beauty of the  
country and faith, Tamar, daughter of  
George, venerator of the Messiah"



King Tamar  
1144-1184 AD.  
Vardzia  
Samtskhe-Javakheti



Pectoral cross of  
King Tamar  
12th-13th c.  
Khobi, Samegrelo



Coin of  
King Tamar  
1200 AD.



Coin of  
King Giorgi III  
1174 AD.



Anchi-Savior Triptych  
Beqa Opizori, 12th-13th c.

Vardzia, 12th c.  
Samtskhe-Javakheti



The Portrait of  
Shota Rustaveli  
17th c.  
The Cross  
Monastery in  
Jerusalem



"The knight in the Panther's Skin"  
The Manuscript, 1680 AD.

King Tamar  
and  
King Giorgi III  
1144-1184 AD  
Vardzia  
Samtskhe-Javakheti



Bertubani  
Davitgareja  
Monasteries  
Complex  
12th-13th c.  
Kakheti



One of the outstanding examples dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century is the altar mosaic of the Church of the Virgin at Gelati, which depicts the Virgin with the child flanked by archangels and displays both Byzantine and Georgian traits. To the most important monuments of this period belong the frescos of the narthex of the main church at Gelati depicting Seven Ecumenical Councils and the paintings of the Church of Archangels at Zemo Krikhi in mountainous Racha.

The artistic explorations of previous periods culminate in the series of monuments of the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> to the first half of 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Georgia was one of the strongest and greatest states in the Middle East, and its economy and culture were in full blossom. Associated with the period of the reign of Queen Tamar (1184-1213), this new style is notable for its elegant, refined images, growing dynamism, flowing lines and a progressively cooler palette demonstrated by the exquisite paintings in Vardzia, an enormous cave monastery hewn out of cliffs, in the main church at Bertubani at Gareja desert, in the Churches at Kintsvisi, Betania and Timotesubani.

The following period after the second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century, was distinguished by constant invasions of Muslim neighbours. The monumental painting of this period reflects an obvious return to Byzantium and its artistic tradition. By the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a new Paleologus style began to assert itself in Georgia. The first evidence of this can be seen in the painting of the Church of St. George at Atchi. Among examples of this style, which soon spread throughout the country, are the frescos of south-eastern Chapel of the main church at Gelati and the paintings of the churches at Khobi, Martvili and Zarzma. Amongst the best examples of Paleologus style in Georgia are the paintings in the Tsalengikha Church (1384-1396) executed by Kyr Manuel Eugenicus, who was invited specially from Constantinople. These paintings can serve as the best examples of the Constantinople school of wall painting. Another important example of this period is the painting in St. George's Church at Ubisi, belonging to 14<sup>th</sup> century,

Georgian wall painting, which continued with vigour through the 16<sup>th</sup> century, revealed a connection with the Mount of Athos School of painting, as evident by the frescos of Nekresi, Akhali Shuamta, Gremi and other monuments in Kakheti. Alongside this official trend, Georgian masters incorporated a peculiar "folk" style, specifically national in character. The paintings of this style reflect an oriental influence, as shown in clothing style; however, they also reveal the originality of provincial masters, characterized with primitive, naive pictorial language, though extremely enchanting decorative and expressive imagery. The examples of this style can be considered as the predecessors of what is called the "Tbilisian portrait" of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus the rich artistic tradition that began with medieval painting in Georgia reinvented itself on the easel-mounted canvases of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century painters.



Last Judgment. Detail. Timotesubani. 13th c.  
Samtskhe-Javakheti

# REPOUSSE WORK AND ENAMEL



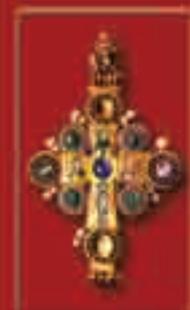
Archangels  
The Khakhuli  
Triptych, 11th c.



Christ Pantocrator  
10th c.



Boka Opizari  
Cover of the  
Takamutavi  
Gospel, 12th c.



Pectoral cross  
from Martvili  
10th c.



The Khakhuli Triptych, 8th-12th c.

Relief icon  
with Scenes  
from the Passion  
1050-1100 AD.



Icon reliquary  
11th c.



Beshken Opizari  
Cover of the  
Berti Gospel  
12th c.



Iconostasis plaque  
from Sagolasheni  
10th-11th c.



The Martvili Deesis, 9th c.

# GEORGIAN REPOUSSÉ WORK AND CLOISONNÉ ENAMEL

The abundance of repoussé work and cloisonné enamel pieces, distinguished for their high level of craftsmanship, that have survived through the centuries in Georgia, form one of the most valuable parts of medieval Georgian cultural heritage. These works enable us to trace the development of this branch of art, mainly represented by ecclesiastical objects, such as, crosses, icons, cups and manuscript covers, from the eighth to ninth century AD through the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Drawing upon the ancient tradition of metalwork and enamel that dates back to the pre-Christian period, medieval Georgian masters further developed the craft, elaborating a peculiar style beginning in the eighth through ninth centuries. Christianity, which brought changes to art in general, strongly influenced the pictorial language of metalwork, moving it away from three-dimensional sculptural methods, such as volume, modelling and relish for reproducing the naturalistic forms, to a more flattened, stylized aesthetic. Overall, examples of repoussé work echo what was being produced at that time in stone reliefs and wood carvings. Hence, this process of development is part of an organic phenomenon that encompassed all Georgian sculpture.

The Icon of Transfiguration from Zarzma (886 AD), which is the earliest surviving monument of medieval metalwork, clearly demonstrates this new trend in art: the surface of the icon is flat and relatively simple. Meanwhile enamelwork of this time is also characterized by flat and non-volumetric imagery as well as by the use of a distinctive semi-transparent emerald-green background, which can be seen in eighth century Qaudrifolium with the crucifixion on the Kakhuli triptych and in the ninth century Deesis from Martvili.

By the middle of 11<sup>th</sup> century, this flat and decorative style begins to become more volumetric. This is reflected in a number of superb artworks of this period, such as the Ishkhani, Breta and Brili processional crosses, and the renowned golden chalice of Bedia (999 AD), which is formed from one sheet of gold and depicts the figures of Christ, the Virgin and the Apostles all worked in repoussé. This liturgical vessel is notable for the orderly and rhythmic organization of the figures, its decorative details and for its classicistic and powerful figural style, the monumental effect of which is symbolic of an authentic indigenous Georgian sensibility. Other fine examples from this period include the plaques from Sagolasheni and Shemokmedi, a splendid processional cross from Martvili and the silver roundel of St. Mamai from Gelati. The plastic forms of the latter are modelled with great sensitivity and the proportions of the figure are held in careful balance.

A series of surviving large pre-altar crosses, which are covered with repoussé work, can be regarded as a unique feature of Georgian medieval art. Amongst these is the 11<sup>th</sup> century pre-altar cross from Mestia, which depicts the earliest known cycle of the life of St. George and is distinguished for its refined reproduction of figures, motion and details.

The 12<sup>th</sup> century marks a tendency toward more decorative forms and away from the volumetric trend typical to the previous centuries. This period is notable for its special focus on ornamental decoration and the wide use of such decorative elements as inlaid precious stones and cloisonné enamel. The 12<sup>th</sup> century works of enamel are marked by thin partition networks, a surprising boldness of color, dynamism, and a strong emotional emphasis, the latter of which lack the doctrinal strictness of Byzantine images. The stunning variety of stones and medallions in cloisonné enamel as well as ornamental motifs, which demonstrate the skillful execution of a unified artistic effect, is evident in the Khakuli Triptych of the Holy Virgin composed in 12<sup>th</sup> century. The Triptych is the largest medieval cloisonné enamel in the world. Combining a large number of medieval enamels from different times (eighth - twelfth centuries) and origins (both Georgia and Byzantine) into a harmonious whole, the Kakhuli Triptych can be regarded as a small “museum” of this branch of art. This relish for decorativeness and ornamental embellishment is clearly seen in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century Anchi Tryptich of the Savior, executed by Beka Opizari, the famous Georgian goldsmith master who worked during Queen Tamar’s reign.

Constant invasions by Muslim neighbours during period after the second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century, restrained further advancement of Georgian metalwork and enamel. However, from the 15<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> century, a notable number of smaller works were produced in goldsmiths’ workshops throughout the country.

Despite the harsh political and economic conditions, Georgian gold repoussé work retained its own traditions and its distinctive style throughout the centuries. On the other hand, the artistic tradition of medieval Georgian enamel degraded and fell out of use by the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Recently, however, it has been revitalized and is quickly becoming one the most popular braches of contemporary art in modern Georgia.

# THE FALL OF THE GEORGIAN KINGDOM

14TH-17TH C.



Holy Shroud  
1632-82 AD.  
Kartli



Triptych, 16th c. Kakheti



Mitre, 17th c.  
Gelati Monastery, Imereti



Tsalenjikha  
The Last Judgment  
14th-17th c. Samegrelo



Ubisi, Annunciation, 14th c. Imereti



Zarzma, 14th c.  
Samtskhe-Javakheti



Saphara Monastery  
St. Saba Church  
The Raising of Lazarus  
13th-14th c. Samtskhe-Javakheti



Ananuri, 17th-18th c.  
Mtiuleti



Stone, 1358 AD  
Ancha  
Historical Ins. Klarjeti  
Northern Turkey

Ananuri  
Central part of  
the east facade  
1689 AD.  
Mtiuleti.



Gromi, 16th c. Kakheti.

# MOUNTAINOUS GEORGIA



Ushguli

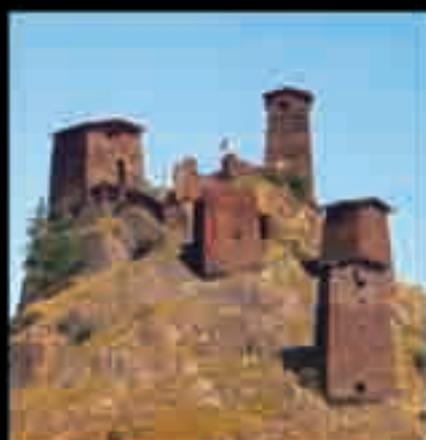
## SVANETI



St. George  
Painted icon  
13th c. Mestia



Interior paintings  
Church of the Archangels  
14th-15th c. Lenjeri



TUSHETI Omalo



Forty martyrs  
Painted icon  
12th c. Mestia



St. Theodore  
Matskhvarishi church  
12th c. Latali



KHEVSURETI Shatli

St. George  
Painted icon  
15th c. Mestia



Gerget's Sameba, 14th c. Kazbegi

# TBILISI-THE HEARTLAND OF GEORGIA



A group of "Karachokhels"  
Artisans in old Tbilisi  
Photo by D. I. Ermakov  
1903-04

Metekhi Church  
of the Virgin  
13th c.



Niko Piroshmanashvili  
(1862-1918)  
"Donkey Bridge"



"There are three towns  
in Tiflisi - Tiflisi, Kala  
and Iani, divided by  
Mtkvari... There is a  
hot spring flowing from  
the rock in Tiflisi and  
there are six baths...  
The flourishing gardens  
in the outskirts of the  
city are rich in fruits  
and flowers"

Vakhushti Bagrationi

"Sazandari", Folklore Ensemble



Niko Piroshmanashvili  
(1862-1918)  
Argan player. Fragment



Old Tbilisi



"Kinto", Small Traders in Old Tbilisi



"Argant", Musical Box

# TBILISI- THE HEARTLAND OF GEORGIA

“Georgians are kind, friendly, staid and restrained at the same time. Here you have the possibility to live with, discuss and protect your faith and traditions. There’s no other place in the world where one would find so many foreigners of different origins as in Tbilisi. In the city, you come across Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Turks, Persians, Indians, Azeri, Russians and Europeans...”

**Jean Chardin**



As the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi (Tiflis) is a significant economic, social, and cultural centre in the country. Located strategically at the crossroads between Europe and Asia and lying along the historic Silk Road routes, the city has been exposed to a transmission of influences from east and west alike throughout the course of its history.

Archaeological studies of the region have revealed that the territory of Tbilisi was settled by humans as early as the fourth millennium B.C. The earliest actual accounts of settlement of the location come from the second half of the fourth century A.D, when a fortress was built during King Varaz-Bakur’s reign. However, according to legend, the origins of the city date to the reign of King Vakhtang Gorgasali, who ruled from 447 to 522. Tradition says that the King went hunting in the heavily wooded region with a falcon, and during the hunt, the falcon injured a pheasant causing both birds to fall into a hot spring. Afterwards, the king decreed his capital to be built on that very spot. Accordingly, the city’s name derives from the Georgian word for “warm” (tbili).

Tbilisi’s favourable and strategic location did not necessarily bode well for its existence as capital. Located strategically in the heart of the Caucasus, Tbilisi became an object of rivalry between the region’s various powers, including Persia, the Byzantine Empire, Arabia, and the Seljuk Turks. The foreign domination of the city began in the latter half of the sixth century when the Persians took over Tbilisi and ruled it for about a decade. In the year 627 A.D., Tbilisi was sacked by the Khazar armies and later from 736-738, Arab armies entered the town. After this point, the Arabs established an emirate in Tbilisi. In 764, Tbilisi was once again sacked by the Khazar, which was still under Arab control. In the year 853 A.D., the armies of Arab leader Bugha Al-Turki invaded Tbilisi in order to establish a Caliphate. Local Georgians were unsuccessful in their drive to expel the Arabs, and Arab domination of Tbilisi continued until about 1050 A.D.

In 1068, the city was once again sacked, only this time by the Seljuk Turks. In 1122, after heavy fighting with the Seljuk that involved at least 60,000 Georgians and up to 300,000 Turks, the troops of the King of Georgia, **David the Builder, entered Tbilisi. After the battles for Tbilisi concluded, David moved his residence from Kutaisi (Western Georgia) to Tbilisi, making it the capital of a unified Georgian State.** From the 12<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Tbilisi became a dominant regional power with a thriving and a well-established social structure. This lasted until 1236 A.D., when, after suffering crushing defeats, Georgia came under Mongol domination. In the 1320s, the Mongols were forcefully expelled from Georgia and Tbilisi became the capital of an independent Georgian state once again. From the late 14<sup>th</sup> until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Tbilisi fell back into the rule of various foreign invaders and on several occasions was completely burnt to the ground. In the mid-eighteenth century, King Erekle tried many times to free Tbilisi from Persian rule but, in the end, Tbilisi was destroyed in 1795 by Shah Agha-Mohammad Khan. After a devastating invasion by the Persians that ruined large parts of the city, the Russians marched into the capital in 1800. In the twentieth century, Tbilisi was the capital of the Transcaucasian Federation (1918), the first independent Georgian Republic (1918 - 1921), the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia (1921 - 1991), and finally the second independent Republic of Georgia since 1991.

Silver vessels



# GEORGIAN ETHNOGRAPHY

Georgian Dance - "Khorumi"



Ceramics



Dress for the dance "Adjaruli" by S. Virsaladze



"Phardagi" Traditional Carpet



Dress from Pshavi



Musical instruments:  
"Doli" (Drum)  
"Chouguri"  
"Panduri"

Costume for the dance "Adjaruli" by S. Virsaladze



Tbilisi is a multicultural city, historically known for religious tolerance. This is especially evident in the city's Old Town, where a Mosque, Synagogue, and Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches can all be found within less than 500 meters from each other. Hence, Tbilisi acquired the attributes of an international city while retaining its own specific *Tbilisian* culture and urban folklore, as can be seen on the historical photos of small traders - Kintos - and artisans - Karachogels, etc. - as well as on the canvases of Niko Pirosmanashvili (1862-1918), who is considered to be the greatest Georgian painter.

The city rises in terraces from both banks of the River Mtkvari. In the old section are medieval buildings and courtyards, narrow streets, overhanging balconies, and the famous hot sulphur springs. The rest of the city has been extensively modernized. The areas of Tbilisi which were built up mainly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rustaveli Avenue, Vera district, etc.) have a contrasting neoclassical look. The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked with an architectural revival, notably, with an art nouveau style. The city's attractions include: the Sioni Cathedral (6<sup>th</sup> c. rebuilt 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> c.), the Anchiskhati Basilica (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c.) the Metekhi castle and church (1278-89) together with the sculpture of King Vakhtang Gorgasali, the recently built Sameba Cathedral, a funicular railway running to height of Mtatsminda overlooking the city, as well as museums and exhibitions, sulfur baths and local bazaars. In addition, *Tbilisoba* (Day of Tbilisi) the largest annual celebration in the city, commemorating the foundation of Tbilisi is held towards the end of October each year and attracts many tourists.

The picturesque landscape of Tbilisi, dotted with ancient churches, fortresses and modern buildings, offers a unique glimpse into nearly the entire history of the country.

## ETHNOGRAPHY OF GEORGIA

Every single province in Georgia has its own images, history, culture, traditions, dress, food, music, dance and temperament amongst its local people, all of which ensures the ethnographic mosaic of the country and its special attractiveness. This diversity is most clearly observed in the different types of dwellings, which vary from region to region according to natural and climatic conditions, lifestyles and history. The most ancient type of Georgian dwelling is *darbazi*, found in eastern Georgia and made with a graded roof (*gvirgvini*) with the central wooden column (*dedabodzi*) that is decorated with wood-carved symbols. The *baniani sakhli*, a massive stone structure with a fiat roof, a light and smoke hole and a pillar in the middle, is also typical to eastern Georgia. Also serving as evidence of this extraordinary variety are the impregnable, proud towers of Svaneti in the most isolated highland of South-Western Georgia; the castle towns and low houses which cling to the soft slopes in Khevsureti; houses with threshing-floors on the terraced roofs in Mtiuleti; double-pitched roofed watchtowers in Tusheti; and the openwork wooden *Oda*-type houses built on wooden "legs," specially constructed for the humid climatic conditions in the western lowlands.

The diversity in temperament among Georgians is best reflected in dressing style, which is particular to each province. *Chokha*, sewn of thick fabric, tight on the waist and wide on the bottom, is common male attire in every part of Georgia. Generally, the *chokha* outfit includes a *khanjali* (sword), *akhalukhi* (shirt worn underneath), *masrebi* (bullets), and *kabalakhi* (a hood, separate from the robe) or *nabdis kudi* (a tall fur hat). The special pressed wool hats are typical to Svantetian male dressing, whereas a lamb leather hat, called *papakhi*, is worn by Mtiuletian man. Female costume consists of a shirt (*perangi*), long trousers (*sheidishi*), long dress with a breast plate (*gulispiri*), and a long fabric belt (*sartkeli*). The head gear consists of a veil (*lechaki*), a carton ring covered with velvet (*chikhta*), a thin roll covered with silk, and a head cover. The most remarkable examples of Georgian national costume are the colorful female and male clothing from Khevsureti, which are usually decorated with extraordinarily stunning embroidery.

Traditional craft production, which developed in many different directions, also forms an indispensable part of Georgian culture. Ceramic production, which is tightly linked with the viniculture, is among the most ancient branches. Georgian folk earthenware – simple, fired clay, fully or partially painted, burnished or glazed – goes back into the hoary past. Woodworking is also a long-standing tradition: household utensils and furniture were entirely covered with carvings of different motifs, including astral bodies, crosses, radiating circles, and rituals as observed on the *dedabodzi*.

Furthermore, Georgia is rich in textile techniques: Archaeological finds testify to the fact that weaving and dyeing was well-developed in Georgia. The high qualities of dyes, which are still preserved today, attest to the artistic taste and professional skill of their engravers. The type of textiles most widespread in Georgia are traditional table-cloths executed in the indigo blue dyeing “negative” technique. Embroidery, especially with gold and silver, was very popular in Georgia, especially on folk dress, household articles (bed covers, table-cloths, curtains, etc.) as well as on horse gear (caparison). Because of this variety, Georgian needlework employs dozens of techniques. Pressed wool, tapestry and knitting were especially advanced in the mountainous part of the country, where the ancient practices are still preserved. Old carpets and traditional socks, *chitebi* and *patchichebi*, mainly decorated with geometric ornaments attest to the refined skills of Georgian households.

Georgia is also famous for its national cuisine, remarkable for its use of assorted kinds of meat, fish, vegetables, cheeses, pickles, and pungent seasonings. Various historical regions of Georgia are known for their particular dishes: for example, *khinkali* from eastern mountainous Georgia, and *khachapuri*, mainly from Imereti, Adjara and Samegrelo. The latter is especially distinguished for its spicy, hot food. Georgian cuisine makes extensive use of walnuts. Walnuts coated in honey are used in a special New Year dessert called *gozinaki* and also in *churchkhela*, in which pieces are threaded on a string, dipped in thickened, sweetened grape juice and subsequently dried out.

Overall, table culture known as *supra* in Georgia has a deeper implication than an ordinary meal. It is also linked with the important element of Georgian folklore – polyphonic music (two, three or four voiced songs). Polyphony is the unifying feature of folk songs from all regions of Georgia and is a trait found in religious chorals and secular music, the foremost examples being *Chakrulo* and *Mravalzhamieri*. Both belong to the family of long Kakhetian table songs, which are meant to lift the spirits and create a festive mood. In comparison with the homophonic songs of eastern Georgia, western ones are characterized by the contrasting opposition of voices which create colorful consonances. In this respect, the Gurian musical dialect, distinct for its surprisingly high voice – *krimanchuli*, is most interesting and is regarded as the crown of folk polyphony. Besides table songs, Georgian folk music is rich with numerous farming and work songs, such as *Gutnuri*, *Orovela*, *Urmuli*, *Kalouri*, as well as martial and funeral songs.

Georgian folklore is also full of rituals and performances. Competitions among poet-singers, where improvised verse – *kapia* – is typically sung to a specific melody, are especially popular in eastern Georgian highlands of Pshavi and Khevsureti. Here in the mountains, the festival of *Khatoba* is dedicated to different shrines that reflect the peculiar synthesis of Christianity with the pagan religion of the region’s local people. Festivals are accompanied with boiling beer (considered a sacred drink) and drinking ceremonies. Researches trace Georgian theatre to ancient festivals celebrating nature’s renewal and fertility, known as *Berikaoba* and *Keenoba*, where humorous texts, with corresponding songs and dances, formed an integral part of these extraordinary carnival pageants.

The vigorous, leaping male dances, with clashing swords, flying sparks and daggers quivering in the floor, combine elegantly with the graceful, gliding female dances. The dance *Kartuli*, performed by a couple, incorporates the softness and gracefulness of a woman with the dignity and love of a man. The same softness of movement is typical to the Osetian *simdi* and *khonga* dances. In contrast, the *mtiuluri* and *khevsuruli* dances from the mountains are characterized by the vigor and strictness of the movements. The war dance-*khorumi* and *adjaruli*, which are distinct for their colorful costumes, originated from southwestern region Adjara. Together, colorful costumes, wild drumming, and pipe and accordion music combine to create the overall unforgettable effect of Georgian national dances.

Though many customs and traditions separate Georgian provinces, a trait common to all is the unprecedented and long established tradition of hospitality. The indisputability of the notion that “the guest comes from god” is evident to everyone who has ever visited the country. Despite being unusually diverse in terms of landscape, people, cultures and traditions for such a small country, Georgia is marked by a solid ethnic identity that has been shaped by and maintained throughout the centuries.

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GEORGIAN ARTS AND CULTURE CENTER "ISTORIALI"

7, Niko Nikoladze str. Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia  
Tel: (995 32) 2935685, Fax: (995 32) 2921335  
[gacc@gacogeorgia.org](mailto:gacc@gacogeorgia.org) - [www.gacogeorgia.org](http://www.gacogeorgia.org)